

Good afternoon, everyone!

We are heading this week to the most critical time since this ordeal began. This week the Knesset will vote on the legislative coup.

Twelve weeks ago, a new government - its 37th - was sworn in in Israel. It is, without mincing words, the most abysmal, most dangerous government in Israeli history. At its helm is a man who is on trial for corruption; below him are a minister of justice who has openly declared a war on the legal system; a minister of finance who has openly declared that he does not care about the economy or data provided by professional economists; an interior defense minister who has been indicted for assault and racketeering; a minister of Information who spews only curses and disinformation; a media minister who is working to defund and shut down free media and promote a Fox News like TV channel whose latest item is that the CIA is behind the protests in Israel. This government, in its three months, has proposed **141 new laws** that if passed will change Israel's character forever. Not just will it obliterate the power of the judiciary but it will limit voting rights, shrink the welfare state, strengthen the power of rabbinical courts, which now oversee "only" family law. It will give the police more freedom to interrogate and arrest citizens, give lengthy sentences to those who supposedly desecrate the flag, and enable more separation of genders in the public sphere. Under one proposed law, helping a minor who has left a religious community will be punishable with up to six months of prison. In this topsy-turvy world, everything is up for grabs: democracy, labor unions and civil rights, all occupied lands, even those that have been returned already. Even our past is up for sale.

Just this past Wednesday, the Israeli government signed an agreement with the Polish government to resume Israeli high school trips to Poland. These trips were cancelled in 2018 out of growing concern about Poland's ultraconservative government's Holocaust revisionism. Now the Israeli government has not only resumed these trips, but agreed that Israeli schoolchildren going on them will learn about "Polish suffering." Why is this important? Because Poland's current government spends over 150 million dollars a year promoting a fictional historical narrative according to which Poles were heroes who saved Jews in the Holocaust and Poles suffered nearly *as much* as Jews during the Holocaust – a narrative contrary to any reliable historical research. In other words, Bibi's government has sold off the Jewish past – *our past, the past of our parents and grandparents*. It has agreed to teach *lies* to Israeli schoolchildren – and why shouldn't it, since it itself tells them lies? And it has done so openly and without hesitation or qualms. As Israel's Information minister recently said – and I'm quoting and translating here directly: "Bibi's alliance with the global extreme right is blessed."

Yet the past twelve weeks have brought to the surface not only the worst of Israeli society, but also *its best*: A broad based civil opposition movement whose determination, organization, creativity, seriousness, playfulness, integrity, solidarity, and above all braveness leave us in awe. *We are here to support the protestors in Israel, link our arms with theirs, offer them our talents, connections and the insights that we have from the virtue of us being here.*

In Israel of my youth, in the 1970s and 80s, we lived, ate and breathed politics. My last big demonstration - Tel Aviv, November 4, 1995 – you know how it ended: Rabin was murdered, the two-state peace plan died, Netanyahu came to power

and has more or less remained in power since. Many of us, since that time, have buried our heads in the sand; some of us just left Israel altogether. But Israel has not left us and in the country's and our worst moment, we are given the gift of finding *ourselves in it again*. We, and the opposition in Israel and everywhere in the world peel off years of confusion, ambivalence, and cynicism and what we see before us is not a new leader, not a reactionary politics, not a politics of hedging bets and making deals with the devil, but *ourselves and our country in the way we would like it to be*. We have been given the chance to redefine a moral agenda, prioritize, put our foot down and set limits. On the verge of losing everything that was built, we need to dig deep down into our deepest wounds – the occupation, the abyss between those who espouse theology and those who espouse democracy – and all this while fighting hard, and fighting smart, the forces that are set to destroy us.

In practical terms, what can those of us who are here in the US do to for this struggle? To me, there are five possible points of intervention:

1. As our compatriots are doing in London, Berlin, Washington, in Princeton tomorrow and here in New York to the CEO of Kohelet Forum last week, let us give Israeli MKs and their ideologues and bedfellows a *very* unwelcoming greeting, wherever they go. Let us give them no space that is free of resistance.
2. Let us follow the money trail, especially those of us who are at universities. We know that many of the ideas behind the government's coup are imported from the Alt Right playbook and funded by Republican megadonors. Let's track those down, identify them, expose them, expose

their motivations, alert our universities if need be. Let's translate and explain the harm of their ideas to the sometimes-unsuspecting Israeli public.

3. Let's lean on our American politicians to lean on the Israeli government. Last week, Naot Worldwide Chairman President Steve Lax spoke here in Washington Square park about supporting J-Street, which these days is doing just that. You can also just write your senator.
4. Let's educate our fellow Americans, especially our fellow liberal American Jews, about what's happening in Israel. I see mostly Israelis around me here. I call on my liberal American Jewish friends - Yes, even those of you who care at this point only about the Palestinians, to join us in our struggle. Be less dogmatic and more pragmatic. Help us chart a way forward.
5. And finally, I call on all of us present here and around the world to form broad based coalitions. Democracies are eroding in many places. Extreme right-wing ideologies are global - from India to Israel - and their playbook is different in each place, but also very uniform. Even here in the United States, our reprieve from an assault on democracy may prove temporary. Let all democratic people - in Israel, Turkey, the US, India, Italy, Poland, Hungary, Iran, Palestine - unite and form our own mutual networks. Even if we lose, even if we are in the minority, there are people everywhere fighting fights like ours. Not only the right should be global, and not only the radical fringes. Let's unite forces. Let's share information and tactics. Let us not fight alone!

THANK YOU!