

## Meretz or Agudat Yisrael

### A voter's dilemma

Ariel Rubinstein

(A Translation of an article published in Yedioth Achronot , February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015)

If I were a settler, I would vote for the Zionist Camp. The settlement enterprise needs a rotation in government between right and left. When the right rules, more funds are channeled to the settlements, a few settlements are built and a few hills are expropriated. When the left rules, a bit less money flows, settlement expansion is only commensurate with the output of the Jewish mother's womb, and expropriation is "for security needs and regional development" – that is, pretended to benefit both Jews and Arabs living there. When the right is in power, there are declarations and provocations launched against the nations of the world. When the left governs, there are songs of peace but not much changes on the ground. The world is hesitant to boycott products from the settlements, and the leftists take a few less shocking photographs. The West Bank is small, the possibilities are limited, and there is not an endless number of people interested in moving to the suburbs of Nablus. So, the rotation in government is sufficient to facilitate significant and steady growth in the Jewish population in the territories.

If a government is formed under the Zionist Camp's leadership, the Israeli foreign minister will perhaps eat humus in Ramallah and the Palestinian foreign minister will perhaps visit Yad Vashem. No substantial agreement will be signed. And if one is signed – it will not be implemented. A number of Labor Party MKs have explicitly expressed sympathy for the settlements, and others will not undermine national unity. Congress will applaud Herzog and the threat of Israel's isolation will disappear. This is very important for the settlers. Even the "price tag" heroes prefer to slit tires and spray-paint mosques when shielded from above by F-35 stealth fighter jets, a gift from America, and when Israeli submarines, made in Germany, prowl the ocean depths. In other words, a government with the Zionist Camp is the oxygen of the settlement enterprise: in the eyes of the settlers – the time of redemption; in my eyes – the great catastrophe the Jewish people brought upon itself.

To all of the dreamers who think that the Zionist Camp will lead a revolutionary change: tell me, do you know of many examples in history when a dramatic change occurred – such as evacuating territories – in the wake of a narrow election victory rather than as a result of war, plague, severe economic crisis or all three? Political manipulation and brandishing the "bottlegate" affair may be enough to win another minister in a national unity government, but not for changing the hearts of a people. In the current state of heart – we are nowhere near evacuating territories. And incidentally, the economic right also has nothing to worry about.

With its recent “parachuted” economist, the Labor Party has changed from a party with a social-democratic bent into a coalition of defenders of the existing order, equipped with social-oriented sweet talk and bold proposals for marginal reforms.

But I’m not a settler. Therefore, the Zionist Camp is not an alternative for me. So I must ask myself what is truly important to me. And my answer to myself is that I care about two main objectives: the continued existence of the Jewish people, and the uprooting of extreme nationalism from Israeliness. I have clear opinions on social issues too, but no party is proposing anything more than marginal reforms that, more than anything else, preserve the economic hegemony of those who are already strong.

So here’s my dilemma. I’m not a religious person, but I have to honestly admit that after Zionism has turned ultranationalist, the only way that offers the Jewish people a chance to exist in another hundred years is the ultra-Orthodox path – the “Lithuanian” (non-Hasidic) model that reveres study and scorns superstition. And the party that represents this path in Israeli politics is United Torah Judaism. I also have a soft spot for this party because my grandfather wrote articles (eighty years ago) in publications of Agudat Yisrael. For me, to vote Gimel (Agudat Yisrael) is to connect to the tribe. On the other hand, the only Jewish party that rejects the settlements without stuttering and without apologizing is Meretz. And my children support this party. So, for me, voting Meretz is to connect to the young generation. Therefore, although I regret (among many other things) Agudat Yisrael’s exclusion of women and disagree with Meretz’s excessive liberalism on immigration, I am undecided: my grandfather points me toward Agudat Yisrael and my children say: “Meretz.” So what should I do?