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## THE ISRAELI STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM

Netanel Lorch

**A Homeland for Whom? / From Assymetry to Absurdity / The Rise of the Kach Party /  
Opposition to Racism / Anti-Racism Amendment Proposed / External Events Aid Kahane**

### **A Homeland for Whom?**

When Knesset Member Aharon Harel of the Labor Party recently told Mayor Hilmo Hanun of the Arab town Tulkarm in Samaria that he was born in Poland, Hanun reportedly asked, "Why don't you go back there?" In his opinion, Jews who were not born in Israel should be induced to leave. This is in line with Articles 6 and 15 of the PLO Charter adopted in 1968. Article 6 reads, "The Jews who have normally resided in Palestine until the beginning of the Zionist invasion will be considered Palestinians," and Article 15 calls for the liberation of Palestine by "attempting to repel the Zionist and imperialist aggression against the Arab homeland . . . the

elimination of Zionism in Palestine." On this matter, Hanun is considered a moderate, since, unlike other Arabs, he does not insist on violent means of expulsion. Moreover, it may be assumed that within the context of the sharp internal PLO debate as to whether the "Zionist invasion" began with the Balfour Declaration of 1917 or only after 1947 (the year the UN adopted the Partition Resolution), Hanun probably identifies with the latter. If the former U.S. citizen and freshman Knesset member Meir Kahane had been the mayor's interlocutor, he probably would have retorted, "Why don't you, Mr. Mayor, go to an Arab country where you belong and where you will feel at home?"

Daniel J. Elazar, Editor and Publisher; David Clayman and Zvi R. Marom, Associate Editors.  
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It appears to present a perfect symmetry: an Arab wants the Jews to go away and enjoy a country free of Jews; a Jew wants the same with regard to Arabs. However, this is where the symmetry ends. The *Judenrein* theme has been inscribed in PLO documents and, indeed, in those of its predecessors ever since the early decades of this country. It is inscribed in the PLO Charter, which is binding on all members of the PLO and on its quasi-parliamentary organ, the Palestine National Council (PNC). It has never been abandoned as the PLO's universally accepted long term strategic objective, even when camouflaged under the innocent phrase, "a secular democratic state for the whole of Palestine."

On the other side, Kahane's ideology, embodied in the platform of his Kach list, has only come to the fore recently. In the 1984 Knesset elections, Kach, for the first time, gained the support of just over 1 percent of the electorate, and thus obtained one seat out of 120 in the Knesset.

In spite of riots and disturbances, terror and indiscriminate killings of Jewish civilians by Arabs and in spite of a series of wars between Israel and its neighbors in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982, the vast majority of Jews in Israel have been steadfast in their conviction that there is room for both Jews and Arabs in Israel, with equal rights for both. It was not only Theodore Herzl, who in his utopian novel *Altneuland* described the co-existence of Jews and Arabs, but also Vladimir Jabotinsky, founder of the Revisionist Party (Herut's predecessor), who dreamt about a country where "the son of Arabia and the son of Nazareth and my son" would live peacefully side by side (from the Herut Party anthem). Indeed, the lack of personalized, intense hatred following two generations of bloodshed has often been noted.

### From Assymetry to Absurdity

The assymetry reaches levels of absurdity when one moves to the international arena. Whereas Kach's attitude has been characterized rightly as racist, fascist and right-wing, the PLO's Doctrine of the Politicide of Israel and removal of Jews from Palestine has been given legitimacy and is accepted as enlightened and progressive. Yasser Arafat has been a frequent visitor in the capitals of the world — East, West and Third World — and

he has been invited to address the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

This absurdity, which no doubt has contributed to the growth of support for Kahane, is something for public opinion molders and political scientists to ponder. The fact remains that for the first time in Israeli history a Knesset member openly advocates discrimination against Arabs in Israel. He talks about the relationship between Jews and Arabs as that of a "horse and its rider" and has proposed bills which in spirit, and sometimes in actual text, bear a striking similarity to the infamous Nazi Nuremberg Laws.

One such bill is entitled "Israel Citizenship and Jewish-Arab Populations Exchange." This bill specifies that only a member of the Jewish people may be a citizen of Israel. A non-Jew may have the status of a *Ger-Toshav* (resident-alien) and be subjected to "taxes and slavery." A *Ger-Toshav* may not reside within the city of Jerusalem, may not hold public office and may not vote in elections. If he does not accept these limitations, he must be ejected from the country. Another bill — "The Prevention of Assimilation and the Sanctity of the Jewish People" — calls for the cancellation of any government programs designed to enhance mutual contact between Jews and Arabs. It also calls for the establishment of separate beaches for Jews and non-Jews, and it prohibits intermarriage and sexual intercourse between Jews and non-Jews. Jews who oppose Kahane's doctrine, such as secular Jews, leftists and liberals, are denounced by him as "Hellenists" (assimilationists) who deserve to die.

### The Rise of the Kach Party

Kahane has been consistently underestimated by many Israelis. His election to Israel's 11th Knesset sent shock waves throughout the Jewish world. Yet Kahane was still viewed as a freak phenomenon. In August 1985, following a period which saw the release of over one thousand Arab terrorists from Israeli prisons in exchange for three Israeli soldiers; a renewal of terrorist attacks; and an economic crisis, a public opinion survey showed Kahane's Kach party winning as many as 11 seats were elections to be held at that time. This mounting support for Kahane's right-wing, militantly anti-Arab policies has aroused an equally strong backlash from all walks of Israeli life, culminating in the current bill before

the Knesset which would make racist acts subject to criminal penalties.

This is not the place to enter into a detailed description of Kahane the man, his doctrine and its origins, his movement and his methods; or to enumerate the moral, theological, Jewish and Israeli arguments against Kahane's philosophy; nor even to demonstrate why, in stark pragmatic terms, the "simple" solutions he proposes are no solutions whatsoever. The purpose here is to analyze the political and ideological struggle which is developing in Israel in relation to this phenomenon of Kahanism.

### Opposition to Racism

No less than nineteen voluntary organizations to combat racism have sprung up within the last few months. Recently, they combined to form one umbrella organization to coordinate their activities. This is in addition to longstanding organizations such as the Israel Committee for Human Rights, the Movement for Mutual Tolerance, the Movement for a Better Israel and others with similar purposes. (There is so much grassroots opposition to racism that one wag suggested that the only organization missing was one for Racists Against Racism.) Their activities range from counter-demonstrations against Kahane and all Kach gatherings to positive action, such as Jewish-Arab encounters.

For example, when Kahane planned to enter an Arab township to try to "persuade" its residents to pick up and leave, he was met by a solid phalanx of Jews and Arabs who would not let him pass. When his party recently held its National Convention, the 350 delegates were confronted by an estimated 5000 demonstrators. Only active police intervention enabled the delegates to assemble in the Binyanei Ha-Uma (the National Convention Center). The building itself was only put at the disposal of Kach in the wake of a Supreme Court ruling that under existing legislation it would be illegal to deny access on the basis of ideology and opinions.

On the positive side, it is no coincidence that, for the first time since the establishment of the State of Israel, a week has been dedicated exclusively to give recognition to the culture of Israeli Arabs, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. A program of encounters between Jewish and Arab students has been instituted by

the Ministry on a small scale, due to budgetary constraints. It is expected that such encounters will become an integral part of the curricula of teachers' seminaries, so that future teachers — Jews and Arabs alike — will become acquainted with one another and with the other's problems and dilemmas.

On the political side, Speaker of the Knesset Shlomo Hillel has taken the lead in containing the threat of racism, despite the constitutional limitations of his office. He refused to submit bills authored by Kahane which, in his judgement, run counter to the basic principles of democracy. This prevented any discussion of the bills and created a precedent which has been challenged by constitutionalists. The Speaker's ruling in this matter has been taken before the Supreme Court by Kahane. In a complicated decision, the Court upheld Kahane's right to submit bills which express his party's positions and program, in line with existing rules of procedure. Undeterred, the Speaker urged the House Committee to amend the existing rules, and this was accomplished. The rules were augmented by an article authorizing the Speaker and his deputies to disallow the submission of bills of a racist nature.

In another unprecedented move, the Knesset, at the request of the Attorney-General, voted by an overwhelming majority in secret ballot, to limit Kahane's immunity as a Knesset Member and to restrain his freedom of movement. Authorities now have the right, which has been exercised on several occasions, to ask Kahane to refrain from entering localities where his presence might cause disturbance or disorder. When Kahane presented a motion of no-confidence in the government on the subject of Jewish-Arab encounters, only two Knesset members were present. One member was there to ask that the motion be struck from the agenda, and the other, a practically unknown Knesset member from the coalition benches, was the only one to vote with Kahane.

In addition, the president of Israel, Chaim Herzog, has consistently utilized the moral power of his office to inveigh against racism. When he consulted the political parties about the composition of the new government, he conspicuously omitted Kahane from the list of invitees. Although as a rule the President attends the opening ceremonies of party conventions, he

refrained from doing so with the Kach Party.

### Anti-Racism Amendment Proposed

For many months, the Knesset has been debating the phrasing of an amendment to the Criminal Code entitled: "Encitement to Racism." It defines racism as, "Persecution, humiliation, defamation or hostility towards a group, or causing quarrels between parts of the population, or carrying out acts of hostility or violence on grounds pertaining to a race, nationality or religion." It continues to say that "the publication of any material inciting racism or with the intention of bringing about racism, henceforth will be punishable by up to five years in prison." Several amendments, including some which would make incitement by secular against Orthodox less similarly punishable, were voted down. Thus, it is hoped that such a law will make punishable speeches such as those made at the Kach Convention, which officially called for a country free of "goyim."

This proposed law entails a number of difficulties, precisely for those who support it. For example, since racism becomes a criminal offense, the term race, which appears in the law, will have to be defined, if not by the legislature, then by a court of law. For those who consider the term race itself to be a malicious myth, this may prove a stumbling block. In point of fact, Kahane is not technically a racist since he allows for conversion to Judaism.

The law has been blocked for the most part by the religious parties, who point out that the distinctions between Jew and Gentile enshrined in Jewish law should not be left open to being interpreted as racist. On the other hand, the left, particularly Knesset Member Shulamit Aloni of the Citizens' Rights Movement, has criticized the law for not actually condemning discrimination in areas such as housing and labor practices. Moreover, civil libertarians have expressed their fears over its vagueness.

At first, the impression was that many of the measures adopted to limit Kahane were having the opposite effect. He had become notorious in Israel and even more so abroad for his outspokenness and flamboyance. The very first sitting of the present Knesset, in which the members take their oath of office, became Kahane's own personal floorshow. To the legal formula repeated by each Knesset member, "I so

commit myself," he added the words, "always to do Your bidding," thus converting a constitutional undertaking into a religious obligation. Subsequently, the media, particularly the state-controlled radio and television, adopted a policy of minimum exposure for Kahane and refrained from covering the media events staged by his group. Following a decision of the Broadcasting Authority, Kahane and his followers were deliberately excluded from discussion programs on radio and television. Kahane duly contested this policy with a motion of order to the Supreme Court. At the time of this writing, that court has not handed down its verdict. In the meantime, the Kach convention and the mass counter demonstration against Kahane drew media attention, and thus provided him with more worldwide publicity. This is a vital consideration for Kahane, particularly as concerns the U.S. where he has a large and reputedly growing number of supporters.

In Israel, a poll conducted last summer at a religious high school (yeshiva) traditionally linked with the moderate National Religious Party, revealed 62 percent of the students approving Kahane's views and attitudes towards Arabs. Alarm bells went off all over Israel in the wake of these and similar surveys. Kach experienced a sharp decline in popularity to seven seats in September, according to one reputable poll, and to only five seats in November, a sensational 29 percent less. This decline has continued as the economy has stabilized. Many observers credited this decline to the media policy of ignoring Kahane. On the other hand, some have recently questioned that policy, arguing that if his actions and speeches were better known, the reactions would be that much more efficacious. This argument, however, seems doubtful since the public to which his speeches appeal is totally dissimilar from those who may react.

In a recently published article, "Meir Kahane and Kach: The Emergence of Jewish Quasi-Facism" (*Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 19, Nos. 3 and 4, 1985), Ehud Sprinzak analyzes Kahane's inherent political weakness, particularly his isolation as a leader who has deliberately avoided cultivating second-generation leadership; the growing resistance he encounters from the government, the Knesset and law enforcement agencies; and, last but not least, the emerging opposition from Gush Emunim and its supporters

in other parties. While demonstrations against Kahane originate on the left, the people politically concerned about him are those upon whose turf he is trespassing, namely those parties from whom he recruits followers. Before the 1984 Knesset elections, these groups paid little attention to him, but since the elections, they have been actively denying Kahane access to yeshivot, settlements in the territories, and other strongholds of their camps.

#### External Events Aid Kahane

Ultimately, the political fortunes of Kahane are influenced by external events beyond both his maneuverings and the countermeasures of his opponents. The continuous indiscriminate acts of terrorism, which increased after the prisoner exchange, play directly into Kahane's hands. If Arabs kill Jews for being Jews, then many Jews will respond by seeking to induce Arabs as a group to leave the country. Kahane claims to oppose violent attacks against Arabs; he thinks they can be encouraged to leave by legal and political action, and even by monetary incentives, thus making his approach seem all the more logical.

For example, the killing of seven Israeli tourists, including four children, at Ras Burka in Sinai, by the combination of a wanton assault on the group by an Egyptian soldier and the subsequent refusal of the Egyptian garrison to allow the surviving Israelis, including a doctor, to assist the wounded has probably garnered more support for Kahane than all his speeches.

Another major factor in Kahane's favor is the difficult economic situation in Israel, particularly the rising unemployment, especially among youngsters in development towns and soldiers just released from the army. While unemployment among Israeli Arabs and Arabs from the administered territories is less noticeable

and more easily absorbed because of the Arabs' social and economic structure, Kahane asks, "Why should Arabs be employed while Jews are idle?" The fact that in many cases Arabs are employed in jobs which Jewish youths would not consider taking is often conveniently ignored.

The struggle is far from over. Indeed, one has the feeling that it has just begun. It is not only a struggle against Kahane as a man, but against a doctrine, an ideology alien to Israel and to Jewish ethos. The struggle against racism is first and foremost an internal Israeli matter. Outside forces may help or hinder. Certainly a ten year old UN resolution equating Zionism and racism is not helpful. Equally damaging is the deliberate ignoring of the racist character of the PLO Charter, which only offers one more proof of the inherent double standard applied to Jews as against their opponents. However, Jews in Israel have deliberately accepted the burden of being judged by a more severe moral code, and they must not be deflected from this path. Ultimately the fight against racism is not just another episode in the long history of the Israel-Arab conflict; it is the struggle for the very soul of the Jewish state.

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*Following a distinguished career in both the Israeli military service and the diplomatic corps, Netanel Lorch served as Secretary General of the Knesset from 1972-1983. Today he is a Senior Research Fellow at the Truman Center, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; a Visiting Lecturer at Bar Ilan University and an Associate of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. His most recent book is *The Knesset From a Different Angle*, (Idamin-Yediot Aharonot).*