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‘Black market, blue uniform: Policing the Austerity Regime in Israel, 1950-51’

The proposed paper will examine the police role in enforcing "The Austerity Regime (*Mishtar hatzena*) in Israel during 1950-1951.

During the early 1950s, the recently formed State of Israel faced an extreme economic crisis. The 1948 war, the severing of economic ties with neighboring countries, and the need to integrate massive numbers of Jewish refugees from Europe, Asia, and North Africa, caused a severe budgetary deficit. Facing the need to provide food, housing, and medical care for its rapidly-growing population, the Israeli government imposed emergency economic measures. These included rationing of food and other essential commodities and strict limitations on commerce and other economic activities. The austerity edicts were overly intrusive, trying to regulate many aspects of private life. For example, people could only consume certain commodities on certain days, wear clothes of a particular brand, etc.

The Israeli public challenged austerity from its inception. A black market quickly appeared, enabling the better off civilians to trade illegally and bypass regulations. In the government's mind, the black market undermined the austerity regime by making scarce products unavailable to Israeli society's poorer sectors, most notably the new immigrants.

The Israel Police participated in enforcing the austerity regime. From October 1950 to October 1951, the police carried out a nationwide campaign, *Mivtza' Tale* ("Operation Lamb"), against possible offenders. Police officers operated checkpoints, raided stores and warehouses, and gathered intelligence on suspects. At the same time, the police monitored public feelings regarding their efforts and austerity in general.

The paper will examine several questions. What roles did the police fulfill within the austerity regime? Second, what challenges did they face? Third, what did police efforts achieve? How did the public respond? Finally, what can we learn from all this, regarding the enforcement of an unpopular economic policy in a democratic society?

The basis for this research is various primary sources, from the Israel State Archive and the press. Most important are police files, which provide a unique look into the organization, and Israeli society. These files were declassified, especially for this research.