

ISRAEL WILL SURVIVE
ONLY WITH A GOVERNMENT
THAT WORKS RESPONSIBLY
AND A SOCIETY THAT'S
INVOLVED.

*LAOR
SHOWS
THE WAY*

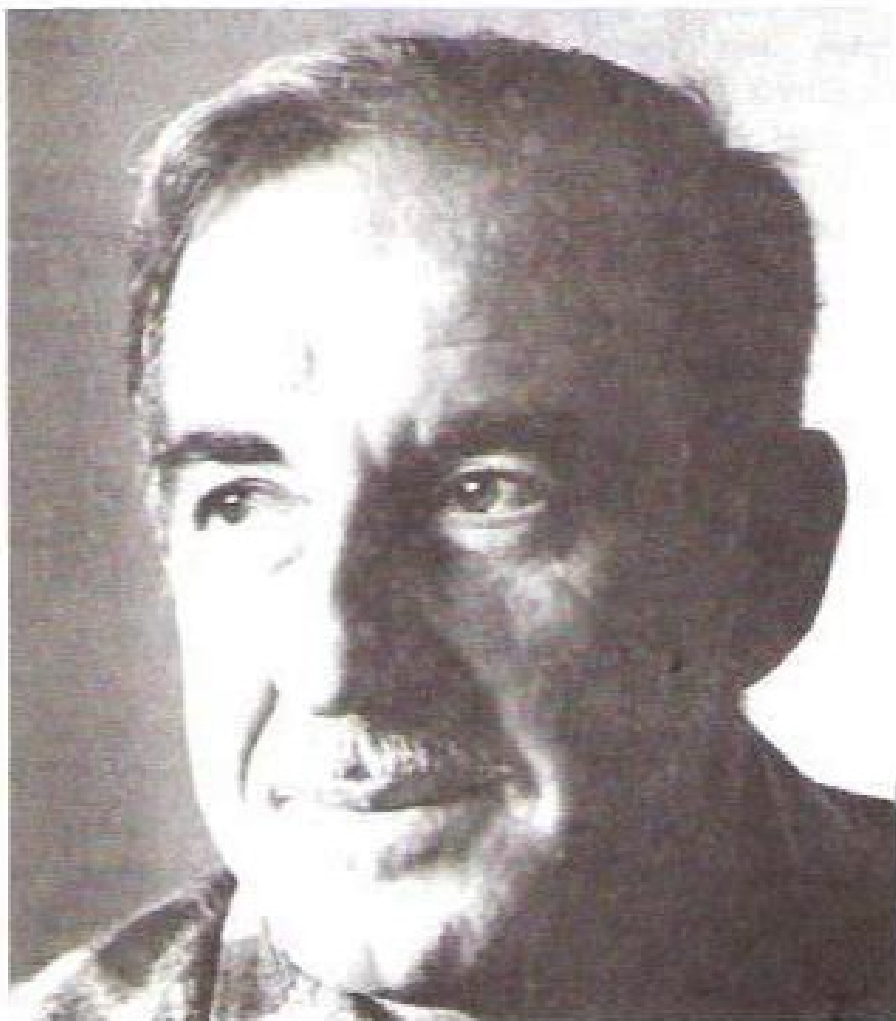
The Quiet Thunder

Based on an article by Ehud Dor which appeared in "Hotam"

THE PRESSING NEED FOR COMPLETE CHANGE

FOR THE LAST ten years, since his discharge from the Army, Yaakov Hisdai has urged Israelis to face with appropriate seriousness, the perils confronting this country. He has done this through newspaper articles, and radio and television broadcasts, calling on Israelis to open their eyes to the danger signals which today are patently clear to everyone.

Yaakov Hisdai was born in south Tel Aviv 50 years ago. The events of the pre-State years are engraved in his memory. While in high school he joined Betar and in 1956 he enlisted in the Army, where he served until 1978. During the Six Day War he was awarded a citation for bravery in an act of unusual courage while being seriously wounded. Commanding a paratroop unit in the town of Suez during the Yom Kippur War, he was again wounded while leading his men out of a difficult situation. But he does not like to discuss his military career. He



Yaakov Hisdai

wants people to relate to what he says not because he won citations for bravery as a paratroop commander, but because of the value and importance of his ideas.

Following the Yom Kippur War, Yaakov Hisdai was asked to join the Agranat Commission as a military researcher. He was able to study records of government sessions, meetings of the Army leadership, as well as testimony from all levels of the Army as to what really happened. He acquired an accurate idea of the pre-war period as well as the course of the war. During this time he had a unique opportunity to see clearly the faults of Israeli government and society.

He began criticizing the social trends which endanger the very existence of the State. He criticized shortcomings in the Army while still in uniform, until his superiors eventually "showed him to the door."

At this time Hisdai not only made good use of the information gathered during his term on the Agranat Commission. He also completed his studies in Jewish history, started while he was in the Army. This knowledge assists him in his analysis of Israel's situation.

After his discharge from the Army, Hisdai continued his studies, obtaining a doctorate from the Hebrew University. He also graduated in law, which he now practises in Jerusalem. He is married, father of 5, and lives in the Jewish Quarter.

LAOR:

"One heart and a new spirit."

Almost from the day of his release he began traveling around the country to lecture on the political and social situation in Israel. A group of people joined him, analysing the problems and formulating solutions. They studied the fate of earlier protest movements such as "Dash," the Democratic Movement for Change, which lacking sufficient preparation and resoluteness regarding its principles, simply dissolved.

The group chose the name, "Laor," which is an acronym from a verse in the Book of Ezekiel (chap. 11) "One heart and a new spirit." Laor poses the question: how did this country, so dynamic and so abundant in promise in its first years, reach the present sad state of affairs? The answer: because of a political leadership which has forfeited the trust of the people. Since the Yom Kippur War the people of this country feel that the leaders are incompetent. Many see no qualitative difference between the Likud and Alignment parties. The leaders are interested primarily in maintaining their positions. They draw the public's attention from the real reasons for national strife, for

faulty function of government. They try to impress upon voters that "everything is fine," by engineering a high standard of living, even when this goes against the real interests of the national economy. They promote hatred between supporters of the Likud and Alignment parties. Thus hiding responsibility for the faults. Furthermore they inflame the national debate on peace and territories, at a time when the main discussion should be on the nature of the State's political leadership.

"We reached the conclusion," says Hisdai with innocent pathos that is honest and penetrating, "that a large part of what has been built up, was suitable in its time, but today is destructive. Also, the disease has spread so wide that it cannot be cured in one brief period. A comprehensive program is necessary — one that will unify and solidify.

RESPONSIBILITY AND CHOICE

The principles which guide Laor are: a life of responsibility and choice. It is from these principles that Laor bases its plan for a smooth-working government and a positively motivated society. The plan includes the setting up of a new social order based on moulding a new kind of citizen, imbued with a sense of responsibility, concern, and involved in the affairs of the community and nation. To mould such a citizen (actually the exact opposite of most of today's citizens), it is imperative to offer the means and the authority.

According to Laor's novel view of government, far-reaching changes in two spheres are necessary: in the governmental system and in the organization of society. In the government, the executive and legislature would each be composed of two separate authorities. The executive would comprise the presidency and the cabinet. The president would be elected in general elections, and would appoint the prime minister who with the cabinet (of his choice), would run the everyday affairs of the country. The president, by means of four national councils would concern himself with long-range planning.

The legislature would also comprise two houses — an upper house and a lower house. The former would concern itself with long-term national planning, while the latter, similar to the Knesset today, would deal with legislature, ongoing supervision of the cabinet, and determining the State budget.

In this way both the Executive and the Legislature will contain within themselves the bodies to deal separately with long-range planning as well as current issues. Such a framework would solve a major political and social problem in Israel — the dangerous lack of clear planning for the future, which should also be expressed in present decision-making.

DRAMATIC BUDGET CHANGES

It is in the State budget that Hisdai and his followers see the main leverage for the establishment of a new social order so desperately needed. This would also be split into two: the government budget, and the people's budget. The former would be allocated to defense, foreign affairs and infrastructure, while the latter would be given directly to the citizens.

In this lies the novelty of the plan: at the beginning of each year every citizen would receive two booklets. In the one would be detailed the budget he is due to receive, according to his family size and status; and the second would list the institutions eligible for allocation of this budget. The budget would not be paid in actual cash, so as to avoid profiteering. It would be paid by the citizen in the form of payment vouchers, designated for specific purposes: education, culture, a political party, neighborhood budget, health, etc. The citizen would allocate these vouchers to the institutions of his choice, institutions which he is interested in supporting. These institutions would be credited by the Ministry of Finance on the basis of the citizens' vouchers. This would be their budget. In this way the citizen would be directly involved in communal affairs on a neighborhood and regional basis.

At the beginning of each year, the citizen would have to decide which kindergarten, school or university would receive his allocation. He would be involved. He would not allocate monies to causes he disapproved of. He would support causes of his choice, and the various institutions would have to prove themselves year after year in order to be worthy of citizens' allocations.

Likewise, there would be a great influence on political parties. Year after year they would have to prove themselves in the eyes of the voters in order to receive their allocations. Party representatives would have to make more frequent direct contact with the citizens and give a continual account on their actions.

According to Yaakov Hisdai this system is eclectically balanced between existing political systems. It harnesses the ability to enlist collective effort, while maintaining equal distribution of the budget among the population, and it employs maximum freedom for the citizen, while preserving the principle of free competition. Thus, it will be possible to encourage the utilization of the citizens' full potential vitality. It will be able to realize the Zionist vision, the main principle of which, is not just the setting up of a state for the Jews, but also to fashion a human being and a society of the highest quality.

AGAINST EXTORTION AS A POLITICAL SYSTEM

Existing for almost a decade as an ideological movement, whose main activities were searching for answers to fundamental problems of ideal government and society and the promotion of these ideas in a limited, educational framework, Laor today, has become a political movement. Its members believe that it cannot continue to function on a low key while the country is now bombarded more than before, with crucial issues that will not find solutions under the present governmental and societal frameworks and attitudes. But this shift into the political arena has posed a number of questions.

Can a group with no political machinery or funding compete against the existing political parties?

Can Laor avoid the stigma attached to a group that becomes political?

The public has already been bitterly disappointed by movements for change which failed. Won't this make people wary of yet another movement for change?

Yaakov Hisdai says, "If things had continued the way they had for another twenty years, we should not have entered the political arena. But the present situation seems to indicate that we are now in an accelerated process of decline that could lead, in the foreseeable future, to social disintegration and even civil war. We conclude that we have to exert every effort to halt the dangers, and to unite all the people who realize this around a common goal.

"The riots highlight the feeling of decline in this country, as well as our bad internal situation due largely to a political system that fails in everything it touches. The riots show that it will not be possible to deal with external problems as long as there is no effective, fundamental relating to our internal problems."

Hisdai continues, "We have to choose between negative alternatives — a solution which is the least dangerous for us. For this we need a strong and wise government, which enjoys the confidence of the public, which can navigate towards the solution in a careful and controlled manner, without demagoguery, without incitement and without concealing facts.

Everything the political system does today is the exact opposite."

NO MERGERS

Asked if Laor would consider merging with any existing political party, Yaakov Hisdai is emphatically negative. Laor is critical of the entire

political system and the social order. No existing party shares this attitude. Any criticism heard is usually in the form of lip service only. Today the parties place priority on their own narrow interests before the interests of the nation and of the state. "We are totally opposed to this," says Yaakov Hisdai.

He continues: "Today there are two main parties which are both in the process of ageing and dissolution. It is easy to see the reasons for their ineffectiveness. The smaller parties are characterized by merely being of service to one of the larger parties, or they flaunt their bargaining power in order to extort privileges for a particular sector of the public. We reject extortion as a political system."

CELEBRITIES INSTEAD OF IDEOLOGY

Asked about Laor's members, Hisdai says: "Our people are not celebrities. Our people are from all walks of life: non-religious and religious, from the cities and from the settlements. They are more concerned with the dimension of ideas. We reject a political system that displays well-known people as a substitute for sound ideas, as a substitute for ideology. If we do this we will become part of the very system we reject, part of that same system that has failed so miserably."

How can Laor succeed in the political arena if it doesn't follow the accepted rules of the political game? Hisdai answers that since leaving the Army, and participating in public life, he found he could break many of the accepted rules and continue to be widely heard. "I didn't hire a public relations consultant or join a political party. But I began giving lectures, and was invited to talk all over the country. My articles appear frequently in the newspapers. You are interviewing me, not because some public relations firm persuaded you, but because I have something to say that is of interest and importance. So, I know that Laor's voice can be heard throughout the country without resorting to the tricks that our movement rejects. Our course will be made through the use of different standards of behaviour – respect, honesty and responsibility, which are part of the cornerstone of our principles, and which are necessary principles of government for Israel. And it begins among ourselves, in the style of our own discussions.

Question: Does the fact that you're religious have any influence on the character the Laor Movement?

Answer: I don't regard myself a policeman of the Almighty. There is a saying that a Jew should concern himself with his own spiritual needs

and his fellow-man's physical needs. But a certain rabbi once said that the trouble is that many Jews concern themselves with their own physical needs and with the spiritual needs of others.

Question: Where do you stand in the political spectrum?

Answer: I'd rather not answer that because our's is a society that sees itself in terms of stereotypes, used for demagoguery and incitement. Thus, any political idea is automatically rejected by half the nation as soon as it is identified with the Right or Left wing. I don't subscribe to any one side, and I attack both Likud and Alignment policies, and I won't, under any circumstances be identified with either side.

If you are categorized, say, Left wing, you feel obliged to favor territorial compromise, be opposed to religion, and to see all Left wing leaders as capable and charming, while all Right wing leaders are seen as incompetent and ugly. I reserve the right to judge for myself who is smart and who is stupid in both camps.

There are extremists on both the Right and the Left, and a confused majority that once knew where it stood, and today is torn to pieces. We stand in the middle, and try to form a clear and balanced orientation, that on the one hand contains the fundamental belief in our right to the Land, and on the other hand sees very clearly the limitations and constraints. So, there is no need today to determine the borders. They have not consolidated according to what you define, but as a result of historical developments. We need to restore the balance between reality and wishful thinking.

Question: Where will you find the inner strength needed for a long, drawn-out, exhaustive political process, based entirely on educating the public?

Answer: From our deep realization of the dangers the State faces. However, when a movement based on integrity enters politics, it faces the danger of failure. And if this happens people will say that it pays to be corrupt. But should this be a reason not to enter the struggle? In spite of everything, if we should succeed, people will see that, acting with integrity, one can accomplish much. This in itself will have tremendous educational value. This is our dilemma at the moment. If it wasn't for the dangers facing Israel, we would certainly not choose the political option, but rather continue as an educational movement.

**if you are concerned about the future of Israel contact:
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