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## **Grossman's Dilemma**

THE KEY word was " Hamas". It was spoken from the tribune and appeared on printed material - but in two very different ways.

On the tribune of the large annual memorial rally for Yitzhak Rabin, two weeks ago, the writer David Grossman, the sole speaker at the event, gave an important speech. Coming to the climax, he advised the Prime Minister: "Appeal to the Palestinians, Mr. Olmert. Appeal to them over Hamas's head. Appeal to the moderates among them, to those who, like you and me, oppose Hamas and its ideology!"

At the same time, dozens of Gush Shalom activists dispersed among the 100 thousand participants of the rally to distribute a sticker that said, simply: "Peace is made with enemies - TALK TO HAMAS!" They later reported that some refused to take the stickers, but the majority accepted them willingly.

These two attitudes illustrate the dilemma which the Israeli peace camp is now facing.

GROSSMAN'S SPEECH aroused many echos. It was a brilliant speech, the speech of a writer who has a way with words. The speech lifted the spirits of those present and was treated by the media as an important event. True, Grossman did not mention that he had initially supported the war and changed his view as it went on, but this fact did lend even more credibility to his penetrating criticism of the government.

He did mention the personal tragedy that hit him, when his son, Uri, was killed in the last hours of the war: "The calamity that my family and I suffered...does not give me any special privileges in our national debate. But it seems to me that facing death and loss brings with it a kind of sobriety and clarity."

He coined a new phrase that gripped the imagination and took hold of the public discourse. "Our leadership, both political and military, is hollow!" he declared. And indeed, that is the general feeling since the war: that this is a leadership empty of all content, devoid of any plan, lacking all values, whose only aim is to survive. He spoke about the "leadership" and not about Ehud Olmert personally, but this adjective fits the man himself exactly: a party functionary whose entire talent consists of devising tactical combinations and spins, without any intellectual depth, without vision, without an inspiring personality.

Another image also caught the imagination. Speaking about the inclusion of Avigdor Liberman in the government as Minister for Strategy, he said: "This is

the appointment of a compulsive pyromaniac to head the country's firefighters."

I could wholeheartedly identify with 90% of his speech. I could identify with everything he said about the state of the State, about the moral and social crisis, about the stature of our leaders and the national need to achieve peace. If I had stood on the tribune (something quite impossible, as I shall explain later on) I would have said similar things, which indeed my colleagues and I have been saying for decades.

The difference between us, and a profound difference it is, concerns the other 10% of his speech. And, even more so, the things he did *not* say.

I don't mean tactical matters. For example, in the entire speech there was no mention of the role of the Labor Party in the government, in the war and in the appointment of Liberman. Olmert is to blame for everything. Amir Peretz has disappeared.

No, I mean more substantial matters.

AFTER THE frontal attack on the "hollow" leadership, which lacks vision and plans, one would have expected Grossman to lay before the tens of thousand peaceniks assembled in the square his own vision and plan for the solution of the problem. But, as much as his criticism was clear and loud, his proposals were vague and banal.

What did he propose? To appeal to the "moderates" among the Palestinians "over the head" of their elected government, in order to restart the peace process. Not very original. That was said (but not done) by Ariel Sharon, that was said (but not done) by Ehud Olmert and George W. Bush.

This distinction between "moderates" and "fanatics" on the Arab side is superficial and misleading. Basically, this is an American invention. It evades the real problems. It contains a large measure of contempt for Arab society. It leads to a dead end.

Grossman's proposal diverts the discussion onto the path of "who to talk with" and "who not to talk with", instead of stating clearly *what* to talk *about*: the termination of the occupation, establishment of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, withdrawal to the pre-1967 border, solution of the refugee problem.

One could reasonably expect that in such a speech, at such a place, on such an occasion, these statements would be voiced loudly and clearly, instead of a repetition of intentionally blurred formulas. "Go to them with the boldest, most serious plan that Israel is able to put forward, a plan that all Israelis and Palestinians with eyes in their heads will know is the limit of refusal and concession, ours and theirs." Sounds nice. But what does it mean?

After all, it is clear that one has to make such a proposal to the elected Palestinian leadership, whatever its composition. The idea that we can talk with a part of the Palestinian people (now the minority) and boycott the other part (now the majority) is false and misleading. It is also imbued with the overbearing arrogance that is the hallmark of the occupation.

Grossman has much empathy for the poor and downtrodden in Israeli society, and he expresses it in moving words. It is obvious that he tries, really tries, to feel a similar empathy with the suffering Palestinian society. But here he fails. His is an empathy without pathos, without real feelings.

He says that this is "a people no less tortured than we are." No *less* than we? Gaza like Tel-Aviv? Rafah like Kfar-Sava? The effort to create a symmetry between occupier and occupied, which has become typical for some of the peaceniks too, testifies to a basic fault. That is true even if Grossman meant the untold suffering of the Jews throughout the ages - even that does not justify what we are doing to the Palestinians now.

About the Palestinians, who voted for Hamas in a manifestly democratic election, Grossman says that they are "hostages to fanatical Islam". He is certain that they would change completely the moment Olmert "speaks with them". That is, mildly put, a patronizing attitude. "Why did we not use all our flexibility, all our Israeli creativity, to extricate our enemy from the trap in which he ensnared himself?" Meaning: we are the thinking, creative party, and we must liberate the poor Arabs from their mindless fanaticism.

Fanaticism? As a genetic trait? Or is it the natural wish to free themselves from a brutal, choking occupation, an occupation from whose devastating grip they did not succeed in freeing themselves when they elected a "moderate" government?

The same is true for Grossman's second proposal - the one concerning Syria. On the face of it, a positive suggestion: Olmert must accept every appeal from an Arab leader who proposes peace. Excellent. But what does he advise Olmert to do in practice? "Offer him (Assad) a peace process lasting several years, only at the end of which, if he meets all the conditions, lives up to all the restrictions, will he get the Golan Heights. Force him into a process of ongoing dialogue." David Ben-Gurion or Ariel Sharon could not have put it better.

Bashar al-Assad certainly did not fall off his chair for sheer enthusiasm when he read this.

IN ORDER to understand Grossman's words one has to remember their background.

There is not one Israeli peace camp, but two - and the difference between them is important.

The first camp, the Grossmanian one, calls itself the "Zionist peace camp". Its strategic concept is that it is wrong to stray from what is called the "national consensus". If we lose contact with the consensus, so they believe, we shall not win over the public. Therefore we have to tailor our message to what the public at large is able absorb at any time.

The "Peace Now" movement is located at the center of this camp, and several other groups and personalities belong to it. It is a perfectly legitimate strategy, if only it were successful in winning over the masses. Unfortunately, that has not happened: "Peace Now", which succeeded in 1982 in mobilizing hundreds of thousands in the protest against the Sabra and Shatila massacre, succeeded last week in attracting a mere 150 protesters against the Beit Hanoun massacre. (The other movements which joined the demonstration brought a similar number. Altogether, we were some 300.) About the same number appeared in other recent demonstrations of "Peace Now", even those which had more time for preparations.

This camp keeps in close contact with two political parties: Meretz and Labor (at least with the left wing). Almost all the founders and leaders of "Peace Now" were candidates of these two parties, and several of them were elected to the Knesset. One of the founders is now the Minister of Education in the Olmert-Peretz war government.

THE SECOND camp, usually called the "radical peace camp", carries out the opposite strategy: to spell out our message loudly and clearly, even when it is unpopular and far from the consensus (as it usually is). The assumption is that the consensus will follow us when our message proves right in the test of reality.

This camp, to which "Gush Shalom" (in which I am active) belongs, together with dozens of other organizations, is engaged in strenuous daily work: from the fight against the Wall and all the other evil doings of the occupation up to the boycott of the settlements and the support for soldiers who refuse to serve in the occupied territories.

This camp differs from the other one also in its close contacts with the Palestinians, from the leadership down to ordinary villagers who are fighting against the wall that robs them of their land. Recently, "Gush Shalom" started a dialogue with Hamas leaders. These contacts enable us to understand the Palestinian society in all its complexity, feelings, insights, demands and hopes.

Not being aligned with any party, this camp knows that it will not become a mass movement. That is the price it has to pay. It is impossible to be popular while taking stands and carrying out actions that are contrary to the consensus. If so, how does it have an impact? How did it happen that, in the course of the years, many of its stands have been accepted by the general public, including luminaries like Grossman?

We call this the "small wheel effect". A small wheel with its own drive pushes a larger wheel, which drives an even larger wheel, and so on, until it moves the center of the consensus. What we say today "Peace Now" will say tomorrow, and a large part of the public on the day after.

This has been proven dozens of times in the past, and was proven again in the last few weeks during the Second Lebanon War. We called a demonstration against the war on its first day, when the overwhelming majority - including Amos Oz, David Grossman and others - supported it openly and wholeheartedly. But when the real motives and the fatal results started to become obvious, the consensus began to change. Our demonstrations swelled from 200 to 10,000 protesters. Even "Peace now", which had supported the war in the beginning, changed its stand, and near the end of the war called its own anti-war demonstration, in conjunction with Meretz. In the end, the entire "national consensus" moved.

It may be true that the "radical peace camp" and the "Zionist peace camp", while playing different roles, complement each other in the decisive fight for public opinion.

GROSSMAN'S SPEECH should be judged in this spirit.

It was a moving speech, even a great speech. It did not contain all we would have wished for, but for Grossman, and the camp he belongs to, it was really a big step in the right direction.