

Australia / Jeremy Jones

Significant themes during the period in review included: firstly, the spread of antisemitism from the extreme margins of Australian society into mainstream discourse; and secondly, the increasingly open antisemitism associated with polemical attacks against Israel as part of the fallout of the Israel-Gaza war.

While ever antisemitism has been confined to the fringes of society, that is, to the far Right and far Left of politics, and to bigoted religious extremists within Christianity or Islam, the situation for Jews has been manageable. Antisemitism will never disappear or be destroyed. The best that can be achieved is that society as a whole deems antisemitism, and other forms of racism, to be socially unacceptable and not to be tolerated, and to be actively countered. Such an atmosphere gives Jew-haters very little breathing space from which to launch their hate propaganda and activities. The danger arises when antisemitism moves from the margins into the mainstream of society.

The mainstreaming of antisemitism was most vividly seen in the conventional media in three particular instances – the Peter Goers article in the *Sunday Mail* of Adelaide, the grossly antisemitic comments posted (and left unmoderated for up to five weeks) on the ABC *Four Corners* Facebook pages following its airing of the documentary “Stone Cold Justice”, and the Le Lievre cartoon in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. When major media outlets, including the national broadcaster, are prepared to publish or host unsubstantiated claims and irrational bias, that is combined with outright demonising of Jews, then a signal is sent that antisemitism is acceptable and even respectable, and Jew-haters feel emboldened to promote their views and to act on them.

The ABC was of particular concern, especially in its hosting of virulently antisemitic comments posted on its Facebook pages, many of which were only removed after five weeks following complaints from the ECAJ. The posted comments were in response to the Four Corners program, “Stone Cold Justice”, with its uninvestigated and unsubstantiated allegations that Jewish soldiers crucify Palestinian boys, and other equally absurd, pernicious and inflammatory claims tinged with classical antisemitic tropes.

Amid much media fanfare, Australia’s former Foreign Minister, Bob Carr, launched his autobiography, *Diary of a Foreign Minister*, in which he gave great emphasis to, and condemned, what he called the “very unhealthy level” of influence of the ‘Melbourne Israeli lobby’ on Australian politics and foreign policy. As Carr relentlessly promoted his book, these claims played in all sections of the media for many days, and were cited as an endorsement of its views by a neo-Nazi group in antisemitic flyers that were letterboxed in Sydney’s eastern suburbs.

Less prominent, but equally pernicious, were the comments of former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser in an interview on ABC Radio, which singled out Australian Jews for criticism, allegedly for dual loyalties. However, Fraser could not explain why advocacy by Jewish Australians in support of Israel is in any way different from Greek Australians, for example, seeking to influence Australian foreign policy on Cyprus, or Turkish Australians on non-recognition of the Armenian genocide; or Palestinians on Israel. These kinds of comments from former 7 political leaders tend to legitimate, license and elicit grossly

antisemitic comments in the media and online about supposed Jewish influence and control, and antisemitic conspiracy theories echoing *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Secondly, the Israel-Gaza war produced mass protests in Australia, and the world, condemning Israel. There is a correlation between the intensity of conflict involving Israel and the level of antisemitism recorded in the western world, of which Australia is part. As observed in the 2010 report *Antisemitism Worldwide*, prepared by the Tel Aviv University based Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism, 'since Jews and Israelis are often conflated into a single collective, events in the Middle East often provoke anti-Jewish groups and individuals into perpetrating hostile activities against local Jews': Stephen Roth Institute, *Antisemitism Worldwide 2010 General Analysis* (European Jewish Congress), p. 1.

Although a direct, statistically reliable pattern is yet to emerge, the correlation between antisemitic incidents in Australia and major violent international incidents involving (or perceived to involve) Israel, particularly since 2005, was noted and graphed in the November 2011 *Gen08 Report on Antisemitism* (Gen08 Report No 4) at pp. 9-11.

For the purposes of this report, these protests were significant, but not because of the views they expressed about the war which, whether well or poorly founded, were a legitimate part of discourse in a democracy. Rather, their significance lay in the antisemitism that was exhibited through slogans and images on placards and banners, and through comments, images and links on the Facebook events pages of the protests. A predominant theme was the equating of Israel with Nazi Germany, the Jewish Star of David with the Nazi swastika, and Zionism with Nazism.

At any given protest in Sydney, the majority of placards had either overt or subtle antisemitic themes.

There were very few public condemnations of the antisemitism of the protesters. Instead, the media and political focus was on the Islamist nature of the protests, especially in Sydney, as exhibited by the proliferation of Hezbollah and jihadi flags. Despite the media condemnation of the presence of these flags, the fact that such flags are freely flown in abundance on the main streets of Australian cities, suggests a deterioration in political sensibilities within certain segments of Australian society which might in time bear adversely upon the Jewish community.

A couple of other matters need to be briefly mentioned here. The invasion of a school bus in Sydney in August by a group of drunken louts, and the threats and intimidation they directed at young Jewish children on board, had a major impact. In the immediate aftermath, Jewish parents were quoted in the media as being afraid to send their children to school. When Jewish children are under attack, as they undoubtedly were in this instance, this indicates a depth of antisemitism that must ring alarm bells. It was heartening to see that this horrific incident was condemned by many outside the Jewish community.

Brendon O'Connell was released from prison in January; he remains unrepentant, and gives voice to his antisemitism on his new website and in more videos. Charges of antisemitism

within the anti-Israel movement have forced the movement to respond, but the predominant response to date has been denial and an unwillingness to face up to unpleasant truths about why the line their movement takes attracts such a large volume of raw hatred of Jews.

The author of this Report, in an article published last December, foreshadowed the year that followed:

Jews in Australia, as elsewhere around the world, worship, study, and work, under the protection of high fences, armed guards, and other security apparatus. This is due to physical attacks over the last three decades, and continuing threats. It will remain the case for the foreseeable future.

Violence does not occur in a vacuum. It is words, when given free reign, which create a poisonous atmosphere for those targeted by racism. It is words that incite hatred and violence.

For a diverse society, such as Australia's, to be harmonious, it is imperative that all Australians, regardless of race or religion, are able to live without harassment and hatred, without vilification and violence. Antisemitism is pervasive and pernicious. It targets Jews but continues to be a destructive force to all others in its reach. Countering antisemitic and other racist expressions is therefore in everyone's interests.¹

That sums up the overall phenomenon of antisemitism in Australia during the year in review. In terms of antisemitic incidents involving physical attacks and threats, which is a more narrow focus, details, tables and analysis are provided in Chapter 2, "Antisemitic Incidents". The year in review began with a vicious physical assault in Bondi against five Jews walking home on the Sabbath, and ended with the fallout from the Israel-Gaza war and neo-Nazi leaflets being letterboxed on the Jewish New Year in Sydney suburbs with a high percentage of Jewish residents. These events bookended a year of heightened antisemitic activity in Australia in comparison to the previous year.

Overall, the number of reports of antisemitic incidents logged by the Jewish community roof bodies in each State and the ACT, the Community Security Groups, and the ECAJ, increased from 231 in 2013 to **312 in 2014**, an annual increase of 35.06%. Other organisations and individuals also received reports of incidents that may or may not have been passed on to the Jewish State roof bodies, the Community Security Groups, or to ECAJ, and it is known anecdotally that many other incidents, especially of casual anti-Jewish racism, are not formally reported at all.

¹ <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=15786>,