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# FOR HER FUTURE Standing up for the Israel we care for



**DAVID KNOLL**

**A**DAPTING the words of French Jewish intellectual, Edmund Fleg, I am a Jew because when Israel is in pain and needs our support, I share her pain and actively give my support.

Last Saturday night, I joined around 400,000 ordinary Israelis, and supporters from the Diaspora, on the streets standing up for the Israel that we all care for.

Having driven down to Tel Aviv after spending Shabbat with relatives up in the north of Israel, I saw protesters waving their Israeli flags at every interchange on the highway. They were out early.

Once back in Tel Aviv, I walked from my hotel to the Sarona market. En route, I saw families with kids and strollers, people in wheelchairs, young and old, a fulsome cross-section of Israeli society. All were proudly carrying their Israeli flags. And what an ocean of flags!

At Sarona, I joined the havdalah led by rabbis of the Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism. Many came in and appreciated that it is possible to experience a living Judaism that is authentic and welcoming. They walked out to Kaplan Street proudly proclaiming that in the name of Judaism we defend democracy.

I was given a scroll with Israel's Declaration of Independence. Its famous description of an inclusive Jewish and democratic Israel is the point of difference between the protesters and the government. All polls now say the protest is supported by the overwhelming majority of Israel's people.

Particularly powerful, parents of deceased soldiers laid blocks and blocks of candles among the protest route in Tel Aviv. Their message: Bibi, this is not what our children died for.

At Kaplan Street, singer and actor Oshik Levi spoke passionately about the late Yehonatan Geffen, who passed away last month at the age of 76. Regarded as the current national poet laureate,



Protesters are fighting for Israel's children.

Geffen was an articulate supporter of the protest movement and the Jewish values which it seeks to defend.

The following evening I was privileged to hear President Isaac Herzog at a packed Expo Centre. He did not pull any punches.

**It is as yet far from clear what the outcome will be.**

With passion he spoke about the need for respectful dialogue, and only proceeding with change that reflected a wide consensus. He described the efforts he was making to achieve that in a range of different ways. Nor did President Herzog shy away from identifying the corrosion that presently divides Israel, and the polarisation and alienation of different sectors of the country from one another. And yet he was hopeful of achieving a workable compromise.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was also scheduled to

leaders from Mexico, Argentina, Italy and Sweden. None supported the judicial overhaul. All expressed concern for the fabric of Israeli society. It was pointed out that supporters of Israel are losing their credit out in the real world.

My colleague Anna Kisilanski, CEO of the Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism, commented about the Prime Minister's absence from the major interaction with Diaspora leaders: "We've been spared an embarrassing and heartbreaking situation. Netanyahu is responsible for the current deep rift in Israel-Diaspora relations. He shouldn't have been invited to speak in the first place."

But back to the Saturday night protests. Adjacent is a photo of my friend Eva's granddaughter. She is far from the only child to come out with her family. It is for their future that the protests continue, and continue to grow. That theme came through from most everyone with whom I spoke.

Israel is facing one of her greatest challenges at the tender age of 75. The broad and deep 16 weeks of protests across the nation are a constitutional moment. It is as yet far from clear what the outcome will be.

One can but speculate whether that decision was influenced by the American leadership being on the record as opposing the government's proposed judicial overhaul. Only a few weeks ago, the North American Jewish Federations took that which for them was an exceptional act of putting in writing opposition to the overhaul legislation and to urge compromise. I say exceptional because the federations have been deliberately apolitical for decades. Yet their leaders understand that the very fabric of Israeli society is being torn, and they too feel the pain.

In President Herzog's presence, identifying the protesters exercising their democratic rights, Jewish Federations chair Julie Platt said, "We are inspired by your love of Israel."

It was not just the North Americans. I spoke with Jewish

David Knoll is a co-president of the Union for Progressive Judaism. He wrote this from Israel.



Candles along the protest route.

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4 May · 🌐

UPJ Co-President David Knoll wrote an article from Israel, which was published in the Australian Jewish News this week:

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