Chapter Three: Improving the Effectiveness of Existing Levers for Entry into the Labor Market

Encouraging the integration of different sectors in the labor market is not a problem that is unique to Israel alone. Broad participation of citizens in the labor market guarantees the robustness of any economy, yet, in many countries there were (and still are) sectors that are traditionally underrepresented in the labor market. This has led, over the past fifty years, to the development of special programs to address this specific problem.

In Israel, there are two areas under the auspices of the state that could be used as levers to encourage employment among the Ultra-Orthodox public: the first is **military and national-civic service**, and the second is **economic policy**, as expressed by incentives and supports. A third area that has not yet attracted sufficient attention is the employment of Ultra-Orthodox **women**.

Military Service and National-Civic Service

One of the main levers used by the government to integrate the Ultra-Orthodox into the military has been the Tal Law, which offers a special military or civic service track to the Ultra-Orthodox public. Today, almost ten years after its legislation, many summarize the implementation of this Law as "a decade of failure."[27] At the same time, others consider it to be the beginning of a positive process.[28] It seems that a more detailed examination of the subject is in order.

Many countries use military service as a lever for entry into mainstream society. The most salient example is naturally the United States, where military service – through the **G.I. Bill**[29] – is a popular way for members of the weaker strata to gain an academic education and improve themselves socio-economically.[30]

From the start, the **Tal Committee** (or under its proper name "The Committee to Consolidate the Proper Arrangement on the Subject of Recruiting Yeshiva Students")

[27] "Tal Committee – A Decade of Failure", Shahar Ilan, *De Marker*, 6.4.2010
[28] "The Tal Law Created a Revolution in the Ultra-Orthodox Sector," Channel 7, 7.6.2009, http://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/190241
[29] See, for example, http://www.gibill.va.gov/
[30] See, for example, Meredith Kleykamp, M. A Great Place to Start?: The Effect of Prior Military Service on Hiring. Armed Forces & Society, January 2009; vol. 35, 2: pp. 266-285.

did not intend to solve the employment problem of Ultra-Orthodox society. It did not even aspire to find an absolute solution to the problem of the inequality of the Ultra-Orthodox community. The goals the Committee set (through interpretation of its formal letter of appointment) were:

1. Finding an **applicable and practical** solution (to the problem of recruiting Yeshiva students), not a theoretical one.
2. Creating a **trend** of reducing the existing **alienation and polarization** between the non-religious and the Ultra-Orthodox (my emphases – **R.G.**).

Accordingly, the Committee recommended (and its recommendations were put into Law) that when a Yeshiva student under the status of "his studies constitute his livelihood" is 22 years old, he will be given a decision year, during which he will be able to choose whether to continue with his studies or go to work. Those who choose to work are able to decide between shortened military service (of one year and four months and reserve service according to the military needs), and national-civic service of one year, without pay and with the possibility of being employed elsewhere at the same time. In addition, the Committee recommended extending the frameworks of military service, such as *Nahal Haredi* (a separate infantry battalion designated for Ultra-Orthodox soldiers) and enforcing the law more strictly on those who have this status.

The assumption underlying the work of the Tal Committee members was that the **implementation of the law would gradually lead to increased recruitment of Yeshiva students to military or civic service and, as a result, the possibility of joining the labor market would be open to them and they would be even more exposed to and integrated into mainstream Israeli society.** Recognizing that their compromising recommendations did not stand the test of equality and absolute justice, the committee members themselves noted that "*The Committee's recommendations should be viewed as the beginning of a long walk… and only at its end will the desired outcome show up - and be accepted by everyone - of involvement also on part of the Ultra-Orthodox public in all spheres of life, defense and work."*

The application of the Tal Law was also very gradual: in the first five years after it was passed in the Knesset, the Law remained practically a "dead letter". Neither the IDF nor the relevant government offices took any actual initiative to implement it. Only towards the end of 2007 (which was also the end of the 5 years allocated to this Law) did the