

# Israel's government collapses after one year in power

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Israel's "government of change" coalition led by right-winger and former settlement leader Naftali Bennett has announced it can no longer stay in office following the defection of two of his Yamina Party members.

The Knesset, Israel's parliament, is to be dissolved next Tuesday, which means that the government will fall and the country will go to the polls, probably in late October or November, for the fifth time in three and a half years.

The announcement comes just 12 months after Bennett's government took power on June 21, 2021, in Israel's fourth inconclusive election in two years, ending 12 years of rule by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In accordance with their coalition deal, Yair Lapid, leader of Yesh Atid, the largest party in the government, will replace Bennett as caretaker prime minister until new elections are held and another government is formed. He will continue as foreign minister, meeting US President Joe Biden when he visits Israel on July 13, while Bennett will take on the role of alternate prime minister, handling the Iran portfolio.

Israel's deepening political crisis flows from the rapid escalation of class tensions within Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, the Middle East and internationally, as Israel's political elite gives succour to the far-right, fascist forces led by Jewish Power legislator Itamar Ben Gvir and his Religious Zionism partner Bezalel Smotrich. It was Netanyahu who engineered their entry into the Knesset to bolster his bloc prior to the 2021 elections. Their Jewish supremacist agenda includes Israeli rule over the West Bank, the expulsion of Israel's Palestinian population and the demolition of the al-Aqsa Mosque to make way for the building of a Jewish Temple.

Lapid and Bennett assembled an unlikely coalition with a razor-thin majority after Netanyahu—on trial for corruption, fraud and breach of trust—proved unable to form a coalition despite his Likud Party winning the largest number of votes in last year's election. United

only in their opposition to Netanyahu, the coalition consisted of eight disparate parties, spanning most of Israel's mainstream parties, including those ostensibly committed to the Oslo Accords and a Palestinian mini-state—Meretz, Labour, Yesh Atid and Blue and White—and included for the first time one of Israel's Arab parties, the United Arab List.

Lapid ceded the premiership to Bennett even though the latter's party won only six seats because he was seen as more acceptable to the coalition's right flank, agreeing not to negotiate with the Palestinians over statehood for the duration of their alliance. That set the scene for what passes for Israel's left and centrist parties to support an ever-sharper lurch to the right, an escalation of Israel's covert wars against Iran and its allies, Syria and Lebanon's Hezbollah, and its attacks on the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

In the last year, Israel has demolished at least 580 structures in the occupied territories, while its security forces have killed more than 100 Palestinians, according to B'stelem, the human rights organisation. The HaMoked Centre for the Defense of the Individual says that 640 Palestinians are being held without trial in "administrative detention." According to other sources, the government has advanced plans to build 7,292 housing units in the settlements and issued calls for proposals for a further 1,550, while housing starts in the settlements increased sharply.

It was the Minister for Public Security from the Labour Party Omer Bar-Lev who approved last month's Jerusalem Flag March that led to violent clashes with the Palestinians amid chants of "death to Arabs." He justified the ultra-nationalist march so as not to "undermine the legitimacy and erode the sovereignty" of Israel in occupied East Jerusalem. His police officers brutally assaulted the pallbearers of murdered Al-Jazeera Arabic journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Jerusalem for carrying

Palestinian flags. Defence Minister Benny Gantz from Blue and White classified six Palestinian civil society organizations as terrorist organizations.

As Bennett faced increasing opposition from his own right-wing, with Matan Kahana, one of his ministers, saying he wished he had a magic button that could peacefully send all Palestinian citizens of Israel to Switzerland and two of his Yamina Party members and three of his political advisors resigning, the left and centrist parties leapt to his government's defence. They supported the extension of Israel's apartheid laws, with both the Labour Party and Yesh Atid absenting themselves from the Knesset, enabling the passage of racist bills expanding community admission committees that can ban Palestinians from living in Jewish neighbourhoods and outlawing Palestinian flags at state-funded institutions.

Most of the centre-left voted to renew the legislation extending Israeli law to the settlements in Area C in the occupied West Bank that is under direct military rule, even as Netanyahu's opposition bloc voted against the extension in a political manoeuvre aimed at bringing down the government and securing his own return to power.

It was the failure of the Knesset to approve the law—renewable every five years—that brought down the government. Without the passage of such a law by July 2, the settlers' right to enter Israel, obtain benefits and de facto rights as Israeli citizens would have lapsed and they would have been subject to military law. By dissolving parliament, Bennett and Lapid automatically triggered the extension of the settler law. They apparently took their decision without discussing or even informing the defence or interior ministers.

With polls predicting that Netanyahu's Likud Party will again win the largest number of seats and the far-right forces of Ben Gvir and Smotrich likely to increase their vote, but not enough for Netanyahu to form a government, it is possible that right-wing parties on both sides of the government-opposition divide will join forces to form another coalition without holding further elections.

Israel's political crisis comes amid key domestic issues, including the annual budget for 2023, the health, economic and social fallout from the continuing COVID-19 pandemic that has killed nearly 11,000 people and is again on the rise as all restrictions have been lifted. The skyrocketing cost of living, one of the highest in the advanced countries, makes it hard for Israelis and Palestinians alike to put food on the table.

In scenes reminiscent of the tent protests in 2011, in the last week young people have been setting up tents in towns and cities throughout Israel in protest against the country's high housing costs that have escalated even as wages fell in real terms, with a big rally scheduled for July 2. With most young people unable to afford to buy a home and public housing sparse, with thousands on waiting lists for years, they are dependent on a rental housing market that is almost entirely unregulated. It also takes place as teachers' half day strikes continue for a third day over their demands for higher pay and dozens of resident physicians from Haemek Hospital in Afula went on 24-hour strike over the postponement of the shortening of on-call times at hospitals.

The occupied West Bank, where the corrupt Palestinian Authority (PA), Israel's subcontractor enforcing its illegal hold over the West Bank and Gaza, has sought to strengthen the grip of the Fatah movement as rumours surrounding President Mahmoud Abbas's failing health spread, is a social powder keg.

The solution to Israel's mounting crisis depends on the deepening of the global class struggle. There is a powerful and growing movement of strikes opposing mass impoverishment via inflation brought on by speculation and the measures taken by the central banks of the major economies, and the mounting danger of all-out war between nuclear powers. It poses the urgent necessity of unifying international working class in a movement opposing imperialist war and fighting for a socialist transfer of state power to the working class.



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