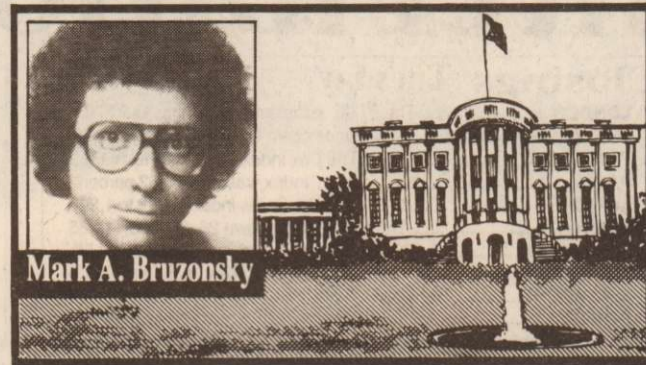


The Labour Party's political schizophrenia can be characterised in many ways — the old-timers of Peres, Rabin and their cronies against the new "young guard"; the Lova Eliav "peace" camp against the "labour hawks"; those truly willing to reach an accord with Palestinians against those who speak one way yet consistently act another; the pragmatists against the realists

From



Washington

Goodbye to Labour Party?

MORE than a decade ago a political earthquake brought Menachem Begin and his Likud Party to power in Israel.

Most observers had a variety of ready explanations at the time: but thought it was an aberration that probably wouldn't last.

After all, former Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin was everything and it was widely known that he and Shimon Peres were personal enemies out to get each other even at the cost of weakening the Labour Party. Furthermore, Rabin's wife had been caught violating Israeli laws with an American bank account.

Israel's economy was in trouble with a series of devaluations and inflation that went up and down (mostly up) teeter-totter fashion.

But most of all Israelis had grown restless with the decades old rule of Israel's Labour Party establishment; and shrewd men from the right-wing exploited this to no end guided by Begin's campaign manager, none other than Ezer Weizman who in later years was to get disenchanted and bolt to Labour.

The perception has widely grown that the long-ruling Labour Party was overly bureaucratized, unreceptive to newcomers, out-of-touch with the common citizens, and wracked with all kinds of petty corruption and favouritism. Most of all it was a self-perpetuating Europeanised elite that controlled Labour and its associated institutions; and Israel was increasingly populated by non-European Jews who

felt the discrimination.

Today the Labour Party is something of a pale shadow of what it was. And day by day the internal schizophrenia that characterises the party's basic political divisions is further eroding what little credibility remains.

Labour has been so outmanoeuvred from within and without that it has even allowed itself to be saddled with the reputation (the historic stain, some would say "stench") of being the junior partner in a coalition government that both Likud and Labour cling to in a kind of death grip.

For each of the two power centres fears that their own could bring about a situation where lesser factions might just succeed in outmanoeuvring either Likud or Labour by making a deal with one to push the other aside.

Labour has allowed itself to become a political Siamese twin with Likud; and each fears it is the other that will suffer most in any separation though each manoeuvres for opportunity to do just that.

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But whatever the characterisation, Labour's days

now seem numbered and the party may soon find itself fracturing into still further pieces as factions on both the left and right — Citizen Rights for one — frantically seek ways to catapult themselves into prominence.

"Labour appears to be nearing the point of no return, whence it may lapse into ever-diminishing minority status," notes a recent editorial in the *Washington Jewish Week (WJW)* that has itself more and more come to reflect the growing predominance of nationalistic sentiments.

Last November was Labour's fourth consecutive defeat in the Knesset elections. But the *Washington*

... a Likud-run Israel confident it can manoeuvre around American constraints and facing a continuing Palestinian challenge and growing economic problems would be a terribly dangerous beast; one that could take unpredictable steps in many directions.

Jewish Weeks editorial goes on to point out that "the two events that may spell finis (for Labour) — this past winter's municipal elections and the Histadrut elections scheduled for October — scarcely have been noticed abroad."

Indeed, the upcoming Histadrut elections may well signal the culmination of the basic, possibly irrevocable, shift from Labour to Likud that few analysts predicted just a few years ago but which now seems to be in its final stages.

Last winter's municipal elections were a major warning sign that Labour should have taken far more seriously than it has. In that election many Likud candidates were catapulted to power in Israeli cities throughout the country for the first time.

Now in just two months everyone associated with the

extremely important nationwide labour federation — the Histadrut, once Labour's almost wholly-owned subsidiary — will be able to vote for delegates to the Histadrut convention.

What Likud is aiming for would have been thought impossible just a few years ago — coalition rule at the Histadrut just like in the government.

And if this is achieved the last bastion of general election strength that Labour has always been able to mobilise will be compromised.

"By establishing a meaningful presence in Histadrut, Likud could deny Labour the full use of the labour federation's employees and facilities come election time," concludes the editorial in the *Washington Jewish Week*, and "this certainly would hasten Labour's demise."

Come the next general Knesset election, whenever that might be, Labour would for the first time ever be unable to fully maximise its leverage within the sprawling multi-tentacled Histadrut which was something of a pre-government back in the 40s before the declaration of Statehood.

"Histadrut may appear to be a bloated bureaucracy," the *WJW* adds, "but that is because its real purpose — to serve as Labour's electoral machine — is only apparent two or three times a decade. Then it becomes the soul of efficiency." Then the offices, the phones, cars, and other perks that go with official position have always been enlisted in one way or another for Labour's benefit.

Coalition rule in the Histadrut would make that far more difficult.

There are those, of course, who will see the situation otherwise. They will say that a strong Likud will finally be able to make a deal with Palestinians, that a return to domination by a single party will be good in the sense that someone will again be in charge, that the US will restrain the Likud and prevent major war.

Don't believe it! Israel under the domination of Likud can better be compared to Chile in the heyday of Pinochet, Germany during the Nazis, the Soviets during Stalin. Likud not only has basic deeply-ingrained fascist tendencies deep within its makeup, but it has a collectively warped historic memory that causes it to view Israel to be facing another potential holocaust. The "never-again" psychy and the "Samson complex" are not illusions for many in Likud.

In short a Likud-run Israel confident it can manoeuvre around American constraints (as it has for so long) and facing a continuing Palestinian challenge and growing economic problems would be a terribly dangerous beast; one that could take unpredictable steps in many directions.

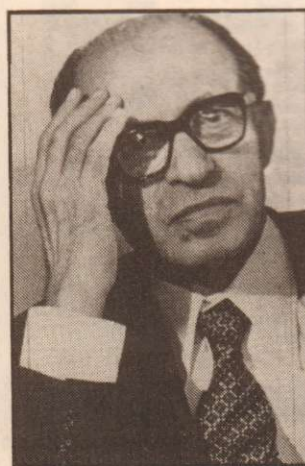
Meanwhile, again to quote the *WJW* editorial, what is happening in Israel today "seems destined to turn Labour into Israel's version of the Federalist party. Like an insect paralysed by an ichneumon wasp. Labour is watching its own demise but can do nothing."



Begin



Peres



Begin



Weizman