



Photo by: Marc Israel Sellem

When the will of the people is undemocratic

By EMMANUEL NAVON
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Israel has heard the voices of hundreds of thousands of its citizens, but are their voices truly the will of the people, and when can social protests be undemocratic? As long as there is a more sinister force behind those voices, democracy in Israel is threatened.

Earlier this month, in response to the social protests that have dominated the Israeli consciousness since July, the government approved the Trajtenberg Committee's recommendations, which include far-reaching measures aimed at easing the burden of the middle class and at making life in Israel more affordable.

The protests may have died out with the opening of the school year, yet it would be misleading to believe that the social unrest is behind us. In fact, the self-appointed leaders of last summer's tent protest announced that they will renew their struggle after the High Holidays.

For a start, the protest leaders entirely rejected the recommendations of the Trajtenberg Committee. Daphni Leef, who emerged as one of the movement's iconic leaders, has declared that there will be a popular general strike on November 1 to shut down Israel's economic activity and to topple the government. Three days before the strike, a huge demonstration is supposed to take place throughout the country as a "last warning" to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu that he must meet the protesters' demands. Eldad Yaniv, from the National Left movement, warned in Haaretz's October 11 edition that the struggle will continue "until the 120 loafers [i.e. MKs] go home."

The leaders of Israel's social protest talk and behave as if Israel was not a democracy; as if Israel's government had not been elected by a large majority. They claim that most Israelis support their demand. Let them prove that in the next elections.

For better or worse, democracy grants power to the people. In a representative democracy, the majority runs the government for the set period of time. By trying to impose their demands on an elected government, the unelected representatives of the social protest movement are trying to subvert the rules of democracy.

Israelis rightly complain about the cost of living. Yet they also didn't elect a government with a policy of overspending – thus turning Israel into Greece. And now, this seems to be precisely what the unelected leaders of the social protest want to impose on our elected government. They have plenty of time (about a year-and-a-half) to convince Israelis to vote for them and their economic platform in the next elections.

In the meantime, the choice of Israeli voters - as it was expressed in the previous elections - must be respected by the movement's leaders.

Not only are the leaders of the movement breaking one of the basic rules of representative democracy, but many of them are funded by organizations, such as the New Israel Fund (NIF), whose agenda is to promote policies and values that are rejected by a majority of Israeli society. The NIF deceives its donors by presenting itself an organization bent on promoting the rights of minorities and on helping the poor, but its true agenda is to turn Israel into a multi-ethnic country, rather than a Jewish one.

The NIF supports Israeli organizations that constantly petition the High Court of Justice to repeal laws that define and preserve Israel as a Jewish state. In court, the government is represented by the State Attorney's Office which has been staffed over the years by former NIF fellows who defend the petitioners rather than the Government.

The NIF's subversive tactics consist of gradually imposing upon Israelis what they reject at the polls. It should come as no surprise that businessman and financier George Soros is a major NIF donor. Nor should it come as a surprise that political advisor Stanley Greenberg, whose firm has done work for George Soros' Open Society Institute, consulted then prime-ministerial candidate Ehud Barak in 1999 on how to unseat incumbent Prime Minister Netanyahu and is now advising Eldad Yaniv towards similar ends.

It should come as no surprise that Daniel Abraham, who helped George Soros set-up the American lobbying group J Street, gave money to Israel's tent protest this past summer. It should also come as no surprise that Daphni Leef works for the New Israel Fund.

Promoting ideas and policies that provide an alternative to the government is a fundamental right, and even a duty, in democracy. Yet there is a difference between promoting a political agenda in an open society, and trying to impose such an agenda against the will of the majority via foreign funding, orchestrated strikes and legal antics. For the sake of Israeli democracy, everything must be done so that Daphni Leef can express and promote her ideas freely, but everything must also be done to prevent her financial backers from trying to impose upon society policies and ideas that are rejected by the majority.

The writer is an International Relations Lecturer at Tel Aviv University and the founding partner of the Navon-Levy Group Ltd., an international business consultancy. He is also the author of numerous books on Israel's foreign policy, including most recently, From Israel, With Hope: Why and How Israel will Continue to Thrive.



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