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The twenty-ninth anniversary of Israel's independence.

The day will yet come when we count our blessings by the decade, and more. For now, each year is a treasured gift. And this year the more so, for Israel Independence Day occurs at a time when the citizens of Israel are deeply involved in the last stages of preparation for elections to the Ninth Parliament.

Elections are their own celebration of democracy; no special holiday is required to mark the occasion. Yet we would do well to take note of it, for democracy is not to be taken for granted. Israel survives in a region where democracy is otherwise unknown. Israel's adult citizens have come, in their overwhelming majority, from countries where democracy was at best a yearning. And Israel's years of independence, in other respects, have been years of deep disappointment for lovers of freedom, who have witnessed the collapse of democratic hopes in so many newly independent nations.

Yet Israel has remained a robust and vigorous democracy. It reflects all the confusions democracy begets; let it, on this occasion, be offered the praise democracy deserves. And let those who care for freedom rejoice as Israel's citizens cast their ballots for the ninth time in a free and vigorously contested election.

The particular form of democratic government in Israel is quite different from the American system, and is often a puzzlement to outsiders. As a birthday present this month, we offer a special section on Israeli politics, in the hope that it will help our readers wend their way through the unfamiliar terrain. The section opens

with a guide to the way the system works, and then goes on to detail two of the more striking recent developments on the Israeli political scene—the emergence of DASH, Yigal Yadin's new party, and the growth of Gush Emunim, Israel's most energetic pressure group.

The article on Gush Emunim is, on the whole, sympathetic to Gush members, a perspective that the editors of this magazine do not share. As I write, the newspapers tell of a Gush Emunim effort to establish still another illegal settlement on the West Bank, an effort which came to naught when the would-be settlers were removed by government troops. However the Gush Emunim people justify their behavior—presumably by proposing that a higher law entitles them to their civil disobedience—I find myself in agreement with those who view their actions as dangerous, both to the rule of law in Israel and to the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

That is not an uncommon view. It is, from all reports, the view of the Israeli government, as well as of a substantial proportion of the Israeli public. Yet, oddly, debate on such matters in the American Jewish community veers off in an entirely different direction. A couple of weeks back, an organization called "Emunim-U.S.A." was founded, and its president (Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld, past president of the Rabbinical Council of America) described its purpose as countering "unwarranted pressure on Israel to return any part of Eretz Israel to foreign rule," and to provide "moral and material assistance to the pioneering idealists of Gush Emunim."

In short, some American Jews have come together to oppose the considered policies of the Government of Israel and to provide aid and comfort to a group that proposes to break Israel's laws.

One might have anticipated that the formation of such a group would call forth howls of protest from establishment organizations, a flood of condemnatory editorials, and the like. No such thing has happened. Instead, there has been silence. Instead, it is an entirely different organization which has the established community exercised these days. That organization is Breira, one of whose central doctrines is that the rights of Palestinians to a national homeland should be acknowledged if and as the Palestinians are prepared to accept the fact of Israel as a Jewish state.

Thus we have one group which opposes Israeli government policy and urges greater flexibility in Israel's negotiating posture, and another group which opposes Israeli government policy and urges greater rigidity in Israel's negotiating posture—and, unlike the first, endorses lawlessness as a way of promoting its ends. As between the two, it seems to me the second that represents the greater danger. But even if we were to judge the contest a draw, it is hard to understand why so much attention is focused on Breira, and none on its right-wing counterpart.

Indeed, the plot is actually a bit thicker. One of the members of Emunim's advisory council is Dr. Rael Jean Isaac, the author of a widely distributed pamphlet, a reckless attack on Breira. When she moves beyond allegations of guilt-by-association, which is her chief form of argu-

ment, she rests the case against Breira on the fact that "it invites criticism of Israel," most especially by pointing an accusing finger at Israel's alleged "intransigence." But the problem, of course, is that Emunim's Israeli counterpart is much more vocal in its criticism, and would turn Israeli intransigence from a debatable allegation into a grim reality.

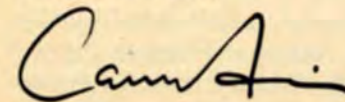
So the right attacks the left. No surprise here. What is surprising is the distribution and endorsement the Isaac pamphlet has received from mainline Jewish organizations and community newspapers.

Now whether one agrees with Breira or agrees with Emunim, or, eschewing both, believes that it is the Israeli government which is in the best position to shape Israeli policy wisely, it is curious that some Jewish organizations have seen fit to endorse an attack on one critic of Israeli policy by another critic of Israeli policy. Or may we now expect such organizations and papers to endorse a comparable attack on Emunim, to be written by a member of Breira?

Which all goes to show that American Jewish politics can be even more confusing than politics in Israel.

A lovely invitation awaits those readers who turn to page nine. We have set a goal of not less than a 10 percent increase in the number of our subscribers by June 1, and we hope you will want to help us in meeting that goal.

Chag sameach.



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