

Democratic protest defines 'tent city' revolution in Israel

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One hot Saturday night in July, I stood in Tel Aviv in the centre of a new revolution that was completely remarkable and yet, at the same time, utterly typical of Israeli society. Taking hold of the tiny country this summer is the ongoing "tent revolution," comprised of middle class Israelis who are troubled by the cost of living and have been camping out in tents all over the country to protest their inability to afford the sky rocketing prices of homes.

What I witnessed was a new 30+ generation of women and men who want to pave a strong future for themselves in Israel. They want to be able to afford homes to raise their families and set down stronger roots in their home land. The site of one hundred thousand young Israelis marching for a cause to strengthen their ties and improve their lives in Israel was exhilarating.

Representing a cross-section of the country, the protesters are educated, articulate, well dressed and employed - many in well-paying positions. They are, in other words, the heart and soul of middle class Israel today.

What is particularly unique about this protest is that it is apparently spontaneous, unplanned and apolitical; the protesters organized themselves on Facebook. And, though they are turning to the government for help, most do not seem to be blaming the government. While voices across the political spectrum in Israel are weighing in on the tent protests, the problem is far too complex and far reaching to punish any one person or entity.

Exercising their right to demonstrate, the protesters were peaceful, jovial and determined. They called for "social justice" in an effort to bring attention to their plight and to improve their standard of living. With most apartments in Israel starting at more than \$350,000, most young Israeli families believe the dream of owning their own home is just impossible.

Still, Israel's unemployment rate at approximately 6 per cent is quite low in comparison to America's at 9.2 per cent and Canada's at 7.4 per cent. With its economy booming, Israel hardly flinched during the 2008 world economic slow down. The real estate market simply cannot keep pace with demand.

Israeli frustration is not dissimilar to that experienced by middle class Americans confronted by the realities of an ever widening socioeconomic gap. As Arianna Huffington writes in her new book "Third World America," more Americans are feeling that no matter their level of education they cannot get ahead.

Demonstrations are a common occurrence in Israeli society. On any given day, somewhere in the country, concerned voices are expressing their opinions, as they continue to do this year on hot summer nights in Tel Aviv.

