

Israeli politician-author fights for women's rights



Shulamit Aloni, a member of the Israeli Knesset, has spent many years fighting for the civil rights of women. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)

A member of parliament in a country where religion and law mix, Shulamit Aloni fights to gain a separation of church and state in Israel.

She voiced some of her views last weekend before the 10th annual meeting of the Society for Humanistic Judaism at The Birmingham Temple, Farmington Hills.

By moving for the severing of church and state, she hopes to gain equal rights for women and the 12 ethnic groups that live in the country. She's involved in a political system which she says gives women equal legal status while keeping their personal status secondary to men.

"In civil law we have an equal vote. We can be elected to office. Professionally, the sky's the limit."

"We have two women on our Supreme Court, which is more than you have here," she said.

Her argument is with the established orthodox clergy in Israel that controls laws affecting the personal status of women.

In her personal life, an Israeli woman is secondary to her husband, according to Mrs. Aloni.

"I am both my husband's property and a member of the Knesset," she said.

The orthodox clergy controls such aspects of personal life as divorce.

A DIVORCE sanctioned by the clergy and religion is recognized, but a civil divorce is not.

"A woman may consider herself single, but she is not if she obtained a civil divorce," she said.

In addition to curtailing the personal freedom of women, Mrs. Aloni charges that the orthodox clergy in power discriminates against some of the 12 different ethnic groups which live in the country. Jews, Moslems and Christians make up the three most sizable groups. Inter-marriage between ethnic groups isn't allowed, a measure which Mrs. Aloni views as taking away the right of persons to choose their own spouses.

She has lectured against this dual view of civil rights through her column in the afternoon daily newspaper, "Yediot Aharonot" and in the weekly "Woman."

In addition she has written several books about the laws that govern the country, including "Women as Human Beings," "The Rights of the Child in Israel," and "The Arrangement," which deals with the question of religion versus state.

She blames the elected government officials for the continuation of this dual view.

"In a new country, it's not unusual to find that the persons who wrote the bill

of rights are ahead of the rest of the people," she said.

"IN ISRAEL we have the opposite," she said.

Instead of reflecting the concerns of Israeli women, she claims the political and religious establishment have shunted aside the question of equal personal rights.

When leading religious parties formed a coalition, the issue of women's rights was sacrificed for harmony between the groups and a chance at gaining more political power, she said.

Women's personal rights were again sacrificed for Israel's overriding concern for defense.

"While defense went first, the religious parties grabbed the rights," she said.

The orthodox religious groups she challenges are viewed by her as "nar-

row minded" and "living in a vacuum."

"I am against the monopolizing of our life by the totally orthodox established clergy," she said.

Instead she wants to remove that clergy from wielding secular religious power. Separation of church and state would help guarantee the rights of the country's citizens, she said.

"It's the duty of government to safeguard the rights of every person to worship in the way they like — or not to worship at all."

LEGISLATION to accomplish this and secure equal personal rights for women was shot down in the Knesset by a vote of 40 in agreement and 80 against, she said.

But she savors a small victory in the fact that she managed to garner 40 votes when colleagues told her she wouldn't gain any support.

Goalie honored for good grades

Doug Nowels of Farmington Hills recently received the Ferris State College President's and dean's award for academic excellence.

He was given the honors by Warner Forsyth, member of the Athletic Advisory Committee.

Nowels is a goalie on the Ferris

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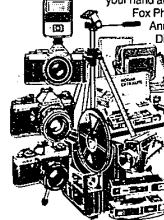
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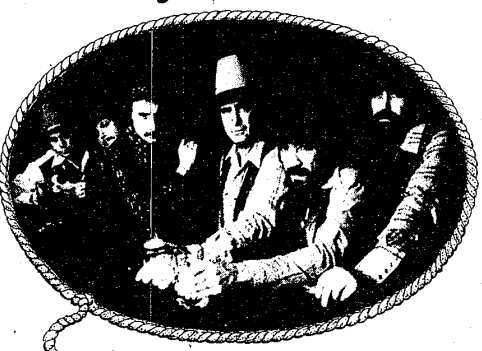


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