

## A Window to Understanding

Rabinowitz Danny

Haaretz Op-Ed, June 12 2001

The Or Commission is the most senior government body so far to have dealt with the Arab sector and its status in Israel, and justifiably so: The commission is investigating the most severe civilian incidents ever to have taken place in the country. The killing of the 13 Arab demonstrators in October 2000, which was spread over 10 days, was not a localized incident that got out of hand and led to complications. Built into it was a dangerous mechanism of feedback, in which each lethal response by the police swept the demonstrators up into a militant escalation, triggering a counter-reaction. This chain reaction will probably be analyzed carefully in the commission's report.

But beyond the seniority of the commission and the severity of the incidents under its investigation, it is today the only government body involved in serious, profound and long-range thinking on the issue of the Arab minority in Israel. Anger is a bad adviser, and since the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada, there is almost no good will left in the Jewish mainstream in Israel, either toward the Palestinians in the territories or toward the Arabs in Israel.

Ministers and senior officials in the ministries that influence the life of Arabs in Israel are in a state of paralyzed inactivity. Even those among them who realize that the situation of the Arab minority in Israel reflects on Israeli society as a whole, have not bothered to initiate a serious discussion of the issue.

The commission of inquiry, which in some of its proceedings hinted that it is not rejecting such subjects out of hand, can be an important catalyst. Even if it doesn't formulate clear answers to critical questions, one must hope at least that it won't avoid placing those questions on the public agenda.

The events of October 2000 transferred the issue of the Arab population in Israel from the margins to center stage, and confronted the Jewish majority with a serious dilemma. Is it proper for the state to observe its Arab citizens through the binoculars of the dominant power, which in extreme cases are replaced by the sight of a sniper's rifle? Or would it be a better idea to work toward rapprochement, by offering them a true and full civic partnership? This is in great part the dilemma hovering over the discussions of the Or Commission, and the question of which solution will be chosen is arousing the interest of many people outside the state of Israel as well.

State commissions of inquiry have a tendency to discuss issues brought

[זויכראב שופיח](#)

[תובתכ תשיכר](#)

[עדימ זויכראה לע](#)

[נובשה בצמ](#)

[המסיס יוניש](#)

[תוריש](#)

[תובוגת](#)

[המסיס יתחכש](#)

before them with tools taken from management theory. They ask themselves questions about the "functioning of the system" and about compatibility between the actions taken and the goals of the organization, the law and the rules of administration. Did senior officials see what was coming? Did they keep abreast of information and analyze it properly? Did they make the proper transition from planning to implementation? Did they respond effectively in time, ascertain implementation, learn lessons?

This sort of thinking usually gives rise to bureaucratization and legal hair-splitting on the question of responsibility. That in itself is not illegitimate, on condition that it doesn't lead to avoidance of a decision based on values. The systems being investigated by the Or Commission, foremost among them the Israel Police, make fateful decisions. In doing so, they reflect the values-based decisions of their leaders, as well as those of the state which sent them.

The tendency to stick to mechanical administrative solutions is likely to leave these decisions hidden from view, to keep them out of the discussion. That is destructive and dangerous: Even when they are kept quiet, these decisions continue to guide the organization, and their consequences will be apparent during the next crisis.

Whatever its conclusions, the Or Commission will not bring the young people who died back to life, and will not remove all the poison recently injected into relations between the majority and the minority in Israel.

Most of the Jewish public will continue to consider it a superfluous move designed to placate the Arabs, and will be interested primarily in the question of which politician will be harmed by it. The Arab public, which continues to relate to the commission with suspicion, will find it hard to see its conclusions as representing objective justice.

We can only hope that the rich gathering of facts gleaned by the commission will encourage it to use the unnecessary deaths of 13 people as a window to understanding profound processes that are determining the character of our society.