

May 20, 2004

## WISEACRES AND PRAGMATISTS

Sholem Asch, one of the great Yiddish writers of the last century, was not a politician but he was convinced, like many others, that in the ongoing Zionist conflict of the Twenties and Thirties between Chaim Weizmann and Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Weizmann was the rational, levelheaded statesman while Jabotinsky was an impractical dreamer.

When I met Asch in the early 1950s, he told me of his pre-Holocaust opinions on Zionist politics. "But," he added, "it turned out that I was all wrong. After all that happened, it became clear to me that the roles were completely reversed. It was Weizmann who was the dreamer, while Jabotinsky was the ultimate practical thinker."

We should not now need a national disaster to discover how wrongheaded are the people who persist in supporting Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan. They indeed preen themselves as the hard-headed people who think with their brains, while those who oppose it are clueless people, thinking with their emotions, their hearts, with their ossified ideologies.

Now Sharon is on the horns of a dilemma. Feverishly he is seeking a "formula" that will satisfy everybody.

At the cabinet meeting on May 9 he asked the ministers a number of "key" questions, to which he wanted a reply.

What should Israel do with the homes and synagogues in settlements that are to be evacuated? What should Israel do with the Erez Industrial Zone? How should Israel deal with the demographic situation in Gaza? With whom should Israel be negotiating?

Asking these questions at this stage strongly supports the charge that the disengagement policy was not carefully thought out but merely a showy quick fix for "running from Gaza."

There are, moreover, several more weighty questions for which he evidently did not find answers.

The wiseacres who were ready with their sneers and their jibes at the poor impractical ideologists who opposed the "rational" and "sensible" disengagement plan as the only game in town should stop their sneering and jibing; they should pause and reflect the very serious - perfectly pragmatic - grounds for opposing the disengagement plan that evidently moved the majority in the Likud Party referendum.

True pragmatists understand that the settlements are not the reason for the terror, so getting rid of settlements will not rid Israel of the terror - which began long, long before the settlements of our day were established.

Otherwise, how come the pogrom in Jerusalem 84 years ago? How come the attack on Jews in 1921, beginning with the Immigrants' Hostel in Jaffa? How come the massacre of the Hebron Jews in 1929, and the three-year-long riots of 1936-1939? And then the full-scale wars, beginning with 1948?

When the realization of the Zionist dream of the reconstitution of Jewish statehood came onto the political horizon, the Arabs states declared, and repeated in one formulation or another, that they would not tolerate a sovereign Jewish state even in a part of Palestine.

That, after all, is why the members of the Arab League, formed after WWII, determined to destroy Israel at its birth. They said so too, in 1947, even before the UN General Assembly had decided on the partition of Palestine - and in 1948 launched war to that end.

Not succeeding then, they tried once more in 1967. Then Abdul Nasser, president of Egypt, boastfully declared that the object of the war was the "annihilation" of Israel.

It isn't the dreamers but the hard-headed who recall why the Arab League, failing to destroy Israel at one blow, decided on the policy of "phases," getting Israel at each phase - by terror, propaganda, and friendly relations with Europe - to hand over a part of its territory and then, with enhanced energy and motivation, fighting for the next phase.

What can the Arabs see in Sharon's disengagement idea if not an obvious realization of the Arab policy? Here is a piece of the country given to them free as a result of their terror. Is this not an ideal prelude to the next "phase"?

There is a plethora of declarations on Arab intent, emphasized day after day by articles and cartoons in the press, by sermons in the mosques, by teachers in the schools, and in the textbooks for the schoolchildren.

The youthful suicide bombers are not killing Jews because of settlers but because they have had it drummed into their heads since their childhood days that this is their country and the Jews came and stole it from them.

The Israeli people are told, and many seem innocently to believe, that handing over Gaza and expelling Jews from Gush Katif and from several settlements in Samaria will somehow stop the terror.

All the significant signs are inflexibly pointing in the opposite direction. The Israeli leadership, instead of basking in compliments from Washington and from Europe for being so generous with Jewish land, should wake up and tell the people that we are at war, that in war a surrender of land is a victory to the enemy.

This victory the Arabs, becoming ever more sophisticated militarily, will exploit to the full. So, in that context, who is being levelheaded and who is being emotional?