



Riffing on Theodor Herzl's novel "Altneuland"; "Prepare for the coming of the deposer"; a play on "Prepare for the coming of the Messiah"; a poster calling Netanyahu a little liar, and "Levin will destroy" instead of "Yariv Levin." Democracy Will Win

The posters pushing the protest forward

Graphic designers and copywriters are producing posters that dish out puns and lampoon the leaders of Netanyahu's hard-right government that aims to eviscerate the judiciary

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From "Handmaid's Tale" re-creations to the pink-red stripe between the Supreme Court building and the Bezalel art school, the artistic efforts in the protests against Benjamin Netanyahu's judicial overhaul have been particularly creative.

Now 100 or so graphic designers and copywriters are producing hundreds of pun-filled posters that are giving the demonstrations an extra boost.

"The idea wasn't to put the spotlight on anyone in particular. We're distributing these materials for free, without a copyright and without signing them. It's the help we're giving the protest," says Hila, an initiator of the program.

The activists formed a group that offers its products on the Hebrew-language Facebook page "Democracy Will Win - Protest Posters." Like many creators and activists in the demonstrations, they want to preserve their anonymity and have only allowed their first names to be used for this article.

"Yesterday we hit directly - and violently - with several posters. But it's hard to

attribute every poster to one specific designer, because every poster goes through a kind of group processing and discussion," Hila says.

"We're a bit like street artists or graffiti artists. We seek to lend visual expression - creative and conspicuous - to the wide range of messages in the protest. This isn't being done to earn a living or bolster the creators' résumés."

One of the group's members, a designer named Maayan, announced on social media that he was looking for designers to help produce signs.

"It spread pretty quickly and worked like an assembly line. Somebody started out with a picture of [David] Ben-Gurion."

Maayan says, referring to Israel's founding prime minister. "And then somebody else threw in the line 'We hereby destroy,'" a play on

"We hereby declare," which

Ben-Gurion uttered when declaring the creation of the state in May 1948.

"And from there it evolved into a brisk ping-pong exchange. It was very freehand; there's no specific style here. I told them, 'You're not doing some final project like a student. Just do something, and whatever comes out comes out. It doesn't have to be perfect.' There were a lot of ideas, which we collected on an Excel sheet."

On Saturday they set up sites in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem where demonstrators could pick up signs on their way to the weekly mass protest that evening. One sign riffed on the song "Jerusalem of Gold," the 1967 hit that many Israelis associate with the victory in the Six-Day War.

On this effort the words "gold," "copper" and "light" are replaced by the handwritten words "money,



"We hereby destroy," a play on "We hereby declare," which David Ben-Gurion proclaimed in 1948. Democracy Will Win

"corruption" and "darkness." There are also signs that criticize the Netanyahu government's attempt to allow lawmakers to override the Supreme Court with only 61 of the Knesset's 120 votes. The sign reads "61 fingers in the air," and below, court-protected rights are listed such as combat service for

women and LGBTQ rights. Another sign features Theodor Herzl - the lawyer and journalist who in the late 19th century envisioned a Jewish state - and the phrase "alt-right land" in capital letters. This is a play on "Altneuland" - "Old New Land" - Herzl's 1902 novel on what the Jewish state

might look like.

Some posters feature politicians such as Benjamin Netanyahu, far-rightists Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, and Simcha Rothman, the Knesset committee chief pushing through the government's bid to weaken the judiciary. Other posters feature early Zionist leaders like Herzl and Ben-Gurion, or institutions and symbols like the Supreme Court, the Declaration of Independence and the Israeli flag.

"It felt banal for us to do a repeat of Bibi and Sara's heads," Maayan says, referring to Netanyahu and his wife. "So we shifted to a discussion on the Supreme Court and Esther Hayut [the court's president]. We felt we needed to elevate her. From there it moved on to increasingly more ideas."

When asked why the center-left's protests generate so many creative projects, Maayan notes that the right-

wing campaign against Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza was also a good one.

"But right now we're the side that's in pain, and it's generating in us resistance," he says. "The right works a lot on scare tactics. Our posters work more on making things accessible, on an attempt to simplify a message that people can connect with."

One poster features Herzl against a blue background; a white tear trickles from his eye. The poster has become so popular that on recent Saturday nights it has been placed onstage at the weekly mass protest on Tel Aviv's Kaplan Street.

"It's easy to identify with it," Maayan says. "There's no text here. It's just Herzl, and he's an extremely iconic figure. It's like the line 'We hereby declare.' Most of the posters don't have any ingenious design; they simply have a good message."

Dan, who designed the weeping-Herzl poster, designed another series of posters with the images of Justice Minister Yariv Levin, Rothman and Ben-Gvir, who as national security minister is in charge of the police. Each face appears in black and white and is accompanied by a pun.

For example, there's "Yahriv Levin" - "Levin will destroy" - and for Rothman, "Simcha v'ason" - "happiness and catastrophe," a play on the Hebrew for "happiness and joy."

"I believe in the power of design minimalism," Dan says, "especially when the subject is protest and the attempt to distill so many emotions and words into messages that will hit home."

When asked if the activists are preaching to the choir, Dan says that "these things have a cumulative effect. It's never just a single

thing but rather a combination, a critical mass that forms.

"In that respect there's meaning to messages that speak to the 'persuaded' camp. They bolster it, empower it and distill its message, which can continue on to other audiences."

Asi, a copywriter who joined the group, says the work on the posters "helped me release some anger about what's happening, to channel my nerves to produce a few amusing posters." It was Asi who coined the slogan "Dial 100, get 0" with a photo of Ben-Gvir in the background. In Israel, you dial 100 for the police.

Ben-Gvir's likeness also appears on a poster alongside the slogan "Why Heroes Fly," a send-up of the Israeli novel and TV series "When Heroes Fly." The slogan was adopted after Ben-Gvir tried to fire Tel Aviv police chief Ami Eshed for his alleged soft handling of the Tel Aviv protesters.

"Ben-Gvir is somebody attracting a lot of poison these days, so it's very easy to find a way to channel that into posters," Asi says. Another slogan of his is "Hague Sameah," a play on "hag sameah" - "happy holiday" - and the notion that Ben-Gvir could be prosecuted at the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

"Right in the middle of the Purim holiday the news broke about the Immunity Law" - giving soldiers immunity from prosecution - "that Ben-Gvir was trying to promote, contrary to the attorney general's legal opinion, which says it could get us in trouble with The Hague," Asi says. "My thoughts about the slogan flowed very easily. As a reserve officer in the army, I was burning to focus on this absurdity."

For now the activists have gone through two rounds of printing. "The original plan was a one-time distribution and then close the group down," Hila says. "We held a vote and everybody wanted to keep going full speed ahead. It's a kind of activism that eases the sense of unease."