



Middle Israel

By AMOTZ ASA-EL

Israel's next elite

Like the whale and the bull, combat pilots and Supreme Court justices seldom meet – except in Israel. Here, the somber, bookish and understated people of the black robes meet the young, zesty and daring people of the grey overalls as equal members of this country's unique elite.

This elite has brought together over the years farmers, scientists, authors and poets in addition to the generals, politicians, academicians and plutocrats that elites ordinarily assemble elsewhere. This month, however, the Air Force said that for the first time in its history its graduating class of pilots will include not one kibbutznik. Evidently, our elite is changing.

In the past, the kibbutz has bred much of that elite. Motti Hod, the commander of the Air Force in its finest hour, the Six Day War, was born and raised in Deganya, the first kibbutz. Behind him lurked a whole generation of kibbutzniks whose share among the combat pilots was far higher than their share in the overall population.

Now that's history. Gone are the days when every cabinet included kibbutzniks, and gone are the times when kibbutzniks felt superior. And it's not that they've lost the urge to serve in the IDF's most demanding units: go to the Jezreel Valley and you'll see that the local 12th graders are still volunteering for the Naval Commando, Sayeret

Matkal, Shaldag and Pilots School. It's just that Israeli society has diversified so dramatically that the elite units and the command posts in the rest of the combat units are now dense with new populations, from the modern Orthodox and the so-called Russians to the Druse and the Ethiopians.

It follows that the IDF, despite eventually feeding the civilian elite – is itself not elitist: it brings in new blood and does not nurture a hereditary nobility. Look at that and you'll understand why no French Revolution is in the making here: people here climb, advance and reach, and nobility – namely a hereditary class out to preserve its hereditary clout – is nowhere to be seen.

Nowhere, that is, except in one place from which, according to a new book, the old elite is waging an effort to preserve its power.

MENI MAUTNER probably didn't vote United Torah Judaism.

A former Fulbright Scholar at Yale and dean of Tel Aviv University's Law School who prides himself on having pioneered its affirmative action policy, he is light-years apart from the reactionaries who ordinarily lead the

charge on the judiciary.

And yet Mautner now warns that the black gowns have been struggling since 1977 to preserve the founding Israeli elite's lost power. That year marked the decline of a hegemony, he told *Yediot Aharonot's* Tova Tzimuki, as "the liberal, secular and Western oriented group lost its control of culture and politics" in the wake of Labor's first electoral defeat ever.

In his book, *The Decline of Formalism and the Rise of Values in Israeli Law Elites*, Mautner argues that the founding elite responded to its loss of control over the legislature by activating the judiciary, which shared the founding elite's values. That is why the courts elbowed their way into any aspect of our life, including strictly tactical security issues that should be none of their business, and that is why they assumed in 1995 the liberty to annul the Knesset's laws. The founding elite, says Mautner, did this instead of engaging in the hard work of political persuasion. That is why the judges held their grip on the High Court's hiring process.

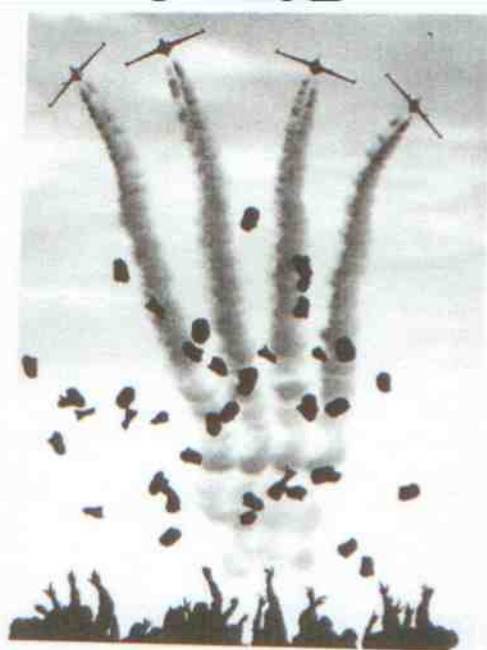
All this means that the elite is being squeezed right now by contradictory processes, with fresh social forces rising from below in places like Pilots School while old forces resist them from above in places like the High Court of Justice. Now one question arises: Where in all this was the elite that was supposed to replace Labor the day it lost power?

And the tragic answer is that Labor's successor never produced an elite. Instead, it produced an establishment.

ISRAEL'S FOUNDING elite survived as long as it did because beside wielding power it also had convictions, an avant-garde and an ethos of personal example.

My wife's class once arrived in Kibbutz Deganya Aleph from their southern kibbutz, to play some kind of treasure hunt. Having been assigned with finding former Knesset speaker Kadish Luz, they ran into an 80-year-old man in blue khakis slowly pushing a wheelbarrow, and asked him: "Do you know where we can find Kadish Luz?" The old man carefully lowered the wheelbarrow to the ground, stood as if greeting a particularly distinguished entourage and then said through his wrinkled cheeks and parched lips: "I am Kadish Luz."

In its good years, Labor had hundreds, probably thousands of such characters, people who demanded little for themselves, gave their all and everything to the state and collectively constituted a "serving elite," one that admired farmers, created a naively egalitarian



Pilot School graduation. Israel's new society is taking over. (IDF Spokesman)

tarian economy and sent its children to the IDF's most demanding units.

And that elite also had priests, people like Berl Katzenelson, Yitzhak Tabenkin, Meir Ya'ari, Natan Alterman and Yizhar Smilanski. You could have liked or hated them, but they were the elite – if not the embodiment of Nietzsche's and Plato's larger-than-life visions of this concept, then at least of modern political science's observation that power is usually driven by elites while the masses are ordinarily passive.

Surely, Labor's elite also created an establishment, an octopus of agencies that controlled budgets, jobs and projects, all of which increasingly came at the expense of ideas, beliefs, solidarity and personal example. From there the road to corruption and decline was short.

The Likud, in its turn, made a shortcut. Though Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir were ascetics of the old, serving-elite school, they were surrounded from the onset by the pickpockets and leeches with whom we have by now become all too familiar. These people were never in the business of building an elite; they just wanted an establishment, a power-and-perk brokerage where they could all travel, earn, boast and embezzle, all at our expense. That is why when these "leaders" need an idea, they are at such a loss that they turn to PR offices.

WHOEVER ENDS up succeeding the current government will have to understand that neither he nor she nor even the High Court will be able to halt the rise of the new Israeli elite.

To get a glimpse of tomorrow's elite, they can lift a cockpit in Pilots School, attend a philosophy class at Mt. Scopus, enter a lab at the Weizmann Institute, join a brainstorming session in a Herzliya startup or read the authors' names along a Steimatzky outlet's main shelf. People like these will sooner or later oust the barbarians who have led the hostile takeover of the Jewish state. If it doesn't want to end up in the drain where its predecessors are headed, our next leadership will have to voluntarily help the new elite in.

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