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## The Children of '86 and Israeli Democracy

by

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Every parent in Israel has the right to vote and, by definition, is also the parent of at least one child. The connection between the two highlights a uniquely homegrown meaning for the word “accountability”. The parents collectively decide the extent of the dangers that their children will face when that fateful month that all Israeli parents dread finally arrives – the August in which their child is 18 years of age.

Welcome to August, 2004. The draft of the children born in 1986 is well under way, and a new generation of trepidated parents is being born today.

Does every parent dread August? Excuse the slip-up, since a minor correction is in order. While 100 percent of Israel’s parents have the right to vote and to determine the fate of their children, almost half of these parents have nothing to fear from August, since their children will never become acquainted with the scent of the Eucalyptus trees in the Bakum (the military base to which all conscripts must initially report).

Welcome to democracy, Israeli-style: the right to vote without the obligation to bear the consequences.

The irony becomes particularly acute when the focus is not just on voters, but on the elected representatives – those whose fingers determine the danger level facing the children of Israel. There are many points of view regarding the sensibility of sending Jews to live in all parts of Eretz Israel, and this is legitimate. Three political parties that serially advocate the non-relinquishing of any and all parts of Eretz Israel are the National Religious Party (NRP), Yahadut Hatorah, and the National Union (Ha’ichud Haleumi). How do they translate the word “accountability” into Hebrew?

While he insists that our children remain to guard the 7,000 Jews living among 1.3 million Arabs in Gaza forever, the head of the NRP, MK Effi Eitam, knows exactly where his son should be (and was recently caught pulling strings to ensure this): in the alpine unit on the distant peak of Mount Hermon. At least his son serves in the army. MK Gafny from the haredim party, Yahadut Hatorah, which is currently negotiating the conditions upon which it will join the government, has no qualms about asserting before all microphones in his vicinity that his party will demand “everything that we deserve.” Rights they have. But what about obligations? Perhaps MK Eliezer “Cheetah” Cohen of the National Union summed up their mindset the best when he outlined the ultimate solution in an interview with Maariv four months ago. “If [my son] would ask me today, I would tell him to stay there [in the U.S.]” And this from a Knesset member that is apparently incapable of making the link between the policies that he vehemently advocates for us and the resultant socio-economic-diplomatic devastation that led his son to leave for greener pastures abroad.

The way to prevent emigration from Israel is not via the traditional custom of verbally smearing the “yordim”, just as marketing alone is insufficient for drawing scores of new olim from the few remaining Jewish reservoirs – particularly in the West. In a competitive world that permits a non-insignificant number of people to freely chose the place they wish to live, in which data and information flow ever more freely and quickly between all points and people, the choice of the State of Israel will be made in a more even-headed and balanced fashion by an increasing portion of the global (including Israeli) Jewish community.

Herzl already understood over a century ago what our current leaders do not: that in order for the Jewish country to sustain itself over the long run, “this must be the country of choice”.

The time has come for Israel to make a clear determination between policies that will allow it to blossom and policies that are causing it to wither. As is indicated by unemployment, poverty and growth rates that have become steadily worse since the 1970s, there is no middle road. The only way to preserve our current population and to draw more Jews to Israel is by creating a viable democratic state with a solid Jewish majority and an internal strength built upon equal rights, obligations and opportunities at the personal level, and unshakeable integrity by its leaders. This is what our children are being drafted this August to defend.

For 18 years, each parent lovingly and tenderly grows these flowers – but not to serve as cannon fodder for irrational and capricious ideologies of hypocritical and self-serving leaders.

A soldier is prohibited from refusing orders (unless, of course, they are ethically unacceptable) – and it is very important that this fundamental tenet be adhered to and enforced. It is one of the essential building blocks that provide democracies their strength and legitimacy when the majority decides which path the country will follow. But anyone who insists that Israel march steadily down the path to ruin should be aware of the fact that it is still not illegal to refuse to continue living in such a country. And if this hypothetical eventuality is ever realized, then who will serve in Gaza and the rest of the territories in order to carry out the will of the majority? Ask Eitam, Gafny and Cheetah.