

Israel's Elections

BY SHIMON BEN NOACH

The drama and controversy surrounding the elections on June 30th, 1981 to Israel's 10th Knesset appealed to the sensation - seeking international media but disappointed the political purists. And the results were not only close but revealed a radical new situation, as a two party reality emerged and most of the small parties diminished or went down without trace.

Justice Moshe Etzioni, Chairman of the Central Election Committee, had scathing words for Israeli election campaigns in general. He described them as "the most expensive, the most wasteful and the most hyper - democratic in the world." He hastened to add that it was the protracted procedures rather than the system of proportional representation to which he objected. Some felt that Etzioni's comment about hyperdemocracy reflected a strength and not a weakness.

Pollster and analyst Hanoch Smith regretted that issues were blurred while the campaign was dominated by personalities. This absence of adequate discussion was particularly unfortunate because unprecedented world attention was focused on these elections, as it was felt that the upcoming talks on the Palestinian question and autonomy have brought the region to a crossroads.

But if debate was lacking, drama was not. After an amazing resurgence of popularity for Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who at the beginning of the year was well behind in the opinion polls, it seems as though anything could happen and just about everything did. The renewal of civil war in Lebanon, the Syrian missile crisis, the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear base, violence by a small band of Begin's supporters and a melodramatic eleventh hour reconciliation between Labor leader Shimon Peres and former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin - all provided the gathered assembly of journalists with colorful material. Amazingly three figure inflation

seems to have been largely forgotten in the campaign.

Then came the close results. Initially they were flashed incorrectly around the world as a victory for Shimon Peres, after an error in the computer prediction of Israel TV analyst Hanoch Smith. When nearly 2 million ballots had been counted, it was found that the two largest parties, Likud and Labor, had taken

80% of the 120 seats, with almost equal strength.

The pundits in the international press immediately began to talk of a country cripplingly polarized between poor Sephardim (Likud) and middle class Ashkenazim (Labor). To some extent this reflects a crude generalization while on another level it demonstrates the tendency for Israel to be judged differently from others. (Few would suggest that the division of Republicans and Democrats in the U.S., or Conservatives and Laborites in Britain are splits likely to tear those countries apart).

ISRAEL'S GAME: TENNIS

BY SIMON GRIVER

The tennis revolution has made further inroads into Israeli society during the last year. The momentum of the sport's rising popularity has been maintained by the opening of new centers in Jerusalem and Ashkelon and additional courts in Jaffa. It is estimated that tennis is now the country's biggest participation sport.

Spearheading the revolution is the Israel Tennis Centers organization (ITC), whose project of es-

tablating 65 courts at seven centers catering for 85,000 children is as much a social as a sports program. Most of the centers have been located in poor neighborhoods and aim to educate and better integrate disadvantaged children into society. The fact that a team of world class tennis youngsters has been produced has added icing to the cake.

Indeed ITC has reversed the situation in most of the world where tennis is a snob sport, with Jews frequently on the

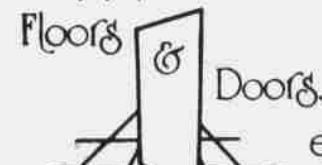
receiving end of such country - club discrimination. Wimbledon characterizes this prejudice. Men's champion John McEnroe's unruly behavior this year made him the second winner not to be invited to join the All England Club. The first was 1961 women's doubles champion and singles runner - up Angela Buxton and the reason - because she is Jewish. In a recent BBC interview, Buxton condemned the closed door approach of Anglo-Saxon country clubs which is stifling tennis and contrasted them with the community oriented Israeli centers.

The man behind ITC is African-born Dr. Ian Froman. The former Israel Davis Cup captain got the program underway despite the indifference of the

country's sporting authorities. In 1976 the 16 court Ramat Hasharon center was opened with a 5,000 capacity center court. Training programs for 8 - 14 year olds were so successful that it was decided to extend the centers nationwide. Most importantly, it was discovered that children brought to Ramat Hasharon from poorer areas began to show improved behavior and to gain a new enthusiasm for life. So centers were built in the northern development town of Kiryat Shmona (8 courts) and Jaffa (this year extended to 17 courts).

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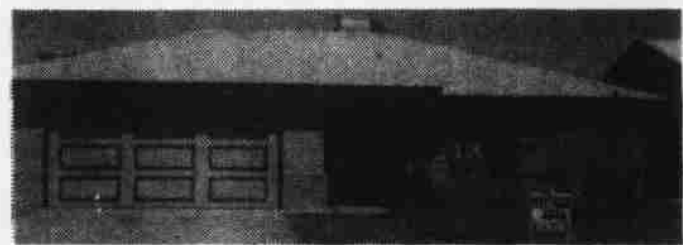
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