

Our World: Israel's uninformed electorate

Caroline Glick, THE JERUSALEM POST

Mar. 20, 2006

On the eve of the Knesset elections, Israel faces multiple challenges. Hamas, in appointing technocrats and terrorists to run its new government is showing that it is possible to learn from the Nazi model of governance. Even genocidal mass murderers who seduce their societies with delusions of racial and religious supremacy can receive international acclaim if they make the trains run on time.

Israel's political spectrum is divided between the Left, represented by Kadima and the Right represented by Likud. Kadima wishes to contend with the Hamas threat by making a public show of shunning Hamas while surrendering Judea and Samaria to the terror organization.

JPOST.COM HIT LIST

JPost.com's [most popular articles](#) this past week



The Likud points out that surrendering Judea and Samaria to Hamas will make it impossible to defend the rest of the country. Since Likud doesn't think that Israel should surrender its right to defend itself by turning its heartland over to a global terrorist organization which together with Fatah and Islamic Jihad has already murdered over 1,100 Israelis and remains committed to annihilating Israel, it objects to surrendering any territory to Hamas.

It has been repeatedly noted in this column that the Israeli media has blocked all public debate on this issue. The media molycoddles politicians on the Left - applauding them for mindlessly repeating the talking points they received from their public relations advisers. Politicians on the Right on the other hand are harassed, insulted and forced on the defensive for daring to suggest that expelling Israelis from their homes and transferring their land to Hamas might not be in Israel's best interest.

It isn't just issues related to Israel's national security that are shunted under the rug by our media stars as they obsess over our politicians' relative likeability and body language. All issues of concern are ignored.

A week before the elections, it seems worthwhile to look at a few of these other issues so that we will at least have some idea of what is at stake.

FIRST, WE have the economy. Of all the parties running in these elections, only two have enunciated their economic policies in any coherent manner. Likud, led by Binyamin Netanyahu is a free market, small government party.

Labor, led by union boss Amir Peretz who oversaw the Histadrut labor union as it plunged into bankruptcy taking several workers' pension funds with it, and held the national economy hostage to its illegal general strikes, maintains that Israel must adopt the South American socialist model that has done such wonders for the Argentinean, Venezuelan and Bolivian economies.

The front-running Kadima party has outlined no economic platform. Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert both promises to continue the free market reforms Netanyahu pushed through as finance minister, and to reverse them, while his deputy Shimon Peres promises an end to "piggish capitalism."

Kadima's incoherence serves its needs in the election season because the only question that the media considers relevant or newsworthy is whether a candidate or a party expresses sufficient "social sensitivity." Translated into talking points this means that candidates are judged by the amount of contempt they level against Netanyahu for having implemented free market reforms.

While Netanyahu's reforms caused a large, sustained drop in unemployment and moved Israel from the brink of economic collapse to become the fastest growing market in the Western world, the media barrages the public with unsubstantiated, and transparently imaginary statistics proclaiming that a quarter of Israel's children are starving.

Aside from the invisible hundreds of thousands of starving kids, no one seems to care that workers just barely scraping the borders of the middle class are paying 33-40 percent income taxes, or that VAT - a regressive tax if there ever was one - is 16.5 percent. It doesn't seem to bother anyone that our markets are run by monopolists that overcharge us for everything from food to housing to banking services because they can because they are monopolists.

All the journalists who ooze "social sensitivity" never seem to make a connection between overtaxed business owners and unemployment or low wages for skilled and unskilled, educated and uneducated workers. Given the media's love affair with South American socialism, it should surprise no one that those minor parties that have something to say about the economy generally say that they hate and oppose capitalism and small government.

ASIDE FROM the economy, there is the issue of Israel's constitutional crisis. During the course of the campaign, there have been several notable episodes which illustrated the depths of Israel's constitutional morass.

First we have the interim government's treatment of the Knesset's investigative committee into police brutality against protesters at Amona last month. Acting in clear contempt of the Knesset, Internal Security Minister Gideon Ezra and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz barred their senior officers from testifying before the committee. The fact that as government ministers in a parliamentary democracy they are constitutionally bound to uphold the decisions of the Knesset seems to have made no impression whatsoever on the ministers - who have the full support of the media in their law-breaking activities.

Then we have the odd decision by Attorney-General Menachem Mazuz to appoint himself arbiter of what decisions the interim government is allowed to make before the elections. Last week, Mazuz ordered the Health Ministry's medications committee, which is responsible for determining what prescription drugs should be covered by state medical insurance, to desist from convening until after the elections. It never seemed to occur to Mazuz that it might not be any of his business whether the committee convenes since absolutely no legal issue is raised by the schedule of its meetings.

Mazuz's decision to turn a committee of civil servants into a matter under his purview is just the latest in a series of dubious if not downright unacceptable maneuvers on his part that have served to empower him far beyond what any reasonable person would deem reasonable.

Following Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's massive stroke in January, Mazuz invented a bit of Orwellian legalistic gobbledygook by defining Sharon's condition as of one of "temporary incapacity of a permanent character."

Mazuz had good reason to act as he did. If he had simply declared that Sharon was "permanently incapacitated" - which he is - then a complicated, multi-step procedure for selecting and approving a new prime minister and government would have been set in motion, the results of which are unclear. But by declaring Sharon "temporarily incapacitated on a permanent basis," Mazuz blocked that procedure from taking place. In so doing, he seized the power to select the prime minister from Israel's elected officials, effectively anointing himself the prime minister's sole elector.

Israel's constitutional crisis has two central characteristics - the Knesset is emasculated and the legal establishment as represented by the Attorney-General and the Supreme Court is disproportionately empowered. By all rights, this state of affairs should have been a major issue in the election campaign. Yet, it has received no attention.

Before his temporary incapacitation of a permanent nature, Sharon and his PR consultants began espousing support for constitutional reform that would transform Israel from a parliamentary democracy to a presidential democracy. Since Olmert

replaced Sharon, Kadima has been all but silent on the issue.

For its part, Labor members have repeatedly voiced their satisfaction with the current imbalance of powers. This makes sense because in constitutional matters, the state prosecution and the Supreme Court routinely rule in accordance with their members' leftist political beliefs thus empowering the Left well beyond its numerical support among the public.

NETANYAHU HAS stated his preference for a reform of the method of electing Knesset members. The Likud supports splitting the ballots so that 60 members of Knesset will be selected directly by voters on a regional basis while the other 60 will continue to be elected by the proportional party lists.

There can be little doubt that a movement away from proportional elections will not only increase accountability by tying parliamentarians to their constituents, it will also eliminate some of the smallest splinter parties and so stabilize Israeli governments.

In the next few years, Israel's security, economic growth and constitutional order will all be challenged in both familiar and unfamiliar ways. Sadly, because of our media's temporary bias and superficiality of a permanent nature which causes it to squelch all public debate on all the issues of the day, as we go to the ballot box next week, we will be casting votes that will influence how those challenges will be met without the least awareness of either the issues at stake or the manner in which the political parties will contend with them.

Then again, since they have never been challenged on any of these issues, most of our politicians are also unaware of them.

This article can also be read at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1139395642779&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

[[Back to the Article](#)]

Copyright 1995-2006 The Jerusalem Post - <http://www.jpost.com/>