

From "Ensured Representation in the Political Sphere," by Galia Golan in Anat Maor, *Affirmative Action and Ensured Representation in Israel*, Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv, 2006.

"In Israel the idea of ensuring representation of women was traditionally part of the left-wing party ideologies (Labor, Mapam, Ratz, the Communists), although formal codification, implementation, or application to the lists for the Knesset were slow in coming even for these parties. With the emergence of feminist consciousness and moves towards gender equality in Israeli society, by the 1980's and especially the 1990's, women in most of the political parties had begun to press for greater, ensured representation. To some degree, a domino or copycat phenomenon was apparent, women in one party using the progress made by women in another party in order to press their demands. Contributing to this development was also the work of women's organizations such as the Israeli Women's Network (via their multi-party political committee which directly pressed parties to expand ensured representation of women), WIZO, Naamat, and Emunah.

While the parties on the left were receptive to minimal quotas for women (and often for other groups as well) in the various party bodies, they were far more resistant to quotas for the lists to the Knesset. Moreover, although party rules in most of these cases called for quotas, in practice they turned out to be targets. For example, the Labor Party long ruled a twenty per cent representation for women in all its elected bodies, including the list for the Knesset. This was increased to twenty-five per cent in 1997 and changes in the party's constitution called for five per cent increases over a period of years to reach forty per cent by 2015. There were, however, no stipulations regarding realistic places, (placement was determined by rules adopted for each election), and, as a result, the quota/target was never met. In the 1992 elections, when Labor introduced primaries for the first time, the women of the party secured agreement to a minimum quota of one woman in every ten on the list -- a move that did not even claim to target more than ten per cent. Nonetheless, this was a fortunate move, for not a single woman won a realistic place, and, due to quotas, one woman came in on a place reserved for the Jerusalem district, and the remaining three were bumped up. The situation repeated itself in the 1996 primaries, with all but one woman being bumped up, bringing to three, possibly four, the number of women in realistic places on the list. There were women in places 36, 40 and 44 but the party received only thirty-four seats in the elections. Had there not been ensured representation, women's representation in realistic places would have been reduced to just one. In the next elections, to the Fifteenth Knesset (1999), Labor agreed to two women in each ten, and four women entered the Knesset out of their total 26 seats -- of which once again, only one was elected, one came in on another quota, and two were bumped up. Clearly, the women had difficulty competing in the primaries with incumbent, better connected and wealthier male candidates. According to the plan adopted by the party at that time, the elections of 2003 were to have two women in the first ten, three in the next, then two, then three. The allocations determined by the party for the Sixteenth Knesset list, however, called for placement of two women in the first ten, one woman in the second, two in the third (ostensibly believing that the party would get thirty-three seats even though polls put them far lower), and two in the "unrealistic" fourth ten. This was not a flagrant deviation from the agreed placements, inasmuch as it was already known, before setting this rule, that there would also be women in the slots reserved for other groups. So indeed the final Labor list for the 2003 elections had women in places 6, 9, 16, 18, 22, 27, 29, 31, and 32, with the first five appearing to be "realistic" depending upon which poll results were taken into account. In the end, the party received only nineteen places in the elections to the Sixteenth Knesset. Thus the number of women Labor Knesset members, four, did not go beyond the party's usual number, but this did represent the highest percentage (21%) ever achieved by women in the Labor party. An unintended result, perhaps, but at least it can be said that ensured representation saved women at this time of Labor's nadir. (shfel)

In contrast to Labor and all other Israeli parties, Meretz and its forerunners Mapam and Ratz, were the only parties to place ensured representation as an ideological tenet to be genuinely enforced and at a significant level on the way to parity. Thus Mapam had a 40% quota for women in all its elected bodies, with the exception of the Knesset list, though they traditionally voted one woman to their Knesset list. The Constitution of Ratz had a 30% ruling for all elected bodies except the Knesset list, despite efforts within the party to extend this to the Knesset list. Ratz used a complicated nominating system whereby voters

selected clusters of 4 out of 5 candidates, with the obligation that one of the four be a woman. In this way two out of the nine members elected to the Knesset in 1996 were women. In 1999, when the Meretz list was chosen entirely together (Mapam, Ratz and part of Shinui) by the Meretz party's council and convention, the rule was three women in the first ten places, and five out of the first fifteen, with minimum quota adjustments to be made after the tally. No woman needed to be bumped up, but a fourth woman was bumped up from position 13 to 10 to fulfill the quota for Arabs. In the 2003 elections the rule was once again three out of the first ten, and four in the first twelve. The women (and many men) of Meretz had, however, pressed unsuccessfully for a 40% each gender minimum quota (and a zipper type of vote) -- measures they had in fact been advocating for many years. The women had also considered but rejected pressing for a minimum quota of two in the first five on the list. It was, however, expected that Meretz would once again receive ten mandates, so this measure was not demanded. This was unfortunate, for the unexpectedly poor election results left Meretz with just one woman MK out of a total of six. (The additional women had been in slot #9, and as a result of quota adjustments, slots 10 and 12.) The new party, Yahad, created by Meretz and the Shahar movement in 2004 placed a 40% each gender rule in its Constitution, for all organs of the party and elected offices -- now, including the Knesset list for the first time for any party in Israel. The system for placement in realistic places has yet to be worked out, but the women are pressing for the zipper mechanism.

The largest party on the right, the Likud, was traditionally opposed to quotas, but efforts on the part of Likud women, particularly after parties on the left generated publicity around their apparent efforts to increase women's representation in the 1990s, led to a change in attitude. With no formal quotas in any of their bodies or elections, the Likud decided for the 1996 elections to the Fourteenth Knesset to set a minimum quota of one woman in every 10 on their list for the Knesset. With the addition of Tzomet and Geshet to the Likud list, only slots 16 and 25 of realistic slots remained for the women -- filled without the need to make adjustments. In the 1999 elections, the Likud followed a similar pattern for quotas with one woman bumped up to slot #18 after the first two reached slots 4 and 7 by vote of the roughly 2000 strong Center. Three out of nineteen (15.8%) represented the largest number of women, in numbers and percentages, ever sent to the Knesset by the Likud (or its predecessors Herut and the Liberals), and since the party had probably expected to get more seats (they fell from 32 to 19 seats), the placement of a woman in the women's slot 25 may have been perceived to be realistic. That this was much more than a gradual trend was clear in the 2003 elections for the Sixteenth Knesset. Applying the same 1 in each 10 rules (slots 10, 20, 30) the election rules also gave slot 35 to a woman. In the end, five women, including the two ministers and deputy minister were placed in realistic slots, and two were bumped up so that the Knesset list had women in slots 6, 9, 11, 13, 17, 28, and 33 -- all of whom were elected when the Likud received 38 seats. Thus women represent 18% of the Likud MKs in the Sixteenth Knesset and when Israel b'Aliyah joined the Likud, one more woman, number three on that list, was added to the Likud faction. While this was an impressive number of women and unprecedented for the Likud, the women in the party intensified their struggle of many years to introduce compulsory quotas into the party takanon. Based on a written commitment made to them by the leadership of the party in 1999, the women have proposed amendments to the party constitution requiring a minimum quota of twenty-five per cent for all elected bodies of the party, including the Knesset list. Their proposed amendment for the Knesset list calls for 25% in each ten, specifically at least two women in the first ten, three in the second and third ten, and two in the fourth and three in all subsequent tens. Procedures have been detailed for achieving this, based on bumping up women if necessary.

No other party on the right or the left has ensured representation for their Knesset lists, although the National Religious Party (Mafdal), under great pressure from the party's women's organization, Emunah, did agree in 1999 to reserve the unrealistic slot number eight for a woman (the party won five places). Emunah actually had a long history of struggling for women to be placed on the Mafal list, and in five of the much earlier Knessets there had been a Mafdal woman member, the last time having been 1977. In the preparations for the 2003 elections, the Mafdal women pressed once again for representation -- in a realistic place, with no success. When the party Center, composed of 1100 men and 120 women, voted three women to unrealistic places, the women threatened to leave the party. There was the possibility that Emunah would run a list of its own (as it had, for the same reason, in the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem municipal elections of 1989). As a result of this threat, the party relented, placing a woman in what appeared to be the realistic, though borderline, number five slot. Since the party received six mandates,

the presence of one woman from Mafdal in the Knesset was restored, but no codification followed to ensure women's representation in the future.

The New List (Hadash, formerly Communist) long had a quota of 20% for women in all its elected bodies, but not its Knesset list. The party's 550 member Council had often placed a woman in a realistic seat, but this was not the case in 2003. Thus, without ensured representation there was no woman representative from Hadash elected to the sixteenth Knesset. The loss was not only numerical, for the woman who had been there from 1988 until 2003 was Tamar Gozansky, generally considered to have been an outstanding parliamentarian and dedicated feminist.

Without ensured representation Shinui brought three women into the Sixteenth Knesset. They were selected by the party's Council to slots 3, 8, and 12. Of these two, at most, were seen as realistic places, given the performance of the party in the past election. Shinui actually won an unexpected fifteen places, compared with six in the previous elections, bringing about the windfall for women. Nonetheless, at least one of the women elected, Eti Livni (no.12 on the list) had pressed for a quota system and, since this was defeated at every effort, she moved to get legislation in the Knesset on the matter. Two other parties that brought in one woman each without ensured representation of any kind were Israel b'Aliyah (the Russian immigrant party) and Am Ehad (an offshoot from Labor). From its inception in 1996 Israel b'Aliyah had placed one woman, Marina Solodkin, in a realistic slot on its list -- which meant that she was returned to the Knesset in 2003 despite the reduction of the party's Knesset size from six to just three. Am Ehad ran a woman in its number two slot place in the 2003 (none in 1999) in what was probably considered a realistic.

No other party elected to the Knesset in 2003 ran a woman in a realistic slot. Indeed none of the religious parties, aside from Mafdal, has ever run a woman, obviously because of their belief that women should not be in public life. The Arab parties have not been much better, never placing a woman in a realistic place, although some of the Arab parties have had women on their lists. The same may be said of the right wing parties that stood in the 2003 elections, with the exception, of course, of the Likud.

The steps taken by the parties have increased the number of women in the Knesset, but they still have not brought women's representation to any where near a critical mass, much less parity. Moreover, with the exception of Meretz and its successor Meretz-Yahad, no party has adopted formal measures that would come anywhere near to leveling the playing field for women. For this reason, there have been a number of private bills proposed by Knesset members (all but one by women). Three tactics were chosen: change in the election law, change in the law on parties, and change in the law for party financing. There were variations between the proposals, though the over-all thrust was to guarantee at least thirty to forty per cent of all, including realistic, places to women, using minimum quotas in each five, six or ten places on a party's list (depending on the bill). A more conservative proposal merely seeks to change the nominating body (for parties that do not conduct totally open primaries), to require that the nominating body consist of no less than one-third women. It was clear, however, that such bills would have little chance of passage given the ideological position of the religious parties (with the exception of Mafdal), namely opposition to women in public life. For this reason, the French device of penalizing via cuts in party financing was eschewed. Instead, a group of women MKs in the Fifteenth Knesset proposed that parties that did include two women in the first six places and equal representation in every following six places would receive extra funding. Thus an incentive rather than a punishment was proposed in hopes that non-religious parties could be mobilized to support the bill without having to bend to an argument based on religious conscience. The explanation of the law referred not only to the principle of equality as such but also to the principle of equal opportunity and, also, the need for women's interests to be represented. There was no guarantee such a law, if passed, would in fact change the situation, given the parties' choice (as in France) to comply or not. It was important, however, if the law were passed, to have codification of these principles and the targets, if not compulsory quotas, of near parity. Slightly different, still more progressive bills were tabled in the Sixteenth Knesset. Calling for forty per cent representation in every group of five, a qualifying list would receive double financing for every women elected to the Knesset from its list. To date, none of the bills passed preliminary readings; some never even reached that stage.

Despite the failures thus far to pass legislation, these attempts do represent a significant move toward change in Israeli political culture. They represent not only acceptance of the idea of women in politics and recognition of women's blatant under-representation. They also acknowledge the disadvantaged position of women in politics and, therefore, seek positive steps through ensured representation by law, rather than the alternative of waiting, possibly in vain, for the political parties to implement gender equality. Ensured representation is generally perceived as a temporary measure, necessary until such time as women will have opportunities equal to those of men. However, it will take much more than legislation to fully level the playing field for women, in politics as in society in general. The political arena was created and built by men, suited by design or otherwise, in Israel possibly even more than elsewhere, to the background, interests, resources and customs of men. Therefore, what is needed is systemic change, beyond ensured representation (quotas). And that change may come, like ensured representation itself, through increased women's action and influence in the political sphere."

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