THE TEMPTATION

Following the assassination of Rabin, Israel's turbulence has become visible for all to see. Michael Warschawi explores ways forwards.

It may sound paradoxical, and even blasphemous, but the assassination of the Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, was an expression of the process of normalisation of Israeli society. "The state will never know what it was," said the government's representative of politicians and opinion-makers in the immediate aftermath of the assassination. It would have been more accurate to say: "The state is no longer what it was, as the assassination so harshly but conclusively demonstrated.

In other words, the words of Yigal Amir belong to Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minister of the state and its (inter-Jewish democratic) norms, which had facilitated the political stability of the nation-state from its inception. The existence of an alternative system of values - something which never existed on the Zionist Left - brought with it a new possibility, however small, of an outbreak of a 'civil war'; of the classification of the prime minister as a traitor, and of his assassination. One can learn a lot from a brief examination of how that term 'traitor' was used.

From the point of view of the old Zionist consensus, the combination of the words 'prime minister' and 'traitor' - that is, as an attack on the state - was someone who challenged this view. Only the birth of a competing value system allows one to call the prime minister a 'traitor'.

This polarisation of left and right is a cause of increased instability and of the nation-state's assassination, and not, as some would have it, an effect. In the face of such polarization one would hope that the left would define its own boundaries and its new identity, and not by the death of the prime minister.

The politicians, and the media, especially the electronic media, are hastening to reproduce a consensus bolstering the ruling establishment and the New World Order, will face the fundamentalist Right alone. If Israel wishes to avoid a future in which Jewish fundamentalism leads inevitably to a total confrontation with the Arab world, an alternate system of values which rejects the spirit of tribalism must become the basis for a new consensus. The proponents of such an alternative must not shrink before the spectre of 'civil war', for such a 'war' would be one between light and darkness, life and death. The current leaders of the peace camp, imbued with rhetoric, cannot generate such an alternative. Perhaps, however, a new spirit will arise among the remarkable young generation of Israelis who have mobilised in the past few years, spurned out of their silence by the shock of Rabin's assassination. These youth have already demonstrated more than once that they are no longer enchanted by the myths that paralyse their elders.

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The temptation is to see the unity of the people long ago ceased to be a reality; all that remains of it is nostalgia, distorted vision and myth. Not only the Bar-Lev Line fell on the Jewish Day of Atonement, 1973: so too did the uncritical attitude towards the Zionist project, its myths and taboos, its rules and its institutions. Very few Israelis understood this at that time, although they spoke about the 'negligence' of army, intelligence and government officials. A decade and a half years later, the Labour movement's fifth-year conference came to an abrupt end with the inaction of the Labour government coalition. Yet it took another six years and the destruction of Lebanon for the depth of the split to be manifested in profound fissures in the Israeli national consensus.

Our journal has always emphasised the challenge to the consensus that emanated from the more progressive end of the political spectrum: the refusal to serve in Lebanon and the occupied territories, the recognition of the national rights of the Palestinians, the refusal of the PLO as their representative, the desirability of moving towards comprehensive peace. These were signs of the cracking of the old Zionist consensus, evidence of the weakening of the national unity that had been a reality for years and was one of the main characteristics of Israeli society.

However, the right wing of the Israeli political spectrum was also infected by the spirit of revolt against fundamental elements of the consensus. The spirit of the right and the garden ethos patriarchal among broad circles of the far right: one which placed the 'Land of Israel' and/or the religious national loyalty to the land of the state.

In religious-Zionist circles, especially amongst Ga'ath Emanim, a kind of reactionary post-Zionism has arisen in recent years, contesting some of the old taboos. There is a new flurry of interest in the religious Right, and are perceived by most Israelis as undesirable, temporary phenomena which in no way detract from the legitimacy of the state at this time. Hence, their constant search for events that can be used to paper over the fissures, restore national unity and return to the warm embrace of the consensus. The Gulf War was used in this way; and after every attack accompanied by heavy casualties, a similar attempt is made.

One can therefore understand the efforts of the government, especially its more 'dovish' wing, to include the religious parties and the secular right-wing party, Tsomet, in the governing coalition. These parties continued quite a bit of the recent delegation of the government. But even after the assassination the government did not take the opportunity presented by the deep political shock and the crises of the right to combat the discourse of fundamentalism, attack on democratic values and the lingering attitude towards Arab terror. Instead it has chosen to woo the right in the name of the 'unity of the people' and 'preventing a civil war'.

In a grand effort to walk this wayward path, leaders of Peace Now held a dialogue meeting with the head of the Yesha settlers' Council, the settlers' major organisation in the country which refused earlier to pay lip service to contemplating its past sins in the wake of Rabin's assassination of a Likud MK, or in the event of defection of the Left. This is not surprising that the settler leaders managed to put the Peace Now representatives on the back foot.

Ben-Gurion declares Israel's independence in 1948. Today its national consensus seems irretrievably broken.

CORRIBALISM

grounded in 'legitimate' political discourse. They are scurrying to distance themselves from the spectre of 'civil war'. For such a 'war' would be one between light and darkness, life and death. The current leaders of the peace camp, imbued with rhetoric, cannot generate such an alternative. Perhaps, however, a new spirit will arise among the remarkable young generation of Israelis who have mobilised in the past few years, spurned out of their silence by the shock of Rabin's assassination. These youth have already demonstrated more than once that they are no longer enchanted by the myths that paralyse their elders.

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