Skunking the Jews Down Under

written by David M. Weinberg | 15.12.2024

“Please remove all signs of Jewish or Zionist identity like kipahs and jewelry including Magen David necklaces and hostage solidarity pins, turn your bags inside out so that no Israel-related logos are visible, and exit the synagogue through the back door in groups of ten people at controlled intervals.”

These were the instructions issued by the Sydney Police to 200 Australian Jews at the end of a grand gathering ten days ago in the Sydney Great Synagogue, celebrating the centenary of The Technion: Israel Institute of Technology.

On the street outside, 100 loud and angry people had gathered to protest “genocide” in Gaza, the Technion’s role in supporting Israel’s military industries, and Technion ties to Australian academic institutions. And they came to demonstrate against me too, the Technion event keynote speaker, whom they labelled a “war-hawk.”

The police were fearful. Afraid of the protesters. They detained one Jew who tried to fly an Israeli flag across the street from the anti-Israel radicals. They arrested none of the radicals, nor made any attempt to move them away from the synagogue front and back exits, even though they had no protest permit. And then they asked the Jews to meekly skunk out of the shul while hiding their identity.

“Turn your Technion tote bags inside out!” they ordered.

This groveling, gutless, and perverted Sydney Police approach to Jews and their attackers jibes with the Australian government’s approach to Israel and Palestinians. It has savaged Israel at the UN and other international forums while assigning little responsibility to Hamas or Fatah.

It is clear to me that the cascading slide away from Israel by the Labor Party government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong has provided tailwind to the increasingly violent and progressively more openly antisemitic street riots.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is right when he says that Australia’s government has motivated antisemitic crimes with anti-Israel policies. The two

cannot be separated.

Every single Australian Jew I met over my ten-day visit Down Under feels this in their bones. Israel and Australian Jews have been abandoned by the Australian government to radical hordes. Skunked, shut out, and shunted aside.

Australia even has moved to delegitimize and disqualify Israeli politicians. Two weeks ago, former justice minister Ayelet Shaked was barred from entering Australia where she was slated to address a conference organized by the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC).

Why was she denied a visa? Because she might "incite discord in the Australian community" by objecting to the "two-state solution," the Albanese government said. How outrageous. How revealing of Albanese government obnoxiousness.

(I spoke at AIJAC in Melbourne last week and focused on Iran. That, and the fact that I am not as prominent as Shaked, kept me out of trouble with Australian authorities, I guess.)

And sure enough, just days after Australia dissed Shaked, it again condemned Israel at the UN (supporting a demand to "evacuate all settlers from the Occupied Palestinian Territory"), and 36 hours after the insidious Sydney incident – a Melbourne shul was firebombed and gutted, just down the street from the home of my hosts.

The Australian government took its time admitting that this was terrorism, at first suggesting that leftover paint ignited the fire even though video footage captured three masked arsonists in action.

Eventually, Canberra mealy mouthed condemnation of the attack while doubling down on its criticism of Israel. It did not dare expressly suggest that the Satmar-style, non-Zionist Hassidic Jews who frequented that synagogue complex were fair game for bigotry because of the State of Israel's "crimes" (this would have been quite ironic), but some Australian Labor Party figures came close to hinting at that.

Confronted by a storm of criticism, Albanese showed-up in a shul on Shabbat morning in far-away Perth, almost without warning. There, he was reportedly surprised to hear the rabbi intone the usual blessing for the Commonwealth

Crown and the leaders of Australia. He didn't seem to know that Australian Jews are patriots. Maybe he didn't realize that they are equal citizens, deserving of protection and even respect.

The situation is so bad – a rise of more than 300% in antisemitic incidents over the past year – that the Simon Wiesenthal Center has issued a travel advisory for Jews or Israelis considering travel to Australia.

"In failing to act against the demonization of Jews, Israel and Zionism on the streets of Australian cities, the Australian government has allowed violence against Jews and Israelis to be normalized. Moreover, authorities have failed to take necessary measures to protect Jewish communities from increasingly belligerent and violent targeting by Islamists and other extremists."

Under pressure, the Albanese government belatedly this week announced additional security funding for Jewish institutions, which the Australian Jewish Association dismissed as an attempt to buy off the Jewish community without truly addressing the causes of antisemitism.

Albanese also hurriedly declared formation of a "Special Operation Avalite for Antisemitism" task force. One hopes that this is intended to counter antisemitism rather than spawn or excuse antisemitism, although with the Albanese government that is not at all certain.

But all is not lost. There are energetic non-Jewish supporters of Israel in Australia, including political party leaders who are likely to replace the current crop of fair-weather friends next year. There also are ethnic community figures and healthy-minded thinkers and writers who have rallied to the side of Israel and the local Jewish communities.

I was privileged to meet one of these heroes, the Australian Aboriginal activist Nova Peris. A double-gold Australian Olympic champion and former Member of Parliament who is lionized and recognized by everyone in the country, she has become one of Israel's most outspoken defenders.

Speaking at the same pro-Israel events I did, Nova electrified listeners with her discourse on proud Aboriginal identity and indigenous claims to ancestral lands, making an explicit comparison between the struggle of her First Nations communities and the struggle of the Jewish People for respect and for

reclamation of its ancient homeland, Israel.

Peris was horrified by the infamous protest just two days after October 7 outside the Sydney Opera House, where a mob chanted "F— the Jews" and burned an Israeli flag. No one was arrested at the protest and no one has been charged yet, but guess what? A Jewish man with an Israeli flag at the scene was arrested "for his own safety," according to police.

Listen to Nova Peris: "As an Aboriginal woman from Kakadu, I know what it means to fight for land and identity. I see you, Jewish people, standing resilient in the land of your ancestors – a land where your history is woven into every stone, from the remnants of Solomon's Temple to the echoes of Masada," she said.

"I believe you when you say Israel is your birthright, you are not colonizers, but you are a people who have endured exile, diaspora, and withstood every effort against you of those who have tried to erase your identity. You have reclaimed your heritage, revived your language, and continued to live with unwavering pride."

"I see you, descendants of David, who faced Goliath with courage and determination. Just like David, you faced insurmountable challenges and prevailed. Your history reminds us that strength comes not just from right but from purpose, faith, and resilience."

"I see you, Jewish people, embodying the values of *Tikkun Olam* – the call to repair the world. Through your technological innovations, medical breakthroughs, and humanitarian efforts, you have shown an unwavering commitment to making the world a better place. I see you. I believe you."

Nova will receive an award from the president of the Technion at its board of governor's meetings here in Israel next June – deservedly so.

It is heartening to know that in these darks days when the Mideast is melting down, when support for Israel in some circles is melting away, and when Diaspora Jews are told to melt into ghettos and be invisible – there are good people who bravely and unapologetically stand with us.

And Australian Jews also should take heart from the knowledge that, despite all detractors, Israel is resilient and intends to win its wars decisively. Jews Down

Under must be resilient too and resist all attempts to nullify them.

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