



MERCAZ: #2 IN ZIONIST POLL

MERCAZ USA, although down from 33 to 25 mandates, still scored an important success in the recent American Zionist poll, rising to become the second largest party among the 11 slates running in the election.

While trailing ARZA's 55 mandates, MERCAZ bested both the Orthodox slate, the leftist "HaTikva" and rightist ZOA slates and several new groupings representing Russian Jewish Americans, Orthodox students and SHAS. In addition, with a planned political faction being envisaged comprising the new Zionist Spring Party, the "Confederation", HaNoar HaTzioni and the Israeli Yesh Atid Party, MERCAZ should become one of the key players at the international Jewish parliament taking place this October in Jerusalem.

MERCAZ USA looks forward to sending a delegation with 25 delegates and nearly 50 alternate delegates including the required 25% youth leaders (ages 18-35) and 30% women to join MERCAZ and Masorti Olami participants from Israel and elsewhere around the world. The weeklong program in Jerusalem will include a Shabbat get-together, a visit to Masorti institutions, orientation meetings and the 3-day Zionist Congress.



MERCAZ President Janet Tobin with Yehuda Yaakov, Israel's Consul General to New England. The next MERCAZ Israel Advocacy conference will take place Sunday, November 8th in the Greater Philadelphia area. Go to the MERCAZ USA website for more information.

The Darkness Before the Dawn: Israel's Majority VS Orthodox Minority

There is a popular saying that the darkest hour is always just before the dawn. Looking at recent events concerning religious pluralism in Israel, things certainly appear darker today than before. But a new poll indicates that a majority of Israelis are in favor of a new dawn in the Jewish State.

The darkness began this past May when the Likud Mayor of Rehovot Rachamim Malul, originally of the ultra-Orthodox SHAS Party, cancelled a planned Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony for children with special needs because it was to be held at the Masorti synagogue in town. The mayor's decision took all by surprise as similar services had been taking place in the past in Rehovot at the same Masorti congregation with no protest.

And later, when negotiations followed to move the disputed ceremony from Rehovot to the President of Israel's official residence in Jerusalem, President Reuven Rivlin – he or his staff – turned around and refused to permit the Masorti rabbi of Rehovot to take part in the service, ostensibly on the grounds that the President's Residence should not be involved in "controversial" situations.

At the same time, the Chief Rabbinate and its supporters in the new government of Prime Minister Netanyahu have been out to reverse whatever small steps had been taken towards religious pluralism during the two years of the previous coalition. First of all, the new government voted to repeal the regulation which would have allowed municipal rabbis to set up independent conversion courts without the permission and supervision of the Chief Rabbinate. Secondly, the government reversed the decision to move the rabbinical courts to the jurisdiction of the secular Justice Ministry and returned them back to the SHAS-held Religious Affairs Ministry.

Add to these acts the attempt to disqualify American-born modern Orthodox Rabbi Shlomo Riskin from a 5-year extension as Chief Rabbi of Efrat and to prevent a Masorti rabbi from participating in an Orthodox-sponsored community event for Shavuot in Tel Aviv, (both acts were fortunately unsuccessful) and it is indeed a darker hour than before.

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