

MAY'AVDUT LE'HERUT:
ISRAELI GRASSROOTS REVOLTS AGAINST THE
PATERNALISTIC SOCIALIST SYSTEM

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Introduction

The State of Israel is one of the world leaders in protest per capita.¹ Nevertheless, such extra-parliamentary activities—especially those protest campaigns which are large scale and of long duration—have been shown to be relatively ineffective in achieving their goals.² Assuming that Israelis will not just return docilely to their personal lives in the wake of such protest inefficacy, and assuming as well that the serious domestic problems which engendered such protest in the first place continue to fester, the obvious ensuing question is where do they go from there? What alternative means lie at the Israeli's disposal to carry out change?

The answer is that from the late 1970s onwards Israelis across the board have begun to take matters into their own hands. I call this "Israel's Grassroots Revolt"—not because it is well organized as are many similar phenomena in the U.S., for example, but rather because for the first time in Israel's

¹Gadi Wolfsfeld, *The Politics of Provocation: Participation and Protest in Israel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988); Sam Lehman-Wilzig, *Stiff-Necked People, Bottle-Necked System: The Evolution and Roots of Israeli Public Protest, 1949-1986* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), chapter 4.

²Lehman-Wilzig, *op. cit.*, ch. 9. See too Shmuel Lehman-Wilzig, "Me'kha'ah Tziburit Be'Yisrael: Ha'im Hee Matzlikhah?" in *Medina, Memshal, Ve'yakhassim Bein'leumiyyim*, Number 31 (Summer/Autumn 1989), pp. 111-125.

history there exists a social phenomenon which has been initiated almost exclusively by "the wo/man in the street" and of which a vast adult majority in the country has participated in one form or another.

What is the gist of this grassroots revolt? The establishment by the public (and not the governing authorities) of alternative social and economic service systems, when and where the official ones do not function adequately or function in grotesque fashion. Often, "alternative systems" may be too strong a term, for usually there does not exist (at least at first) a conscious desire on the part of the initiators to institute an entire apparatus to compete with the governmentally sanctioned one. However, where the government's response is late in coming (or there isn't any at all), a fairly full-fledged service system does evolve. In any case, as I will argue later on, the critical aspect here is not the intent of those in revolt but rather its ultimate result.

Issues Under Revolt

It would be useful to first describe Israel's sundry grassroots revolts, to illustrate the nature and essence of this contemporary phenomenon.

1) *Illegal Settlements*: Starting in the 1970s, *Gush Emunim* began circumventing the authorities by establishing "settlements" overnight. While in and of itself such activity did not set up a huge number of "facts in the field," the perception (and part reality) of do-it-yourself success became the opening salvo of the coming societal battles. The tremendous public controversy engendered by this anti-establishmentarian activity, and the obvious capitulation of the government in the face of these settlers' steadfastness, could not but plant seeds in the minds of other Israelis, ripening over time.

Subsequent developments were to bear this out—on both sides of the ideological divide. I would argue that (on the Right wing) increasing settler vigilantism in the territories during the 1980s³ was but a logical extension of the earlier illegal settlement activity. On numerous occasions, the settlers took matters into their own hands—either by overreacting in self-defense, or even through pre-planned violent (although rarely fatal) confrontations with surrounding Arab communities. In addition, and even more insidiously, such vigilantism reached its zenith in the famous "Jewish Underground" which resorted to premeditated murder of Arabs in the early 1980s, while another extreme manifestation expressed itself in the declared "Nation of Judah"—a

³David Weisburd, *Jewish Settler Violence: Deviance as Social Reaction* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989).

state-in-waiting in the event that the Israeli authorities ever decided to withdraw from Judea and Samaria.⁴

On the Left wing, the *Yesh G'vul* movement introduced a relatively new and dangerous approach to Israeli public disagreement with government policy: conscientious objection. Both during the Lebanon War and then later in the throes of the Palestinian intifada, well over a hundred Army reservists refused to serve in the territories, with many more signing public petitions demanding that the government change its harsh policy.⁵

The common denominator in all these phenomena is that they constitute a revolt against the government's exclusive authority in the most sensitive of all fields—national security. *Al akhat kama ve'kama* (all the more so) would this prove to be the case when we turn to less threatening, but no less problematic, domestic concerns of Israeli life.

2) *Economic Policy*: The Israeli public is among the world's leaders in income tax evasion, while the country's underground economy has been estimated at one-sixth of GNP.⁶ At some point in the early eighties, illegal foreign currency trading was so widespread that the papers reported the Black Dollar rate on their front page—illustrating how quasi-normative the alternative economy had become. While no official figures are available, for obvious reasons, a conservative estimate would put the value of the public's Black Dollars at around \$5 billion—well over \$1,000 for every Israeli man, woman, and child! On numerous occasions, public runs on the legal dollar forced the government into devaluations before it wanted to—a case of the public tail wagging the policymakers' economic dog.

Even the public's inactivity at times was a sign of revolt. After the bank shares and stock market collapse of 1983, the public refused to return to the market during the latter part of the decade because of the "golden voting shares." These granted exclusive voting power to a very small number of shareowners (the ones who founded the company decades ago) at the expense of the vast majority of later shareholders who had no vote at all. By staying out of the market, the public's message was clear: it would no longer play by rules which were completely stacked against the small investor.

3) *Mass Media*: Israeli television commenced broadcasting in 1968 as a governmentally-controlled medium, a state of affairs which soon led to great

⁴Nadav Shragai, "The Leadership of 'the State of Judah' Decided to 'Convene a Military Forum Which Will Establish an Army Infrastructure'," *Ha'aretz*, May 26, 1989, p. A5.

⁵Tom Segev, "The New Conscientious Objectors," *Ha'aretz*, Nov. 23, 1987, p. B5.

⁶Ben Zion Zilberfarb, "Omdanay Ha'kalkalah Ha'shekhora Be'Yisrael U'bekhal," *Riv'on Le'kalkalah*, Number 122 (October 1984), pp. 319-322.

dissatisfaction on the part of virtually everyone involved: the public as well as political parties of the Left and Right. Thus, soon thereafter promises were made to establish an independent commercial channel. In fact, nothing was done on this score, and so after fifteen years of only one TV channel, the disgusted Israeli public came up with a dual response.

First, Israeli VCR consumption skyrocketed to the point in 1984 where Israel was second in the world (behind Saudi Arabia) in VCR consumption per capita (other countries have since caught up). Second, and far more insidious, illegal neighborhood pirate cable television stations began springing up, and at the height of the phenomenon fully one-quarter of all Israeli households were subscribing—a staggering number considering the personal expense, not to mention the blatant illegality of the whole operation. The fact that “organized crime” began to control this entertainment medium did not seem to disturb the general public; indeed, many newspapers hinted that high-level police officers were to be counted as subscribers of these pirate operations.

On yet another front, two nationwide pirate radio stations were in operation by the end of the decade: Abie Nathan’s “Voice of Peace” had been broadcasting for two decades, while “Channel 7” began to broadcast in the late 1980s as a self-styled antidote to Israel’s regular “negativistic, secularistic, and non-nationalistic” stations.

4) *Health*: The Israeli health system, dominated by the Histadrut’s *Kupat Kholim Clalit* (a nationwide type of HMO) in tandem with government hospitals, teetered on the verge of collapse during the 1980s with “rotating” strikes by doctors, nurses, paramedics, orderlies, etc. Waiting time for operations such as open-heart surgery reached 18 to 24 months!

Here too the public’s response appeared on several planes. First was the large-scale hemorrhaging caused by members belonging to the *Kupat Kholim Clalit* moving to the far more flexible and efficient smaller health plans (e.g., Maccabi, Leumit, etc.) which afforded greater freedom in choosing a personal physician. From a high of approximately 90 percent national membership in the 1970s, *Clalit* found itself in the 1990 health plan census with only 74 percent of the country’s insured citizenry.

Second, and far more problematic, was the gradual introduction into Israeli society of what has come to be called “Black Medicine,” wherein patients get superior health care and/or their operations are scheduled earlier by way of payments to hospital department heads in lieu of “personal” consultations. Through such a subterfuge, cardiac patients (for example) with means could have their open heart surgery scheduled in the public hospitals a couple of weeks hence instead of a couple of years.

Third, and most recently, private clinics, hospitals, and even insurance programs have been set up to enable Israelis to bypass the entire official sys-

tem altogether. This is not an internal transfer from one public plan to another, but rather a loss to the entire public health system of the most well-to-do patients, not to mention many of the most proficient physicians.

5) *Education*: Severe budgetary cutbacks decimated Israel’s education system in the 1980s, forcing elementary school children to be let out of classes before noon! And this at a time when the educational expectations of the expanding middle class were intensifying (not to mention their growing appreciation of the connection between future advancement and educational attainments). Moreover, on the upper end of the educational hierarchy, the universities’ budgets remained frozen for well over a decade, despite the greater number of students entering the halls of academe. In short, in a country full of Jews who had traditionally valued education above almost everything else, serious erosion was taking place.

The public’s response? “Grey education”—in a variety of guises and approaches. First, and most conspicuous, was the establishment of afternoon enrichment classes (on school premises) by the parents themselves for those who could pay, causing a furor regarding the undermining of “social integration.” It wasn’t so much the fact that many of these “quasi-private” classes were being conducted on public school premises (although there were legal problems with this as well), but rather that the more affluent were providing their children with extra instruction not offered equally to all. The argument that these parents were only looking out for the best interest of their children in a situation where the State was unable or unwilling to do so only exacerbated the frustration felt by the poorer parents as well as the Education Ministry, which was just not receiving the funding it felt it needed to perform its job. In this case, the clash was not between right and wrong, but rather two rights.

Also on the elementary education front, but from a different perspective, the 1980s ushered in a new trend: “TALI” school programs (an acronym for enriched Jewish programming) in the secular school system where parents organized themselves to push through more Jewish curricular content (by Israeli law, parents may determine up to 25 percent of the schools’ curriculum). Somewhat on the other side of the theological divide, the ultra-Orthodox “independent” school system expanded its ranks (by 1990 it incorporated about 10 percent of all Israeli students), functioning almost autonomously beyond the State’s supervision. To this one can add a couple of newer wrinkles: a *masorati* (American conservative) school in Jerusalem, and *khardal* (“haredi leumi”), i.e., ultra-Orthodox Zionist, education!

On the higher education front, the pressure for increased funds and expanded admissions to Israel’s elite programs led to the formation in 1990 of quasi-public law schools, semi-academic journalism schools, and a host of

other technical/vocational schools without official sanction by the authorities (*de rigueur* in the education field of the past). At present, pressure is mounting for the establishment of non-research "colleges" for those who cannot pass the stiff requirements of Israel's universities. The country's highly successful "Open University" (over 18,000 part-time students) may serve as a model for future "alternative" higher education should the authorities not be forthcoming in this regard.

6) *Religion and State*: Beyond the protest demonstrations and "symbolic" Sabbath rockthrowing campaigns (e.g., trying to stop the construction and use of the Ramot road during the early 1980s), both sides of the religion and state issue have started taking matters into their own hands to further their respective positions.

On the ultra-Orthodox side, Israel has been witness to obstruction of archaeological digs, widespread bus shelter burnings against "indecent" ads, demolition of newspaper kiosks selling "pornographic" materials, attacks on leavened bread vendors during the Passover holiday, and numerous other physical attempts to stem the tide of rampant Philistinism as perceived by the *haredi* community. These were not so much protests against the government to change policy as they were attempts to alter social reality without recourse to political machinations.

The same held true for the secular camp: in order to circumvent the dominant authority of the Orthodox Rabbinate in matters of "personal status" (marriage, divorce, conversion, etc.) several stratagems have been employed. Some of these are: civil marriage contracts which are legally, if not *halakhically*, binding, whereby the partners sign a contractual agreement akin to the *ketuvah* without the presence of a Rabbi or religiously acceptable witnesses; proxy nuptials through Paraguay or Mexico (where the physical presence of the marrying partners is not legally necessary); weddings in Cyprus (a short hop from Tel Aviv), which must be recognized by the Israeli authorities as valid (as are all marriages in any foreign country); increased number of abortions by using loopholes in the stringent law ("psychological stress" of the mother in having to undergo a birth); "living wills" of non-believing individuals negating the right of next of kin to block autopsies, a right granted by Israeli law to any close family member; etc.

7) *Constitution Making*: By the end of the 1980s the Israeli public had begun to realize that one of the central reasons that such grassroots revolts were necessary, and that public protest does not work in Israel, is the flawed election system which denies political accountability, direct representation, and personal communication between the citizenry and the leadership. However, it was also clear that this being a purely "political system" problem, there was no possibility of extending the "grassroots revolt" general approach of creative circumvention to the issue at hand.

Thus, at least here the public had to revert to the more traditional form of extra-parliamentary activity, albeit of unusual scope: a massive public campaign commencing in the late 1980s (and gathering steam over time) to change the election system. Half a million Israelis signed a petition to this end, while repeated demonstrations drew up to tens of thousands of protesters. Private civic-minded financing was found for large-scale advertising in order to continue the campaign and keep up the pressure.

The culmination of these efforts was, in one sense, a continuation of the "do-it-yourself" revolts mentioned in the pages above: a distinguished panel of law professors and political scientists from Tel Aviv and Bar-Ilan Universities "convened" in 1987 to produce a workable Constitution for the Knesset's consideration, a proposal which has served to focus both the public's and their representatives' attention on the details of the necessary changes. While such a full Constitution has not been enacted into law (at the time of this writing, early 1991), both major parties have undertaken (separately and jointly) serious internal deliberations regarding possible changes of the election system, with the Labor Party officially voting for both a change to a part district system (twenty districts, each with three MKs) as well as the direct election of the Prime Minister.

In short, this last general area of public revolt is not only an extension of all of the earlier phenomena but an attempt to lessen the need for such "revolting" activity in the future by reforming the general rules of the political system to make it more responsive to the public's needs and wishes.

Factors Underlying the Revolt

Two questions present themselves at this stage. First, what were the factors behind the evolution of such a grassroots revolt? Indeed, why in the 1980s?

Without reviewing all of Israeli political history, one can at least point to several of the key developments. For reasons which are common knowledge, the *yishuv* (the Jewish community under the British mandate) developed a highly socialistic, paternalistic, and centralistic polity and economy. Given the exigencies of that time (few natural resources and limited economic resources, etc.), this was probably the preferred route to follow. More important, most Israelis seemed to think so as well; indeed, there was almost universal support in principle for Ben-Gurion's *mamlakhtit* (unified statism) policy. Whatever the problems, Israelis naturally turned to the State and the authorities to resolve them.

However, cracks began to appear in the facade of government omniscience and infallibility: the Lavon Affair split Mapai in 1960; Ben-Gurion's defection and establishment of the RAFI party in 1965 was an even bigger

blow; including Gahal (the Herut and Liberal parties' union) in the first National Unity Government lent political legitimacy to the Opposition; the *mekhdal* (maladministration) of the Yom Kippur War did severe damage to the government's image of faithful guarantor of the country's national security; and the scandals of the 1970s (e.g., Asher Yadlin) undermined even its moral stature. Because of its own mistakes, then, by the late 1970s the Labor Government was perceived in quite different terms by the populace.

Meanwhile, other developments were occurring lower down on the socio-political pyramid. Probably the most important were education and money. It is only in the late 1970s that we find for the first time in Israel a critical mass of college-educated people with enough confidence not merely to doubt the authorities but to feel that they can manage things better themselves. Even more important, it is only by the late 1970s that Israel had begun to develop a relatively large and comfortable middle class with enough disposable income to spend/invest in those "alternative" social and economic systems mentioned earlier.

However, normally such a middle class will prefer to resort to "political action": intense lobbying within parliament, coupled with growing extra-parliamentary pressure from without. Yet as briefly mentioned at the top of this article, that is precisely what the Israeli public *did* get involved with through the 1970s—with not too much to show for it (the one major exception being the toppling of the Golda Meir government in the wake of the post-Yom Kippur War wave of protest). The number of protest events skyrocketed in the 1970s (more than tripling over the course of that decade as compared to the 1960s), and increased a further 60 percent in the early 1980s to an average of well over 200 demonstrations per annum—to little avail.⁷

The central reason for this lack of success, of course, has already been alluded to: the election system which renders all of Israel's ostensible "representatives" unaccountable to the citizenry at large. If Israelis cannot directly elect their members of Knesset, then they can also not punish them electorally when the MKs do not respond to parliamentary or extra-parliamentary pressure. It was the public's inchoate understanding of this situation which galvanized them into their multifarious grassroots revolts in the late 1970s and early 1980s along a host of issue areas.

Finally (almost), we come to the Likud. The title of this article—*May'avdut Le'herut* (from slavery to freedom)—is obviously a pun, but an ironic one. During the reign of the Likud the citizens of Israel have gone from "servitude" (under the government of *mifleget ha'Avodah*, the Labor Party) to "freedom" (under *mifleget Herut*, the dominant faction in the Likud)—but no thanks to the Likud are in order!

⁷Lehman-Wilzig, *Stiff-Necked People*, chapter 3.

It is true that the longstanding laissez-faire economic and social philosophy of the Likud⁸ did lend legitimacy to "do-it-yourself" public activity, as opposed to the historically paternalistic approach of Mapai and her satellite Socialist parties. Thus, one could argue that the Likud served as the ideological spearhead of the grassroots revolt, but in practice very little changed regarding government paternalism and centralism during the Likud's 1977–1984 regime. Indeed, from an economic standpoint conditions worsened during this period with hyper-inflation, a skyrocketing foreign debt, etc. Whatever the antipaternalistic merits of that party's general socio-economic philosophy, it was altogether clear to the Israeli public by the early 1980s that *in practice* succor could not be found in any of the leading parties (nor even in upstart reformist parties like the Democratic Movement for Change which won fifteen Knesset seats in its first election in 1977—and then promptly imploded into oblivion by the ensuing election).

Thus, a very important factor for the 1980s grassroots revolts was the deep disappointment felt by the Israeli public when their ostensible saviors after twenty-nine years proved to be no better (and in some respects even worse) than the previous (officially) Socialist regime. It was this final straw of frustration with their government that set the Israelis thinking that change could only come about if they took matters into their own hands.

In order to round out the picture, it is important to note that Israel—even more than most other countries, given its small size and obvious self-insufficiency—is attuned to trends occurring overseas, especially in such countries as the United States, Great Britain, and France. While those nations did not suffer from similar levels of grassroots revolt activity, all three were palpably and quite vociferously moving (France after 1982) in a laissez-faire direction, with governmental control giving way to market forces. While it would be wrong to attribute Israel's grassroots revolts to any mimicking of international trends, it is clear that the world's increasing capitalist and free market orientation provided strong psychological support for the Israeli public in this regard.

Consequences of the Revolt

The second question is: what are the consequences of this grassroots revolt? How are we to assess it in the context of Israeli stability—social, economic, or political?

⁸For a discussion of Herut's capitalistic approach to economic matters under the long party leadership reign of Menachem Begin, see Yonathan Shapiro, *La'shilton Be'kharanu: Darka Shel T'nuat Ha'kherut—Hesber Sozio-Politi* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1989), pp. 103–105.

To begin with, it is important to note one major aspect of the Israeli situation which tends to mitigate the most seriously damaging effects of uncontrolled grassroots activity: the overlapping nature of Jewish ethnicity and Israeli nationalism. Israel (and perhaps Japan) stands alone in the democratic world in that "nation" (ethnic—not racial or linguistic—identity) and "state" (political identity) are virtually synonymous and exclusivist for them. Whereas most other countries have no singular ethnic character which defines them politically as well (e.g., Frenchmen, Spaniards, Swiss, etc., are defined by their allegiance to the State, and not to any specific ethnic grouping coterminous with their polity), the modern Israeli polity by contrast has no meaning beyond the national identity of the Jewish people which in fact preceded it.⁹

What does this have to do with the negative effects of rampant and uncontrolled grassroots activity? The latter, of course, tends to undermine the glue which holds any country together. When the people's primary allegiance is to the State (indeed, when they define themselves exclusively through membership in that State), and when that political authority is weakened through active grassroots undermining, then the foundation of the social contract is destroyed—with great danger to the very fabric of society. On the other hand, when (as is the case with Israel) the social contract, i.e., the social complex of relationships, is organized and ordered not only through the authority of the State apparatus but equally by the common feeling of national/ethnic identity, then disobedience to the State's authority need not necessarily lead to the collapse of "law and order," for the citizens at large still harbor a measure of self-control due to their innate mutual empathy born of ethnic solidarity.

From where does such a cultural approach emanate? The Jewish political experience through close to two millennia in the Diaspora. To be sure, the various Jewish *kehillot* (communities) did have a semblance of local autonomy, but the true political locus of power and authority almost invariably lay within the surrounding Gentile world. While the Jew was commanded by his own *halakhic* legal system to obey that governing authority (except when there was a direct conflict with Torah edicts), from a practical and communally normative standpoint an ethic of "getting away with what you can" ruled the day in the Jews' ongoing political relationship with the hostile Gentile world.

On the other hand, precisely because of this general external anti-semitism (whether in the Christian or the Moslem world) the Jews had to

⁹For a fuller discussion of this general idea, see Bernard Susser and Eliezer Don Yehiya, "The Nation v. the People: Israel and the Decline of the Nation State," *Midstream*, Vol. 35, No. 8 (November 1989), pp. 13-16.

make the extra effort to maintain internal social solidarity to the greatest extent possible. Thus, over time a "natural" bifurcation occurred in the Jewish political culture between acceptance of governmental authority (weak) and maintenance of social unity (strong).

The Jewish heritage has a traditional epigram for this "sophisticated" sort of social scientific analysis: *koll yisrael arevim zeh ba'zeh*—all members of Israel are mutually bound up one with another. The term "Israel" in this context is not a political one, but rather a national (and social) one. It is the ethno-national element, in point of fact, which constitutes the stronger allegiance for the Jewish/Israeli people.

This is why the entire grassroots phenomenon has shown virtually no signs of disintegrating into anomic social violence. While Israeli society suffers from a very high level of "verbal violence," there is almost no physical violence between the citizenry (especially within the dominant Jewish sector). Even the vigilantism mentioned earlier has almost always stopped short of outright killing (although indiscriminate mayhem is somewhat more frequent). The Jewish Underground is the exception proving the rule; its murderous actions were very widely condemned by Israelis of almost all political stripes, and has not been repeated in organized fashion. Nothing remotely approaching even this extremely limited "revolt" can be discerned between Israeli Jews, Emile Grunzweig's death at a Peace Now demonstration¹⁰ being the only such fatality in the entire history of the modern State of Israel.

In short, there is little danger that overall national unity will be dissipated as a result of these grassroots revolts, because what holds Israel's Jews together in the first place are not the State's political institutions but rather the social bond of religio-ethnic solidarity. The reverse side of this is that there is bound to be less civic self-restraint in circumventing (or even undermining) the norms of the official political system—both because it is viewed as secondary to the "social system," and because the feeling of Jewish social solidarity is a comfortable guarantor that a weakened polity will not necessarily lead to total social chaos.

But let us assume for argument's sake that this "cultural" theory is wrong or irrelevant. On the question of how to assess the grassroots phenomenon I would still part ways with some of my esteemed Israeli colleagues for a different reason. For example, Ehud Sprinzak argues that Israeli "ille-

¹⁰He was killed by a hand grenade thrown into a protest gathering in 1983 during the Israeli Army's extended stay in Southern Lebanon in the aftermath of the Lebanon incursion. Grunzweig was only the second Jewish protester ever to die during a demonstration; the first, an ultra-Orthodox Jew, was trampled to death by a police horse in a Jerusalem riot in 1956.

galism" is a serious and potentially dangerous phenomenon.¹¹ I beg to differ in part. While I agree that some of the manifestations mentioned earlier are not constructive or conducive to social stability, overall I believe that one ought to view this entire phenomenon in a positive light. For it is not the actions of the public which endanger Israel's future but rather the ossified and inflexible system against which the Israelis are now engaged in grassroots guerrilla warfare. Indeed, what is happening in Israel today is not too different from what is occurring in Eastern Europe—in the political and especially economic spheres. If it is good for them, why not for Israel?

In fact, while I noted at the start that public protest has not been very successful in Israel, it turns out that the grassroots revolt has had a significant measure of success—albeit incomplete as yet. There are numerous examples of changed government policy directly resulting from the public's "revolting" behavior: new laws were enacted establishing both regional cable TV and radio stations, as well as an independent national Second Channel for TV; serious stock market reform has begun and more is in the offing (the golden voting shares have been abolished); the government has embarked on a policy of privatizing many of its State-run corporations (the telephone company, *Bezek*, had a highly successful private stock offering in 1990, with its shares oversubscribed by a factor of four); the Histadrut's Kupat Kholim has finally begun to give its patients free choice in their doctors, and the government is now seriously considering permitting a second daily hospital shift for operations to reduce the unconscionable waiting times; the gradual reinstatement of the "long" school day commenced in 1990–91; the Labor Party voted in late 1990 to institute internal party primary elections for their candidates, with the Likud seriously considering the matter as well; etc. etc. Whether one is aesthetically appalled or amused by the manifestations of Israel's do-it-yourself grassroots revolts, the fact is that such a strategy is working a lot better than the traditional (and essentially paternalistic) approach of beseeching the government to reform itself.

Let not "enlightened" Americans, or Israeli social scientists for that matter, wring hands at the takeover by the "street." The Israeli public has not been given the credit and the intelligence which is due it. We are not witness here to the beginning of rampant lawlessness and social anomie, but rather to the death throes of a system whose time has long passed. While not yet over, this is one "war" which the state of Israel will not, and cannot, win. The victors, though, will be the Israeli people.

¹¹Ehud Shprinzak, *Ish Ha'yashar Be'ainav: Illegalism Ba'khevrah Ha'yisraelit* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1986).

MINORITY RIGHTS, JEWISH POLITICAL TRADITIONS, AND ZIONISM

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One of the central puzzles of Israeli politics is the general strength of democratic institutions, given the fact that relatively few of the immigrants to Palestine or to Israel over the last century came from countries with a viable democratic tradition. A second puzzle is that one of the weaker aspects of these democratic institutions is respect for minority rights, though it is precisely as a minority group that Jewish historical experience is most extensive.

A number of influences have clearly contributed to this outcome. The general currents of Western liberalism, the role of the British model, and populist aspects of East European socialist ideologies all pushed the Zionist movement and Israeli governance in a democratic direction. On the other hand, Zionism, like contemporary nationalisms to which it was both an imitation and a reaction, focused on the rights of those who shared a Jewish identity rather than their relations with those who did not. As Jews knew all too well from their own experience with modern nationalism, the place of minorities in a state based on the principle of nationality was highly problematic. Furthermore, Zionism functioned in a Middle Eastern context where ethno-religious particularism—the delineation of all rights and privileges according to group identity—was the rule even before the advent of modern nationalism. And finally, Zionism and Israel both have had to contend with an ethnic group considered to represent a basic threat to the security or survival of the Jewish community.

While these influences may be important, one cannot overlook the impact of political traditions developed during centuries of Jewish communal life. Attitudes toward democratic procedures and non-Jewish rights were inevitably shaped by the way that Jews had customarily organized their political life; as Shlomo Avineri argues, "in the Jewish *kehilla* [community] lie the origins of Israeli democracy as well as some of the lack of elegance which ac-