BOOK REVIEW

FATHERS, SONS AND POLITICAL IMPOTENCE

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ELITE WITHOUT SUCCESSORS, *by Yonathan Shapira.* Tel Aviv: Sifriat Hapoalim, 1984. 178 pages.

SONS IN THEIR FATHERS' SHADOW, *by Yossi Beilin.* Ramat Gan: Revivim Publishing House, 1984. 222 pages.

The prime outcome of the 1977 elections in Israel was the failure of the Labor Party. The Likud won a victory by default, which enabled it to take over the government. The reasons for the major political upheaval are likely to remain one of the more interesting questions for research in this sphere. Two recently published studies offer historical interpretations of these developments from different perspectives. One book is Yonathan Shapira's *Elite Without Successors* (Sifriat Hapoalim, 1984); the other is Yossi (Yoseph) Beilin's *Sons in Their Fathers' Shadow* (Revivim, 1984).

Yonathan Shapira's study provides a sociological-historical explanation of the failure of the labor movement to sustain its political dominance. According to his analysis, it is the case of an elite which did not survive the life-time of its founders. The reasons for this failure of political reproduction are analyzed at the macro-sociological level.

Shapira distinguished between the revolutionary and post-revolutionary generations. The former includes individuals who came to Palestine in three waves of immigration known as the Second, Third, and Fourth Aliyahs (the period between 1904 and 1928). These immigrants (olim) came mostly from Eastern Europe. Most of them were *halutzim* (pioneers), namely, members of socialist-Zionist youth movements who came to the land of the fathers as a practical step towards realizing their ideology, implementing a social and political revolution in Jewish life. They were not only committed to recreating Jewish nationhood in the historical homeland. They wanted to do it in a way which would reintroduce a working class into the predominantly middle-class Jewish society of their time. The post-revolutionary generation, born into the new society created by the revolution, were either sons and daughters of the original *halutzim* or arrived in Palestine (Eretz Yisrael) at an early age. They were the first generation to be brought up on the Hebrew language.

The peculiar relationship between the revolutionary and post-revolutionary generations is, according to Shapira's analysis, the key to understanding the failure of the former to reproduce itself. The older generation had ambivalent feelings toward the younger. The latter was expected to be creative and continue the revolution, without being excessively independent and rebellious. It so happened that the young generation played their part by being critical and creative within the limits set by the adults. Why were they so accommodating? The book goes into some detail in describing the power resources of the elite and how they were used to control the younger generation and preventing it from becoming a threat to the Founders.

As Shapira elaborates, the revolutionary elite built its political power through the creation and control of a bureaucratic class. Through the establishment of the Histadrut (the General Federation of Hebrew Workers in Eretz Yisrael), the Jewish Agency, and the Party organization, they gained control over the flow, distribution and management of most of the public resources available to the Zionist enterprise. Through exercising control it could not only decide who would get what but also who would be deprived of public resources.

The pioneering elite was not satisfied with economic control. It maintained that the culture created in the new society should reflect the values of the Zionist Labor movement. Consequently, the leadership could not tolerate an independent educational system, and challenged the traditional high status of the teacher in Jewish life. The ideas of cooperation on the basis of equality advocated by the teachers' organization were rejected. Several years marked by bitter debate and unsuccessful teachers' strikes culminated in their capitulation. There was a significant reduction in the status and pay of the teachers, and the schools started playing an increasing role in socializing the post-revolutionary generation. The school curriculum was adjusted to promote ideas and behavior prescribed by the elite.

Shapira also suggests that the use of Hebrew as the dominant language in the schools provided the elite with another important means of control. Through the development of the language, certain ideas could be promoted. Moreover, the language limited the exposure of the youth to alternative ideas and philosophies.

The post-revolutionary generation was brought up to believe in the image of the *halutz*. Though many of the ruling elite did not live up to this image, most of the younger generation accepted their ideas and acted on them. (Occasionally Shapira cannot hide his scorn for this form of political naivete.) Many of them left urban life and went to live on kibbutzim. They responded well to challenges posed to them by the leadership, such as the settlement of the Negev and, later on, the absorption of new immigrants. Moreover, as security needs increased, they carried most of the burden involved in defending the Jewish community in Palestine through the War of Independence and the creation of the State. Thereafter, many of them stayed on in the army in senior positions.

In spite of the increasing importance of the younger generation in the life of the country, the ultimate control remained in the hands of the founding fathers. According to Shapira, this situation was the outcome of the socialization which the entire post-revolutionary generation had undergone. By virtue of their upbringing and limited intellectual and practical experience, they were not capable of ruling. And when, due to the laws of biology, the transfer of power from the revolutionary elite to mem-

bers of the younger generation became unavoidable, the latter managed to forfeit it within a few years.

Yossi Beilin's work offers a well-documented challenge to Shapira's work. The two books were published around the same time, but Beilin refers to similar arguments brought up in Shapira's earlier publications, while Shapira cites Beilin's doctoral thesis which was the basis for the book. It should be noted that Beilin's study deals with inter-generational fights in three parties: Labor, General Zionists and Mapam. He describes and analyzes how, in all three cases, the younger generation tried to gain power but were opposed by the party leadership and lost the fight. Beilin's discussion of the Labor Party is by far the more detailed and better informed part of his book (as it is the subject of his doctoral dissertation).

Beilin's analysis differs from Shapira's in several ways. First, in what Shapira calls the revolutionary generation, Beilin distinguishes between two groups which are critical to his analysis. The elite from the Second and Third Aliyahs are the founders, while the Fourth Aliyah leaders constitute a different generation unit. He sees the latter group as an intermediary elite which took over from the founding fathers and controlled the party apparatus and public establishments into the 70's. It was that group which fought against the group Shapira denotes as the post-revolutionary generation.

Second, the post-revolutionary generation as depicted by Yossi Beilin (he calls them the '1948 generation' – 1948 was the year of the War of Independence and statehood), is not a submissive and politically impotent group. On the contrary, he sees them as a group of talented young men. In spite of their youth, they had, to their credit, considerable achievements as pioneers, in the military and in administration. Their start at gaining political power was promising. They organized, voiced open criticism of the establishment and even held a convention with impressive attendance. Nevertheless, they failed to gain any significant political power in the nineteen fifties.

The failure of the 1948 generation to become a significant force in the party before the 70's is attributed by Beilin to several factors. First, it was the fight of people in their twenties and thirties against leaders twenty to thirty years their senior, who were well-entrenched in the power positions of the establishment. It was not a 'fair fight'. Secondly, members of the post-revolutionary group were involved in national tasks in the army, the foreign service and elsewhere which they regarded as no less important than political posts. Thirdly, their personal relations with the members of the ruling elite were inhibitive. Some of them had to defy their own fathers. Others found themselves fighting against close family friends who had known them since they were born and called them by their childhood nicknames.

Beilin's explanations do not help us understand why the Labor Party fell from power in the 70's. Shapira does offer a link between his macro-sociological analysis and the political upset of 1977. Yet, the question is still open, especially since many members of that post-revolutionary generation came back into power (at least, a share in power) in 1984. Perhaps several years from now we will be able to tell whether this is a generation which cannot make the political system work for it, or a generation which was the victim of certain circumstances.

I would like to conclude on a methodological note. Yonathan Shapira makes an interesting attempt to proceed from macro-sociological analysis to the explanation of specific events and elite behavior. This move is not entirely convincing. Though one

may accept his analysis of broad political and social processes, it is not self-evident that this is the case with a certain group of people. Therefore, as Beilin deals with subject matter directly, his analysis is more convincing. Still, Beilin's portrayal of an energetic and talented group of young people fighting against a group of 'machine' politicians in attempting to gain control over the Labor Party (Mapai) can co-exist with a general depiction of the post-revolutionary generation as a whole as politically impotent and submissive.