

SHELI'S POWER

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"What power does Sheli have?", many ask themselves, replying, "After all, they have only two Knesset members, or at the most three, if one takes into consideration Shulamit Aloni, who is gradually sliding over to the positions of Uri Avnery and Meir Pail".

But that is a mistake. Those three are the most dynamic and talented of all Knesset members. Moreover, Sheli's power rests also with HAO-LAM HAZEH, a widely circulated political weekly whose readers are interested not merely in its pictures and gossip stories but also in its political articles.

Sheli's power also comes from a large group of talented writers and journalists, whose widely read writing, both in books and in the press, hammers into the reader's mind views that are practically identical with those of Sheli.

Another source of Sheli's power is found in a considerable number of employees of the state-owned Broadcasting Authority, who — consciously or unconsciously — strengthen Sheli-like attitudes within the public by selecting Sheli material and posing Sheli's brand of questions through their commentaries.

This does not necessarily mean that they are organized, overtly or covertly, in a single organization or acting in a concerted manner. On the contrary, many of them have strong individualistic urges. Still, this does not mean that all of them together do not constitute an ideological propaganda machinery (or if you do not like the word, "ideological", then I shall use the terms "educational machinery", "persuasion machinery" or "machinery for spreading ideas"), which is the most sophisticated and powerful in Israel.

Each of us — teachers and students, reader and T.V. viewers or radio listeners — is under their sphere of influence.

Their ideology summed up in one sentence: Jews and Arabs have the same rights in Eretz Israel, but Jewish rights have been tarnished with the stain of quasi-invasion of foreign territory, while Arab rights are cleaner. The inevitable conclusion therefore is that anyone who still has a conscience should sympathize with the Arabs' claims. That ideology, by the way, was not palatable to Aryeh Eliav, one of Sheli's founders and a believer in Zionism. That is one of the reasons that he left the battlefield.

Sheli's political power also finds expression in the fact that some of the Alignment activists, both inside and outside of the Knesset, already look up to them. Take, for example, the idea

of the New Outlook Washington symposium. That initiative caused commotion in the state for at least a week. It did bear the stamp of Sheli, of course, in all its details. An honorable member of Mapam's leadership, Simkha Flapan, stands at the head of New Outlook. In the Labor Party's top hierarchy too, there are activists whose views are close to those of Sheli; but due to various considerations, pragmatic and personal, it is very unlikely that they will quit their party. It may also be that it was out of similar considerations, but without personal ambition, that the writer, A.B. Yehoshua, recently joined the Labor Party. The writer, whose writings are a classical literary expression of Sheli's philosophy, will probably try to exercise his ideological influence through a large party.

However, the greatest part of Sheli's adherents does not wish to join the Alignment. On the contrary, if they cannot get the Alignment to stand closer to Sheli's own positions, they attack it. The same happens in their approach to Begin and the Likud, an approach that changes according to circumstances. When it seemed that Begin was ready to make large concessions, many of them supported him, both in writing and in speeches; and only when he refuses to yield to Arab or American demands, they attack him.

As a matter of fact, Sheli and adherents are also opposed to the basic policy of the Alignment, the policy unanimously accepted by Peres, Rabin, Allon, Talmi and Hazan. Recently, while chances for the Alignment's participation in the government, or for earlier elections, become stronger, attacks by Sheli adherents on the Alignment have become more frequent. This is quite understandable, since any more votes coming to Sheli will come from the ranks of Alignment supporters.

Now we arrive at the crucial question: what will Sheli's power in the future be? The answer is that it will surely grow. In the next elections Sheli may serve as a refuge for most of those who are more sensitive to Arab claims than to the needs of their own people. I asked an old Mapam member if there was no fear that Mapam might leave the Alignment. "Mapam will not quit", he said. "First of all, as everybody knows, if Mapam goes it alone, it will get less votes than Sheli, and a great part of Hakibbutz Haartzit (Mapam's Kibbutzim movement) will also vote for Sheli."

As for myself, I do think he is right. Mapam's ideological heart is the aspiration of radical socialism; Sheli's is — sympathy to the Arab side of the dispute between the two nations. The attraction for the first ideology is shrinking, whereas that of the second is gaining ground. The main urge in tomorrow's opposition will not emanate from social left wing views, but rather from the questioning of Jewish nationalism and the whitewashing of Arab nationalism. At any rate, even if Mapam remains in the Alignment and gets, thanks to that, a respectable number of mandates, many of its past adherents will vote for Sheli, and Sheli will become, in the tenth Knesset, a formidable power. ■



SHELI'S ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN AT KFAR TAIBEH