

Opinion Jews Against Israelis: Netanyahu's Hungarian-style Politics

The real target of the ethnocentric politics driven by the nation-state law is those who don't toe the Israeli government line.



Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, left is welcomed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu upon his arrival, at the Prime Minister's office in Jerusalem, July 19, 2018. Debbie Hill/AP.

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"The issue now is a conflict between Israel's identity as a Jewish state and as an Israeli state," explained right-wing journalist Shimon Riklin on Army Radio. He's right. That is the basis for the campaign waged by organizations such as the right-wing group Im Tirzu, labeling members of human rights groups as traitors and foreign moles. It also underpins Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Hungarian-style campaign, led by the nation-state law.

The law has in effect eliminated the notion of Israeli citizenship. There is no such thing as Israeli anymore. It's now an epithet akin to leftist. Now it's Jewish, while the status of everyone else has been downgraded.

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In a Haaretz op-ed (in Hebrew), former cabinet member Haim Ramon played the

innocent, wondering why we are angry, holding protest rallies instead of embracing the new nation-state law. After all, he wrote, it's only about "granting the right to nationhood exclusively to the Jewish nation," without harming "individual rights." All the spokespeople for the ethnocentric right wing, along with their helpers, such as Ramon, have avoided elaborating on the "national" rights granted only to Jews by the law, along with any discussion of violations of the individual rights of the population as a whole.

The bottom line is that this law totally ignores minorities and their rights. Clause 7, for example, provides that the state will encourage and promote the establishment and consolidation of Jewish settlement. This detailed description underscores the fact that only Jews will benefit from all these efforts undertaken by the state, whereas non-Jews won't. The state won't develop or encourage or promote or establish and consolidate anything for them. That wouldn't be in the "national interest," as the law explicitly states when it comes to Jews.

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But come on, guys, why be crybabies and make such a big deal of something as trivial as residential communities and housing and associated services? After all, no "individual rights" will be violated, say Ramon and those on the right. But that's a blatant lie. When a Druze citizen wants a permit to build a house and is denied it for "national" reasons (for not being Jewish), his individual rights are trampled. Is there anything more important to a person than a house?

We should listen to the two people who sponsored the law, ideologues of the new right in the cabinet, Tourism Minister Yariv Levin and Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked. Levin explained that the law's main objective is to assist judges who have a rightist agenda. "The law gives them tools they never had before. It permits incentives and benefits to be granted based on a desire to maintain a Jewish character," he said. Last year, Shaked said it would allow judges to favor the Jewish character of the state over its democratic one.

The real target of this Hungarian-style politics is not necessarily minorities, but anyone who doesn't toe the government line. The nation-state law is the tool to achieve this. Who will determine what Jewish character is and who will decide

who is Jewish and entitled to Levin's benefits? Not the law, not the courts, but religion and those who speak on its behalf. The key to admission to this world of benefits will not be in the hands of every Israeli, not even of every Jew, but only of government rabbis.

The law already puts hundreds of thousands of people from the former Soviet Union beyond the pale, since they are not recognized as Jews. Many of them vote for Yisrael Beiteinu, the party whose name in Hebrew means "Israel is our home," but Israel no longer views itself as their home.

Even Israelis considered Jewish now may face a problem. Who will guarantee that they aren't re-labelled? I'm not sure they will recognize me. I've been accused many times of not being Jewish. Others have claimed that I've forgotten what it means to be Jewish. If it were up to them, why would they recognize me, a secular person, as their equal? They may predicate the desired recognition on keeping religious commandments and the adoption of a religious lifestyle, in addition to a loyalty oath. "A Jewish nation" is not synonymous with Jews in general, but only with loyal Jews. Think about it. When they have the authority to grant special privileges in a Riklin-style "Jewish state," do you really think they'll give them to you?



Nitzan Horowitz
Haaretz Contributor

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