

Fighting the billionaire: this is how 30 Israelis from Philadelphia managed to get the main donor of the Kohelet Forum to withdraw the his contribution

A group of postdoctoral fellows and hit-and-runs from the suburbs of Philadelphia discovered that the money fueling the coup d'état in Israel comes mainly from the estate of their neighbor, Arthur Dantchik.

It's not every day that you see the wealthy residents of Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, protesting with a megaphone on their doorstep. In addition, it is not every day that new immigrants get to demonstrate in a luxury neighborhood, in front of the house of a billionaire whose fortune is estimated at 7.5 billion dollars, who employs a private security company - and even the street in front of the house is owned by him. In fact, it is not surprising that those who raised the gauntlet and demonstrated with determination outside the house of Arthur Dantchik, one of the two main contributors to the Kohelet Forum - which pulls the strings of the legal coup in Israel - are a group of Israelis.



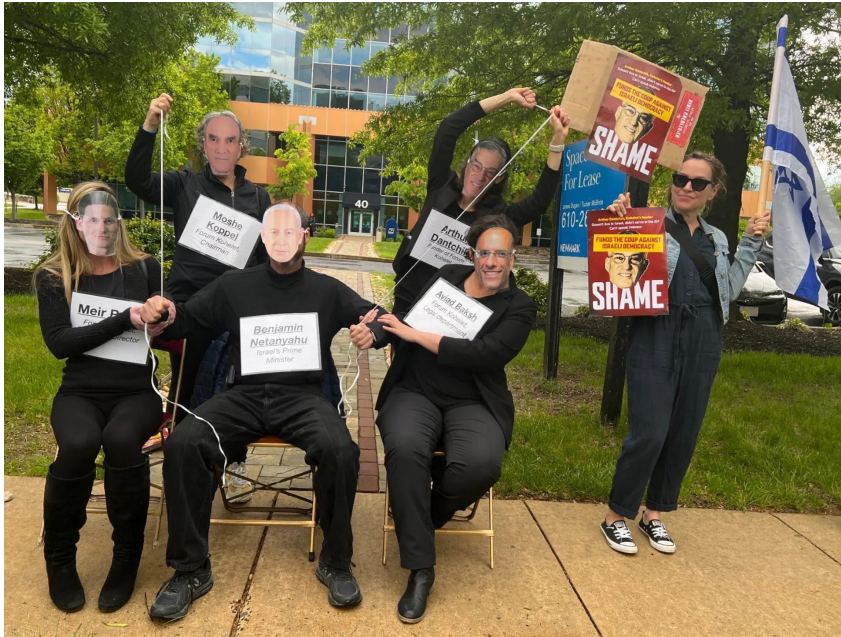
Protest against Dantchik. "The place we live in is picturesque, beautiful and quiet. We don't do things like we used to do here" Photo: Rotem Elinav

Israeli insolence may be a worn-out cliché (and often a little embarrassing) — but recently it became clear that Israelis who seek equality, balance between authorities and proper administration owe this trait a great deal of thanks. This un-American attitude is exactly what spurred a group of about 30 Israelis living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to visit Dantchik's home and offices several times a week for several months, armed with signs and a megaphone. Yesterday (Friday), they finally achieved their goal: Dantchik announced that he is stopping donating to the Kohelet Forum,

according to a "Calcalist" publication This is a significant victory for the camp that is horrified by the organization, which plays a central role in drafting legislation to weaken Israel's social character, with American inspiration and the scent of promoting the annexation of the territories.

"We've been living in the suburbs of Philadelphia for two and a half years. We went for my wife Tali's post-doctorate," says Guy Brodetsky, a 43-year-old hightechtist - and Dantchik's neighbor. "My wife teaches biology in college, we have children, a garden, three dogs. It's very pastoral." According to him, it took the Israeli community time to consolidate and protest, as far as it understood the centrality of the Kohelet Forum in promoting the revolution. "We started by saying that we had to do something. We thought of organizing a demonstration and then,

when we realized that the contributors to the forum were our neighbors, some things started to connect with us."



A protest performance against Dantchik and his audience. "We discovered that we are not allowed to demonstrate in front of his house at all, so we moved to a nearby intersection" Photo: Rotem Alinev protesting against Dantchik. "The place we live in is picturesque, beautiful and quiet. We don't do things like we used to do here" Photo: Rotem Elinav

"We are in the core of the group, which comes consistently, something like 25-30 people," says Daniel Gutman, who is in Philadelphia for a post-doctorate in computational biology and genetics. "Among us there are also Americans who lived in Israel for a time but grew up here, there are people like me who are half and half. There are religious, secular, Mizrahim, Ashkenazim, and those who no longer know what they are. We do a lot of home circles in synagogues to explain what is happening, and after Every activity like this they join us in. It's pretty crazy, these are things I never thought I'd do in my life.

quiet. We don't do things like we did here. In addition, sometimes three people would come to his house and sometimes I would be alone, with a huge sign, standing and waiting for people. Later we found out that we are not allowed to demonstrate in front of his house at all. This It's a private street and if you don't live on it, you're not allowed to enter it, so we moved to a nearby intersection."

"The place we live in is picturesque, beautiful and

The connection to Dantchik was made by Shani Granot-Lovton, one of the leaders of the protest in the USA, who lives in New York. Shani knew Forum Kohelet from the days when she worked as a parliamentary adviser to Sheli Yachimovich. To ensure that the Israeli government disclaims responsibility towards me its citizens," she says.

"Since then, it has been very clear to me that Kohelet are the enemy of anyone who believes that Israel should invest in welfare, education, and equal rights for all minorities, regardless of who they are. When we arrived in New York, Moshe Kopel, the chairman of Kohelet, came to give a speech and we held a large demonstration in front of him, and after that his sons also Jersey. It was clear that in order to be effective from a distance, what is important is to attack the Ecclesiastes. We also demonstrated in front of Keren Tikva, the big sister of Forum Kohelet. Then we decided to promote a demonstration in front of Arthur Dantchik's house in Philadelphia, and we contacted the guys from the UnXeptable protest in the city".

The protesters were not satisfied with gathering outside Dantchik's house, and took the demonstration to the offices of the two biggest donors: Dantchik and his partner Jeffrey Yass, two billionaires who tend to maintain extreme discretion, who started out as gamblers in Las Vegas and were upgraded to Wall Street. They made their fortune in an investment company

they founded in 1987 called the Susquehanna International Group (SIG), which specializes in algorithmic trading. Their most successful bet was an investment in the Chinese company Bytedance, the parent company of TikTok. The company's value was last estimated in 2019 by the Wall Street Journal at \$80 billion.

Discretion has a reason: Yass and Dantchik are among the biggest donors to the Republican Party, and especially to the representatives of the Trumpist wing in it. They are also among the largest contributors to conservative and libertarian research organizations in the US they are similar to the Kohelet Forum.

"The security guards became more and more aggressive"



Compared to the demonstrations in Kaplan, the group's demonstrations were small and suburban - in front of a powerful billionaire who used his security company to deter protesters Photo: Rotem Elinav

In fact, until it was revealed in "Haaretz" that Dantchik and Yaas are the donors behind Ecclesiastes, the forum itself was careful to remain silent about the source of the money. As soon as the shroud of secrecy was cracked, the close connection between American populist right-wing elements and the moves taking place in Israel became clear. Israelis in the US and American Jews began to take responsibility for what was happening in their own backyard as the legal coup plans progressed.

The defining event of their activity was swallowed up in the news on the day Netanyahu fired Galant, on

March 26. "We saw that there was an event at a synagogue next to Dantchik's house," says Granot-Lovton, "we demonstrated there, and then we moved to demonstrate at the entrance to his house. There were almost 50 of us, with Israeli flags and megaphones. We called on him to stop donating to the congregation, because they were dismantling the Israel and tearing the people apart."

Compared to the mass demonstrations in Kaplan that give the security of numbers, the group's demonstrations were small, suburban and in front of a powerful billionaire, who did not hesitate to use his security company to deter the protesters. He also deployed a disproportionate amount of police force to each gathering, sometimes on the order of three cars per three protesters.

"From demonstration to demonstration, his security guards became more aggressive and under more pressure," says Rotem Elinav, a doctoral student in psychology who lives in Philadelphia, and photographs and uploads the protest events in the city to social networks. "It arrived climax in a demonstration where one of us handed out flyers to the drivers, as we

always did, and there were seven security guards around us. They simply surrounded her, yelled at her and told her to stop, which by the way is something that is strictly forbidden in the US, according to our consultation with lawyers.



Demonstration in front of Dantchik's house. "They follow us very closely. They took pictures of us up close, right in our faces, and they constantly tried to scare us and create a sense of threat" Photo: Rotem Elinav

"On another occasion, we were standing there and the security guards crossed the road towards us in a protest, and of course I took a picture. The main security guard, who always popped up everywhere, pointed at me and said, 'She's the only one I'm interested in, I want to know who she is.' He teased me, they were following us very closely. I'm the one who gives pictures to the media and they know it. He and the other guards took pictures of us very close, right in our faces, and were constantly trying to scare us and create a sense of threat. We found out later that it's illegal in the US and it's not allowed to take pictures from that distance.

But after we tweeted and wrote posts about these events, they changed their attitude completely and did not approach us. We realized that they are very They are afraid of this publication."

Some of the neighbors were not satisfied either, although others actually supported it enthusiastically. "This is an area that is very democratic," says Tali Brodetsky. "Overall, we encountered a lot of support. There were neighbors who didn't like the presence so much Ours is on the street, but after we explained they understood and supported us. There are also those who let us park in their parking lot and enter their services. But because it is the stronghold of Ecclesiastes, we also had unpleasant events. There were several Rich Jews who claimed to us that we would bring anti-Semitism with these demonstrations. There are people you could talk to and others that are impossible."

A less pleasant demonstration took place in the synagogue, where many supporters of the ecclesiastical come. "The navel of the congregation is in our suburb, in Lower Marian," says Brodetsky. "The brother-in-law of Moshe Kopel, the chairman of Kohelet, is a rabbi in a synagogue here. We distributed flyers there and it was really unpleasant, they even spat on us. It's a bit funny that people who have lived in the US for 200 years stand up and tell you why you are oppressing Israel."

In order to act within the law, the group turned to legal advice. "We were helped by several local lawyers who accompanied us, who specialize in the issues of individual rights and demonstrations," says Brodetsky. "That's how we learned what's allowed and what's not. We found out, for example, that it's only allowed to demonstrate in front of someone at a distance of three meters or more from them. Demonstrators are not allowed to approach the object of the demonstration beyond this distance. Once we knew all the rules, it really helped us and

kept us safe, and we were also more confident in ourselves. The letter project took us a whole month to pick up, because we sat down with the attorney to correctly draft the letter and find out how to protect ourselves, so that God forbid dear Dantchik doesn't sue us with such and such claims. We paid for everything out of our own pocket. We collected money between us, printed flyers and made signs

The letters in question are perhaps the group's flagship act. "The project, #DearDantchik, is an initiative of a member of the group named Liat Shrift," says Elinav. "We wrote a letter to Dantchik asking him to stop his funding of the congregation. There is a place to fill in personal details, and we left an empty space at the bottom of the page where you can add a personal message in the handwriting and from the heart of Israelis. We emphasized that it is legal and that it is necessary to maintain clean language. We opened a WhatsApp group People from Israel and the world joined the project. We coordinated collection points with everyone who was there in visits to Israel and signed people on social media as well.

"The idea was to send a mass of letters to his mailbox. Hundreds and even thousands of letters were sent to him from Israeli women and men in Israel and around the world, calling on him to stop funding the congregation and telling him how his money is having a negative effect. The second element is the hashtag #DearDantchik. We asked people to take pictures of themselves signing and upload it to the networks. But you can see that Dantchik really cleans up the Internet. He makes sure that his photos are taken down. Of course, he cleaned that up too, and many of us had posts on Facebook taken down: we received messages that it 'violated the rules of the community.' A lot of people against us. For those of us who were targeted, it was scary that people who could buy anything and every person were following us so closely. But that's also where the courage came from."

DearDantchik# letters

After harnessing the local Jewish public, another move came that tipped the scales - it is not clear who is behind it. On March 30, a full-page ad was published in the most widely used Jewish newspaper in Philadelphia, to which approximately 80% of the community subscribes, denouncing Dantchik. The ad reads: "Shame! Take your hands off Israeli democracy. Greetings, people of Israel." "Dantchik controls the Jewish Federation in Philadelphia, and with his money he buys the silence of many," explains Granot-Lovton. "The ad was published in the Jewish Exponent newspaper, and it really made waves." The interviewees claim that from this point on, the Jewish Federation turned a cold shoulder on them - but they believe that in the end, the public denunciation is what broke Dantchik.

About two weeks ago, when Israelis were drenched in skunk water in Jerusalem, another record was reached in Philadelphia. The reason for the likelihood is out of our minds. About 30 people spontaneously arrived at his house," says Gutman. "A policeman arrived who was really nervous. We stood in the same place where we had always been, but suddenly it was forbidden to stand on the grass and we were pushed to stand on the fence. They said we were obstructing traffic and yelled at us but we didn't give up. We marched to the central intersection and continued to demonstrate there, and neighbors came out and encouraged us."

Brodetsky continues: "Mostly we didn't shout with a megaphone, we just stood with signs and were really quiet - until the cause of reasonableness passed. That day we came there and poured out all our hearts, it was really an outburst of rage." now, after the cause of reasonableness has passed and Dantchik's contribution has been stopped, there is a feeling that the local protest may go into a freeze. However, all the activists said that the cessation of Dantchik's contribution was only the beginning: they talked about reconnecting the local,

liberal Judaism to Israel, after it had grown further and further away from the extremist government in Jerusalem on the one hand, and was afraid to criticize Israel publicly for fear of anti-Semitism on the other.



"The day they passed the plea of reasonableness, we lost our minds. About 30 people spontaneously arrived at his house" Photo: Rotem Elinav

"Dantchik was a special project that was done wholeheartedly, but a significant part of our work is to mobilize the American Jewish community," says Brodetsky. "Although there is the synagogue of Kohelet with whom we will probably not move forward, but there the community also split and a separate minyan was opened following this story. We move from community to community, make home circles and explain what is happening in Israel, and that it is okay to love Israel and criticize the government's decisions. This is something that is very difficult for American Jews to do, but little by little

they are doing it. It warms the heart to see that they understand the magnitude of the hour. We are also putting pressure on members of the House of Representatives who represent us to act on the issue."

Beyond that, with all the joy over the success of the move, it is clear to many that Kohelet will find another octopus arm of conservative American money to lean on, which will flow through another channel that will remain secret until revealed. Obviously, the battle is still long, that the outcome is not clear - and that life abroad for those who wish to see a liberal Israel is complex: whether to stay or come back and fight?

"When I see the things that are happening in Israel, I get angry and tearful, and one of the reasons for this is that I am not in Israel," says Brodetsky. "We went with the clear knowledge that we would return, but right now, specifically because of the way things unfolded, we are comfortable here. But there are gaps. For example, I train in a running group with really great people in Philadelphia. But I don't catch half of their jokes, because they talk too fast, Or is it simply a reference that I will never understand. In the end there is one home, it's called Israel, and Israelis abroad never stop being Israelis. We helped build this house, we were all in the army and contributed in one way or another and it hurts. we do not sleep at night and are unable to concentrate on work when we hear about what is happening in Israel and feel that we are not can do anything."

Even if a final victory in the struggle is not achieved, a respite will also be welcome. When it was announced that Dantchik had stopped his contribution to the congregation, the Brodetskys sat in the car and cheered. "But then I said to Tali, 'But wait, what are we going to do now with all the free time?', and our daughter who was sitting in the back seat said: 'Maybe you will finally be with your children.'"