

A Curious National Home

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THE PRESENT ISRAELI GOVERNMENT coalition consists of 67 (out of 120) members of the Knesset.

Each member wants to be elected again (and again and again).

In order to be reelected, he or she must attract the attention of the public.

How? The simplest way is to propose a new law. A bill so outrageous, that the media cannot possibly ignore it.

This sets up a natural competition. To draw attention, each new bill must be a bit more outrageous than the last. The sky is the limit. Perhaps.

THE LAST bill, concocted by a Member who is an ex-secret service chief, is called “Israel—the National State of the Jewish People”.

In general parlance, the Jewish People consists of all the Jews in the world, more than half of whom live outside Israel and are citizens of other states. They are not asked if they want the State of Israel to represent them. Goes without asking.

Indeed, Israeli ambassadors everywhere are considered by many a kind of unofficial overlord of the local Jewish community.

What about the Arab citizens of Israel, who constitute slightly more than 20%? Well, they remain citizens, but the state does not belong to them.

SO WHAT does the proposed bill say?

First of all, it abolishes the status of Arabic as an “official language”, a status it has enjoyed since Israel was founded. Hebrew will reign supreme—and alone.

Israel has no written constitution. The Supreme Court has created a kind of virtual constitution, resting on several “basic laws”. A Knesset majority can overturn any of these at any time.

The basic legal assumption until now has been that Israel is a “Jewish and Democratic State”, both attributes of equal status. The new law will change that. Both attributes will remain intact, but “Jewish” will become more important than “democratic” and trump it if there is a contradiction, as there frequently is.

This week Binyamin Netanyahu announced that he has adopted this bill and will push it through the Knesset in

two months time. No problem.

WHY IS there no problem? Because, basically, there is no ideological opposition.

There is, of course, an Arab faction (split into three sub-factions: nationalist, religious and communist). But most Jewish opposition members would rather be seen in the Knesset cafeteria in the company of a rabid fascist Jewish member than an Arab one.

So if Netanyahu wants to ram the bill through, it will indeed become the law of the land.

WHAT DOES “Jewish” mean? Is it a national or a religious designation?

The average Israeli will answer: both, of course. It can be used in the one sense or the other, as expedience demands.

Zionism was basically a process of attempting to transform an ancient ethno-religious community into a modern nation. When the bill says that Israel is the “nation-state of the Jewish people” it means all the Jews around the world. “Nation” and “people” (and religion) are considered synonyms. We are all Jews, aren't we?

What about the US Jew who feels he belongs to the American nation? What about the Canadian Jew who is a complete atheist and treats his Jewishness as a quaint reminder of his grandparents? Or a hypothetical black South-African whose parents have been converted to Judaism by their white Jewish master? Or a Russian Jew, whose parents have adopted the Orthodox Christian faith?

They are Jews, all of them. Jewish religious law says that “a Jew, even if he commits a sin, is still a Jew.” Adopting the Christian—or any other—faith is certainly a sin, but the convert still remains a Jew, whether he wants it or not.

The Nation-State of the Jewish People belongs to all of them. Or, rather, they all belong to the Nation State of the Jewish People.

ALL THIS has very little to do with the original Zionist ideology.

Theodor Herzl, a thoroughly naïve person, believed that all the Jews in the world would come to the Jewish State. Those who did not would cease to be Jews.

Even to David Ben-Gurion, an early Zionist, the idea that an American Zionist leader could continue to live in

the USA was an abomination. His colleagues had a hard time convincing him that it was bad policy to tell that to the American Jews when you need their money.

Ben-Gurion would certainly not have agreed to a definition that would have turned Israel—his Israel!—into the state of these Jews, and turned them into quasi-citizens of the Jewish National State. God (in whom he did not believe) forbid.

WHAT ABOUT secular Jews in Israel?

Well the first question is whether there really are “secular” Jews in Israel.

All the Jews who grew up in Israel are products of the Jewish educational system, based on the Bible. This produces in their mind a set of ideological certitudes that cannot be eradicated.

The People of Israel was born in a conversation between God and Abraham in a place located in today's Iraq. This is of course a legend, like a large part of the Hebrew Bible, including the forefathers, the exodus and the kingdoms of David and Solomon.¹

But historical evidence is unimportant here. The fact is that every Jewish child in Israel carries the Bible deep in their consciousness. Meaning: Jews are special. Jews are unique. It's “them” and “us”. The whole world against us.

My friend Reuven Wimmer has sent me a list of the basic beliefs of the average “secular” Israeli. It goes a follows:

- He does not observe the Shabbat. He uses his car, buys, travels and goes to the seashore on the Holy Day.
- But he believes in God.
- He does not eat kosher, but prefers kosher restaurants.
- He goes at least once a year—on Yom Kippur—to synagogue.

- He marries and divorces at the Rabbinate.
- He does not like Arabs very much.
- He does not want to be identified as a Leftist, but does not vote for the Right.
- He is not in favor of separation between state and religion.
- He has served in the army, loves the army and is proud of the state.
- He is for Two States for Two Peoples, provided this does not harm the settlements.
- He does not take part in demonstrations or any other political activities.

Since that is so, no real protests against the bill can be expected. We will call ourselves the Nation State of the Jewish People. Halleluyah.²

WHAT ABOUT the close to two million Arabs who are citizens of the National State of the Jewish People?

Up to now, no attention-hungry Member of the Knesset has yet concocted a bill to take away their citizenship.

So they will remain citizens of the state, which belongs to another people. For the time being.

We will have a National State for the Jewish people, in which the majority of the world's Jews are not citizens, and in which two million non-Jewish Arabs will be citizens, in whose “eternal capital”, Jerusalem, there live some hundreds of thousands of Arab inhabitants who are not citizens, which militarily occupies the West Bank with some 2.25 million Arabs, and which indirectly controls the lives of another two million Arabs in the Gaza Strip.

Altogether, there live now in historical Palestine some 7 million Jews and some 7 million Arabs.

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¹Their existence is disproved, inter alia, by their total absence from the voluminous correspondence of Egyptian rulers and spies in the Land of Canaan.

²For those who do not know: Halleluyah is Hebrew for “Praise God”.