

{JANUARY 3 2004}

WHO NEEDS AN IMITATION?

Would you believe it? The Israeli Labor Party has a political program. Like a top hat for a bum.

Seems this program has been around for two months already. I just didn't hear a thing about it until somebody took pity on me and faxed me a copy the other day.

This is the Labor Party that is now considering whether to extend Shimon Peres' term as party chairman for another year or two. Shimon Peres, who served as Ariel Sharon's foreign minister and who is now longing to return to Sharon's government.

So what has this party to offer? Only good things.

The program starts out with: "The settlement activity and the rule over the Palestinian people damage the security of the state and its citizens. The demographic balance between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan endangers the existence of Israel as a Jewish-democratic state. Therefore, political and demographic separation between the two national entities is the foundation of any settlement."

What is lacking in this paragraph? Even a single word about morality and justice. Morality and justice do not sell, and prudent people should keep well away from them. There is no word about the iniquities of the occupation. Iniquities don't sell either. Any good copywriter will tell you that a program should speak only about how bad the situation is for the Jews. Palestinian women produce too many children.

So what is the remedy? Separation. As Labor's Ehud Barak used to say: "We are here and they should be there." No living together in two friendly states. No reconciliation. Of course no open border. Not even as a vision for the future. Only separation. Ehud Barak remains the true philosopher of the party.

"Peace between Israel and the Palestinian State will be achieved only by political negotiation. Nevertheless, as long as the acts of terror against Israel continue, Israel will relentlessly and unconditionally use all the means..."

That is the quintessential Sharon gospel. The root of all evil is not the occupation, but the resistance to the occupation. As long as there is resistance, called "terror",

oppression must be intensified. And as long as there is terror, there is no point in conducting negotiations.

By the way, pay attention to the word “nevertheless”. It is so useful. We fervently want peace, “nevertheless” we do the opposite.

Does the Labor Party have “Principles for a Peace Settlement?” You bet.

The first is “cessation of fighting and terrorism in its different forms”. Not the end of the occupation, God forbid. That can wait. First of all, terrorism must be stopped. Sharon at his best.

“The secure and recognized border between Israel and the Palestinian State will be fixed on the basis of the June 4, 1967, borders.” Excellent. But then it continues: “and will include changes emanating from the security requirements and the attachment of Jewish settlement blocs to Israeli sovereignty on the basis of the principle of exchange of territories between the two states.”

So not really the 1967 Green Line. There are “security requirements” which will, of course, be decided upon by the government of Israel. What requirements? The widening of the “narrow waist” of the state? The annexation of the Jordan valley? The absorption of other territories? And, concerning “Jewish settlement blocs” - here we have the legitimization of the settlements, from Kedumin in the middle of the northern West Bank (founded by Shimon Peres) to Kiryat Arba in the south (founded by Labor’s Yig’al Allon).

“Greater Jerusalem will be the capital of Israel.” That’s unequivocal. “Greater Jerusalem” is a known term. It includes all of Arab East Jerusalem. But the verbal acrobatics of Labor’s copywriters easily overcome this obstacle: “The agreement about East Jerusalem will be based on the principle: ‘What is Jewish - to the Jews, what is Arab - to the Arabs’.” So the Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem will at the same time be the “Capital of Israel” and belong “to the Arabs”. Clear? Clear as mud!

“There will be no return of Palestinian refugees to the territories of the State of Israel.” This is the most unequivocal sentence in the entire document, and this is also the sole reference to four million Palestinians. They do not count. Nothing must be offered them. No solution, not to mention an apology or even a verbal recognition. We shall make peace with half the Palestinian people, and may the other half go to hell. But the leaders of the Palestinian people must, of course, confirm that this is the “end of the conflict”, as stated in the very next paragraph. Even Ehud Barak could not have phrased it better.

“Special security arrangements will safeguard the security interests of the State of Israel.” Of course. The Palestinians do not have security interests. And if they do have any, who gives a damn?

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And, most important: “The Palestinians will recognize Israel as the State of the Jewish people”. Meaning: The Palestinians must confirm that the State of Israel belongs to a Jew in Brooklyn and the Falashmura in Ethiopia who claim to be Jews, but Israel will not even confirm that the State of Palestine belongs to the refugees in Sabra and Shatila.

So these are the principles for peace. What about the “unilateral steps” of Sharon? Don’t worry, they have their rightful place in Labor’s program, too.

In the Gaza Strip, for example. “The security fence will be improved and perfected.” Israel will continue to “control the air and sea.” That’s to say, Gaza will remain a big prison.

But that’s not all: “The security strip between the Gaza Strip and Egypt will be enlarged and strengthened.” Meaning: More neighborhoods in Rafah will be destroyed, so as to cut off all contact between the Gaza Strip and the rest of the world.

“After terrorism in Gaza and emanating from Gaza has come to an end,” many good things will happen. That is the order of events: the first step will not be the evacuation of the settlements, leading to the cessation of attacks, but the other way around: first all attacks must stop, and only then will the settlements be evacuated. The Palestinians must take that on trust.

What remains? The fence, of course. It was originally thought up by the Labor leaders. Later, Sharon converted it into an all-devouring monster. What has the Labor Party to say about it now?

“A continuous security fence will be built without delay along the Green Line. The security fence will include Israeli villages that are in close proximity to the Green Line.”

Israeli villages? What is meant are settlements built on Palestinian land. And what is “close proximity? A mile? Ten miles? Alfei-Menashe settlement? Elkana? The Etzion bloc? Efrata? Ma’aled Adumim? Ariel? Kedumim? What is the difference between this and Sharon’s twisting snake of a fence?

But not to worry. In the meantime, “meaningful steps to ameliorate the living conditions of the inhabitants will be undertaken.” As in all of Sharon’s speeches.

There remains only one question: who will be convinced to vote for such a program? Not the people of the peace camp. Nor the voters of the “center” that exists only in the imagination. Anyone looking for verbal gimmicks to disguise the continuation of the occupation will find them with Sharon. So who needs Peres? Why make do with an imitation if you can have the real thing?