The New Wave by Uri Avnery

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WHEN I was young, there was a joke: "There is no one like you – and that's a good thing!"

The joke applies now to Donald Trump. He is unique. That's good, indeed.

But is he unique? As a world-wide phenomenon, or at least in the Western world, is he without parallel?

As a character, Trump is indeed unique. It is extremely difficult to imagine any other Western country electing somebody like that as its supreme leader. But beyond his particular personality, is Trump unique?

BEFORE THE US election, something happened in Britain. The Brexit vote.

The British people, one of the most reasonable on earth, voted democratically to leave the European Union.

That was not a reasonable decision. To be blunt, it was idiotic.

The European Union is one of the greatest inventions of mankind. After many centuries of internal warfare, including two world wars, with uncounted millions of casualties, good sense at long last prevailed. Europe became one. First economically, then, slowly, mentally and politically.

England, and later Britain, was involved in many of these wars. As a great naval power and a world-wide empire, it profited from them. Its traditional policy was to instigate conflicts and to support the weaker against the stronger.

These days are, alas, gone. The Empire (including Palestine) is but a memory. Britain is now a mid-ranking power, like Germany and France. It cannot stand alone. But it has decided to.

Why, for God's sake? No one knows for sure. Probably it was a passing mood. A fit of pique. A longing for the good old days, when Britannia ruled the waves and built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land. (Nothing very green and pleasant about the real Jerusalem.)

Many seem to believe that if there had been a second round, the British would have reversed themselves. But the British do not believe in second rounds.

ANYHOW, THE "Brexit" vote was considered a sharp turn to the Right. And right after, there was the American vote for Trump.

Trump is a Rightist. A very rightist Rightist. Between him and the right wall there is nothing, except, perhaps, his Vice. (Vice in both meanings of the word.)

Taken together, the British and the American votes seemed to portend a world-wide wave of rightist victories. In many countries, rightists and outright fascists were flexing their muscles, confident of success. Marine Le Pen was scenting victory, and her equivalents in many countries, from Holland to Hungary, hoped for the same.

History has known such political waves before. There was the wave started by Benito Mussolini after World War I, who took the old Roman fasces and transformed them into an international term. There was the Communist wave after World War II, which took over half the globe, from Berlin to Shanghai.

So now it was the great right-wing wave, that was about to submerge the world.

And then something quite different happened.

NOTHING SEEMED as stable as the political system of France, with its old established parties, led by a class of old experienced party hacks.

And there – lo and behold – appears a nobody, a practically unknown non-politician, who with a wave of the hand clears the entire chessboard. Socialists, fascists and everybody in between are swept to the floor.

The new man is Emmanuel Macron. (Emmanuel is a good Hebrew name, meaning "God with us".) He is very young for a president (39), very good looking, very inexperienced, except for a short stint as an economic minister. He is also a staunch supporter of the European Union.

A quirk, party functionaries comforted themselves. It will not last. But then came the French parliamentary elections, and the flood became a tsunami. An almost unprecedented result: already in the first round Macron's new party gained an astounding majority, which will surely grow in the second round.

EVERYBODY NEEDED to think again. Macron was obviously the very opposite of the New Rightist Wave. Not only about European unity, but about almost everything else. A man of the center, he is more left than right. A modest person, compared to the American Trump. A progressive, compared to the British May.

Ah, Theresa May.

What got into her? Put in power after the brexit vote, with a comfortable majority, she was restless. Seems she wanted to prove that she could get an even larger majority just by herself. These things happen to politicians. So she called for new elections.

Even poor me, with my limited experience, could have told her that this was a mistake. For some reason, people don't like untimely elections. It's like a curse of the Gods. You call, you lose.

May lost her majority. There was no obvious coalition partner in sight. So she is compelled to court the most obnoxious right wingers: the Northern Irish protestants, compared to whom Trump is a progressive: no rights for gays, no abortions, no nothing. Poor May.

Who was the big winner? The most unlikely of unlikely persons: Jeremy Corbyn, (Another one with a good Hebrew first name. Jeremy was a major Biblical prophet.)

Corbyn is as unlikely a near-winner as you get them: ultra-left, ultra-everything. Many members of his own party detest him. But he almost won the elections. In any case, he made it impossible for Theresa May to rule effectively.

Corbyn's achievement brings to mind again that something very similar happened in the US elections within the Democratic Party. While the official candidate Hillary Clinton aroused widespread antipathy in her own party, a most unlikely alternative candidate stirred a wave of admiration and enthusiasm: Bernie Sanders.

Not the most promising candidate: 78 years old, a senator for 10 years. Yet he was feted like a newcomer, a man half his age. If he had been the candidate of his party, there is little doubt that he would be President today. (Even poor Hillary got a majority of the popular vote.)

SO DO all these victories and near-victories have something in common? Do they add up to a "wave"?

On first sight, no. Neither did the Left win (Trump, Brexit) nor did the right (Macron, Corbyn, Sanders).

So there is nothing in common?

Oh yes, there is. It is the rebellion against the establishment.

All these people who won, or almost won, had this in common: they smashed the established parties. Trump won despite the Republicans, Sanders fought against the Democratic establishment, Corbyn against the Labour bosses, Macron against all. The Brexit vote was, first of all, against the entire British establishment.

So that is the New Wave? Out with the establishment, whoever it is.

AND IN Israel?

We are not yet there. We are always late. The last national movement in Europe. The last new state. The last colonial empire. But we always get there in the end.

Half of Israel, almost the entire Left and Center, is clinically dead. The Labor party, which for 40 years held power almost single-handedly, is a sorry ruin. The right-wing, split into four competing parties, tries to impose a near-fascist agenda on all walks of life. I just hope that something will happen before their final success.

We need a principled leader like Corbyn or Sanders. A young and idealistic person like Macron. Somebody who will smash all the existing occupation-era parties and start right from the beginning.

To adapt Macron's slogan: Forward, Israel!