

---

The Atkin Paper Series

**‘The People Demand  
Social Justice’:** *How the  
Israeli Social Protests Ignored  
the Palestinian Issue, and the  
Road Ahead*

---

Talia Gorodess, ICSR Atkin Fellow

---

July 2013

## About the Atkin Paper Series

Thanks to the generosity of the *Atkin Foundation*, the *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR)* offers young leaders from Israel and the Arab world the opportunity to come to London for a period of four months. The purpose of the fellowship is to provide young leaders from Israel and the Arab world with an opportunity to develop their ideas on how to further peace and understanding in the Middle East through research, debate and constructive dialogue in a neutral political environment. The end result is a policy paper that will provide a deeper understanding and a new perspective on a specific topic or event.

### Author

Talia Gorodess was a Spring 2013 Atkin Fellow. Talia currently serves as the Director of Socio-Economic Development at the Reut Institute. She oversees all R&D efforts, alongside the implementation of projects such as the development of Israel's periphery and open-source technological community centers. Previously, she was a research associate at the Hudson Institute, Washington, D.C., focusing on democratization processes in the Muslim World, and served as a campaign coordinator at U.S. PIRG. Talia is a regular contributor to "Toshav Hozer" (Returning Citizen) and she serves on the board of the Social Guard in the Knesset. Talia holds an M.A. in Security Policy from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (2010), and was awarded a Fellowship from the Saltzman Institute for War and Peace Studies. She earned her B.A. in Political Science from the University of Chicago (with honors).

### Editor

*Dr Peter R. Neumann*  
Director, ICSR

### Editor

*Dr Ahron Bregman*  
King's College London

### Editor

*Jeni Mitchell*  
King's College London

### Editorial Assistant

*Katie Rothman*  
ICSR

To order hardcopies or contact the editor, please write to [mail@icsr.info](mailto:mail@icsr.info). All papers in the *Atkin Paper Series* can be downloaded free of charge at [www.icsr.info](http://www.icsr.info)

THE INTERNATIONAL  
CENTRE FOR THE STUDY  
OF RADICALISATION AND  
POLITICAL VIOLENCE



## Introduction

This paper aims to shed light on the largest civil awakening in Israel's history – the social protests of summer 2011 – and its neglect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I argue that in order for the social justice movement in Israel to come full circle, it must ultimately address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as social justice and peace can be neither theoretically nor practically alien to one another.

Since the summer of 2011, Israeli society has seen a revolution in public consciousness. As the editor of *The Marker* newspaper, Guy Rolnik, puts it, Israelis began to understand that the popular book *Start Up Nation* is perhaps a 'fascinating story about Israel that can be sold to American Jews or to Chinese businessmen, but has little to do with the everyday life of millions of Israelis... [to] the ordinary citizen'.<sup>1</sup>

The events of 2011 began with small individual acts, which then became a massive popular outcry over deteriorating social conditions and bleak future prospects for many Israelis. While it is true that the Israeli economy has fared fairly well in recent years, macroeconomic figures can be quite deceiving, as the fruits of Israel's economy are shared by an increasingly smaller group of people. Harvard Professor Ricardo Hausmann summarised it well when he said that 'growth that is not inclusive can be explosive'.

The social problems highlighted here were not created overnight, but are the result of decades of government policies which brought about a rising cost of living alongside depreciation in wages and public services, making it difficult for many Israelis to make ends meet. These problems are perhaps the real 'ticking bombs' of Israeli society. Left unaddressed, they threaten Israel's ability to survive and prosper. As demonstrated in this paper, attempting to resolve these problems cannot be done while treating the conflict as a separate issue.

The paper starts with an overview of the social protests of 2011: their origin and characteristics, successes and failures, and relationship to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The second section is dedicated to the argument that in order for the social justice movement to be both meaningful and successful, it must ultimately address the Palestinian issue at a minimum, if not join forces with the peace camp. This chapter relies on both theoretical arguments as well as interviews conducted in Israel with key figures in the social justice and peace camps. The last chapter discusses future prospects for cooperation, and includes modest yet practical guidelines for the Israeli government and civil society.

---

## Meet the 'Soft Revolution' of Summer 2011

**H**istorically, Israeli political discourse has been largely limited to security and foreign affairs issues, and most notably to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This has been consistently accurate since the country's inception, and is reflected in virtually all national political campaigns and their outcomes. Israeli governments, from the first Knesset elections in 1949 until 2009, have been mainly preoccupied with security-related issues.

A striking exception to this rule is the most recent Israeli election of January 2013, the first since the 2011 social protests. For the first time in Israeli history, public discourse was almost exclusively focused on previously neglected or undermined domestic issues, such as housing, health, education, and the rising cost of living. In order to appreciate the magnitude of this moment, it is important to keep in mind that these issues are normally not considered news. For decades, these issues were perceived as private issues, and not suitable for serious discussion.

In this context, it is important to remember the Black Panther movement, which carried the banner of social justice decades ago. The movement originated in the 1970s among second-generation immigrants from Middle Eastern countries (Sephardic Jews) who felt betrayed by their government, and proclaimed that it was systematically discriminating against them. While the movement made significant gains, and its legacy lives on in the Israeli political system and society, it never enjoyed massive popular backing.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, notable leaders of the Black Panther movement joined the 2011 protests, which were perceived as white, middle-class protests. They were treated with a great deal of respect and given prime speaking slots on stage during the demonstrations, even though they often ridiculed the protestors for being overly docile in comparison to themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1970s, no meaningful national protest had taken place over social issues. However, concealed grievances caused by the swelling burden felt especially by lower-middle-class and middle-class individuals for the past several decades continued to simmer. These sentiments quickly surfaced after a young orthodox man, Itzik Shmuli, boycotted cottage cheese following a substantial price increase, and a film student, Daphni Leef from Tel Aviv, pitched a tent in the city's main boulevard.<sup>4</sup> These individual acts of despair resonated deeply with the public, like a match thrown into a haystack. Within weeks, nearly 100 tent cities were set up in public spaces, and thousands of families and individuals left their homes and moved to

---

<sup>2</sup> To read more about the Israel Black Panther Movement, click here.

<sup>3</sup> Tamara Zief, 'This Week in History: The Original Social Protest', Jerusalem Post, 19/08/10.

<sup>4</sup> Asher Schechter, Rothchild, A Chronicle of Protest (in Hebrew) (Kav Adom: HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 2012)

squares, parks and other public places.<sup>5</sup> Jews and Arabs, Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, members of Israel's middle and lower classes, residents from both the Tel Aviv area and Israel's periphery, young and old, said in effect: 'Do not talk to me about security issues. We are staggering under the burden of everyday life, and we can no longer take it'.

In this context, it is important to note that not everybody chose to take part in the protests, even if the majority of the public passively supported its goals. Arabs, former Soviet immigrants, Sephardic groups, and the national-religious and Haredi camps largely chose to stay put, most likely due to the fact that the movement was perceived as a 'white', secular, middle-class movement as opposed to an all-encompassing national one. Also, years of what is perceived as neglect and betrayal by the establishment towards many of these groups gave rise to general suspicion and scepticism towards the movement.

The 'March of the Million', which took place on 3 September 2011 and drew nearly 500,000 Israelis to the streets, served as the swan song of the social protests. This large and hopeful crowd, chanting 'The People Demand Social Justice', constituted nearly 10 per cent of Israel's adult population.<sup>6</sup> This is the equivalent of more than 4 million British citizens, or 21 million Americans. Both in absolute and relative terms, the Israeli social protests drew larger crowds than the Arab Spring or Occupy Movement. The Israeli movement was particularly peaceful, which is perhaps one of the reasons why it received relatively little international media coverage.

In a sense, the protests could be the Israeli version of the 1905 attempt to bring about a democratic revolution in Russia, which despite its failure was seen in hindsight as the prelude to the 1917 revolution. The popularity of the movement and its unprecedented efforts show that things could look quite different in Israel.<sup>7</sup>

## What Were the Social Protests About?

The protests were about domestic, and particularly social, issues. Protesters took to the streets over the deteriorating quality of life and public services and the gloomy prospects for the future. Young people in Israel increasingly populate the lower socio-economic groups, and rising up the economic ladder has become very difficult. Consider the following figures behind the sentiments felt by many: Since 2005, the price of housing has risen by 44 per cent, while real median salary has dropped by 15 per cent. To put it simply, in 2007 it took an average of 124 monthly salaries to buy a four-bedroom apartment; by 2011, this number had risen to 150 monthly salaries. This is by far the highest figure among other OECD countries (the closest example is France, with 90 salaries).<sup>8</sup> In addition, since 1996, all governments have consistently slashed spending on education, health and welfare. Since 2005, food prices have risen by 27 per cent, compared with 16 per cent in other OECD

5 <http://news.walla.co.il/?w=/90/1851173>

6 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/some-450-000-israelis-march-at-massive-march-of-the-million-rallies-across-country-1.382366>

7 Asher Schechter, A Chronicle of Protest

8 <http://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000683442>

countries. Lastly, 51 per cent of Israelis do not earn enough money to qualify for the lowest tax bracket, meaning that 60 per cent of the economic burden is shared by only 29 per cent of the population – the shrinking middle class.

Thousands of protesters across the country formed 'on-the-ground think tanks' which operated every night, attracting dozens, often hundreds of people who joined discussion circles revolving around taxes, health policy, education, governance and other issues. Despite some variation in content and method,<sup>9</sup> the vast majority of protesters sought a return to a modern welfare state alongside competition and private initiative, characterised by more public investment in health and education, tighter regulation on corporations and banks, higher corporate taxes, greater government transparency, and public participation in decision-making processes.<sup>10</sup>

But these issues were merely the superficial manifestations of the deeper, underlying issues that triggered the protests, which were in fact not about the soaring prices of cottage cheese and housing. The protests were about a re-definition of the most basic values in Israeli society. In this sense, they qualify as a social revolution: an attempt to reshape society. Evidently, the movement has (so far) failed to achieve its aims, but it succeeded in considerably shifting public discourse, which remains true to this day. Thus, its aims, combined with other small but concrete gains and the degree of its soft power, could well classify it as a 'soft social revolution'.<sup>11</sup>

## What Were the Protests Not About, and Why?

Evidently, the protests were not about issues related to security and – perhaps most importantly – not about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many observers of the events, particularly overseas but also from within the traditional Israeli peace camp, often derided the Israeli incarnation of the Arab Spring, treating it as a joke: indeed, who can compare the pain caused by an increase in the price of cottage cheese with the pain of everyday life under the Mubarak regime or the Israeli occupation?

Unfortunately, this analysis of the protests misses the point. In order to succeed to the extent that it did, with thousands of people living in tent cities for a period of approximately 80 days, enjoying the backing of 90 per cent of the public (which 'identified with and/or supported' the protest), it had to put aside divisive issues and rise above traditional partisan politics. The protests therefore shunned any attempts of activists to sway discussion, introduce demands or even use language on signs in the squares that could be affiliated with either right- or left-wing politics and therefore alienate large portions of the public.<sup>12</sup>

9 Talk about Trachtenberg Committee and alternative Spivak/Yona report; tension between tent city leaders and "leadership" of the protest

10

11 talk about 'soft power' in political/military sense

12 <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/israel-s-cottage-cheese-protest-is-anything-but-civil-revolt-1.369008>

## Main Achievements and Failures of the Protests

The protests of 2011 resulted in a number of concrete achievements. Some can be seen today, from a perspective of less than two years following the protests, while others will probably only be fully appreciated in years to come. A snapshot of the main achievements includes the following areas:

### *Legislation: Trachtenberg Commission*

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu formed the Government Commission for Socio-Economic Change, known in short as the Trachtenberg Commission. The Commission was formed of top professionals from the areas of tax policy, education, housing and so on, and received a mandate to address the protesters' concerns directly. After approximately two months of research and a public participation campaign which included tent-city representatives, ordinary citizens and professionals, NGOs, and academics, the Commission presented its recommendations. According to the Bank of Israel, 68 per cent of its recommendations were adopted by the government, but only a few have been implemented. The main recommendations that were implemented are the following:

- **Free education for ages 3 and up:** This piece of legislation has been around since the 1980s, but has never been implemented. This major reform has a direct impact on young working couples in Israel.
- **Changes in tax policy:** This involved changes in tax policy, such as raising corporate income tax from 24 per cent to 25 per cent, or raising social security government allowances from 5.9 per cent to 7.5 per cent.
- **Increasing the deficit by 3 per cent:** For years, this was considered a taboo in Israel. However, Israel enjoys a relatively low debt-to-GDP ratio of 74 per cent. In fact, Israel was the only country in the West that managed to reduce its debt in 2012.<sup>13</sup> Netanyahu agreed to increase the deficit by 3 per cent in order to finance some of the proposed social reforms.

### **Legislation: Other**

**Modest decrease in housing prices:** In 2012, the price of second-hand apartments in Tel Aviv dropped by up to 7 per cent. Other cities, such as Herzliya, Netanya and Tiberius, dropped by 2 to 5 per cent. Real estate experts claim this drop is mainly due to a psychological effect caused by the social protests, and a public that is not willing to simply pay any price.<sup>14</sup>

13 <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4349610,00.html>

14 <http://www.buat-naclan.com/2013/02/7.html>

**Changed public discourse and willingness to act:** This is arguably the greatest achievement of the protests – something virtually all commentators on both the left and the right agree on. While it is considered a 'soft' achievement, it is perhaps the most important one. For the first time in Israel's history, the social agenda has become a top priority, dominating the newspapers, television, street conversations, and politics. For example, it is highly unlikely that Bank Leumi would have otherwise reversed its decision to forgive a major debt of tens of millions of shekels owed to the public by Nochi Dankner, a so-called tycoon. Commentators and observers all agree that it was the spontaneous public outrage and calls over social media to boycott the bank that ultimately reversed the bank's decision. Moreover, there is a consensus that this kind of public outcry would simply not have taken place prior to 2011.<sup>15</sup>

### *Political arena*

In the lead-up to the 2013 national elections, virtually all major parties appropriated the 'social agenda', carrying the social justice banner in their respective campaigns. Likud, which traditionally hails the issue of security in its election campaigns, chose to emphasise its success in opening up the cellular market in Israel to competition. Labor chose to undermine and almost disassociate itself from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Head of Labor and Head of Opposition MK Shelli Yachimovich was heavily criticised by many members of the left, who argued that she had betrayed the historic mission of her party. This ensued after her appeal to 'middle ground' voters in the form of a statement in which she said, 'I don't see Israeli settlements as a crime', emphasising that it was Labor that founded the first settlements in the occupied territories.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the establishment and stellar parliamentary success of Yesh Atid, headed by now Finance Minister Yair Lapid, exemplifies the primacy of domestic issues in Israeli society. It ran on a civil platform, emphasising education, health, housing, and improving the social and economic condition of the middle class in general.<sup>17</sup> Last but not least, two prominent activists in the protests, Stav Shaffir and Itzik Shmuli, joined Labor and are now serving Knesset members.

### *Media*

The media, and especially the traditional media, has seen a marked shift in priorities. Not only has the protest movement itself received widespread and generally sympathetic coverage (although coverage dropped significantly after 2012),<sup>18</sup> figures show that news searches and interest in some of the main topics put forth by the protest movement continue to dominate public interest. Below is a sample of several

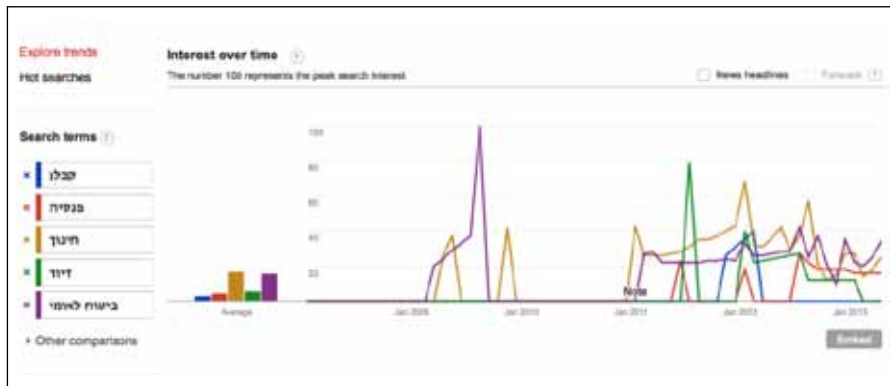
15 <http://www.haaretz.com/business/under-public-pressure-bank-leumi-agrees-to-suspend-debt-talks-with-israeli-tycoon.premium-1.516087>

16 <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/leading-labor-party-candidate-i-don-t-see-israeli-settlements-as-a-crime-1.379200>

17 <http://en.yeshatid.org.il/>

18 <http://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/media/1.1742337>

issues that show a dramatic spike in popular interest after 2011 [the search was based on Hebrew keywords]:



**Figure 1** Table highlighting terms used in Google searches in Israel<sup>19</sup> News  
Blue = casual workers; Red = pension funds; Yellow = education; Green = housing;  
Purple = social security

### Civil society

Since 2011, Israeli civil society has been booming. The protests gave rise to more than 150 new organisations, institutions and initiatives in various areas: political transparency, financial literacy, housing, health, media, etc. Some are meant to challenge, pressure or monitor the existing order, while others present new alternatives.

Below is an updated diagram presenting all the active initiatives that have sprung from the protests, divided into several categories. The diagram is a reflection of the complex, interlinked network of new NGOs and social initiatives that sprang from the protests, showing a non-hierarchical yet powerful movement with many leaders and ‘hubs’ of action.



**Figure 2** Map of the Social Protest 2013<sup>20</sup>  
Yellow = field organisations; Light Green = media; Green = advocacy campaigns;  
Light Blue = transparency; Purple = NGOs; Pink = social coalitions; Peach =  
cooperatives; Light Orange = awareness-raising

Several initiatives that have made exceptional progress and concrete achievements, and received respect from the political establishment and traditional media, include: The Social Guard in the Knesset; Open Knesset; Shelanoo Coop for Socio-Economic Change; Mipakdim; Education Activists; Beit Ha’am (alternative community center); The Struggle for Saving Israel’s Beaches; and many others.<sup>21</sup>

19 Source: Google Analytics

20 <http://j14.org.il/polimap/>

21 Spivak, Aviya and Yona, Yossi (eds.), Another Reality is Possible: An Outline for Repairing Our Society and the Social Protest 2011-2012 (in Hebrew) (HaKibbutz HaMeuhad Publishing House, 2012)

---

## Why the Social Justice Community and Peace Camp Must Join Forces

Perhaps the biggest success *and* failure of the social protests is that they did not mention peace or the political process with the Palestinians. Striving to rise above traditional partisan lines and loyalties, activists spoke in a language accessible to almost everyone: housing, food prices, education, health. The political price was the complete absence of any language or activity that aimed to bring the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the fore.

In the earlier phases of the protests, there were some attempts by left-wing groups to emphasise this problem by coming to the popular marches wearing partisan shirts and/or carrying signs and banners addressing the Palestinian issue, but these attempts were quickly shunned and these groups were even chased out of the crowd. While in countries like Greece, the United States, Egypt and Chile, protesters quickly understood that change ultimately must be carried through the political system, in Israel the protest movement refused to speak in political terms and began to do so only when the majority of the tents had been evacuated.

Shying away from anything that was deemed too 'political' meant that the Israeli-Palestinian issue, one of the top challenges that Israel faces, remained absent from the biggest protest movement in Israeli history.

With a few notable exceptions during the protests themselves, the social justice community and the peace camp have been and continue to be largely disconnected from one another. Many key figures in both camps even abhor the idea of joining forces. Both camps have their faults. The social justice protest movement distanced itself from the Palestinian issue in an attempt to avoid the left/right partisan trap and the alienation of large portions of the public who may vote for the right on security grounds, but sympathise with the left on social issues. For its part, the Israeli peace camp has neglected social and economic civil problems, and instead focused only on the struggle to end Israeli control over the Palestinians and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In a sense, it could be said that the protests partially owe their success to the peace camp, in that the protest movement functioned as a counter-response to the peace camp, 'compensating' for its prolonged neglect of civil issues.

### **Jews and Arabs During the Protests**

It could be argued that in some respects, the social protests have succeeded more than the Israeli peace camp in bringing Jews and Arabs together in order to demand both social justice and peace: it brought together dozens of Arabs and Jews who fought side by side, realising they are suffering from similar afflictions. Furthermore, from a regional perspective, it signalled perhaps the first moment in Israeli history where Jews did not look down on their Arab neighbours, but looked up to them.



Figure 3 Sign saying “Corner of Rothchild and Tahrir”

This sentiment is best expressed by the large sign that was put in Rothschild Boulevard from the onset of the protests, which read ‘Corner of Rothschild and Tahrir’, attempting to create an affinity between the two protests – despite their very different aims and methods (regime change and use of violence in the Egyptian case, and reforms through peaceful means in the Israeli case).

To what extent did Israel’s Arab population take part in and/or identify itself with the social protests? According to one study, 60 per cent of Israeli Arabs supported the protests and saw them as an expression of ‘shared aspirations’ between Jews and Arabs. Roughly 19 per cent of Israeli Arabs took an active part in them, joining the marches and gatherings, signing petitions, starting or joining a tent city. This is a particularly high number, especially considering the fact that while a much higher percentage of the Israeli-Jewish public supported the protests (90 per cent), the percentage who actually took an active part in them was the same as within the Israeli-Arab community (i.e., 19 per cent).<sup>22</sup>

22 <http://truman.huji.ac.il/>



Figure 4 Numbers and locations of tent cities<sup>23</sup>

Out of the approximately 87 tent cities, there were between 20 and 25 distinctly non-Jewish ones, set up in places like the Bedouin town of Rahat in the Negev, the Druze village of Horfesh, and the Arab neighbourhood of Wadi Nis-Nas in Haifa, as well as in cities like Nazareth. (Note that the diagram below presents a very conservative depiction of actual numbers.<sup>24</sup>) So while their relative size and influence were not as big as some of the others, roughly 20 per cent of all the tent cities were non-Jewish, which is precisely the percentage of Israel’s non-Jewish population.

It was not a trivial matter for Israeli Arabs to join the protests, and this caused some confusion and even some splits among them. Some simply did not identify with the protests and refused to partake in them; others chose to form tent cities but lead a separate struggle, which was often localised (more public transportation between Arab villages in certain areas); and others joined forces with Jewish activists and became part of the landscape of the protests.

23 <http://news.walla.co.il/?w=90/1851173>

24 <http://news.walla.co.il/?w=90/1851173>



Despite the fact that the protests were perceived as mainly 'white', Jewish, middle-class protests, there were numerous examples of Jewish-Arab cooperation around class interests, especially around issues like public housing and house demolitions. This undercurrent within the protests was expressed in speeches made by notable Arab figures on the main stages during big marches, or in joint tent cities. However, what was both socially acceptable and feasible during times of social upheaval is not necessarily a workable model on the policy level for everyday life. These instances of cooperation around shared interests are fascinating and worth mentioning in their own right.

### **Notable Speeches Expanding the Scope of the Protests to Minority Issues and Peace**

On 6 August 2011, Arab writer and public figure Uda Basharat addressed protesters in Tel Aviv: 'The Arab population in Israel is looking sympathetically at what is happening here... The young people of Rothschild have planted seeds of hope for change in the hearts of the Arab population... It's about time that this protest melts the estrangement between both nations, when Arabs and Jews refuse to be enemies'.<sup>25</sup>

On 13 August 2011, in a gathering in Haifa, the esteemed Jewish novelist Sami Michael said: 'Tonight I am optimistic... for the first time, Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Arabs, Jews, Muslims, Christians and Bahaii, black and white people, residents of large cities and small villages are forming one fist and forming one struggle... I addressed the Arabs [Israel's Arab citizens] and told them that they are our partners in days of happiness and days of sadness and that this cooperation will be for everyone's benefit'.<sup>26</sup>

On the same date, Arab reporter Raja Zaatra said: '... a family without a roof on its head is a family without a roof on its head, and a hungry child is a hungry child, regardless of whether he speaks Arabic, Hebrew, Amharic or Russian... It is time to talk about peace and justice together! I don't know whether there will be another war, but one thing I can say: we will continue fighting together – Arabs and Jews – for justice, peace, equality and a better and more just future for both people'.<sup>27</sup>

On 6 August 2011, the popular *Haaretz* columnist, novelist, TV producer and actor Sayed Kashua spoke in a gathering in Jerusalem: '[In this kind of harsh reality] who has time to think about what is happening in the occupied territories?'<sup>28</sup> In a later column, Kashua ridiculed himself and the protest: 'This is a social protest on economic grounds, I reminded myself. One must not speak about settlements, racist laws, occupations and other such nonsense, it's irrelevant, it is also negligible. I must understand that something big is happening here, something real, something

25 <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4105266,00.html>

26 <http://tv.social.org.il/social/2011/08/20/sami-michael-haifa>

27 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ojj2G1mA4g>

28 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebFIW49r1xE>

that has never happened before, something so real that I have no clue what I could possibly say about it'.<sup>29</sup>

### **Notable Jewish-Arab Tent Cities**

#### *Jaffa tent city: The Right and the Left join forces*

This tent city essentially joined forces with activists from the HaTikvah tent city, located in one of Tel Aviv's poorest neighbourhoods. Until the protests, the relationship between residents of the two neighbourhoods was one of mutual hostility and ethnic tension; HaTikvah was considered a classic stronghold of Likud.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, during the protests, residents of these two tent cities had daily meetings and discussions, and marched together with signs in Hebrew and Arabic. One of the founders of the Sephardic Black Panthers movement gave a speech acknowledging that the two groups are essentially fighting for the same things and are part of the same struggle. Common signs read 'Jaffa and HaTikva are united for public housing'.

#### *The tent city in the Arab neighbourhood of Wadi Nis-Nas in Haifa*

This tent city was known for its Jewish-Arab cooperation, especially around the broad issue of what activists deemed discrimination against Israel's Arab citizens. During the 'March of the Million', a prominent activist from there said: 'Today we are changing the rules of the game. No more coexistence based on hummus and fava beans. What is happening here is true coexistence, when Arabs and Jews march together shoulder to shoulder calling for social justice and peace'.<sup>31</sup>

### **Chief Legislative Gains: Israel's Arab Citizens**

Finally, in terms of legislation, both the Trachtenberg Commission and the counter-report prepared by some of the activists and alternative experts who joined them (called the Yona-Spivak Report) addressed the issue of Israel's Arab citizens.<sup>32</sup>

For example, the Trachtenberg Commission (which incidentally did not have any Arab experts as part of its panel) allocated 785 million NIS to the opening of employment and training centres dedicated to the unique needs of the Israeli-Arab women. It also allocated 250 million NIS to expanding the five-year plan for economic development in Arab, Druze and Circassian villages, and offered better transportation options between Arab villages and employment centres.<sup>33</sup>

The Yona-Spivak report advised, among other things, giving land development rights to Israeli Arabs based on their demographic needs; sanctioning Arab

29 <http://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.1972677>

30 For a complete breakdown of real voting results by city and neighborhood, click here.

31 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/some-450-000-israelis-march-at-massive-march-of-the-million-rallies-across-country-1.382366>

32 For an article explaining the main differences in vision and policy between the two reports, click here.

33 <http://hidavrut.gov.il/> (p. 135; p. 228)

villages which are currently not acknowledged by the Government of Israel and are therefore underserved; and prohibiting housing discrimination. Its recommendations concerning Israel's Arab citizens and other minority populations did not appear in a separate chapter, but as part of chapters on housing, transportation and public administration.<sup>34</sup>

### **Social Justice and Peace: The Case for Unity**

We have seen that while the social justice discourse during the protests was mainly limited to domestic issues, there was still a fairly strong and under-reported undercurrent which did address the Palestinian issue and minority rights within Israel, by creating a marriage between the popular social justice discourse and peace. In other words, while the majority of activists fought for social justice within the green line, others expanded the concept of justice to include everyone under Israeli control.

Indeed, there are many good arguments as to why one cannot advocate for social justice without fighting for peace, and vice versa – arguments that are perhaps as old as philosophy itself. More specifically, they were made relevant again during the protests by, in particular, members of the old Israeli peace camp, who interpreted the surge of public upheaval as an awakening on purely economic grounds, and therefore benign and not as important as a popular call for peace.

#### *Philosophical arguments*

Plato, for example, did not think that social justice is separate from general justice. In a famous dialogue about the concept of justice in *The Republic*, Socrates cunningly leads Polemarchus into concluding that justice is a quality that is always sought after, and cannot be separate from peace or replaced by it (and vice versa). Polemarchus concludes that 'justice is the art which gives good to friends and evil to enemies'. Following his friend's logic, Socrates asks him who, in his opinion, is best suited to delivering justice in a time of sickness. Polemarchus replies: the physician. Socrates goes on to show that justice is not an instrument whose relative merit is contextual (in times of sickness, for example) – rather, it is the highest quality of both the individual *and* the state. According to Plato, the ultimate aim of a good society should be neither freedom nor economic well-being, but justice.

For Plato, peace in the city-state is analogous to peace in the individual. If only the just man can be truly free, then by analogy, only a state that is just is truly free. Plato shows us that talking about or advocating justice without peace is futile at best – and at worst, ultimately leads to less justice.

#### *Peace and justice in the Jewish tradition*

Plato was not the only one who saw a philosophical affinity between peace and justice. Jewish sources from different periods also observed a unity between the two,

34 [http://j14.org.il/spivak/?page\\_id=17](http://j14.org.il/spivak/?page_id=17)

both in theory and in practice. It is not by accident that for the past two millennia, Jews have repeatedly found themselves at the forefront of struggles for civil rights, labour rights, and general advocacy for the most vulnerable in society. This Jewish predisposition is rooted in the belief that Jews themselves can only be equal and secure if human rights are omnipresent.<sup>35</sup>

The rabbis of the Talmud did not see war as inevitable.<sup>36</sup> They taught: 'The sword comes to the world because of delay of justice and through perversion of justice'. Similarly, in the Mishna,<sup>37</sup> Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel taught his students that 'the world rests on three things: justice, truth and peace'. The implication of this thesis is that the Jewish people have a certain role to fulfil vis-à-vis the promotion of these values.

#### *Political arguments: Party politics*

Judging both the campaigns and the results of the January 2013 general elections in Israel, it is difficult to say whether it was politically wise to tie the discourse of social justice to that of peace. On the one hand, another right-wing government was elected: Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu formed a coalition with Yesh Atid (headed by Yair Lapid), Jewish Home (headed by Naftali Bennet), and Hatnuah (headed by Tzipi Livni). Between them, they have 68 seats out of the 120 in the Knesset.

Let us look at the case of Labor in order to show that, politically, separating social justice from peace can backfire. Yachimovich, the leader of a party that has traditionally represented the Israeli peace camp, chose to undermine the discourse of peace in favour of social justice. The political thinking behind this move was that focusing on peace or political negotiations with the Palestinians might alienate voters who are undecided and located in the 'centre' of the political map. This was expressed in the party's campaign slogan, 'Bibi is good for the rich – Shelli is good for you', which emphasised economic issues. Yachimovich attempted to distance herself from primary candidates who were perceived as too left-wing, such as Director of Peace Now Yariv Oppenheimer (who ultimately did not win a Knesset seat) or Merav Michaeli (who did win a Knesset seat). Senior Labor officials were even quoted as saying Yachimovich did not see Oppenheimer and Michaeli's candidacies with 'great enthusiasm', an understatement for the reported 'blacklist' of candidates who were considered too left-wing for Yachimovich and her staff.<sup>38</sup>

Was this strategy smart? Not necessarily. A *Haaretz* election poll a month prior to the elections predicted that Labor would be 'weakened' and drop to 17

35 Merken, Stefan and Polner, Murray (eds.), *Peace, Justice and Jews: Reclaiming Our Tradition* (Bunim & Bannigan Ltd, 2007)

36 The Talmud is the written record of the Jewish oral tradition, which became the basis for many rabbinic legal codes and customs which are adhered to until this day (mainly among the Orthodox and Conservative). The Talmud has two components: the Mishna (from 200 CE) and Gemara (from 500 CE).

37 The Mishna is the first major written work of the Jewish oral traditions.

38 <http://news.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleID=940943>

mandates.<sup>39</sup> A Mina Tzemach poll, considered to be the most authoritative, predicted that Labor would maintain its power and keep 19 mandates.<sup>40</sup> What happened in reality is that Labor has plummeted below expectations, with only 15 mandates, one of the lowest numbers in its long history. It could be said that the reason for this sharp drop is that Yair Lapid's party won an impressive 19 mandates, rendering it the second-largest party after Likud-Betenu, which swayed potential Labor voters towards the 'centre'. This argument, however, can be easily refuted if one takes into account the success of Meretz, a left-wing, Zionist, social-democratic party. In the previous elections, in 2011, Meretz was crushed and won only 3 mandates, the lowest figure in its history. In 2013, in contrast to Labor's campaign strategy, Meretz emphasised the fact that it is a left-wing party, running with the slogans, 'Meretz: Israel's Left' and 'Your Heart is in the Left'. This strategy, aided by Labor distancing itself from the left, helped it double its power and gain 6 mandates. This shows that Labor's decision to create an artificial distinction between 'social justice' and 'peace', carrying the banner of the former and distancing itself from the latter, did not serve its interests well.

#### *Political arguments: Civil society*

Many social justice advocates shun the idea of cooperating with peace advocates because of their fear that they would be immediately labeled as left-wing, and their success would therefore be compromised. Similarly, many peace advocates shudder at the idea of joining forces with members of the social justice camp, deeming issues like the rising cost of living insignificant in comparison to the Palestinian issue.

Stav Shaffir, who was one of the leading figures in the protests and is currently a Labor MK, nicely explains both the challenge and opportunity that reside in the tension between the two camps:

It was obvious that Jewish-Arab cooperation was essential to the success of the protest... We were looking for common grounds... in the beginning it was one's home. Housing is something everybody could talk about. Then we moved onto education, welfare and health. . . we were criticised for collaborating with Arabs. At the same time, left-wing activists told us that unless we address the occupation directly, no Arab would want to take part in the social protest.<sup>41</sup>

The above quote signifies good politics – it aims for the possible, or pragmatic course of action. It shows that working together may in some cases be mutually beneficial and promote the respective goals of each camp.

#### *Economic arguments*

39 <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/elections/1.1882765>

40 <http://news.walla.co.il/elections/?w=2780/2596745>

41 'How Do You Say "Social Justice" in Arabic?': <http://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/1.1581074>

For decades, the peace camp in Israel has highlighted the financial price of Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories. In my view, this is the weakest argument for why social justice and peace should be part of the same struggle. After all, the Zionist project was not an especially 'economic' project either, and it is doubtful that figures like Martin Buber, Ahad HaAm, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda or David Ben-Gurion performed an economic cost-benefit analysis when migrating to the land of Israel. Nevertheless, economic arguments have their own merit and should therefore be noted.

In a comprehensive report published by the Adva Center, *The Cost of Occupation*, Shlomo Swirski argues that other than the obvious defence expenditures, and the deep recession caused by the second intifada and the burst hi-tech bubble, continued occupation also takes a heavy toll on Israeli society, compromising overall quality of life, level of social services, etc.<sup>42</sup> In a chapter titled 'Society in the Shadow of the Conflict', Swirski shows a sharp rise in income inequality since the 1970s, based on the Gini Coefficient (an accepted measure of inequality), alongside marked drops in government expenditures on social security and education.

Swirski admits that inequality does not stem only from the occupation and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, of course. He points out other factors, such as the increase in the economic and political power of the business sector and the weakening of the bargaining power of workers. Still, there is no doubt that public services in Israel suffer also because of defence expenditures related to the occupation. For example, one main problem is that even when budgetary cuts across the board are proposed, they rarely apply to the Defense Ministry. This immediately translates into widening social gaps, as it is much easier for wealthy families to 'pick up the bill' for their child's education following budget cuts in schooling.

More specifically, Israeli settlements in the West Bank encompass 12 million square metres of roads, homes and factories that have cost more than \$17 billion over the past 40 years. The total estimated market value of the settlements today is \$18.8 billion. (The Settlements Encyclopedia contains nearly all West Bank settlements and their cost breakdown.<sup>43</sup>)

According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), various ministries (Education and Interior excluded) gave 9 per cent of local government funding to settlements, even though their portion of the population is closer to 4 per cent. This is in addition to defence expenditures. On average, a Jewish West Bank resident receives from the government double what an Israeli resident living within the 1967 borders receives.<sup>44</sup> In addition, a 2011 OECD study of the Israeli economy and the West Bank found that the areas of public administration, education and housing are 2-3 times higher than their relative contribution to GDP. A typical Jewish West Bank

42 [http://www.adva.org/uploaded/costofoccupation2008fullenglish\(1\).pdf](http://www.adva.org/uploaded/costofoccupation2008fullenglish(1).pdf)

43 <http://www.macro.org.il/lib/File/Settlement%20Encyclopedia/Ma'ale%20Efrain.pdf>

44 <http://peacenow.org.il/eng/content/peace-now%E2%80%99s-plan-save-billions-reducing-some-benefits-settlements>

settlement has therefore more social, education and welfare services compared with cities like Beer Sheba, Hadera or Tiberius inside Israel. In short, the Israeli welfare state is much more developed in the West Bank than within the 1967 borders.<sup>45</sup>

Even without making the argument that defence expenditures related to the occupation should go towards public services within the 1967 borders, it is clear that in the simplest terms, Jewish West Bank residents are simply much more expensive: they receive more government funding per capita compared with 'ordinary' Israeli citizens residing within the green line, far greater than their relative size within the population and/or GDP contribution.

45 <http://www.oecd.org/social/family/48442642.pdf>

## What Can Be Done? The Road Ahead

**A**s we have seen, the biggest civic awakening in Israeli history gave rise to meaningful changes on the domestic front, in areas like legislation, parliamentary politics, media and civil society. In contrast to its image, it did not entirely neglect issues like Israel's non-Jewish minorities or the Palestinian problem, which remained strong undercurrents in the discourse throughout the summer of 2011.

However, no one can argue that the popular concept of 'social justice' now has a universal meaning in the public eye. According to a recent poll, public support for Yesh Atid and its focus on middle-class problems is soaring,<sup>46</sup> with the majority of Israelis equating social justice with the burden on the middle classes, especially in areas like education, housing, taxes or high transportation costs.

It is therefore unlikely that a sudden wave of popular peace protests will force Netanyahu to swap the conservative elements in his coalition in favor of Labor, who since the elections has been more vocal about the need for a political settlement with the Palestinians. It is also not clear how serious the prime minister himself is about a settlement. In his famous Bar-Ilan speech from 2009, he spoke about the need for a two-state solution.<sup>47</sup> He was also quoted in mid-2013 as saying 'we must reach a settlement with the Palestinians that would prevent Israel from turning into a bi-national state', and even went so far as to say that 'as important as it is, economic peace cannot replace political peace'.<sup>48</sup> Actions on the ground, however, show a different story, with a surge in the expansion of isolated settlements in the West Bank between 2009 and 2012, during Netanyahu's tenure.<sup>49</sup>

In the absence of serious political negotiations or the emergence of a popular peace and social justice movement, those who care about social justice in the broad term can still do considerable work to bring the two camps together. The first section of this chapter highlights examples of cooperation between the two camps that have taken and continue to take place. The second section provides guidelines for political parties, NGOs and civil society members who wish to see greater synergy between the two camps.

46 <http://www.imra.org.il/story.php3?id=60381>

47 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/full-text-of-netanyahu-s-foreign-policy-speech-at-bar-ilan-1.277922>

48 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/full-text-of-netanyahu-s-foreign-policy-speech-at-bar-ilan-1.277922>

49 [http://peacenow.org.il/sites/default/files/Summary4years\\_Heb.pdf](http://peacenow.org.il/sites/default/files/Summary4years_Heb.pdf)

## Emerging Trends and Practices Showing a Gradual Nearing of the Two Camps

### *Leveraging the Arab Peace Initiative*

According to Boaz Rackotz, CEO of the Social Guard, an NGO that sprang from the protests and monitors social legislation in the Knesset: 'In 2011, "peace" simply did not exist. It did not fit into the protests'. Today, he says, the situation is different. The Arab Peace Initiative presents opportunities for organisations focusing on the domestic agenda:

The angle we ought to take is an economic one: the Arab Peace Initiative has enormous potential as far as investments, narrowing social gaps and creating jobs – not to mention projects that rely on regional cooperation between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians. The peace camp lost the 'occupation' struggle.

In this sense, normalisation with Arab countries can create a positive and tangible influence for the average taxi driver, waitress, teacher or travel agent in a way that an abstract conversation about the evils of the occupation cannot. This is an angle that organisations like the Social Guard can adopt and still remain within their original mission.

### *Increased cooperation across party lines*

Domestic agendas can create unorthodox links between Arab parties and Haredi (ultra-orthodox) parties. According to Rackotz, 'Since the last elections [which forced the Haredi parties into the opposition], we have seen ongoing cooperation between Arab and Haredi parties, especially around issues like proposed budget cuts, housing, pension funds and infrastructure'.<sup>50</sup>

With regard to Jewish-Arab cooperation in the Knesset, one of the challenges the social justice community is facing is that Arab parties tend to be absent from important votes concerning social issues that directly affect their constituency.<sup>51</sup> If Arab parties like the United Arab List Ta'al and Balad improve their performance in the current Knesset and show they care about domestic issues, this could create reverberations outside the Knesset and bring social justice and peace activists together, not to mention the immediate benefits it could have for the Israeli-Arab population itself.

### *Change in language*

Towards the end of 2012 and during 2013, anyone who was closely following the social justice community in Israel could notice a shift in language. Suddenly, it was more common and acceptable to talk about the Palestinian issue, which was

50 Interview with Boaz Rackotz, 05/13, Israel

51 <http://hamishmar.org.il/>

not perceived as alien and even harmful to the ultimate goals of the movement. According to Esty Segal, a leader of Dor Shalom (Peace Generation), an NGO that emerged following the Yitzhak Rabin assassination, and one of the founders of the Social Guard: 'There is a lot more openness to the Palestinian issue. You don't see the immediate shaking off of the topic among activists, like we used to see during the 2011 summer protests'. The Palestinian issue is not something the social justice community addresses in practice, according to Segal, but this could also happen at some point.

So far, this change in language is especially visible on social media platforms and on signs during the 2013 rallies over the budget and proposed natural gas exports, signalling the reawakening of the social protests. A change in language could be seen as a 'soft' aspect of change, but this is arguably the most important aspect. After all, change often starts in people's mindsets and ways of interpreting the world around them, and then goes on to be much more.

### *Environmental campaigns as multi-faceted arenas for action*

The reawakening of the social protests began with environmental campaigns, most notably around saving Nachsholim Beach and halting Israeli natural gas exports. This is not by accident: environmental campaigns, if led wisely, can bring together many different segments of the population that would not otherwise necessarily cooperate, as they revolve around all aspects of life: land and water, privatisation, history and religious heritage, preservation, and so on. As such, they by definition address both social and political justice issues.

- **Example 1:** Nachsholim Beach campaign: The beach, a pristine stretch of land with ecological and historical significance to Jews and non-Jews alike, triggered a massive environmental campaign designed to save it from real-estate developers.<sup>52</sup> Segal explains: 'Our most logical partner on this issue would have been Israel's Antiquities Authority. But we knew they had no teeth... so we turned to the less immediate, yet relevant suspects: right-wing settlers who care about this area due to its biblical significance'.<sup>53</sup>
- **Example 2:** The IDF and Social Justice: A politically negligible yet interesting effort by social justice activists called for reservist soldiers and officers to publicly return their reserve soldier certificate. The rationale is that if the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) ought to be 'the people's army', then it should not guard the private gas rig which many people believe should be at least partially nationalised, so that the Israeli public could also reap some of its economic benefits. Even if the group's efforts are unlikely to echo within the Israeli

52 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/israel-scraps-plan-to-establish-beach-resort-at-nahsholim-1.455338>

53 Interview with Esty Segal, 05/13, Israel.

mainstream, as they specifically encourage civil disobedience, it is nevertheless a cutting-edge effort to bring together social justice activists and the IDF.<sup>54</sup>

In short, focused campaigns that are multi-faceted should be encouraged, as they have the power to bring together segments of the population that are largely absent from the social justice movement and/or do not normally cooperate with one another.

### *Making the connection between peace and socio-economic problems*

Before the protests broke out, Peace Now, an Israeli NGO advocating for the two-state solution and the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territories, embarked on a campaign titled 'This Cottage Costs You More!', equating the cost of private cottages in Jewish settlements with the price hike of cottage cheese, considered a staple of the Israeli diet.<sup>55</sup>

- **The example of Peace Now:** Peace Now is one example of a peace organisation that found itself in limbo, so to speak. On the one hand, its leadership was happy to see the strength of the protests; on the other hand, they did not find their proper place within them, and decided to participate in them on an individual basis as opposed to under the Peace Now banner.

Peace Now General Secretary Yariv Oppenheimer and Yaniv Shaham, who runs the organisation's new media and outreach efforts, both admit that the cost of the settlements should not be over-emphasised, but is nevertheless important to mention. In this vein, the organisation has taken several actions designed to draw public attention to this issue and bring social justice and peace activists closer together. Beyond the cottage campaign, Peace Now published a booklet about the cost of settlements, and a video clip urging Finance Minister Yair Lapid to stop indulging isolated settlements instead of announcing tax hikes and austerity measures.<sup>56</sup> Finally, Peace Now turned the divide between the social justice community and peace camp into the main topic of their 2012 Annual Convention of the Israeli Left, which attracted some 800 people.<sup>57</sup>

54 <https://www.facebook.com/events/613596205318527/>

55 <http://peacenow.org.il/eng/content/cottage-costs-you-more>

56 <http://vimeo.com/64997810>

57 <http://peacenow.org.il/eng/content/annual-convention-israeli-left>

## **Operational Guidelines for Policymakers and Civil Society**

### *Political parties: Coalition parties*

1. **The ruling party Likud-Betenu** can take small but meaningful steps on the ground, even in the absence of official or unofficial talks with the Palestinian Authority. It is almost common knowledge in Israel that isolated Jewish settlements will not be part of a future Palestinian state. While the third largest coalition member, HaBayit Hayehudi, will surely oppose this move, support comes from an unexpected place: Israel's national security adviser, Yaakov Amidror, considered a 'hawk' on security and foreign affairs. Amidror, who opposed the Disengagement Plan from Gaza, talks with Hamas and the very idea of a Palestinian state, told Netanyahu that 'isolated settlements impede Western support for Israel'. Amidror does not rule out a construction freeze in isolated settlements outside the three main blocs (Ariel, Ma'aleh Adumim and Gush Etzion), conditioned upon resuming negotiations.<sup>58</sup>
2. **Yesh Atid**, headed by Finance Minister Yair Lapid, should also support this move, which would be relatively easy to do with an approval stamp from the National Security Council. Further, Lapid himself was quoted as saying that more money should go towards Israel's middle class and not to 'isolated settlements resembling pastoral villages in Switzerland'.

### *Political parties: Opposition parties*

1. **Meretz**, a party that publicly carries both peace and social justice banners, should avoid 'zero-sum game' language when it comes to advocating for a political settlement with the Palestinians. This language alienates many voters who would otherwise be sympathetic to the party's social and political agenda. For example, when the head of Meretz, Zehava Galon, says, 'There is no housing problem beyond the green line', referring to some of the economic arguments raised in the previous chapter, the party is immediately perceived as 'anti-settlers'.<sup>59</sup> The party should not be against settlers, but for ordinary Israeli residents.
2. **Labor** should restore its original role as the party for peace. After all, according to a survey from 2012, a majority of Israelis prefer a two-state solution. Yachimovich has been recently quoted, both in closed-door discussions and now publicly, as saying she regrets undermining the Palestinian issue in her election campaign, going so far as to say that this strategic choice cost her

58 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/netanyahu-s-top-security-adviser-settlements-impede-western-support-of-israel.premium-1.501940>

59 <http://meretz.org.il/english/>

party 4 mandates.<sup>60</sup> Responding to the Arab League's willingness to negotiate based on the 1967 borders with some mutually agreed-upon land swaps, Yachimovich urged Netanyahu to endorse the Arab peace plan. In May 2013 she even met Palestinian President Abu Mazen for the first time since she took office, in an attempt to renew negotiations with the PA.<sup>61</sup>

### *Guidelines for NGOs/civil society*

1. **Adopt 'pragmatic idealism':** Social justice organisations – such as media outlets, education initiatives, monitoring bodies and advocacy campaigns – should not immediately shun any attempt to expand social justice to also include peace, out of fear it will compromise their popular appeal.

At the same time, peace organisations should cease looking at the social justice struggle as 'inferior' or aggressively push their agenda when it is not welcome. As Yaniv Shaham from Peace Now said, '[When the protests erupted] we immediately realised that the next day, once the protest was over, these people would be our natural partners, so we now have to respect their desire to keep the protest limited to domestic issues'. Daniel Dor, co-founder of the Social Guard, said that the Spanish Occupy Movement approached Israeli social justice activists when the protests erupted, asking them to sign a joint document on the condition that the Israeli movement would also talk about the occupation. The atmosphere was not conducive to this condition, and the idea fell through. Dor did not push, but continued to be active within the framework of the social protests.<sup>62</sup> According to Dor, 'The question of the occupation was on my mind from the very beginning; but it was simply not possible to address it as part of the protest'.

In a way, peace organisations should to some level 'wait it out': ride the current wave of protests on social, economic and environmental grounds; join when possible; and prepare the ground for the day when the public mood is ready to talk about peace as an integral part of social justice. This does not mean they should cease their core activities, of course; it does mean they should rethink their strategy and adapt to the changing reality. Lia Nirgad, prominent peace and human rights activist in MachsomWatch (women who monitor checkpoints) and co-founder of the Social Guard, described it as follows: 'For so many years, we [referring to peace activists] were barking up the same tree, but nothing happened. I thought to myself, maybe this way [focusing on domestic agenda] we will finally succeed'.<sup>63</sup>

---

60 <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.2018198>

61 <http://www.timesofisrael.com/arab-peace-initiative-optimism/>

62 Interview with Daniel Dor, 05/13, Israel.

63 Interview with Lia Nirgad, 05/13, Israel.

2. **'Driving a wedge' between positive and negative activists<sup>64</sup>:** Activists from both the social justice and peace camps should make a clear distinction between those organisations that truly strive to promote peace, security and prosperity for all – and those who simply wish to push a narrow agenda and refuse to take part in the overall effort of Israeli civil society to fight for a better future. For example, Jewish-Arab groups that choose to only commemorate the Nakba and refuse to acknowledge Israeli independence immediately alienate the vast majority of Israeli Jews. Similarly, social justice marches should be tolerant towards peace groups who join them, and not chase them out.
3. **Avoid a 'zero-sum game' between Israeli and Palestinian welfare:** Often, Israeli Jews become immediately suspicious of anyone trying to advocate for Palestinian rights, fearing it will somehow come at their expense. This is particularly true among the lower classes who barely make ends meet, and who naturally feel like they are competing for the same limited resources with migrant workers from Eritrea, Israeli Arabs, and so on. Projects that focus on poverty relief and social investment in both Israel's peripheral areas and in Palestine help break the zero-sum game mindset.<sup>65</sup>
4. **Parliamentary guerilla tactics, not a mass movement:** Mass movements rarely arise frequently; their power is in their spontaneity and the ability to subsequently organise and sustain public outrage and channel it wisely around a given issue (civil rights, women's liberation, etc). It is neither realistic nor necessarily productive to expect that millions of Israelis will take to the streets again. Instead, public calls for social justice should be sustained via smaller, yet ongoing rallies combined with parliamentary guerilla tactics which could lead to better results. This is especially true given the new composition of the Knesset. Successful campaigns could build upon an existing ambition of a serving minister and a certain public interest. In this way, Minister of Justice Tzipi Livni of Hatnuah could be lobbied on the issue of opening the protocols of the Knesset's Ministerial Committee on Legislation to the public, and at the same time be supported across social media platforms and on the street. This guideline necessitates a much more focused and organised leadership, in contrast to the leadership of the 2011 summer protests, which was dispersed and mainly focused on bringing the masses to the streets.

---

64 Credit for this concept goes to the Reut Institute for Strategic Thinking, which used it in the context of Israel's de-legitimisation.

65 <http://www.portlandtrust.org/>

---

## Conclusion

**A**s shown in this paper, the struggle for social justice in Israel and the struggle for peace with the Palestinians are two aspects of the same challenge facing Israeli society. The social justice community and the peace camp are philosophically, politically and economically tied to one another, even if it does not seem so in practice. Furthermore, it is doubtful that one camp can be successful without the other.

The Israeli left has largely lost the political battle due to decades of repeated negotiations which did not result in a peace deal and reduce violence. The Israeli public by and large abhors the term 'occupation' and feels sceptical about the likelihood of reaching a political settlement with the Palestinians, even if 67 per cent of the public supports the basic idea of the two-state solution. There is no longer a wide audience for the messages the peace camp was spreading during the 1990s. Worse, the repeated failures to achieve peace chase increasingly more people out of the peace camp, causing them to become sceptical or even apathetic citizens. As Nirgad, a prominent peace activist who 'crossed the lines' and is now mainly active on social issues, says about peacemaking, 'You simply cannot galvanise people around a failed struggle over time'.

As we have seen, there are several moderate steps that can be taken by both politicians and activists who care about peace and/or social justice to foster synergy between the two camps. Some argue that the current popular focus on social issues is a retreat from the 'real' issue of peace with the Palestinians. But in fact, this could be alternatively viewed as a return to fundamental humanist values, which form the basis of any healthy body politic. This Israeli zeitgeist has the potential to unite Jews and Arabs, Haredi and secular, Ashkenazi and Sephardic people, residents of Tel Aviv and Israel's periphery, around shared socio-economic challenges and mutual foes. As more Haredi, Jewish settlers, Arab Israelis and Russian immigrants join the movement for social justice, so will Israel's fragmented society be characterized by greater solidarity and basic humanist values, which are a precondition for any popular call for peace. In short, anyone who self-identifies as a member of the peace camp should support the social justice movement and find ways to communicate with it, and vice versa.



---

## **About ICSR**

ICSR is a unique partnership of King's College London, the University of Pennsylvania, the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya (Israel), and the Regional Centre for Conflict Prevention Amman (Jordan). Its aim is to counter the growth of radicalisation and political violence by bringing together knowledge and leadership. For more information, see [\*\*www.icsr.info\*\*](http://www.icsr.info)

[\*\*www.icsr.info\*\*](http://www.icsr.info)