

{MARCH 11 2006}

A FOUR-LETTER WORD

In English, a 'four-letter word' is a rude expletive. It is a vulgar description of a sexual act or organ, and an educated person will not use it. Now it appears that in the Hebrew language, too, there is a four-letter word, which a decent person will not use, especially not in an election campaign. A (politically) correct person will avoid it at all costs.

That word is Peace (which in Hebrew consists of four letters).

This week, the election propaganda moved from the street to radio and TV. Israeli law accords every list of candidates a minimum of free broadcasting time (10 minutes on TV), with parties represented in the outgoing Knesset getting additional minutes according to their size. No other election broadcasts on TV or radio are allowed.

As a result, election propaganda has been taken out of the hands of the politicians and turned over to the 'experts' - advertising people, copywriters and assorted 'strategists'. This is a cynical bunch. Like lawyers, most advertising people are mercenaries. They may serve a left-wing party today and sell their services to a right-wing one tomorrow. Their personal opinions do not count, business is business.

When an advertising expert plans an election campaign, his aim is not to explain the program of the party that hired him, but to attract voters. He is more a circus juggler than a preacher.

Election propaganda is like a gown: it should emphasize the attractive features of its owner and hide the less attractive ones. The difference is that the advertising expert can invent limbs that do not exist and cut off limbs that do, according the demands of the market.

One of the major headaches of the propagandist is that his candidates may speak up, God forbid, and expose their real views, thus spoiling the show. As a well-known advertising expert told me: 'Selling a politician is like selling toothpaste, with one important difference - toothpaste doesn't talk!'

As a result, the election propaganda does not say much about the real aims of the

AVNERY | A FOUR-LETTER WORD

leaders and their parties. One can assume in advance that most of the content of the broadcasts is fraudulent. If a commercial enterprise distributed such a mendacious prospectus on the stock exchange, it would be indicted.

Does this mean that the election propaganda is not interesting? On the contrary, one can learn a lot from it. It does not reflect the real positions of the parties, but it does reflect public opinion. More precisely: public opinion as it appears to the experts, who conduct daily polls, listen to test groups and such.

On this background, it is worthwhile to examine the broadcasts.

In one of his mysteries, Sherlock Holmes observed that the solution lay in the curious incident of the dog in the night. 'But the dog did nothing in the night-time!' his assistant exclaimed. 'That is the curious incident!' Sherlock replied.

The curious incident in the present election campaign is a word that does not appear at all: the word 'peace'.

A stranger will not understand its absence. After all, Israel is in a perpetual state of war. The broadcasts themselves are full of frightening Hamas parades. The fear of suicide bombings is stronger in Israel than any other fear. Logic says that a party that promises peace will reach the heights of popularity. Yet, wonder of wonders, no important party is claiming this crown for itself. More than that, no important party so much as mentions the word peace in its broadcasts.

Kadima speaks about Hope, Hope, Hope - without spelling out what kind of hope, hope for what. It speaks of 'Might', and even of a 'Chance for a Political Move'. Peace? Nyet.

Kadima's masterpiece is a TV clip which harnesses to its cause the whole crew - Herzl, Ben-Gurion, Begin, Sharon and Rabin. It shows Herzl announcing the Zionist idea, Ben-Gurion founding the State of Israel, Begin making peace with Egypt, Sharon crossing the Suez Canal in the Yom-Kippur war, and Rabin making peace with -- King Hussein.

King Hussein? Wait a minute. Didn't Rabin sign an agreement with the Palestinian Liberation Organization and shake hands with Yasser Arafat? Wasn't that the high point of his life? Wasn't he awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for that? Wasn't the peace with Hussein almost an afterthought, since Hussein had already been an unofficial ally of Israel for more than 40 years? But Kadima has decided that it must not show Arafat at any price. It could be accused, God forbid, of striving for peace with the Palestinians!

Amir Peretz of Labor might have been tempted to speak about peace, if his handlers had not shut him up in time. He feels much safer talking about children without food and oldsters without pensions.

Likud, of course, does not speak about peace. Binyamin Netanyahu is at his best when

AVNERY | A FOUR-LETTER WORD

scaring people. For this purpose he went down to the junkyard and retrieved some used generals, who testify that Hamas and the Palestinian Authority pose an existential threat to Israel, much as the frightful Iranian bomb. Only the Great Bibi knows how to deal with them. Peace? Don't make me laugh!

Most amusing is Meretz, the party headed by Yossi Beilin, originator of the Geneva Initiative. Its main broadcast shows men and women pushing slips of paper into the cracks of the Western Wall while voicing their most ardent wish. There is a woman yearning for an academic degree, a man who wants to marry another man, a grandpa who longs for money in order to buy a present for his grandson, a Christian woman who hankers for recognition as a Jewess, a mother who desires to send her son to kindergarten, a woman pining for a divorce. And what is the one thing nobody yearns for, longs for, pines for according to the Meretz propaganda people?

You guessed it: That four-letter word again.

What does all this say about the Israeli public, 2006?

It says that the huge majority of the Jewish Israelis do not believe in peace. Peace is being conceived as a dream, something that has nothing to do with reality. A party that speaks about peace brands itself as living in a fantasy world. Worse, it may be suspected of 'Arab-loving'. What could be more disastrous?

So what do Israelis believe in? They want a Jewish State, with as large a Jewish majority as possible. That is agreed among all the Jewish parties. They believe in fixing the final borders of Israel unilaterally, without speaking with those Palestinians. The Palestinians, as everybody knows, have just elected Hamas and want to throw us into the sea.

What borders? Ehud Olmert is gradually disclosing what he has in mind. His map will not surprise the readers of this column. His Greater Israel includes all the territory trapped between the Green Line and the Separation Wall; and in addition the Jordan Valley; Greater Jerusalem, which includes the Ma'aleh Adumim settlement and the territory between it and the city (but giving up some densely populated Arab neighborhoods); the settlement blocs of Ariel, Alfei-Menasheh, Modi'in Illit and Gush Etzion; and 'special security areas'. He takes care not to draw an actual map, so there is no certainty about the borders of the settlement blocs. But he certainly aims at annexing more than half of the West Bank.

For Netanyahu, that is, of course, blatant treason, a shameful surrender to the Arabs. In his broadcasts, he denounces Olmert's borders as 'borders inviting terrorism'. The Likud does actually draw a map, in which the Wall moves right to the center of the West Bank.

Labor and Meretz agree in principle to the annexation of the settlement blocs, but

AVNERY | A FOUR-LETTER WORD

they do not publish maps. They mention half-heartedly some undefined swaps of territory. No wonder, since they dream, almost visibly, of joining the coalition under Olmert that will probably be set up after the election. The map of the coalition is more important than the map of annexations.

And peace? Shhhhhh...