

# UJPO News



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The United Jewish People's Order is a national, nonpartisan, socialist-oriented, secular organization, serving Canada's progressive Jews in individual organizations since 1926 and collectively as the UJPO since 1945.

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Banner graphic by Avrom Yanovsky, 1911-1979

## Everything You Wanted To Know About the 2021 Israeli Elections

### Independent Jewish Voices Canada

By Sydney Nestel, *IJV-Toronto*

Israel held elections to its Knesset (Parliament) on March 23rd. The final results are now in, and the top line is that there is no clear way to put together any coalition at all – Netanyahu and his opponent have fought themselves to a standstill: Israel might well be headed back to the polls in a few months.

On one level, there is nothing new here. This was Israel's 4th election in two years. All previous attempts to cobble together a workable coalition have floundered on the issue of whether Netanyahu himself is suitable to be Prime Minister (and this is even more so since he was indicted on corruption charges last year.) But the pro and anti Netanyahu forces evenly balance. The people who hate Netanyahu, either personally or as result of his arrogance, dirty dealing and corruption, really hate him. Those who support him think he is a super experienced and competent leader: look at the "peace deal" with the UAE; look at the US embassy move; look at the total disarray among the Palestinians; look at the success of the vaccination campaign. And the result this time is no different than the last three elections – a virtual tie between pro and anti Netanyahu forces.

But below that top line, there have been some interesting developments that may bear watching.

First, let's look at the results themselves. Thirteen parties managed to get more than 3.25% of the vote – the minimum required to get any Knesset seats at all. There are 120 seats in the Knesset, and 61 votes are required to establish a new government.

### The Parties

- ◆ Likud 30
- ◆ Yesh Atid 17
- ◆ Shas 9
- ◆ Blue and White 8
- ◆ Yamina 7
- ◆ Labor 7
- ◆ United Torah Judaism
- ◆ Yisrael Beyteinu 7
- ◆ Joint List 6
- ◆ Religious Zionist Party 6
- ◆ New Hope 6
- ◆ Meretz 6
- ◆ Ra'am 4

Let's review where each party stands on the main political issues.



**Is it possible for a group of Jews to have a meaningful discussion on the topic of Israel/Palestine? Find the answer on page 3: \*\*\*An Amazing UJPO Event\*\*\***

*Continued on page 10*

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# NATIONAL UJPO NEWS

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## FROM WINNIPEG

By Harriet Zaidman

Our lecture series with Dr. Itay Zutra wrapped up happily at the end of February, with lots of discussion and exchanges. We were quite pleased that Zoom afforded people from other parts of Canada to join us - from Toronto, St. Sauveur, Quebec and Vancouver. Before we parted, participants were invited to submit ideas for future workshops. Dr. Zutra is a teaching fellow at the University of Manitoba and writes a regular Yiddish column in the *Jewish Post & News*. We would like to thank Dr. Zutra, for his deeply thought and researched programs that informed and enriched us.

The UJPO Book Club met online in March to discuss their latest selection, *Behind the Headlines: A History of Investigative Journalism in Canada* and heard author Cecil Rosner talk about his work as a journalist, first in print at the *Winnipeg Free Press* and now for the CBC. April's Book Club will feature *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* by Isaac Deutscher, the renowned Marxist scholar.

UJPO Winnipeg conducted its annual Warsaw Ghetto Memorial on Zoom this year, with more than 80 participants, again from locations across Canada. Our theme was **Warsaw, Terezin and Vilna: Jewish Resistance in Poetry and Song**. The program was written by UJPO member Dr. Lionel Steiman and narrated by Harry Nelken, well known Canadian actor. Musical selections were delivered via Youtube. Our sincere thanks to Lionel and Harry for their hard work in leading this important evening. Our hope is to meet again in person next year, and hear songs performed by the North End Jewish Folk Choir.

To view UJPO Winnipeg's Warsaw Ghetto Memorial, visit:

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vfipgiyctxrfgms/AAC57go5kRR0pODsH4\\_ugszna?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vfipgiyctxrfgms/AAC57go5kRR0pODsH4_ugszna?dl=0) or  
<https://youtu.be/BnmbwoGF9HA>

Scroll past the first 9 minutes of the waiting room for the program to begin. ♦

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## FROM TORONTO

By Rachel Epstein

**April, 2021**

Greetings from Toronto! As we enter the second year of pandemic and lockdown, we are grateful for the community that UJPO provides – albeit online these days. As vaccines are slowly and chaotically being delivered, we anticipate

the changed world that will emerge post-pandemic. Hoping it will be a world more imbued with social justice than the one we left behind.

Here's what's been going on in Toronto since January:

**Office & Staff:** Our office continues to be closed with all staff working from home, though sue goldstein goes into the office a couple of days a week to check the mail, back up the computer and make sure the building is still standing. Saskia Laufer continues to work with us part-time doing social media; Gin Marshall is assisting with IT and digital communications; and of course our accountant Lynn Lubitz is working hard from Orangeville.

**Morris Winchevsky School (MWS):** The MWS is back online. Our creative and dedicated Education Director and teachers have been experimenting with various online platforms to encourage student engagement. Check out the photos in the weekly digest! On February 28 we held an online Purim extravaganza, with lots of costumes, masks, and noisemakers. Special guests, all characters from the Purim story, presented arguments re who is the “true hero” of Purim. The winner: Queen Esther...though it was close and we heard some very interesting arguments!

The families of our five B'nai Mitzvah grads are in full swing planning the B'nai Mitzvah ceremony which will take place on Saturday, June 19. It is a challenging time to be planning an event. Kudos to the parents and students who are rising to this occasion. We look forward to celebrating our grads: Aaron Bergman, Mika Breznitz, Sadie Kopyto Primack, Keegan Munk-Phillips, and Miles Sommers.

### **Adult B'nai Mitzvah (ABM)**

The ABM program is also in full swing and participants are starting to plan an end of year group ceremony for those who want to participate. As always, we are grateful to facilitator Sharoni Sibony who enriches the program with her knowledge, creativity and commitment to Jewish learning.

Registration for the 2021-22 Morris Winchevsky School and the Adult B'nai Mitzvah program will open soon. We are in the process of automating all our registration systems...stay tuned!

**Camp Naivelt:** Camp Naivelt is gearing up for a new season. Plans for spring clean up, short term rentals and programming are well underway under the guidance of a robust and well-functioning Camp Committee.

**Programs:** All our programs continue to run online.

On February 6 we partnered with the Noor Cultural Centre and others on an extremely well-attended event called *Connecting Abolitionist Struggles: Settler*

*Colonialism, Mass Incarceration and the “War on Terror,”* featuring speakers: Shady Hafez, El Jones, and Arun Kundnani. The recording is available here: <http://tiny.cc/NoorCentre6Feb2021>

On April 3 we held our annual Third Seyder, with the theme: a Nayer, Frayer Velt, Olam Chadash Chofshi (ישפוח שדה מלווע), Un Mundo Nuevo Mas Libre – A Newer, Freer World.

With several hundred attendees from all over the world, we celebrated resilience, mutual care, community and the significance of solidarity – through poetry, music and text – and lots of wine. The readers were ABM facilitator Sharoni Sibony and four of the ABM participants: Suzanne Carson, Julia Horel, Lauren Schreiber-Sasaki, and KigaTymianski. Marilyn Lerner and David Wall, as usual, graced us with their music via pre-recorded videos, UJPO-Toronto Board member Ely T. wowed us with their Ten Plagues Rap, Saskia Laufer wrote and recorded an original song, and Education Director Lia Tarachansky and B’nai Mitzvah teacher Lainie Basman worked with the MWS students to produce two fabulous, funny and creative videos. Gin Marshall skilfully handled the IT. sue goldstein produced a beautiful booklet of the poems and songs (see: <http://tiny.cc/SeyderSongsheet>)

Thanks to event planning committee: sue goldstein, Saskia Laufer, Rachel Epstein.

On April 11 many members of UJPO Toronto participated in the Israel-Palestine 3-minute Panel & Discussion organized by UJPO Canada. It was a fabulous and engaging event. Look out for a special issue of *UJPO News* featuring text of the presentations.

### Upcoming events:

“By These Presents: ‘Purchasing’ Toronto”

**Film Screening and Talk-back with Creator Ange Loft**  
**Friday, April 30, 2021 - 6:30 p.m. EDT**

Event page: <https://fb.me/e/1qy95Ziwf>

*Sponsored by the Indigenous Solidarity Working Group (ISWG) of UJPO-Toronto*

**Free. RSVP to [info@winchevskycentre.org](mailto:info@winchevskycentre.org)** for Zoom link “By These Presents” is the history lesson you wish you had gotten in school. The film leaves us with more questions than answers for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples who want to honour treaties. How do we “honour” a dishonourable agreement?”

### In the Muse’s Voice:

**A Poetic Evening with Lisa Richter & Ruth Panofsky**  
**Thursday, May 6, 2021 – 7:00 p.m. EDT –Free**

Event page: <http://tiny.cc/May6Eventpage>

Zoom link: <http://tiny.cc/94svtz>

Two award-winning poets, Lisa Richter, author of *Nautilus and Bone* (Frontenac House, 2020) and Ruth Panofsky, author of *Radiant Shards* (Inanna Publications, 2020), will read from their recent books and engage in conversation about feminist poetics, the writer’s craft, Jewish identity, the rewards and challenges of writing “in persona” and resilience. The event will consist of two readings, followed by a conversation between the two authors and audience Q&A.

We are in the process of formulating some new program ideas including educational sessions on radical Jewish history and Yiddishkeit; more intergenerational events that encourage relationship and community building; and some events that are pure fun. Let us know if you have program ideas! ♦

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## Discussion on the Topic of Israel/Palestine

*By Ester Reiter*

Is it possible for a group of Jews to have a meaningful discussion on the topic of Israel/Palestine? For those UJPO members who tuned in to the panel on April 11th, the answer was a resounding yes. A subcommittee of the UJPO Canada Board, consisting of Abbie Bakan, Rachel Epstein, Elka Guz, and Carl Rosenberg extended an invitation to ten participants of various ages and political perspectives to present their views on Israel/Palestine to UJPO members. Panelists were given exactly three minutes to address the question: “How would you describe your current views on Israel/Palestine, and how did you come to this?”

Who participated: Old members, new members, young members, members from Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver. Panelists were: Sam Blatt, Rachel Epstein, Emily Green, Elka Guz, Sol Hermolin, Rubin Kantarovich, Henry Lowi, Ester Reiter, Henry Shorr and Lia Tarachansky.

The gracious but firm moderators, Abbie Bakan and Jennie Lewis, kept the panel in line – three minutes really was three minutes. The panelists talked about their histories, and how they came to hold the views they do. The personal biographies were not only informative, but very moving.

Groups of people zoomed in from 54 devices and after the three-minute presentations participants were divided into groups of three for further discussion. Who can be too shy to speak in a group of three? Most of the breakout groups could have gone on discussing for a lot longer than the fifteen minutes allotted.

The office is planning to transcribe and publish the presentations of all the panelists. It’s safe to say that we as Jews struggle against anti-Semitism and share dismay at the

actions of the Israeli government and a commitment to justice for the Palestinian people. Our views on Zionism, the Israeli state, and what actions should be taken about illegal settlements in the Occupied territories, as might be expected, varied.

During the panel much use was made of the Zoom Chat. Following are two of the comments:

“The depth of experience, questioning and self-questioning in this organization is stunning.”

“We are non-Zionist, we fight anti-Semitism, and we oppose Israeli oppression of Palestine.”

Stay tuned for the publication of panelist presentations. ♦

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## FROM HAMILTON

By Paul Weinberg

On March 14 our Hamilton UJPO group discussed what music would we take with us on a desert island. Some of these can be found on YouTube. Here are some picks from Ruth Levkoe:

(1) Starting at the top is *Ol Man River* from *Showboat* 1936 as sung by Paul Robeson; (2) *If I had a Hammer* by Pete Seeger and Lee Hayes; (3) *Finlandia* tone poem by Jean Sibelius, particularly the version by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra; (4) *Here Comes the Sun* by George Harrison, the Beatles; (5) *Aida* opera by Giuseppe Verdi, an Italian libretto by Antonio Ghislanzoni. Try the Russian State Ballet and Opera House. Meanwhile Sandy Nickolas von Kaldenberg chose *Pigs* (Three Different Ones) by Roger Walters of Pink Floyd taken from the album *Animals*. For Paul Weinberg it is Billy Bragg and others singing unearthed Woody Guthrie compositions on the album *Mermaid Avenue*.

We will meet again in May to discuss the book *The Light of Days: The Untold Story of Women Resistance Fighters in Hitler's Ghettos* by Judy Batalion. ♦

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## HONOURABLE MENTSHN

### In Memoriam: Claire Klein Osipov (1931-2020)

By Carl Rosenberg, Vancouver

I'm devoting this report to a belated tribute to our beloved friend and community member Claire Klein Osipov, who passed away last August.



Claire made an immense contribution to Vancouver's Peretz Centre for Secular Jewish Culture, and to the wider Jewish community, both through her music and her many forms of involvement with the Peretz Centre.

Claire was born in Toronto in 1931, the daughter of working-class immigrants from Poland. She said of her upbringing, “We were poor, we didn't have fine things in life, but [my parents] both knew that they wanted us to learn the Yiddish language, so they sent us to Jewish school, where we learned to read and write, and the history of the Jewish people.”

Claire studied voice at the Toronto Conservatory of Music and also sang with the Toronto Jewish Folk Choir, taking part in the late forties in UJPO's first Warsaw Ghetto Memorial. At the age of 19 she toured across Canada as a soloist with the Choir, performing with husband-wife team Emil and Fagel Gartner, conductor and pianist of the Choir. She later said that Fagel Gartner “was my mentor, she took me under her wing and really helped me with my interpretation and gave me love for the Yiddish song.” They performed in Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver, where UJPO then had a strong presence, including a drama workshop.

In 1953 Claire married Lou Osipov, whom she had met in Vancouver, and they made their home here. (Lou passed away in 1987.) While Claire was more active in some periods than others, taking time off for her family, her singing career lasted over 60 years, including performances on CBC TV and Radio. She was especially known for her interpretations of Yiddish music, touring Canada for UJPO. In 1972 she was invited back to Toronto to sing again with the Toronto Jewish Folk Choir, at the invitation of Searle Friedman, who later founded the Vancouver Jewish Folk Choir and was living in Toronto with his family at the time.

In 1978, Claire made a recording of songs together with Wendy Bross Stuart (her accompanist since the mid-70s), *Sing to Me in Yiddish*. Claire often sang at Peretz events such as holiday celebrations and annual concerts of the Vancouver Jewish Folk Choir.

Claire was active in the Peretz Centre in many ways, as musical director of the school's children's choir, serving on the board and on the programming committee, and leading the FraytikTsuNakht, the Centre's monthly shabbas gathering.

Claire's dedication to *yiddishkeit* was eloquently summed up in her words: “I want to perpetuate the Yiddish language. If the language dies, then let at least the songs live.”

(For the quotations from Claire, I'm indebted to Cynthia Ramsay's article, “Peretz honors singer: Banquet

will feature Claire Klein Osipov," *Jewish Independent*, Nov. 25, 2011.) ♦

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## WHAT'S IN ORDER

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### Get Well/Thinking of You to:

Pat Rayman, Ross Morgan, Mari Drexler, Terry Azar, David Abramowitz, and Chandler Davis

### Mazi Tov to:

Gord Meslin on his 80th Birthday and on becoming a great-grandfather

### Heartfelt Condolences to:

Trudy Blugerman and Jeffrey Rubenstein on the passing of Trudy's mother, Frances Blugerman

MWS family Alejandro Paz, Natalie Rothman, Nour and Tamouz Paz on the passing of Hans Peter Bayerthal, father, father-in-law, and grandfather. ♦

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## GETTING TO KNOW OUR UJPO MEMBERS

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### Lyn Center

*Interviewed by Sam Blatt*

#### Since when have you been a member of UJPO?

Since 1980.

#### What brought you to UJPO?

A lefty friend suggested it as a non-religious Jewish organization with a program for kids. My daughter was about 5. And I bought a cottage at Camp Naivelt where we spent the summer for several years. Terrific for my daughter.



#### In which boards and/or committees are you active?

I resigned from the National Board just a few months ago. From what I remember I joined the National Board around 2009.

#### What are some of the projects or activities your committee or board has been or is involved in?

As a member of the National Board, I connected with our members in Montreal, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Hamilton. I became an editor of *UJPO News* several years ago and am still active on the *UJPO News* collective, gathering articles, editing and formatting them for online and print production. I also encourage Paul Weinberg to

contribute a report on our Hamilton activities for each issue of the News.

#### What is your life outside UJPO (that you are willing to share..)?

I used to work for the Ontario government in computer systems as a trainer, retired in 2006 and moved from Toronto to Hamilton, which I love. And my daughter, her husband and 2 wonderful young children now live in Burlington. I have formed a Hamilton UJPO group of around 10 people who meet around once a month, now virtually. Our discussion this month will be about the "desert island" music of Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson. I would also like to note that since COVID the Hamilton Jewish Federation has organized volunteers who will shop for me and others weekly and deliver my groceries. I can order and pay online.

#### Are you able to bring your non-UJPO activities and skills into a close relationship with your UJPO activities?

My computer knowledge has been helpful for designing UJPO News. And I am still connecting with UJPO friends weekly via Zoom. Thanks to Sherri Bergman, Maxine Hermolin and Rosie Lappin.

#### Are other members of your family involved in or members of UJPO?

No. I was raised in an Orthodox Jewish household in Windsor and, aside from my daughter, am probably the only non-religious member of my family. My views on religion changed when I was studying at the University of Toronto.

#### Have there been any changes in UJPO since you joined, that you would like to mention?

I am impressed with our ability to continue activities virtually in the face of the pandemic. I think it is very important for our community. And I am also very pleased that we are paying so much attention to Indigenous peoples. We have become more and more involved in progressive issues.

#### Are there changes you would like to see over the coming years?

The more younger people the better.

#### How do you see yourself contributing to the health of the organization?

I'll keep connecting via friends and the *News* committee until my arthritis prevents me from using a computer.

#### Last and not least – recent book and/or movie and/or play you recommend!

These two books: *The Secret River* by Kate Grenville, an Australian novel about the takeover of aboriginal land, and *The Wake: The Deadly Legacy of a Newfoundland Tsunami* by Linden MacIntyre. ♦

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## POETRY & SONG

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### (I lived in the first century of world wars)

By Muriel Rukeyser

Muriel Rukeyser (1913-1980) was an American poet and political activist, best known for her poems about equality, feminism, social justice, and Judaism. Early in her career, some critics thought her poems were too political to be truly poetic, though she won the prestigious Yale Younger Poets Award for her collection *Theory of Flight* (1935). Others thought she managed to be poetic despite the politics. The racist trial of the Scottsboro Boys and the Spanish Civil War were among the many events she wrote about as both a journalist and a poet. By the end of her life, it was more widely (though not universally) recognized that poetry and politics were not alternatives, and she was embraced by a new generation, though, ironically, some otherwise admiring voices suggested that her ability to find hope in some of the worst situations was out of touch with the times. This poem was written in 1968, during the Vietnam War, but in 2016 was adopted by many as a poem of resistance to the Trump era:

I lived in the first century of world wars.  
Most mornings I would be more or less insane,  
The newspapers would arrive with their careless stories,  
The news would pour out of various devices  
Interrupted by attempts to sell products to the unseen.  
I would call my friends on other devices;  
They would be more or less mad for similar reasons.  
Slowly I would get to pen and paper,  
Make my poems for others unseen and unborn.  
In the day I would be reminded of those men and women,  
Brave, setting up signals across vast distances,  
Considering a nameless way of living, of almost  
unimagined values.  
As the lights darkened, as the lights of night brightened,  
We would try to imagine them, try to find each other,  
To construct peace, to make love, to reconcile  
Waking with sleeping, ourselves with each other,  
Ourselves with ourselves. We would try by any means  
To reach the limits of ourselves, to reach beyond ourselves,

To let go the means, to wake.

I lived in the first century of these wars. ♦

*Muriel Rukeyser, "Poem" from The Speed of Darkness.  
Copyright © 1968 by Muriel Rukeyser. Reprinted by  
permission of International Creative Management.*

*Source: The Speed of Darkness (Vintage Books, 1968)*

*Contributed by Harriet Lyons*

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## A Little Nosh

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By Harriet Zaidman

### Gefilte Fish in a Loaf Pan

*(For more Passover and other recipes, visit  
northendnosh.weebly.com)*

This heritage Jewish recipe combines all the ingredients



within the fish mixture like a meatloaf, instead of making individual patties. Using this method means the preparation and cooking process are shortened dramatically. Simply mix and bake. The taste is terrific. Add a dollop of searing horseradish for that “Wow, what have I done!” moment.

**Note:** This recipe can also be made as individual servings in lined or greased muffin tins. Adjust the baking time accordingly.

**Serves:** This produces 2 loaf pans, 8-10 pieces, with one slice equivalent to 1 traditional piece of gefilte.

**Time:** 30 minutes to make, 1 1/2 hours to bake

#### Ingredients

- 3 pounds ground fish (combination whitefish/pickereel/sauger/carp or your local fish)
- 2 large onions, browned and cooled (option - leave about 1/4 cup raw onion, according to your taste)
- 1 large carrot, grated
- 3 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 2 heaping tablespoons sugar

- 2 tablespoon matzo meal
- 3/4 - 1 cup cold water
- 3 eggs, beaten

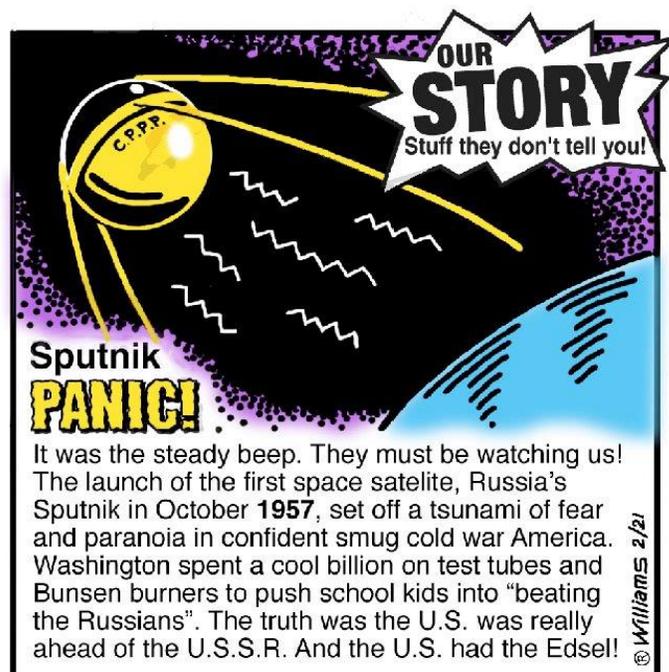
### Method

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line two 8 inch loaf pans with parchment paper (recommended) or grease them well.

Grind together the fish, onions, and carrots. Add and the salt, sugar, pepper, sugar, matzo meal, water and eggs. Mix well. If all the fish doesn't fit into the food processor, do an initial blend and remove to a bowl.

The mixture should not be sticky. Spoon the fish into the pan and bake on the lowest rack in the oven for 1 1/2 hours.

Cool well before lifting the parchment paper out of the loaf pan. Cool completely on a rack before removing the parchment paper or from the greased pan. Wrap the loaves in plastic wrap or wax paper. Don't use foil, which will blacken the fish. ♦



Cartoon by John Williams

## YIDDISH

### Silver Seders that Turned Black (Passover memoir)

#### By Melech Ravitch

Who doesn't sometimes feel like telling about the seders of his childhood, the seders of his home. And I too have a story to share and I will try to do it here.

Both my mother and father were poets – at least in small measure. And whose mother and father aren't? But you seldom see it when you're young. You recognize it only when you're getting on in years yourself, when they – the secret poets – have already passed away, and are in the World to Come, which is, after all, a world of poetry. But that's not our subject. Our subject is the silver seders that my parents had every Passover – and which one fine year turned black, never to return to silver again. This is my story:

My father's father was a *maskil*, a man educated in worldly matters. He was well-versed in Jewish learning and studied, for the most part, on his own, chanting passages with a beautiful, rhythmic melody. When he studied a page of Talmud – and this he would do at dawn when everyone and everything around him was sound asleep — it seemed as if he were reciting poems, so rhythmically did he do it. And he studied with such sweetness that it wouldn't wake the members of the household in the nearby rooms, but was more like a lullaby to their honeyed dawn-like dreams... But this isn't our subject either. What I mean to say is that my father came by his singing ability and sense of rhythm

honestly. He also inherited from his father the entire seder ceremony, which was, in truth, a symphony.

All year round, our house was an ordinary earthly household – with all the usual worries and day-to-day concerns. Although ours was a well-to-do household, there was plenty of the mundane about it. But upstairs, in our spacious third-floor attic, we also had a sort of heavenly house, packed into about a dozen boxes and baskets. Every year, a few days before Passover, this heavenly house would descend from the third floor and reign over us for eight days, and then, after Passover, over the course of several days, it would ascend again to the heavenly realm to wait out the whole year of 357 days of *chametz*.

Our father never interfered in kitchen matters. He believed that that was unbecoming for both him and my mother – something he learned from his own father, who was a *maskil*, too. And his father learned it from classical German literature, which he would study with the same melody and with just as much zeal and understanding, as a page of Talmud. But before the holiday, my father took over the command of the Passover heavenly house and, with the help of all the members of the household, as well as his trusted business associates and the laborers on his property, transported it downstairs.

And when we started to unpack these baskets and boxes, like the baskets and boxes of a caravan of camels and mules, coming from the marvelous Land of Ophir, laden with all kinds of goods for the Temple in Jerusalem, all the corners of our rooms grew fragrant and gleaming and full of color. Those rooms were now three times cleaner and neater than they had been all year round, in

order to receive the guest whose name was Peysesekh but who was, in fact, invisible. Even so his retinue took over every object in the house.

And out of the baskets came forth sets of dishes with vases and giant plates and deep bowls and plates flat and small and smaller still, some regular-shaped and others shaped like half-moons. And dishes decorated with all sorts of flowers. And others gleaming and white as polished silver. And dishes adorned with all sorts of miniature figurines from many centuries and many European countries. And out of the baskets came forth all sorts of pots made of porcelain and glazed clay and steel and glazed tin. And chopping knives and food mills and giant three-tined forks with curious handles.

And from a separate bundle there emerged old haggadahs that breathed in the fresh air, relieved to be taken out of the spices in which they had been packed all year to keep out the moths. And out came a snow white *kitl*, the white linen robe worn by religious Jews on some holidays, with bands of silver trim and a silver belt, as well as a golden yarmulke – my father’s royal garments for the seders. For Yom Kippur he had another *kitl* – without any decoration at all, like a shroud. And although the *kitl* at the seder was, after all, supposed to be a reminder of that “eternal” *kitl* – the shroud in which Jews are buried – Father had his own views on the matter.

At the very end of this caravan of baskets that had come down from the heavenly household to spread the Passover spirit over the earthly household down below, yes, at the very end, out came the symphony of goblets. At the time we were just a family of four, so why did we have so many goblets? The answer is that the goblets were my father’s unwritten poems rendered in glass. Some were blue as the sky and others – blue as the dark sea, as well as pink ones like roses, and others – red like the sunrise. And speckled ones with transparent circles and others with stripes. Some smooth and polished and completely without color, but nonetheless shimmering like a finely honed diamond crowned by sixteen facets.

And goblets with feet and some without feet and some with three feet and tiny goblets which could barely hold a dewdrop and others that could hold enough to make a Lot or a Noah drunk – if one managed to empty all four, as prescribed by Jewish law. And from the cotton padding there emerged at the very end the cup of Elijah the Prophet. In our house there was also a great silver goblet that we called Elijah the Prophet’s cup that was kept in the silver cabinet, open and accessible all year long – so there was a special polished cup for Elijah the Prophet just for Passover, made of glass, a fusion of red and blue, the rising sun and the blueness of the early morning sky.

And now it’s a day closer to Passover – and the dishes have all been unpacked and arranged where they belong. The time has come to search for the *chametz*. And now it’s Passover Eve, the *chametz* has already been burned, and Father is standing with us at the synagogue and choosing two guests. Every shabbes Father would bring at least one poor guest to our table. He would tell the shames, the caretaker of the synagogue: “Give me whichever guest you’d like” – but for the seders he would be selective.

Aesthetics triumphed over ethics... Father would derive great pleasure from his seders, which fulfilled his longing for beauty and so he only settled for respectable, tidy-looking guests who were also musically inclined. Some guests would even plan their journeys across the land so that they could arrive in our town for Passover because our father’s seders were renowned among both his family and the beggars of the region.

And now for the seder table itself. It takes up almost the whole living room. A bed is moved into the middle of the room and is transformed into the *hesev-bet*, on which the leader of the seder would recline on pillows. And although we all know this bed very well, we don’t recognize it. It’s become a wide throne with plush covers and pillows underneath and – most importantly – the royal garments.

Six silver candlesticks sparkle and shimmer. Two of them with branches that can hold four candles. Today they are arranged differently, covering the entire length of the table. The stearin candles are quite tall, since they need to last as long as the seder. Reclining on pillows, next to my Father, sits the youngest: me. It’s not customary for the king to sit with the queen at the seder because the queen in this instance needs to guard over her empire, which comes into its own during the pause in the reading of the haggadah – her empire being the kneidlekh, the matzah balls. And not only does she need to stand guard over the matzah balls – at a seder some little thing is always lacking and needed right away, so my mother has to be ready in the wink of an eye. Whether it’s salt or the shank bone – at some point during the seder, something will not be quite right and things won’t run like a Swiss watch... And although my father is always gentle in these matters, as gentle as one could possibly be, at a seder it’s different – any little detail could spoil the rhythm, the rhyme – and the seders were his poems.

I finish asking the Four Questions. And although usually my brother and I speak Polish with our parents, I have to ask the Four Questions the traditional way, in Hebrew with a garnish of Yiddish. I feel a little panicked, because although I understand Yiddish, I’m not used to speaking it. But that’s the way it has to be. Tradition.

And my father lifts up his eternally warm voice, which, although a little hoarse from endless smoking, is always full of love for everything, and it soon rises on the wings of some sort of rhythm which isn't quite song, and yet is song:

“*Avodimhoyinu*, we were slaves –“

And in an instant the whole house becomes a choir. Every part has its own melody, although all the melodies together comprise one great symphony. If someone makes a mistake – whether it be my mother, the maids, the guests, or us, the two boys – Father catches it right away, like an experienced choirmaster and pauses an instant – so that the rhythm might join together again. He calls no attention to it – so as not to shame anyone, but the seder too is an entity unto itself and must not be shamed. Perhaps it is even the divine presence.

And since I had drunk the first little cup and the flower of poetry had already begun to unfold in the depths of my own soul, everything – the candlesticks and the candles, the tablecloth, the porcelain dishes, the melodies and the moonlit night outside with the great moon that would always peer in at the seder through the window – would merge within me into one silver current.

These seders would go on for a long time. By the time we got to the food, all our uncles had already finished their own seders and their children would come over to our place for the second part of the seder to sing *Hallel*, the Psalms sung on the holidays with my father, as well as *Ki lo noe*, *Ekhod mi yodeya* and *Khadgadyo* – and only then, after everything was over, go for a night stroll around the town with him. The roofs and the trees of the town were bathed in silver and silence. Only from a distance, from a corner of a poor street, could drunken voices be heard yelling “*Ku-ku-ri-ku!*” like roosters. There was an old man in our town with that nickname and the kids on the street had a custom of meeting under his windows after each seder and crowing at him, causing the poor man much suffering. And my father, in turn, made it his custom after every seder to chase the kids away. And they obeyed him and once again a silvery silence would descend upon the town and we would walk to the river on one side of town and to the meadow on the other and breath in the nocturnal fragrances of the approaching spring.

And so it went, year in year out, until the year 1906. That year Father was orphaned, he had lost his beloved mother. And although he was forty years old at the time, his grief knew no bounds. But that's a story unto itself and I mention it now only because it has a bearing on the silver seders.

Of course we all knew that Father was very sad. But a seder is a seder so everything was prepared as in previous years. Everything was sparkling and silvery. And now the

first part of the seder is over. And with every page of the haggadah, we breathe more easily and hope that everything will go smoothly. Now we've finished eating and we're reciting the blessings after the meal. And Father says: “May the Compassionate One bless my father my teacher and ... and before the words, “and my mother, my teacher” which he was not supposed to say because he no longer had a mother – he erupts in a deep and heartrending wail and the whole seder is transformed into a river of tears – everyone is crying, my mother, the maids, the guests, the children – for many minutes.

But it wasn't just this particular seder that turned dark, but the whole tradition at our house, which had gone on for fourteen years. From then on all the other seders grew dark as well. Every year brought a new misfortune or calamity. And they all came to the surface around the seder table. Although in 1907 a new child was born – our brother Herts – by the year 1910 there was one brother fewer at the seder: my older brother had gone off to Israel with the second *aliyah*, and become a guard – and who knew where he was wandering about while we were sitting here at such a lovely seder. That thought didn't let us put the food to our lips or let a melody begin.

A year later I became a vegetarian and didn't eat the holiday meal with everybody else. My mother prepared a separate little tablecloth for me with my dairy food at the end of the table... and this too brought my father to tears. “His own son was sitting at his table in a corner, like an uninvited guest...” he said. And in general, everything about these seders roused tears of sorrow and remembrance in him – the poem of joy and beauty became a poem of sorrow and beauty. Everything was veiled in darkness – and the melodies too became melodies of sadness. From the year 1906 on, even the moon was edged in black. And yet, the beauty remained.

And then came the year 1914, and with it, World War I. Foreign hands plundered our entire heavenly household and also the earthly one. The house was left, at least partially, in shambles. We still had seders wherever we could, but they felt so mundane, mere bits and scraps of times gone by. Most years, Father was now alone with Mother for the seder and there was only one guest randomly allocated to their table by the *shames* so as not to shame the remembrance of times gone by.

And so it was until the year 1939 – when everything swam away, out of reality and into eternity, where it shines once again with a silver light so radiant it can never again grow dark.

*Translated by Sheva Zucker, with thanks to Merle Bachman for her poetic ear.*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melech\\_Ravitch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melech_Ravitch)

<https://forward.com/yiddish/466461/silver-seders-that-turned-black-passover-memoir/>

*Zechariah Choneh Bergner (Yiddish: רענגרעב אנה הירבו) (27 November 1893 – 20 August 1976), better known by his pen name Melech Ravitch (Yiddish: ראַװיטש דלם), was a Canadian Yiddish poet and essayist. Ravitch was one of the world's leading Yiddish literary figures after the Holocaust. His poetry and essays appeared in the international Yiddish press and in anthologies, as well as in translation.♦*

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## ISRAELI ELECTIONS

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*Continued from page 1*

Likud is the party of Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's current and longest serving Prime Minister. It is the mainstream "right wing" party in Israel and has dominated Israel politics since 1977. It has held the Premiership for 32 of the last 44 years (and for 4 of the 12 years that Likud did not hold power, the PMship was held by former Likud members who had defected and set up a competing party.) Likud is hawkish, opposes the creation of a Palestinian State, supports limited settlement expansion, is in favour of unilateral annexation of large parts (but not all) of the West Bank, leans right on economic matters (but can endorse populist economics when politically useful), is comfortable with most of the demands of the Jewish religious parties and the "Rabbinat" (though not on LGBTQ and women's issues, where it is more liberal than its religious partners would like), and is in favour of limiting the independence of the courts and the State Prosecutor's office. This last position has been the Likud's for a while, but has come more strongly to the fore as Netanyahu tries to delay, or ideally stop, his trial on multiple corruption charges. Many people now view the Likud as a party of Netanyahu sycophants, as he has driven out all who ever opposed him or who feel that he should resign because of the corruption allegations against him.

Yesh Atid is the largest opposition party, It is headed by Yair Lapid, a former TV journalist, whose father at one time headed the centrist Shinui Party. Yesh Atid is considered "centre-left" on the Israeli political spectrum, but would be considered centre-right in most Western countries. It is nominally willing to negotiate with the Palestinians over a two state solution, but puts up so many conditions that it is clear such negotiations would go nowhere. It is in favour of annexing some parts of the West Bank, but not unilaterally. In the meantime it seems to prefer managing the "status quo", perhaps with a bit lighter

hand than the Likud, but perhaps not. It is against expanding settlements, but would allow the existing ones to grow and to add population. On economic matters it is more committed to a neo-liberal agenda than the Likud – and Lapid has proven his bone fides in this regard during his stint as Minister of Finance in an earlier Netanyahu government. Yesh Atid is militantly secular, and would end all religious coercion and roll back many of the privileges that religious institutions have gained for themselves – most controversially it would cancel draft deferments currently granted to students in adult religious schools. It has thus earned the loathing of the religious parties. It fashions itself firmly anti-corruption and in favour of "the rule of law" and judicial independence.

Shas is the ultra-orthodox Sephardi party, whose base is largely among Jews of Moroccan and North Africa descent. It is as much about Mizrahi grievances (and they certainly have what to be aggrieved about) and populist economics as it is about religious demands. Generally hawkish, it is not officially in favour of annexation, but has indicated it would not oppose such moves if brought to a vote. It is militantly xenophobic, with its Ministers being at the forefront of denying status to African refugee seekers in Israel. It is also anti LGBTQ rights. On the judicial front, it sides with the Likud in wanting to restrict the independence and power of the courts. In the current coalition negotiations, Shas is firmly in the pro Netanyahu camp.

Blue and White is the party of the "liberal darling" of the previous three rounds of Israeli elections – Benny Ganz. Ganz, a former general and head of the Israel Defence Forces, is currently Minister of Defence, Deputy Prime Minister, and acting Minister of Justice in the outgoing, and now caretaker, government. He ran in the past three elections on a commitment to bring down Netanyahu. But then, after the previous elections ended in a similar stalemate, Ganz went back on his promise and joined Netanyahu in government. Though he only did so – so he claims – to help battle the Corona crisis, he is now viewed as a liar or a fool by most of his previous supporters, and Blue and White dropped from 35 seats in the last election to 8 this time around. Officially the party's positions are similar to Yesh Atid's: perhaps less militantly secular and a bit more hawkish. But the main reason Ganz didn't run with Yesh Atid is ego. He and Lapid don't like or trust each other, and neither was willing to play second fiddle to the other. In the current coalition negotiations, Blue and White is firmly in the anti Netanyahu camp.

Yamina, whose name means "rightward", is supported mostly by people who previously voted Likud or for various religious Zionist parties. It is more hawkish than the Likud, strongly in favour of settlement expansion, in favour of unilateral annexation of most or all of the West

Bank, neo-liberal in economic outlook, and even more committed in undermining the independence of the courts than the Likud – although it is not interested in helping Netanyahu out of his legal difficulties. Yamina’s leader, Naftali Bennett, and Netanyahu dislike each other intensely, but have worked together in the past when it was in their mutual interest. In the current coalition negotiations, Yamina is uncommitted and is being courted by both pro and anti Netanyahu camps.

Labor, is ... well Labor: the party that ran Israel until 1977 and then again under Yithak Rabin and Ehud Barak. It almost disappeared after the last election when it entered the Netanyahu coalition despite promising to never do so. Most of its disgraced older leadership resigned, and the party has tried to remake itself under new leader Michal Michaeli. A former journalist, Michaeli has attempted to rebrand the party and militantly feminist, anti-corruption, social democratic on economic issues, in favour of a negotiated two state solution with the Palestinians – although it wants to hold onto some parts of the West Bank and all of East Jerusalem. It is secular, but not militantly so, and it stands for judicial independence. Still it remains, for the most part, a party of the Ashkenazi old guard now retrenched to its last strongholds on kibbutzim and in liberal upscale “north Tel Aviv”. In the current coalition negotiations, Labor is firmly in the anti Netanyahu camp.

United Torah Judaism is the party of the Ashkenazi ultra-orthodox. Officially its policy on Israel/Palestine issues is to do whatever the security establishment recommends, but practically it has moved to increasingly hawkish positions over the years. It is in favour of expanding existing settlements – particularly those with ultra-orthodox populations – and has indicated it will not oppose annexation if it comes to a vote. Its economic policies are populist, supporting strengthening and expansion of the welfare state. It is against LGBTQ and women’s rights, and of course advocates for the maintenance and expansion of privileges granted to religious institutions and to the imposition of even more religious norms into Israeli society. It is for the restriction of judicial independence and powers. In the current coalition negotiations, UTJ is firmly in the pro Netanyahu camp.

Yisrael Beytenu, is primarily the personal vehicle for its leader Avigdor Lieberman. Its voters are mostly immigrants from the Former Soviet Union. Generally the party is hawkish, in favour of annexation of parts of the West Bank – but not all of it, as it is worried about the “demographic threat” that full annexation would present to a Jewish majority. (Lieberman himself lives in a West Bank settlement.) At one point Lieberman proposed a territorial and population swap as part of any Israeli deal with the

Palestinians: Israel would annex most of the settlements and Palestine would get in return Arab towns and villages currently inside Israel! Lieberman is not opposed to a Palestinian state in principle, but the conditions he would impose are far from what any Palestinian would accept. He is an economic populist. He is militantly secular and would roll back religious privileges including draft deferments. His position on judicial independence is not clear, though he – more than almost any other Israel politician – is determined to bring down Netanyahu. (In the 1990s he was Netanyahu’s chief of staff, so he knows well who he hates and why.) In the current coalition negotiations, Yisrael Beytenu is firmly in the anti Netanyahu camp.

The Joint List is an amalgam of three mostly Israeli Palestinian Arab parties: Hadash, the Arab-Jewish Communist Party (though the vast majority of their supporters are Israeli Palestinians); Taal, a liberal party that is mainly a vehicle for its leader Ahmed Tibi; and the Palestinian nationalist party, Balad. In the previous three rounds of elections the Joint List had also included the conservative Muslim religious party Ra’am. But Ra’am decided to run on its own this time. One of the issues that engendered the split was the parties’ stances on LGBTQ issues. The Joint List is favour – or at least not vehemently opposed – to LGBTQ rights. Ra’am actively opposes them. The other, and perhaps more important, issue that caused the rift is the parties’ stances re Netanyahu. The Joint List is firmly committed to bringing him down, and has insisted on getting progress on the “diplomatic front” in return for any support it might grant to a Zionist party. Ra’am’s position is to negotiate with whoever will give it the best deal on “bread and butter” issues. The Joint List stands for a two state solution based on a full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied in 1967 as well a full equality for Palestinian Arabs within Israel. It is also firmly for judicial independence. As a result of the split – and the not unrelated very low turnout among Israeli Palestinian Arabs – the Joint list fell from 13 representatives in the outgoing Knesset, to 6 in the new one. This is a big blow to those who saw the Joint List as the rising star on the Israeli left. The Joint List is firmly in the anti Netanyahu camp.

The Religious Zionist Party is a tactical union of three parties: the very far right and openly racist religious nationalist party, National Union; the even farther right fascist party, disciples of the late Meir Kahane, Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power); and the militantly anti LGBTQ religious party Noam. They are super hawkish in relations with the Palestinians, advocating maximum force, and the Otzma faction at least supports extra-legal attacks on Palestinians by militant settlers. They oppose intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews and most intercommunal mixing of any kind. They support unilateral annexation of

all of the West Bank. And of course they are strongly in favour of curtailing judicial independence and power. In the current coalition negotiations, the RZP is firmly in the pro Netanyahu camp.

New Hope is a break away from the Likud led by the person who was, until recently, one of the most popular politicians within the Likud, Gideon Saar. Precisely because he was so popular, Netanyahu did everything in his power to keep Saar down. In light of Netanyahu's indictment on corruption charges last year, Saar openly challenged him for the leadership of the Likud. He lost, and promptly left the Likud to set up a party devoted to bringing down Netanyahu. The party's policies are not much different than the Likud's, except on the issue of judicial independence: New Hope is committed to "the rule of law". In the current coalition negotiations, New Hope is firmly in the anti Netanyahu camp.

Meretz, represents the left wing of Liberal Zionism. It is firmly against the occupation, against any expansion of settlements, and against any annexation of the West Bank. It supports a two state solution based on the May 1967 lines with "minor mutually agreed adjustments and territorial swaps". It is the only Zionist party to advocate for almost (it still would retain the Law of Return for Jews while opposing the Right of Return for Palestinians) total equality of Jews and Arabs within Israel, and 40% of its new caucus will be Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel – making it the most integrated caucus in the Knesset. It is militantly secular and supports revoking draft exemptions for religious students as well as opposing "religious coercion". Its economic policies are social democratic to democratic socialist. Its leader, Nathan Horowitz, is openly gay. And it stands firmly for judicial independence. In the current coalition negotiations, Meretz is firmly in the anti-Netanyahu camp.

Ra'am is the conservative Muslim religious party. It broke with the Joint List partly over LGBTQ rights (it is against them), but perhaps more significantly over how to prioritize Palestinian "national" issues versus bread and butter issues for its constituents, like recognition of Bedouin villages in the Negev, getting them hooked up to the national electricity and water grids, better police protection in Arab towns and villages, bigger budgets for crumbling infrastructure in the Arab sector, etc. It argues that the "big issues" like recognition of Palestinian national rights, ending the occupation should be deprioritized in favour of bread and butter local issues. As such Israeli Palestinian Arabs should not be seen in the pocket of the Israeli "left", but should be willing to make a deal with whoever will provide more on the bread and butter front – even if that turns out to be the right lead by Netanyahu. Of course, it helps that Ra'am agrees with many of the policies

of the Jewish religious right parties on the role of religion and state, and on women's and LGBTQ rights – or more properly lack of them. In the current coalition negotiations, Ra'am is uncommitted and is being courted by elements of both the pro and anti Netanyahu camps. In that sense, its strategy has already succeeded, and it can be viewed as a victory for the principle that Zionist parties would even consider having an Arab party in government.

So where does that leave us. Let's look at the party electoral results along several axes:

- ◆pro versus anti Netanyahu;
- ◆pro versus anti unilateral annexation;
- ◆pro versus anti Palestinian State;
- ◆pro versus anti full Jewish/Palestinian equality within Israel;
- ◆pro versus anti LGBTQ and women's rights;
- ◆pro versus anti judicial independence; and
- ◆left versus right economic policy.

### **Netanyahu or Not Netanyahu**

The most relevant axis in the short run, but perhaps the least relevant in the long run, is the pro versus anti Netanyahu axis. This will determine if one side or the other can form a government or if Israel will have a fifth round of elections in a few months. Currently there are 4 parties (Likud, Shas, UTJ and RZP) with 52 seats in the pro Netanyahu camp. There are 7 parties with 57 seats in the anti Netanyahu camp. And there are 2 parties – Yamina with 7 and Ra'am with 4 – who are uncommitted and willing to bargain with either side. Netanyahu needs both Yamina and Ra'am to get to 61. The opposition needs one or the other to get itself to 61.

Barring someone doing something very surprising, it is doubtful whether either side can pull it off. In the Netanyahu camp, the far right racist RZP has said it will not enter a government with the anti-Zionist Arabs of Ra'am, and Ra'am has said that sitting with RZP is a bridge too far, even for it. Nevertheless there are elements in the Likud openly calling for such a deal and pressing both the RZP and Ra'am to "compromise". It is unlikely this would happen without Netanyahu's blessing, though he is being coy on the matter at this point.

But that does not mean that the opposition camp can cobble together 61 either. Its 7 parties are already an incoherent amalgam that only agrees on their joint opposition to Netanyahu. And they have their own "Arab problem". It's not clear that all the Zionist parties would agree to have the Joint List in government, nor that the Joint List would agree to be in a government with some of these partners. Nor is it clear that the partners would agree to the Joint List's minimal demands for agreeing to support the government "from the outside". But even without the

Joint List, parties such as Meretz and New Hope have virtually nothing in common, and very much that they actively disagree on. How could they come up with a common program for governing? Now try to bring in Yamina or Ra'am and the difficulties multiply. For his part, Yamina leader Bennet has recently said he would never allow Yesh Atid's "leftist" leader Lapid to become Prime Minister, and has denounced him for negotiating with the Joint List and Ra'am.

Of course, politicians recant and bend in all sorts of contorted ways during coalition negotiations, and anything is possible. But it seems unlikely, as I write this, that there will be 61 votes for either Netanyahu or for the opposition. New elections in a few months are a very distinct possibility. On the other hand, any government that might be formed will almost certainly be as a result of a formal deal with one or both of the Arab parties – and that can only be a good thing in the long run.

Given the intricacies of Israeli law regarding forming new governments, it could be one to three months until we know for sure how the coalition negotiations do, or do not, turn out.

### **Pro vs anti Unilateral Annexation**

There are currently 4 parties (Likud, Yamina, RZP and New Hope), representing 49 seats (41% of voters), that support unilateral annexation of major portions or all of the West Bank. There are another 3 parties (Shas, UTJ, and Yisrael Beyteinu) representing 23 seats (19% of voters) that are unclear about this but would probably support it if it came to a head. And there are 6 parties (Yesh Atid, Blue and White, Labor, Joint List, Meretz, and Ra'am), representing 48 seats (40% of voters) who oppose any unilateral annexation – though some would demand some annexation as part of an agreement with the Palestinians.

While there appears to be a slim plurality for unilateral annexation at this point, it probably won't come to pass in the short run, even if Netanyahu forms a right wing government. Netanyahu has a history of talking tough for internal consumption, but acting more moderately in the face of international pressure. He may be loath to put the "peace deal" with the UAE at risk or to face strong U.S. condemnation in order to push unilateral annexation. But in the longer run, the trend to unilaterally annex major portions of the West Bank is gaining strength among Israeli voters and likely will win out at some point.

### **Pro versus anti Two State Solution**

There are currently 4 parties (Likud, Yamina, RZP and New Hope), representing 49 seats (41% of voters), that are on record as opposing a Palestinian State. (These are the same 4 parties that support unilateral annexation.) There

are two parties (Shas and UTJ), representing 16 seats (11% of voters) that have no official policy on this issue. There are 3 parties (Yesh Atid, Blue and White and Yisrael Beyteinu), representing 32 seats (27% of voters) that officially support the possibility of a Palestinian State, but do not really prioritize it as a goal and put so many conditions on it that it is very unlikely any Palestinians would agree to their terms: these parties seem content to manage the status quo forever. And finally there are 4 parties (Labor, Joint List, Meretz and Ra'am), representing 23 seats (19% of voters) that support a two state solution and are willing to make concessions that might actually lead to an agreement. (Some people might disagree that Labor belongs in this category, but under its new leadership I am giving them the benefit of the doubt.)

What should be clear from this, however, is that no matter who forms the next government we should not expect any progress towards a two state solution any time soon.

### **Pro versus anti full Jewish/Palestinian equality within Israel**

There are only three parties (Joint List, Meretz and Ra'am), representing 16 seats (11% of voters) that stand for full equality of Jews and Arabs within Israel. All the rest – 104 seats (89%) – support some level of legally privileging Jewish citizens over Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel. (Some people might exclude Meretz from the former group, because of its support of the Law of Return for Jews while opposing the Right of Return for Palestinians. I have chosen not to.)

### **Pro versus anti LGBTQ and women's rights**

There are 4 parties (Shas, UTJ, RZP and Ra'am), representing 26 seats (22% of voters) that openly oppose equal rights for women and/or LGBTQ people. All the rest – 96 seats (78%) – at least nominally support equal rights for women and LGBTQ people. However, some (e.g. Likud) have been less than committed to enforcing these rights given political pressure from their coalition partners.

### **Pro versus anti Judicial Independence**

There are 5 parties (Likud, Shas, Yamina, UTJ, and RZP), representing 59 seats (49% of voters) that would restrict the independence and power of the courts. Yisrael Beyteinu's position – 7 seats (6%) – is unclear. All the other parties, representing 54 seats (45% of voters) support "the rule of law" and the independence of the courts. If Netanyahu does succeed in forming a government, it is almost certain that laws will be passed to weaken the court system. But in any case, respect for strong and independent courts in Israel is steadily eroding, and the long term trends in this regard do not look good.

### **Left versus Right Economic Policy**

While the parties often espouse economic policies that they do not always follow up on when in power (Likud talks more neo-liberal than it actually delivers, and Labor talks more social democratic than it delivers) the parties can roughly be divided as follows. There are 4 parties (Likud, Yesh Atid, Yamina, and New Hope), representing 60 seats (50% of voters) that support a conservative / neo-liberal approach to the economy. There are 3 parties (Blue and White, Joint List and RZP), representing 20 seats (17% of voters) that could be described as centrist or split or unclear economic policy. And there are 7 parties (Shas, UTJ, Labor, Yisrael Beytenu, Meretz and Ra'am), representing 40 seats (33% of voters) that can be described as social democratic or at least pro-welfare state. While economic inequality in Israel is no worse than in Canada, its image as a social democratic model has long been inaccurate, and these numbers show that that is not likely to change in any time soon.

### Summary

The major takeaways from this round of Israeli elections are the following:

- ♦ It is very likely that no government will be formed and that Israel will be headed to a fifth round of elections in the fall.
- ♦ The main issue preventing the quick and easy formation of a governing coalition is Netanyahu himself. If he was to disappear, and someone else came to lead the Likud, there could be a clear path to a strong and stable right wing / religious coalition.
- ♦ There is no majority, now or on the horizon, that could realistically negotiate a two state solution.
- ♦ There is no majority, now or on the horizon, that would support full equality between Jews and Palestinians within Israel.
- ♦ The forces that support unilateral annexation of all or significant portions of the West Bank are a slim plurality. While annexation is unlikely to happen in the short run, due to collation considerations and international pressure, it certainly could come about at some point in the not so distant future.

- a sizable portion of the electorate that would curtail women's and LGBTQ rights, and it will be a constant struggle to not see those rights eroded, in practice if not in law.
- ♦ Judicial independence in Israel is under serious threat. While the Israeli courts have never been as progressive as they have been sometimes portrayed – especially when it comes to the protecting rights of Palestinians – they have provided a much needed counterweight to the worst impulses of successive Israeli governments. Neutering them would put Israel clearly in the camp of the “illiberal democracies” like Hungary and Poland.
- ♦ The Israeli economy is currently in the model of the UK, with a once strong social welfare system that is slowly being dismantled. There is no majority to reverse this trend and it's more likely to move toward the U.S. model than toward the Swedish one.
- ♦ One of the few positive results of this election may be the breaking of the taboo against Zionist parties openly negotiating with Arab parties over coalition arrangements, and perhaps – hope against hope – include them in government. This may come to naught, but it also might lead to future improvements in Jewish Palestinian relations within Israel. This is a development to watch.

Analyzing these Israeli election results can lead to little optimism for anyone of a progressive tilt. The short term promises instability and therefore no major changes in the status quo. The medium term, as far as it can be extrapolated from current voter preferences, shows no majority for “the good guys” on almost any issue. And while there are some political forces in Israel working towards progressive ends, for the most part, they are an embattled minority and will need as much outside help as can be mustered to succeed. It all portends a long struggle for justice, equality and peace, and there is every possibility that things will get worse before they get better. The struggle will not end with one or two elections, and will be measured in decades not years. ♦

<https://jiv-canada.medium.com/everything-you-wanted-to-know-about-the-2021-israeli-elections-53fbc3c8c043>

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