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*Israelis go to the polls November 11, deciding on city councils and mayors. Inside, Tel Aviv candidates lobby for your vote and we present the choices from Nahariya to Eilat*

**Let the voting begin!**



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Artificial Grass

## Dov Henin, head of City for Us All

• By Jesse Fox

**D**ov Henin is not the typical Israeli politician. A veteran environmentalist, Henin gets around the city by bus or on his bike. He shows up for our interview at a small coffee shop in northern Tel Aviv casually dressed and on foot.

A human rights lawyer with a doctorate in political science, Henin served as Chairman of Life and Environment, the umbrella organization of Israel's environmental movement, for three years prior to being elected to the Knesset. Though he comes from a political family (Henin's father was one of the leaders of Maki, the Israeli Communist Party), Henin has been in politics for only two years.

As a Knesset Member from the Jewish-Arab Hadash party, Henin has been instrumental in passing environmental legislation. Together with Rabbi Michael Melchior, he heads the Knesset's Social-Environmental Lobby, a group of 40 lawmakers that promotes progressive legislation.

The party he heads, City for Us All (*Ir Le' Kulanu*), is one of the alternatives to the policies of incumbent mayor Ron Huldai.

### What is City for Us All?

Well, City for Us All is really a fascinating phenomenon. It is a kind of urban movement that was created in Tel Aviv over the past year by people who were involved in different struggles on the municipal level, and came to realize that they all have something in common.

We created this very unique, multi-party movement. Most of the people involved aren't members of political parties at all, though some are members of various parties. But we have a strong and well-developed opinion on the problems of the city and we want to put forward an alternative to what is going on in Tel Aviv-Jaffa right now.

### What is your vision for Tel Aviv? What can we expect after five years under your leadership?

Tel Aviv-Jaffa is a fascinating city. It's a really interesting, intense, good place to be. But there are very grave dangers that are hanging over Tel Aviv right now.

First of all, we would like to have a transportation revolution in the city. We should have a very modern, efficient public transportation system here. Otherwise we'll continue with the present transportation crisis. You know, people don't have a place to park their cars, there are terrible traffic jams and air pollution. We shouldn't continue to wait around for an underground train system. There are different solutions for public transportation systems based on rapid, clean, modern buses that could really change the transport situation.

Another very important problem is housing. Many young people are driven out of the city because they can't really afford to continue living here. This is

another area where the municipality can be involved and make a difference.

Of course, the Tel Aviv Municipality does not create market forces, but we believe that the city should not just swim along with the current, we believe it should swim against the stream. [This can be done,] for instance, by building flats that are more suitable to the population here. Most households in the city are very small, so people need smaller flats, cheaper flats, and not the very luxury giant flats that are being built in these towers that [current Mayor] Ron Huldai is encouraging.

So the municipality, using smart urban planning policy, can change the crisis of demand that is driving up housing prices. We should also use the municipality's own housing companies to build affordable housing. The city can encourage different affordable housing schemes; it is possible, it is being done in different places around the world, and Tel Aviv is very suitable for such programs.

Another is the issue of democracy and openness. Some people say that the city is being run like an army barracks, with the mayor as commander, where the people's

Aviv that will persuade the average Israeli to leave his car at home, avoid using it in the city, and instead use public transport. This is the key. Our policy on transport is first of all public transportation and then bicycles, at the expense of the private car.

**In recent years, skyscrapers have been appearing all over the city, and much criticism has been leveled against them. Does the city have a policy regarding tall buildings? Are there places where skyscrapers are inappropriate?**

There are places where we can build skyscrapers, for example along the Ayalon Highway. Where you have a rapid transportation system that can serve these huge buildings, it is possible to build skyscrapers. We do not oppose skyscrapers on principle. But the current administration is building skyscrapers all over the city. And in places where the structures are very low and dense, such a tower is a social, environmental and transportation disaster. That we will surely avoid.

**Do you have any plans to make the city's bureaucracy less onerous and more functional for citizens and local business owners?**

tions, struggles, people with ideas, is really a very important resource for the city. So we should see ourselves as very lucky that we have all these kinds of energy in the city. We should really embrace all of these organizations and movements.

The current administration really views these organizations and activities as some kind of obstacle. The mayor has his own ideas, and there are these very strange green people who come and make things difficult. It's very wrong to view things this way.

**Tel Aviv is also home to some of the country's most powerful business interests. How do you plan to garner their support for the new party?**

Well, we're not a party, we are a movement. But our movement deals mainly with small businesses. These are very important in the city, and we should protect the small shops and cafés in the street, because this is part of what makes the city a city. If we don't preserve them, there's a danger that businesses will leave the city for all kinds of complexes outside the city.

### How can that be done?

We should encourage small cafés in different parts of the city, not only in the north, but also in the south. Small enterprises can really make a big change in the total overall atmosphere of these neighborhoods, without putting much money into it.

**You are a member of the Hadash Party, and you have been characterized as a communist and even an anti-Zionist. How would you characterize your political worldview?**

Well, of course I'm from the Left. I'm a member of Hadash, which is a Jewish-Arab political movement. And my worldview is socialist and universalist, and I am for peace with the Palestinians as well as with the Syrians. All these issues are very important, and of course I have my opinions, which are not a secret, but these are not the issues being voted on in Tel Aviv.

So when people tell me, 'you are for peace with Syria,' I tell them this is correct. Of course I'm for peace with Syria, with all the implications that this entails for the Golan Heights and so on. But with all due respect, this is not something that the Tel Aviv-Jaffa Municipality will decide.

When people speak about Zionism, what they understand is very different. Is it a specific ideology or is it a way of saying that someone is a patriot? Of course I'm an Israeli patriot. I love my country. As an environmentalist, I defend my country against all kinds of threats; from businesspeople, for example, who would like to tear it apart.

When my opponents try to divert the discussion from the issues on the agenda in Tel Aviv to grand ideology, I think that they are afraid of debating the real issues here in the city.



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opinions do not really count. In our view, the most important thing in the city is not the streets and the buildings, but the people and the communities. Ron Huldai is not attentive, at all, to the needs of the communities in the city.

Another very important issue is education, which is also connected with the issue of equality between north and south Tel Aviv.

### What can be done to make transportation in the city more efficient?

One very important legal tool is a new change in the Transportation Law. This was one of my initiatives, as a member of the Knesset, which gives local authority a clear and wide mandate in dealing with transport in the city, in order to reduce air pollution. With legal tools like this one we can really make a revolution in the city.

What we plan to do is to make rapid routes open for public transport. We would like to change the bus system, which can be done relatively cheaply, and create a network of rapid buses all over Tel

Well, the strangest thing of all is that if you want to build a 40-story tower, it will be [approved] much quicker than if you want to close the small balcony in your apartment. That is very strange, and we cannot accept that situation. We should create different fields of approval for different plans. The smaller issues should be dealt with in a simple, quick fast-track. When we deal with the big plans, the discussion should be much deeper and much more serious, and would certainly take much more time.

**Tel Aviv is home to some of the country's most active and influential environmental groups, many of whom have quite a lot to say about the city's development, but feel like they are always fighting an uphill battle. How would you, as mayor, relate to environmental groups and neighborhood organizations?**

This is a very, very important issue. I think that what you refer to, that Tel Aviv is very rich with many kinds of organiza-

## Doron Sapir, No. 2 in Mayor Ron Huldai's Tel Aviv 1 Party

• By Jesse Fox

**D**oron Sapir holds the No. 2 position in Mayor Ron Huldai's Tel Aviv 1 Party, and has been a prominent figure in Huldai's administration. He has held the key positions of chairman of the Local Committee for Planning and Construction and manager of Hiriya, a former garbage dump which is slated to become part of an enormous metropolitan park in the future.

**Tel Aviv's mass transit system has been stuck in the pipeline for years, and many blame Mayor Ron Huldai. Is one man holding up the entire project? When will Tel Aviv have a decent public transportation system?**

If the subject were under the authority of the city, I'm sure work would have been started on the system at least two years ago. The problem is that transportation issues are decided by the Transportation Ministry and the central government, along with government companies like NETA, which is planning the mass transit system for Metropolitan Tel Aviv.

Currently, the Transportation Minister determines everything. I'm convinced that these authorities need to be in the hands of the cities themselves. And by the way, the transportation laws were passed during the British Mandate. It's time to give more authorities to the local governments, or at least the large ones like Tel Aviv that have proven themselves.

**What about the recent amendment to the Transportation Law, which gives local authorities more powers in transportation planning?**

I am not familiar with that amendment.

**The past 10 years have seen enormous investments in the city's roads, highways, interchanges and parking lots, despite significant public resistance. Isn't this kind of car-oriented urban development policy an anachronism?**

Not at all. In fact, quite the opposite. Even in the future, when we have a mass transit system, we will still need good roads, infrastructure and parking lots. Once the subway is built, though, we will be able to lower parking minimums in new buildings [the amount of new parking spots which developers are required to build].

Even in New York, which has an excellent subway system, the roads are still very significant. Tel Aviv is an attractive city, and a lot of traffic enters the city, including people who live here and people who come here just to work. The high demand for parking and roads are a result of the city's attractiveness.

**To what extent is public participation in decision-making a priority for Ron Huldai's administration?**

I am glad you ask. The agendas and protocols of all of our meetings are open to the public, and are published on the Internet. Anyone can come and attend our meetings. Three months ago, we approved a decision on new procedures for public participation in decision-making, which we drew up in cooperation with the green organizations in a two-year process.

Right now we are preparing a Master Plan for the city, with the participation of the public. And all of this is being done according to the "City Vision" document, which we formulated three years ago with the participation of all kinds of stakeholders.

**Skyscraper construction has encountered fierce resistance among the city's residents, especially in places where the existing urban fabric consists of low-rise, historical buildings. Why hasn't the city drawn up a clear policy regarding the construction of tall buildings, defining where exactly they can be built?**

There is a policy that no additional skyscrapers will be built in the "White City," the historical part of the city between Arlosoroff and Allenby, which has been recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. However, we think that Tel Aviv, if it does not build up, will die. There is huge demand for housing and prices are going up all the time. When residential apartment towers are built, people move there from other places, which frees up those apartments. I believe that the more we build tall buildings in the city, the more we'll bring down housing prices and thus create affordable housing.

**Do you believe it is correct to build 40-story buildings in historic neighborhoods, such as Neveh Tzedek and Jaffa?**

No. We're not building very tall buildings in Neveh Tzedek. Historical mistakes were made in [former mayor] Roni Milo's era, before Ron Huldai was elected mayor, and the skyscraper that was recently built [just outside Neveh Tzedek] is one of these mistakes. The building is not appropriate for its surroundings, and it is quite ugly. The skyscrapers, or tall buildings, that are planned for the area of Eilat Street are going to go up closer to Allenby and Nahalat Binyamin, and will be more a part of the urban fabric of the Rothschild area, the city's central business district. Regarding these towers near Neveh Tzedek that were approved in the past, all we can do is to try to fix the mistakes of the past, and build in a way that is more appropriate to the architectural context.

**The city recently came out with a plan to build affordable housing for young people and families. However, most of the housing built during Mayor Huldai's term has been large, luxury apartments. How sincere is Huldai's commitment to providing affordable housing in the city?**

Our plan is to increase the supply of affordable housing in two ways: building taller buildings and requiring affordable apartments in new construction projects. Tall buildings free up older apartments. Some 60-65% of the people who buy apartments in new residential towers are coming from somewhere else in Tel Aviv, and their former apartments increase the supply of the housing market. We are also trying in new projects, especially in the south of the city, to build cheaper apartments.

But we can't forget that Tel Aviv is really a well-off city, and the city cannot always regulate these things, nor does it have the authority to regulate rental prices. It can initiate projects with more apartments set aside for

young couples and renters. I know what it is to take on a mortgage and have to pay it every month, it's not a simple thing. But the answer is to increase the supply by building taller buildings. We can either build low-rise buildings at the expense of open spaces, or we can build up. All claims to the contrary are cheap demagoguery.

**Hundreds of families in Jaffa and Kfar Shalem face eviction and demolition orders because the government defines them as "squatters." Why hasn't the city intervened on behalf of its residents with the central government?**

How can it intervene? I don't really know the story, I've never heard of anyone being thrown out of their home in Jaffa.

**What steps must be taken in Tel Aviv in light of the world economic and ecological crises? Which other world cities could serve as development models for the city?**

Tel Aviv can learn from Tel Aviv, and from what has been done here over the past eight or nine years, since the beginning of the crisis in the local authorities. Today, Tel Aviv has a solid financial standing. We have a AAA credit rating, thanks to responsible financial management. Tel Aviv 1's team, and Ron Huldai himself, have taken responsibility and taken a leadership role in putting order in the city's finances.

**And the ecological crisis?**

That question is too easy for me. I have been involved in reducing greenhouse emissions as part of my job as manager of Hiriya, where we prevent the emission of 60,000 tons of carbon a year. Until a few years ago, gas from the dump site was emitted into the atmosphere and contributed to global warming. Now that [same] methane is trapped, neutralized and transported by pipeline to a factory in Azur, where it is used to create the energy that powers the plant.

We're also working on a project to capture the gas emitted from household waste and use it to fuel vehicles. An Israeli company, with support from abroad, is working on a plan for this, and is waiting for approval from the Interior Ministry. The plan is to power 800 cars owned by the local authorities in Gush Dan.



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