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Bennett's Mistake

By Amihai Attali

- A historic moment is currently at hand. I am not talking about Binyamin Netanyahu's possible departure from the stage; that event, if it happens, will betoken the end of an era. Netanyahu not go down as a mere footnote in the annals of the State of Israel, as some people used to say; his presence is felt everywhere. Nobody can remain indifferent him, for better or for worse. But even if Netanyahu does leave, we are in the throes of a much more substantial change, a deep social change whose outcome is hard to predict. The change that has been unfolding in Israel in the last few years, and which has been made manifest by the political chaos we have all been mired in, is a dramatic change of the country's agenda.
- Before anything else, the basis for this change is very good. We have become a wealthy country and we aren't focused on existential security. Israel's citizens don't leave for work in the morning wondering if they will arrive in one piece. Just 19 years ago, the situation was utterly different. The failure of disengagement, the failure of the Oslo process and the murderous violence that the Palestinians waged against innocent civilians made any meaningful peace process unequivocally impossible. Twenty-six years ago, there was still a majority in the Knesset that believed in peace, people who dreamed with starry eyes of eating hummus in Damascus and shopping in the Nablus market. Reality slapped us in the face, and today all we want is quiet, security and economic prosperity.
- In tandem, the massive construction of hundreds of thousands of housing units beyond the Green Line created facts on the ground, making the option of uprooting of Jews no longer viable. And it is those developments, incidentally, that answer the question as to where the Labor Party and Meretz have vanished. But we currently find ourselves looking at what used to be an unfathomable reality: Mansour Abbas would prefer to form a government with Netanyahu, whereas Bennett (deep down inside) would prefer a government with Lapid. Some of the developments that occurred in

the State of Israel in the last few years have changed Bennett utterly.

- “There is no more right-wing and left-wing” was the cliched election slogan that was conceived by some Tel Aviv PR agency, but reality is proving that it is entirely true. Is there a right-wing and a left-wing when Netanyahu considers Abbas to be a first-rate political partner? Is there a left-wing and a right-wing when the government that has the best chances of being formed is comprised of Ayelet Shaked and Ibtisam Mara’ana? There is no more right-wing and left-wing, but there is—quite clearly—a new fault line: conservatives versus liberals. Abbas would prefer partnering up with Yaakov Litzman. He can more readily communicate with someone who, like him, subordinates himself to the religious law. It is clear to him that there will be no pro- LGBTQ legislative initiatives from Litzman, and conservatism on this issue is his first concern.
- In that context, Israel is marching into an era in which it will be easier for Bennett to have a political relationship with Lapid rather than with Moshe Gafni. Why? Because Bennett and Lapid were both sprung from the same mold. In the end, both are more Israeli than they are Jewish. It would appear that Bennett wants to retain Israel’s Jewish identity but is capable of accepting much broader maneuvering room than Smotrich is. Incidentally, is every Orthodox Jew necessarily conservative? Absolutely not. If I may be permitted to provide a yardstick for observing Halacha and the commandments, we can assume that Rabbi Yuval Cherlow is no less observant than Rabbi Zvi Tau, the most conservative rabbi of the nationalist-Haredi stream. And yet, one of them has spearheaded a large number of revolutions, and the other adheres to uncompromising conservatism. This is an issue that is new to all of us and will most likely be an issue for us in the coming years. We must definitely be ready for conventions to be upset and for surprising alliances to be formed.
- That is probably the mistake that Bennett made in his last campaign. In essence, he is a liberal, that is his nature and that is reflected in his resume. But he was afraid of trying to appeal to a broad audience that could have more easily digested his joining a government with Lapid. Instead, he stuck

to his conservative base and is now paying the price, in which half of his voters don't want him to see him in a government with Lapid.