

Haaretz20140418 Unconditional Palestinian surrender By Zeev Sternhell

At the moment there is no change to forge a majority for a fair agreement; the road to South Africa has been paved.

Israeli Arabs wave Palestinian flags during a rally in the northern Arab-Israeli town of Sakhnin  
Israeli Arabs waving Palestinian flags during a rally in the northern Arab-Israeli town of Sakhnin on March 30, 2013 commemorati... / Photo by AFP

The demand that the Palestinians recognize a Jewish state is no coincidence; it's not to be taken lightly. It's the way to demand that the Palestinians admit their historic defeat and recognize the Jews' exclusive ownership of the country.

In the eyes of the ruling majority there is no difference between Arabs who are Israeli citizens and Arabs who are residents of the territories, because citizenship is seen as a legal fiction that can be annulled. In any case, it is inferior to national affiliation. According to that approach, the nation is a creation of history or divine creation — others will say a creation of nature — whereas citizenship is artificial, the product of an arbitrary decision.

In the eyes of the right, the Jewish people won a decisive victory when they occupied the country in a process that began with the First Aliyah — the immigration wave from 1882 to 1903 — and continues to this day. Its two high points were the War of Independence and the Six-Day War, both part of the sequence of settlement. In that sense there is no difference between the occupation of parts of the country before and after 1949, while the Green Line has no significance except for being a temporary cease-fire line.

The right, with all its subgroups, believes it is expressing the Zionist consensus, and to a great extent it is right. From the beginning, the differences of opinion in the Jewish nationalist movement were about means rather than ends. There was a power struggle between Mapai — the forerunner of the Labor Party — and the Revisionists — the forerunner of Likud, but it wasn't over the essence of Jewish nationalism. The Labor movement didn't recognize the national rights of the Palestinians either. For its leaders and thinkers, Jewish control of the country was enshrined in history, not in people's natural right to be their own masters.

According to them, history always came before the desires, needs and aspirations of people. Humanist values were not central to Mapai's thinking, and to this day these values have not been absorbed by the Labor Party.

Therefore, for Israel's leaders, the word "agreement" means unconditional Palestinian surrender. For the Jews' exclusive right to the land to be complete and recognized, the Palestinians must accept their inferiority. This perception is anchored deep in the Israeli consciousness and is shared by the right, the center and the center-left, the towns in the country's outskirts and most residents of Greater Tel Aviv, the Labor Party and Likud. They all reject the principle of equal rights for the Arabs.

This is why it's absurd to expect the army to behave with a modicum of decency in the territories, just as it's hard to imagine the High Court of Justice taking a strictly egalitarian approach toward Jews and Palestinians. Since the start of the settlement movement, this institution, which presumably serves as a symbol of Israeli liberalism and democracy, has

operated like the army, the police and the Shin Bet security service as an arm of Israeli rule in the occupied territories.

So at the moment there is no chance to forge a majority for a fair agreement. Even if Likud miraculously splits in a move led by the prime minister — who would try to go down as a de Gaulle rather than as a son of Prof. Netanyahu — and the necessary majority is found, it won't be considered legitimate by large parts of the population. Nobody will have the courage to implement the new policy.

Therefore the occupation will continue, land will be confiscated from its owners to expand the settlements, the Jordan Valley will be cleansed of Arabs, Arab Jerusalem will be strangled by Jewish neighborhoods, and any act of robbery and foolishness that serves Jewish expansion in the city will be welcomed by the High Court of Justice.

The road to South Africa has been paved and will not be blocked until the Western world presents Israel with an unequivocal choice: Stop the annexation and dismantle most of the colonies and the settler state, or be an outcast.