
REJECTED AND OUTCAST

Begin was rarely absent from the first Knesset, which resided in the Frumin Building on King George Street in Jerusalem. He used to sit casually, with his legs crossed and an expression of disdain on his face for politicians who had never led an underground resistance movement. After four years of solitude in Etzel he enjoyed public exposure. Those who met him were under the impression that he was in high spirits. Herut's defeat in the first elections had been forgotten. From his seat on the right-hand side of the government's table he would rise expressively only when he was called to the podium—usually dressed in a black (or sometimes brown) suit, with a pin in his lapel inscribed with the Etzel slogan, “Rak Kach,” a stylish mustache adorning his face, his deep bass voice resonating through the chamber when he spoke. Less than a year earlier Begin had still been a wanted man and the public did not know him, and now his speeches were a public attraction.¹ Despite his being the leader of the fourth largest party in the Knesset, he forged a special position in the assembly based on his uncompromising standpoint on two main issues: Etzel's contribution to the establishment of Israel and the need to expand the state's borders.

Begin was an active MK. In July 1949, when the Rhodes Armistice Agreement was finalized, he was the first MK to submit a no-confidence motion against the government in response to the agreement dealing with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, headed by King Abdullah.² He claimed that the agreement waived the Old City of Jerusalem and the West Bank. His no-confidence motion showed that Begin was a