Yonathan Shapiro

Analyse der Herut-Partei

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I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg with two distinct projects in mind. The first was to start writing a book. This was to be *a socio-historical analysis of the Herut party,* which dominates the Likud electoral alliance in Israel. I had already collected my empirical data which included archival material, newspapers and other party publications, as well as personal interviews. I still had to continue the examination of relevant theoretical and comparative studies in the Berlin libraries.

The comparative material I was looking for included studies on rightist nationalist movements in Europe, especially Eastern Europe, between the two World Wars. The origins of Herut are to be found in that period in this political camp. The founders of Herut started their political career as members of a youth organization — Betar — in Poland in the 1930s. In contrast to most other Jewish political organizations who had a close affinity with socialist and other progressive groups, Betar came under the influence of radical right groups, many of whom were the ruling groups in the Eastern European states.

The strong man in Polish politics was Joseph Pilsudsky, who headed the dominant nationalist camp. He had started as a democrat, but especially after his coup d'état in 1926 became more authoritarian. After his death in 1935 his successors adopted many of the ideas and methods of other European radical right movements. These people were the reference group of Betar youngsters and influenced their thinking. These youngsters too became extreme nationalists and wished to create in Palestine a militarily powerful state along the historical borders of ancient Israel. Like Pilsudsky and his associates, they believed this was the way to reproduce the nation's glorious past. In preparation for the inevitable military struggle to liberate the ancient homeland, their organization in

Poland was a para-military organization similar to many other radical right organizations. They were organized in military units, dressed in military uniforms, and led by commanders who were appointed by the leader who was the organization's supreme commander.

When they arrived in Palestine they were confronted with an already organized Jewish community. It was run democratically, led by political parties and elected representative bodies dominated by a social-democratic party. After the state of Israel was established in 1948, the former Betar leaders were forced, after a confrontation with the dominant groups, to dismantle their military organization. They consequently built a political party — Herut — which accepted the democratic rules of the game. This adaptation to the democratic institutions is the major part of my study.

Acceptance of the democratic structure led to their concentration on the populist aspects of politics which was also part of most European radical right parties. But unlike these parties they now neglected the organizational aspect. They did not create a bureaucratic party organization like other Israeli parties which followed the social-democratic organizational model. Furthermore, instead of an articulate ideology their nationalism was a set of myths and symbols. This helped maintain the exalted position of their leader. He symbolized the nationalist myths and this became an important source of his authority. The leader of Herut was Menachem Begin from 1948 until his resignation in 1983. He had already been the head of Betar in Poland, and had transferred to the new party some of the former ideas and political practices.

Such was Herut's desire for a great Israel along its ancient historical borders and the belief that military might was the guarantee for the state's survival and the revival of the nation's honor and glory.

All this had kept Herut for many years a pariah in Israeli politics dominated by the social democratic parties and their associates. But a set of historical circumstances and sociological developments led to the decline of the social democratic party and the evolution of a new political discourse which got Herut out of its isolation. Without its having to change its structure, its ideas and its political style it became a major political factor. After it had won the 1977 election Herut's nationalist emotional politics and its myths and symbols gained supremacy over the rational didactic political discourse of social democracy.

Without changing formal democratic procedures, Herut introduced a new political content and style. At its center was the leader whose speeches aroused the public. This was the politics of the pia77a which weakened considerably the intermediary political structures and the former bureaucratic party politics.

I have now written a first draft of my study and hope that the book will be completed in the coming year.

My second project in Berlin was to improve my proficiency in the German language and get acquainted with German history and sociology. The writing of my book together with my study of German history have prepared the ground for my next study. It will concentrate on the *conflicts and tensions between democracy and nationalism.* This I would like to do on a comparative basis at the center of which should be comparisons and contrasts between the new Israeli democracy and the two German democratic republics (the Weimar republic and the Bundesrepublik).