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ISRAEL'S ELEVENTH KNESSET

by David Clayman

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The recent Israeli elections to the Eleventh Knesset produced interesting, if chaotic, results. Focus was understandably centered on the seeming "mission impossible" of forming a stable government. Neither of the two major parties could form a stable, durable government on its own, and the alternative—a "national unity" government—seems to be so fraught with internal contradictions that it is just as likely to be a "national disunity" government.

What has received considerably less notice in the aftermath of the elections has been the makeup of the Eleventh Knesset.

NUMBER OF PARTIES

The Eleventh Knesset is composed of fifteen political parties, ranging in strength from the Alignment's forty-four seats to several one-seat parties. This is a net increase of five parties over the ten-party Tenth Knesset. The thirteen parties, besides the two large blocs of the Alignment and the Likud, include three 1-man parties, three 2-man parties, three 3-man parties, three 4-man parties, and one 5-man party.

AGE

The Eleventh Knesset is slightly older in composition than its predecessor. Nearly a quarter of all members are aged sixty or above, and two are over seventy (Yosef Burg and Eliezer Shostak). Ten MKs are under

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forty, a slight increase in that age group, as compared with the previous Knesset. Seven of these younger members are Likud MKs, and only one is from the Alignment—Haim Ramon, who at thirty has the distinction of being the youngest member of the Eleventh Knesset.

NEW FACES

There are nine new members of Knesset from the Alignment, as compared with seven new MKs from the Likud. These new faces include Simcha Dinitz, former Israel ambassador to the United States (Alignment), and Dan Meridor, former cabinet secretary (Likud).

One of the old faces that has been replaced by these new MKs is, of course, Menachem Begin. In addition, four other former ministers will not serve in the present Knesset: Yitzhak Berman, Mordechai Ben-Porat, Yaakov Meridor, and Mordechai Zippori.

The Herut faction of Likud has added an additional young Sephardic mayor to its Knesset mayors' contingent: thirty-nine year-old Ovadia Ali, the mayor of Afula. The revitalization of the Herut party is in some measure due to the popular appeal of young, dynamic, Sephardic leaders who made their marks in municipal politics. Ovadia Ali joins Meir Shitrit, mayor of Yavneh (36); David Magen, mayor of Kiryat Gat (39); and Moshe Katzav, mayor of Kiryat Malachi (39). These MKs represent the new leadership of the Herut party, which is fast replacing Begin's "Fighting Family." Nevertheless, Herut's ties to its underground pre-state Irgun roots are evidenced by the election of two new young MKs who are the sons of Irgun/Herut leaders: Dan Meridor (37) and Uzi Landau (41).

In the 1960's and 1970's, the Likud, in opposition, was blocked from national government posts and positions, hence, their concentration on local leaders. After seven years in power, they now can draw upon senior government officials to stand for election. This new Knesset will have three senior civil servants who resigned their posts to run for elective office on the Likud list. Two of them served as directors-general of government ministries—Uriel Linn and Uzi Landau. The third, Dan Meridor, as mentioned above, served as cabinet secretary.

WOMEN IN POLITICS

The new Knesset, like its predecessors, is not the bearer of good tidings for women in politics. Only ten women will serve in the Eleventh Knesset: Alignment - 6, Likud - 2, Tehiya-Tzomet - 1, Ratz - 1. This represents a gain of one woman MK over the previous Knesset. The two new female MKs, Chaïke Grossman (who did not serve in the Tenth Knesset, although she has served in others) and Amira Sartani, are both members of the Mapam branch of the Alignment. The one departing female MK is Tamar Eshel of the Alignment.

MINORITY MKs

The Eleventh Knesset has two MKs who are Druze, as opposed to only one in the previous Knesset. One is from the Likud and the other from Shinui.

Although there was a new political party in this election headed by an Arab (the Progressive List for Peace), the total number of Arab MKs in this Knesset is the same as in the previous Knesset, that is, four.

Two Arab MKs are from the communist Rakah (Hadash) party, and one each is from the new Progressive List and the Alignment. These results do not reflect the marked voter increase in Israel's Arab sector.

GENERALS, DIPLOMATS, AND PROFESSORS

Joining the Eleventh Knesset are five former senior IDF officers: Maj. Gen. (Res.) Ezer Weizman (Yahad); Maj. Gen. (Res.) Matti Peled (Progressive List for Peace); Lt. Gen. (Res.) Rafael Eitan (Tehiya-Tzomet); Col. (Res.) Ran Cohen (Ratz); and Col. (Res.) Mordechai Bar-On (Ratz).

The election of "Rafal" (Rafael Eitan) increases the number of former Chiefs-of-Staff serving in the Knesset to four; he joins Yitzhak Rabin, Chaim Bar-Lev, and Motta Gur.

With Simcha Dinitz's election on the Alignment list, the number of former Ambassadors to Washington also rises to four (Eban, Rabin, and Arens).

Three new MKs come from academic life: Law Professor David Libai (Alignment); Dr. Matti Peled (Progressive List for Peace), whose field is Arab literature; and Professor Avner Sciaky (NRP), whose field is law. With the loss of Professor Yosef Rom (Likud) from the ranks of MKs, the number of academics in the Eleventh Knesset stands at seven. It is interesting to note that all the professors belonging to center and leftist parties are in the humanities and social sciences, while the two right-of-center professors are in the exact sciences.

MINISTERS AND MKs

One might have expected that a national unity government would allow for a streamlined, efficient cabinet with a minimum number of ministers. Usually the inflation of cabinet posts is due to pressures by the splinter factions and small parties, demanding cabinet posts in return for their support. With the two major parties forming the government, there was hope for fewer ministerial payoffs. This is not to be the case. The Alignment-Likud agreement calls for a government of twenty-five ministers, which will make it the second-largest cabinet in Israel's history. The smallest cabinets were those in the First and Sixth Knessets—twelve ministers—and the record high was under Golda Meir—26 ministers.

It seems likely that additional appointments of splinter faction and religious party representatives as deputy ministers will leave less than three-fourths of the Knesset membership to function as Israel's legislative body on a regular basis.

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