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**Israel’s New Wretched Republic** - by Gideon Levy

On Tuesday, the Second Republic of Israel was born. It will be different
from its predecessor. The First Republic chalked up impressive
achievements, accompanied by lies and deceptions. The Second Republic will
dispense with any pretense.

The new Israel will no longer use disguises. When the ninth Israeli prime
minister puts together his fifth government, Israel will look different.
With victory at hand and growing confidence, Benjamin Netanyahu will be
able to declare the advent of the Second Republic, formed in his image.
Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. No one will be able to
claim again that this man hasn’t left his mark on the country and region.

The Second Republic will no longer hide anything taking place in its
backyard or try to pretty itself up. It will look exactly like it is. The
First Republic was characterized by a mixture of reality and deception: the
only democracy in the Middle East, but, at first, one with a military
government in Arab areas, then one with a military dictatorship in the
occupied territories.

It says it’s the darling of the free world, but it’s also the last colonial
regime in the world. It says it’s an esteemed member of the family of
nations, but it breaks almost every international law, and it doesn’t annex
occupied land so that it can create a false sense of impermanence. It takes
pride in this country’s rule of law and Supreme Court, but it has two
separate sets of laws based on nationality; it’s Jewish and democratic, but
with a built-in contradiction, an unbridgeable one.

All that is over. The next government will be a continuation of the
previous one, but stronger, more ultranationalist and racist, less
legitimate and democratic. And, it must be admitted, it will be a better
reflection of reality.

On Tuesday, voters said a resounding yes to this Israel. The choice wasn’t
as hard as it may have seemed: a choice between a government of generals,
which would have continued the masquerade to the applause of the world and
enlightened Israelis, or another Netanyahu government shaping Israel in its
image, without pretense or apologies.

Things will look different. The fire that began flickering during the
previous government will spread. The courts, the media, human rights groups
and the Arab community will quickly feel it firsthand. Some op-eds in this
paper will no longer be approved for publication, by law. It will be
forbidden, for example, to criticize Israeli soldiers. Anyone against?

It will be forbidden to support a boycott of Israel. Ben-Gurion Airport
will be even more closed to critics of the regime. Nonprofit groups will be
outlawed. Arabs will be excluded even more than they are now, on the road
to realizing the vision of a Jewish state with Jewish-only legislators. The
representation of Arabs in the Knessetmight already mirror their
representation at the Israel Electric Corporation. And of course, there’s
the annexation waiting around the corner.

That’s how it is when you face Likud; the only choice is to lose your path.
That’s how it is when the election is only about Netanyahu, for or against.
That’s how it is when the two major parties compete in their racist
statements against Arabs.

If there’s one place Benny Gantz has to go immediately, it’s to a town near
his home, Kafr Qasem, to bow his head and beg the forgiveness of this
country’s Arab citizens, whose representatives he has insulted. Gantz lost
his chance to win in part because he distanced himself from this community
and humiliated them as if they were lepers, just as Netanyahu did. The
revenge of the Arab voters is the punishment we all got.

Maybe it’s not punishment. Maybe the truth is preferable. Let the world see
and judge. Let liberal Israelis see and judge, deciding if it’s possible to
continue living complacently and in denial. Let them see in Europe and in
Ramat Hasharon, in the Democratic Party and in Ramat Aviv, as it all
continues.

Maybe the annexation of Area C in the West Bank without giving citizenship
to its Arab residents, the legislation of more nation-state laws, the
closing of nonprofit groups and the censorship of cultural institutions
will achieve what all the years of denial haven’t. Maybe this will finally
awaken the opposition that so few have desired over so many years.

Somehow, Haaretz carried no obituary after the election. But the day
before, a sweet illusion died. Maybe it’s for the best.