

## Racism Laid Bare in Israel

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*If proof were needed that Zionism is racism, then the evidence has been amassed over the past century and is now there for all to see. That it has taken the likes of alleged war criminal Tzipi Livni to remove the rose-tinted spectacles from the eyes of some in the Knesset is a bitter-sweet irony.*

If is a big word in Middle East politics and is often used with the benefit of hindsight or wishful thinking. My “if” focuses on the departure of Israeli ministers Yair Lapid and Tzipi Livni from the Israeli cabinet; both refused to support Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Jewish State Bill. In his own words Netanyahu said that the bill would provide “national rights only for the Jewish people.”

Breaking ranks, Livni and Lapid and their supporters claimed that the bill was racist and now so-called liberals and less fanatical supporters of the Zionist state agree. If passed into law it would certainly end the hollow boast of Israel’s claim to be the only democracy in the Middle East.

By consolidating a sectarian Jewish identity, it is clear that Netanyahu is pandering to right-wing voters who, at the moment, are in the majority. These are the voters who are opposed vehemently to a State of Palestine and overwhelmingly supported Israel’s latest brutal summer onslaught against Palestinians in neighbouring Gaza.

And here comes my “if”: *if* Livni and co are right about racism then this will lay wide open the inherent racism of Israel (and its founding ideology of Zionism) and the flawed activities, for example, of the Jewish National Fund, an organisation which will only sell land to Jews.

Founded in 1901 by Theodor Herzl, the godfather of political Zionism, the JNF was originally set up to buy land in Palestine to establish Jews-only settlements before the creation of the Zionist state of Israel. Now it’s a global charity describing itself as the “caretakers of the land and people of Israel”.

JNF critics say that it expropriates land belonging to Palestinians and has obliterated pre-1948 Arab villages by planting forests and parks over their ruins. At the moment, the charity is involved in the demolition of Bedouin villages in the Negev desert as part of yet another forestation project.

The Israeli Knesset approved the discriminatory Praver-Begin Bill, by 43 votes to 40, for the mass expulsion of the Bedouin. If implemented fully, it will result in the destruction of 35 villages plus the forced displacement of up to 70,000 Arab citizens of Israel, as well as the dispossession of their historical lands in the Negev. Despite the Bedouin community’s complete rejection of the plan and an outcry from the international community and human

rights groups, the Praver Plan is happening right now.

Max Blumenthal, author of "Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel", is also a film-maker of some repute who has spent much time exposing racism in Israel. In a recent article in the New York Times, he also reached for the if-word and observed: "If a shift is underway in Israeli politics, it is primarily tonal. Israel's rightists intend to carry on the Zionist project as originally conceived, but without the pretence of democracy. In a way, their honesty is refreshing."

The article attracted a wave of angry comments from extremists in the Zionist community who were angry that the NYT had given column inches to Blumenthal. Like most pro-Israel lobbyists they wanted to close down the debate over the failure of their project in Israel.

Yet there shouldn't even be a debate, for the early Zionists made no secret of their intentions and views on equality. The late Dr David Eder told a court of inquiry back in 1921, when he was head of the Zionist Commission: "There can be only one National Home in Palestine, and that a Jewish one, and no equality in the partnership between Jews and Arabs, but a Jewish preponderance as soon as the numbers of the race are sufficiently increased."

A few years earlier the American King-Crane Commission spent six weeks in Syria and Palestine, investigating the intentions and goals of Zionists. Its report stated: "The commissioners began their study of Zionism with minds predisposed in its favour... The fact came out repeatedly in the Commission's conferences with Jewish representatives that the Zionists looked forward to a practically complete dispossession of the present non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine."

In 1940, a director of the JNF, Joseph Weitz, stated: "It must be clear that there is no room for both peoples in this country... there is no way besides transferring the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries, to transfer them all; except maybe for Bethlehem, Nazareth and Old Jerusalem, we must not leave a single village, not a single tribe."

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If the ultra-right win in the forthcoming elections and completely engulf the Zionist State, enabling it to push on with its racist policies, then it is clear that Israel's brain drain crisis will continue as more highly educated, entrepreneurial and talented Jews migrate back to Europe or America. Israel itself has a lot to lose by an even more determined push to the right.

*If* certainly is a big word, and it certainly can have serious consequences.

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