

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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This submission addresses terms of reference 1 (a) – (d) and (h). It focuses on the motives of those championing special treatment and laws to protect Jews from pro-Palestinian activism, but now defined by peak Jewish organisations as antisemitism. Pro-Palestinian speech and activism should not be suppressed by special pleading and sophisticated public relations by those exploiting Jewish fellow-feeling. At this time of unconscionable brutality by Israel in Palestine, should the NSW government be swayed by a partisan political campaign exploiting some real concerns to redefine antisemitism to stifle political speech and action as seen in other contexts like Indigenous Rights, Industrial Relations, Abortion Rights and Marriage Equality. Or, should it err on the side of preserving freedom of speech and political expression as provided for by existing laws?

My submission on these terms of reference is submitted to assist the Committee. I was brought up in a Jewish community, have Jewish family and friends, was a member of a Zionist youth movement, have visited Israel, and am a keen observer of Israel and Jewish politics.

The heightened concern in the community about rising antisemitism, notwithstanding what has occurred in Australia since the October 7, 2023 massacre, is the result of a concerted campaign as much as being due to the actual events leading to this parliamentary inquiry.

Peak Jewish organisations, e.g. the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the Zionist Federation of Australia, and the Australia Israel Jewish Affairs Council claim to be in favour of peace in the Middle East, but usually amplify talking points of Israeli governments and label anything but the most anodyne pro-Palestinian statements as antisemitic. Those and similar organisations lead and represent the Australian Jewish community. They have a long and significant history of pro-Israeli activism that belies Australia's comparatively small Jewish population and distance from Israel. Their antecedent organisations successfully lobbied H.V. Evatt, the Australian Foreign Minister, who played significant roles in the late 1940s at the United Nations, leading to the establishment of the state of Israel. From the 1960s to the 2010s, I.J. Liebler, the Australian Jewish community leader, played increasingly major national and international roles in support of Israel, until his emigration to Israel in the late 1990s. He contributed significantly to the activist pro-Israel community leadership model we see today.

In her recent 2021 biography of Liebler, historian S.D. Rutland, OAM, of the University of Sydney, confirms that Liebler was also an agent of influence of Israel's intelligence services. Initially recruited to a campaign exploiting antisemitism to facilitate the emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel, he played a prominent role in that campaign for decades, including convincing Australian politicians to move parliamentary motions in favour of it. In her book, *Lone Voice: The Wars Of Isi Liebler* ((2021) Dr. Rutland also reports, that Malcolm Fraser, when Prime Minister of Australia, would ask Liebler to convey confidential information to Mossad (Israel's external intelligence service)! Further she notes, in the context of the Soviet campaign, "Notably, unlike its American and British counterparts, Australian Jewry remained

closely aligned with Israeli government priorities.” Is it unreasonable to assume given this history, that the current antisemitism campaign which also aligns with Israeli interests, is inspired by Zionist intentions as much as by real events. Mobilising public opinion, in conjunction with the mainstream media and politicians, based on inflated threats to local Jews deflects attention from Israel’s increasingly egregious conduct in its Gaza War.

The conflation of antisemitism with criticism of Israel and Zionism is readily apparent from statements by Israeli politicians, local Jewish community spokespeople, and statements by the federal government’s special envoy on antisemitism. What they now want defined as antisemitism, and have succeeded in doing to an unfortunate degree, is pro-Palestinian speech and activism. What will be denied by this campaign is the give and take of life in a functioning democracy although it confronts the carefully nurtured pro-Israeli feelings of some Jews.

Does the Jewish community really require special legal protection from what it characterises as a tsunami of antisemitic conduct since October 7? There are issues about the methodologies, statistics and definitions in surveys commissioned by the organisations using them to bolster their claims for special treatment. Doctored videos of pro-Palestinian demonstrations have been circulated along with some unfounded allegations of Hamas flags flying. Despite numerous pro-Palestinian demonstrations on a weekly basis since October 2023, the number of incidents that can conceivably be evidence of antisemitism per se, or support of proscribed organisations, are vanishingly small. As we have seen, government, police and educational authorities have responded with special measures. Secondly, Jews who regularly attend pro-Palestinian demonstrations, and the university sit-ins, do not report antisemitism, while observers who do, often seem to be pro-Israeli provocateurs intent on fomenting confrontations.

Although Jewish reaction to sustained hostility to Israel may be conditioned by Jewish fellow-feeling, the manipulation of same is a *sine qua non* of the pro-Israel structure and sentiment of the Jewish community. At a time of unmitigated brutality by Israel, should the sensitivities of some Jews, often curated through long-established and effective public relations strategies, take precedence over the right to criticise Israel’s genocidal conduct?

Is it surprising that active criticism of Israel rises when Israel is committing war crimes with impunity? When large demonstrations in favour of Israel are attended by thousands of people, many draped in the Israeli flag, it is disingenuous to call on government to effectively curtail the rights of those opposing Israel’s war while asserting the rights of those who for all intents and purposes appear to endorse it.

It is now reported that some ‘antisemitic’ incidents of the past year or so may be the actions of petty, and not so petty criminals, exploiting this divisive issue for their own motives. Unfortunately, politicians have been exploiting antisemitism too, egged on by lurid and often

inaccurate reporting, especially in the Murdoch media where demands from the Jewish establishment and Coalition party figures are lavishly reported.

Israel and political Zionism, the Jewish nationalist philosophy and movement that posits Israel as the exclusive national state for Jews, intentionally conflate criticism of Israel and Zionism with antisemitism. This is so notwithstanding that logically they are not the same, and that Jews, historically and contemporaneously, have been and are critical of political Zionism and Israel.

Historically political Zionism was a response to increasing secular antisemitism (after millennia of religious antisemitism) arising from the decline of multi-ethnic European empires in the C19th. Different national groups in the disintegrating empires of Austro-Hungary and Russia called for nationally exclusive states and used antisemitism often based on pseudo-scientific racism and anxieties stemming from modernisation, to rally support.

Due to its C19th origins, political Zionism today still unfortunately shares tenets with antisemitism: e.g. Jews are alien in non-Jewish societies; the social and personal character of Jews is deformed; Jewish culture is parasitic; Jews should go to a Jewish state to reach fulfilment; antisemitism is an understandable reaction to the alienness of Jews. Added more recently to this dismal worldview: antisemitism is a permanent feature of non-Jewish societies and that Israel is the Jew amongst nations, always the victim of an antisemitic world order personified by the United Nations, the International Court of Justice etc. etc.

Antisemitism, is the twin of political Zionism. It attended its birth, is its *raison d'être* and its sword and shield, used as justification for Israel's monumental excesses and its defence to criticism. Importantly, if antisemitism is absent to any significant degree, it is discovered and inflated. Conveniently diasporic Jewry is kept engaged in Israel's interest by imagined threats to life and property with invocations of the Holocaust. Failing that, the 'feelings' of some Jew's, often an unexamined, albeit sincerely felt sympathy for Israel, are exploited.

While many Jews do not consciously share the prejudices of political Zionism, not to mention the continuing destruction it has wrought on Palestinian society, the cadres of the movement and many Israelis do to varying degrees. At a recently concluded Israeli conference on antisemitism, organised by its increasingly beleaguered, corrupt and authoritarian government, speakers were invited from Europe's right-wing parties. Parties with antecedents in the fascist movements that destroyed European Jewry! While pro-Israel actors in the diaspora deploy a new definition of antisemitism to deflect from Israel's policies and actions, Israel's leadership sups with proven antisemites like Victor Orban of Hungary and the American President.

The advent of the Jewish state meant that diasporic life has been subsumed by the interests of Israel, which have evolved into something far different from the utopia envisioned in the theological literature of the Jewish religion or the limited social idealism of the founders of

Zionism. Much of that idealism conditioned by the European Jewish experience is now discarded, especially by the current Israeli ruling coalition government.

Until the advent of the Holocaust, Zionism was a marginal Jewish movement. Very few Jews migrated to Palestine until the advent of Nazism. Most Jewish communal organisations, religious and secular, opposed political Zionism. In Palestine itself the old Jewish community settled there for eons was not unanimously in support of the new Jewish immigration starting in the late C19th. And, amongst the new Zionist community itself there was opposition to the establishment of a Jewish state that would prioritise Jews over Palestinians.

Australia to its credit received a high proportion of Holocaust survivors, second only to Israel itself. Unlike Israel where initially survivors were often treated as pariahs, Australia was mainly welcoming and supportive of them post WW2. However, as Israel faced profound problems stemming from its foundational dispossession of Palestinians, Holocaust memory has become part of its justification for its militarisation, discrimination and violence against its non-Jewish citizens and subjects. The Holocaust must not be forgotten, but its promulgation as the justification for Israel as an exclusively Jewish state, and one exempt from international law and humanitarian convention is surely untenable. Unfortunately, that is how Israel and its proxies use Holocaust memory as can be seen in the dubious IHRA definition of antisemitism which, in large part, shields Israel from criticism by limiting how its conduct can be discussed.

Holocaust education needs to decouple itself from justifying Israel. It would be better if the Holocaust was taught as a paradigm of European racism with roots in feudal Christian theology and practice, nationalism, colonialism, C19th. eugenics, not to mention masculine narcissism, rather than the singular fate of Jews in an eternally antisemitic world. But that would allow for some uncomfortable questions about Israel's origins and conduct. The restructuring of the Sydney Jewish Museum, and its Holocaust program seems to be firmly situated in the unique Jewish experience narrative. An opportunity lost.

At this time of tragic brutality in Israel and Palestine, the NSW parliament should be alert to being influenced by a partisan campaign exploiting some real concerns. It should err on the side of preserving freedom of speech and political expression as provided for by existing laws. People must be allowed to publicly pursue issues that concern them. The Jewish community of NSW would be better served if its leadership took a critical stance towards Israel. It would serve its constituency better, especially in the long-run, if its support for Israel were premised on a political solution being reached with Palestine and not one based on Israel's superior violence, its force of arms and further annexation of Palestine.

I am happy to give evidence to the Committee in support of my submission.