

Israel adopts powers to suspend members of parliament

Jean Shaoul
2 August 2016

Within weeks of Avigdor Lieberman and his nationalistic Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel Is Our Home) party joining Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud-led coalition, the government has authored a raft of legislation that is little short of fascistic.

Last week, the Knesset passed legislation that will allow a three-fourths majority, 90 of the 120 members, to suspend serving legislators (MKs). The law is one of a number that allow disqualification of candidates and candidate lists for incitement against the state of Israel or "support" for the armed struggle of an enemy state or terror group against Israel.

The law is so loosely written that any verbal expression of sympathy for Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza could be interpreted to justify expulsion of a member of the Knesset.

It is aimed initially at Hanin Zoabi, who is one of the 13 members of the Joint Arab List, a coalition of the four Palestinian parties in Israel, and who joined the Knesset in 2009. She has been prominent in opposing Israel's brutal suppression of the Palestinians.

She became the *bête-noire* of the ultra-nationalists for joining the Turkish flotilla as it tried to breach the naval blockade of Gaza in 2010, witnessing the Israeli commandos' raid on the Mavi Marmara that killed 10 activists on board.

There have been repeated attempts to strip her of her parliamentary immunity and disqualify her for election. In July 2014, she was suspended from the Knesset for six months as retribution for saying five days after the kidnapping of three Israeli teenagers by Palestinians, "Is it strange that people living under occupation and living impossible lives, in a situation where Israel kidnaps new prisoners every day, is it strange that they kidnap? They are not terrorists. Even if I do not agree with them, they are people who do not see any way to

change their reality, and they are compelled to use means like these."

Zoabi said she encouraged the Palestinians to "declare a popular uprising" and "impose a siege on Israel instead of negotiating with it." Earlier this year, she was fined and given a six-month suspended prison sentence for accusing Arab-Israeli police officers of being traitors.

Zoabi also said that Israel's agreement to pay compensation to the families of the flotilla raid victims as part of a deal to restore full diplomatic relations with Turkey amounted to an admission that Israel's soldiers were "murderers."

Earlier, Ayman Odeh, leader of Hadash and chairman of the Joint Arab List, had threatened to resign from the Knesset if any members of his coalition are expelled. He said that Netanyahu "wants politics for Jews only" by alienating and infuriating the Arab public to the extent that it boycotts the next elections and thus no longer constitutes a political force capable of joining other opposition parties to bring down the government.

The bill follows Netanyahu's remarks during last year's election about "Arabs streaming to the polls in droves" last Election Day, the outlawing of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement and the uprooting of the Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran. A few days ago, the authorities seized 325 acres of Bedouin land around the village of al-Araqib in the Negev for the construction of Jewish homes, and detained several residents who were protesting the bulldozing of their land.

Two weeks ago, the Knesset approved the so-called Transparency Law, which requires nongovernmental organizations that receive more than half their financing from foreign governments to disclose their donors' identities in their publications, advertising and

meetings with public officials. The new law targets some two dozen human rights and left-wing groups, including B'Tselem, Peace Now, Breaking the Silence and Yesh Din, critical of Israel's policies toward Palestinians within the occupied territories and Israel.

Last year, then-defence minister Moshe Ya'alon banned Breaking the Silence from any contact with the military, accusing its members of being "traitors."

The Transparency Law leaves the far more numerous settler and ultra-nationalist groups untouched, since they largely get their funding from private donations from abroad. According to *Ha'aretz*, American donors, including the late Irving Moskowitz, a casino mogul, and the Christian evangelical preacher John Hagee, channelled at least \$220 million in tax-deductible payments over a four-year period to settler NGOs.

Netanyahu made the claim that the Transparency Law was necessary "to prevent an absurd situation, in which foreign states meddle in Israel's internal affairs by funding NGOs without the Israeli public being aware of it."

He himself is subject of a police investigation because all of his recent election campaign contributions have come from overseas sources. US billionaire Sheldon Adelson funds the loss-making free daily newspaper *Israel Hayom* that operates as the mouthpiece of the Netanyahu government.

The original version of the law would have required groups in receipt of funding from overseas governments to wear special tags when visiting the Knesset, implicitly branding them as traitors.

These efforts come amid Israel's brutal crackdown on the unrest provoked last summer by right-wing elements, with the support of the security forces, over access to the Al-Aqsa mosque complex. Since October, more than 220 Palestinians have been killed, thousands injured and hundreds arrested in response to the attacks by lone Palestinian youths in the West Bank and Israel, who have killed some 30 Israelis and two Americans with stones, screwdrivers and knives, or their cars.

While the number of attacks has fallen, the Israeli security forces have continued to respond with extreme brutality, killing Palestinians on a weekly basis, including 26 Palestinian children in the West Bank and Gaza, and implementing collective punishment—illegal under international law. This has included demolishing the family homes of the alleged attackers, expelling

Palestinian residents from Jerusalem, revoking the work permits of Palestinians who work in the settlements or in Israel, and imposing curfews and lockdowns.

A third measure is Israel's new Anti-terrorism Law, which dramatically widens the range of offences to include sympathising with, encouraging and failing to prevent terrorism, gives Israeli police sweeping new powers to arrest suspects and deny them access to lawyers, and mandates long jail sentences.

The legislation is legitimised under the rubric of opposing terrorist activities of both Palestinians and Jewish extremists. However, its real immediate targets are Israel's own Palestinian citizens, some 20 percent of Israel's 8 million-plus population, and East Jerusalem residents. They can be penalized for any political activity in solidarity with the Palestinians in the occupied territories, who are subject to a separate system of Israeli military courts. More generally, these measures are aimed at preventing and suppressing any united opposition on the part of Jewish and Palestinian workers and youth to government policies.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact