

Two extracts from Annual Report on Antisemitism in Australia : 1 October 2009 to 30 September 2010

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1.1 The Year in Review

During recent years, there has been a great deal of discussion and debate internationally on a perceived rise in antisemitic prejudices and anti-Jewish activity. The end of the Cold War did not bring a new civility to inter civilisational dialogue, but has seen a flourishing of crude ethno-nationalisms, intensifying of racist rhetoric and, all too often, failure of political will to confront antisemitism. Serious historical and philosophical works have explored the tenuous place of Jews who identify as such in the New Europe, while distance in time and emotional estrangement from the Nazis' Genocide has allowed public discourse to be conducted in a manner almost unimaginable during the late 20th century. The constant stream of overt antisemitism from the Arab Middle East, as well as from other identifiably Moslem sources, has not been effectively countered. To some extent, it has been both tolerated and conscripted by sections of the political left who see themselves as engaged in struggles against some or all of the USA, capitalism, the legacy of colonialism or amorphous "establishments". Antisemitism from far-right wing sources continued to be propagated and some traditional anti-Jewish tropes emerged with slight variations so as to appeal to contemporary audiences.

While perceptions of the place of Israel in the international body politic plays some part in informing discussions relating to Jews and to antisemitism, it is a gross oversimplification to treat Israeli policies, Zionism or the relationship of Jews to Israel as the driving force or most compelling influence on this situation.

Having been a participant in a number of international meetings, including the notorious NGO Forum at the United Nations' 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Asia/Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogues, International Jewish-Muslim and Jewish-Christian dialogues and many formal discussions in Australia for more than twenty years, the author of this paper is well aware of the problems, dangers and challenges presented by individuals, organisations and some State actors who promote one or more antisemitic tropes to further local, national and even global political agendas,

This Report considers the presence of antisemitism in Australia in 2010, which should be understood as a local phenomenon and also in a broader, international context. It also covers a distinct 12 month period, which also can be constructively contrasted with preceding reporting.

In Australia, in 2010, to accuse any person or organisation of antisemitism is to allege that their behaviour is antisocial and unacceptable. Unlike in some contemporary societies, no one with aspirations to public credibility admits to holding antisemitic views or to associating with openly

antisemitic organisations. Individuals and organisations associated with the political left who promote extreme anti-Israeli racism, which sometimes included offensive and gratuitous anti-Jewish imagery, are keen to assert that they are not antisemitic and even some far-right and neo-Nazi groups publicly profess to be "anti-Zionist" rather than anti-Jewish, although the material they distribute can give the lie to any such distinction. Promoters of often-crude anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, including Holocaust deniers who allege that the Holocaust is a Jewish confidence trick played on gullible Christians as one part of a raft of anti-Jewish slurs, generally claim they are only "researching" historical or topical subjects.

It is worthwhile, in any assessment of antisemitism in Australia today, to consider the observations of the Community Security Trust, the English experts on contemporary anti-Jewish activity and discourse. The Executive Summary of their "Antisemitic Discourse in Britain in 2009" included these comments "Explicit antisemitism about Jews is rare in mainstream British discourse. It is, however, disturbingly common for older antisemitic conspiracy themes to be evoked by modern depictions of "Zionism" and "Zionist". Antisemitism is a matter of concern for British Jews, and many other observers, but it does not prevent Jews from leading a full life as British citizens. Rhetoric against "Zionism", "Zionists" or "pro-Israelis" is fostering hostility against British Jews and their representative bodies. In 2009, the Gaza conflict caused Israel to be compared to Nazi Germany and its supporters to be compared to Nazis. Previously a fringe phenomenon, the Nazi comparison is now widespread and also appears in mainstream media. This causes significant upset to Jews and is an antisemitic abuse of the memory of the Holocaust. The play "*Seven Jewish Children*" typified the emerging trend to depict Israel and Zionism as a mass Jewish psychological reaction to the trauma of the Holocaust. The ugliest medieval accusation, the Blood Libel, claiming that Jews steal children in order to use their blood, was strikingly revived in 2009. This feature of medieval village antisemitism now returned as a shocking example of antisemitic rumours in today's global village. . . Two senior journalists at *The Independent* newspaper wrote separately about the supposed power of America's "Jewish" lobby. It is quite common for *The Independent* and *Guardian* newspapers, in particular, to depict a dominant US "Zionist" lobby in America: which risks reflecting and encouraging antisemitic Jewish conspiracy allegations. The term "criticism of Israel" continued to be used as a catch-all defence against the raising of Jewish concerns about antisemitic manifestations, public speakers, groups, websites, agitprop and other phenomena." Much of this is reflected in Australian society.

The period in review included the 2010 Federal Election, which passed without any notable change in the prevalence of antisemitic acts. Despite efforts by anti-Jewish groups and individuals, matters of specific concern to Australian Jewry, such as community security and funding support for Jewish education, were discussed publicly in a manner which was generally free of prejudice.

Antisemitic individuals and racist groups took part in the electoral process, with the voting public recording advance judgements of their candidates.

There were during the period in review, nonetheless, a number of discussions on legitimate matters of public concern which were marred by injections of antisemitism, generally by a small minority

of those taking part in them. These included planning decisions regarding Jewish community structures, which had the unfortunate tendency to degenerate from discussions of environmental concerns to attacks on the alleged un-Australianness of Jews, false claims regarding alleged Jewish belief that they are superior to non-Jews or ignorant critiques of Judaism.

While this type of discussion is at least related to activities in which Jewish people had an interest or involvement, anti-Jewish comments were recorded in the public arena on matters such as the change of Prime Minister by Australian Labor Party parliamentarians, US foreign policy, immigration legislation, intercommunal conflict not involving Jews in any identifiable manner, and even internal Christian schisms.

While debates on Israel may cause distress due to the public assertion of arguments which are a-historical, counter-factual or completely divorced from reality, they were generally conducted in a manner which did not include any obvious antisemitism from Australians involved in them.

Some more partisan individuals in Australia involved in arguing against Israel's real or perceived actions and in extreme circumstances its existence, nevertheless employed double standards, demonisation and distortions to such a degree that it is not illegitimate to postulate that they were, to some extent, motivated by and/or fuelling antisemitism. That said, the overwhelming majority of public comments on Israel's actions did not cross the line from vigorous criticism to anti-Jewish racism.

Antisemitism emanating from Islamic sources in Australia has been a topic of public discussion for a number of years. Particular concern has been expressed at the negative impact of material from a variety of overseas sources which has as its thesis an eternal enmity of Muslims towards Jews. A number of individuals in Australia in the period in review faced court on charges relating to involvement in planning or supporting terrorism. A theme identified across many of these cases was a belief that malevolent Jewish influences needed to be fought by all means available, to achieve religious goals.

Between 1 October 2009 and 30 September 2010, the database assembled and maintained by the author of this report since 1989 included over 390 reports of anti-Jewish violence, vandalism, harassment and intimidation, the lowest tally recorded for five years, but five percent above the average for the previous 20 years. Anti-Jewish propaganda in fringe publications and from extremist organisations remained an ongoing concern. Conspiracy theories abounded on the internet and these included a disturbing proportion which were overtly or implicitly antisemitic.

INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE, VANDALISM AND INTIMIDATION

3.1 Introduction

The author of this report has logged data on all incidents reported to Australia's central state and territory Jewish organisations, or sent directly to him, since October 1989, which has meant that the incidents have been assessed by identical criteria, on a national basis, for a full twenty-one year period. While there are evident and obvious problems in the reliability of a report-based system, the mechanisms for collecting data and the analytical and interpretative process have been effectively unchanged over the full period of the life of the database, which should minimise the impact of variables which may otherwise affect report-based systems.

During the twelve months ending September 30, 2010, 394 reports were recorded of incidents defined by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (now the Australian Human Rights Commission) as "racist violence" against Jewish Australians. These incidents included physical assault, vandalism – including through arson attacks – threatening telephone calls, hate mail, graffiti, leaflets, posters and abusive and intimidatory electronic mail. This was a dramatic decrease from the highest tally (recorded in the previous twelve month period) but was five percent above the full 20 year average. It was the second lowest tally in the past ten years.

Regarding the data in this section, it is important to note that incidents of suspicious behaviour around Jewish institutions, which do not directly relate to a physical manifestation of harassment or vandalism, while obviously important, do not appear in the database as they do not constitute racist violence. Telephone calls, letters, e-mail or graffiti which consist of criticisms of Israel or of political stances of the Jewish community which do not include specifically antisemitic comments are also excluded, even though there is a realistic prospect that a proportion of these are motivated by antisemitism.

An assault on a Jewish person who is not identifiably Jewish, and which does not include any reference to the person being Jewish, would not be included. The bias is in favour of exclusion rather than inclusion, which limits the ability for distortions to appear in the statistics over time and also protects the integrity of the data base.

3.2 Reports for the Year 1 October 2009 to 30 September 2010

The total for reports of all incidents was five percent above the previous average. Many of the reports were of threats and abuse, primarily by email, rather than physical attacks on person or property, but the reports reveal that hundreds of Jewish individuals and organisations were targeted, some repeatedly, by persons seeking to intimidate or harass them.

Incidents of assault, arson attacks, face-to-face harassment and vandalism which are broadly defined as "attacks" were recorded at the fourth highest rate on record, just below the three previous 12 month periods. The total was 77% percent above the previous average. Threats, conveyed through the telephone, mail, leaflets, posters or e-mail, were however recorded at a rate over thirty six percent below the previous average and at the lowest level in fourteen years.

It is not possible to give a comprehensive analysis of the motivation for most of these incidents. Nearly all of the attacks have been carried out anonymously with the perpetrators never identified and while Jews are clearly identified as targets, the reasons for this generally are not specified. While public matters with which the Australian Jewish community is identified in the public mind (e.g. advocacy of cultural diversity or events in the Middle East) appear as rationalisations in some of the hate mail or threatening telephone calls received by individual Jews and Jewish organisations, the number of reports of incidents in which the motivation is clearly expressed remained low.

The effect of incidents of antisemitism on the quality of life of individual members of the Australian Jewish community should never be minimised. The psychological impact on members of communities affected directly by harassment and intimidation can be serious, particularly as many of the threats have been directed against individual Jewish Australians in their homes, including survivors of the Nazi Holocaust.

3.3 Serious/Violent Incidents

During the twelve months in review, the combined number of incidents involving physical assault, property damage and direct, face-to-face harassment was nearly two and a half times the previous average.

Amongst the most disturbing incidents of assault and property vandalism reported were (month/year):

*** An Orthodox Jewish man was assaulted on train in Melbourne suburb. (3/10).**

* A driver alighted from his vehicle near synagogue on Sydney's north shore, pushing personnel and making anti-Jewish comments. (4/10).

* A Jewish student was assaulted on campus at a university in Sydney, after being identified as Jewish due to wearing a kippa. (6/10). A non-Jewish student was also assaulted for supporting Jewish students. (6/10).

*** Jewish men in a street in Sydney's eastern suburbs were subjected to antisemitic abuse and one of them was assaulted, by a larger group of people. (6/10).**

*** A rock was thrown through a window of a kosher product store in Sydney's eastern suburbs. (9/10).**

*** A Jewish man walking home from a synagogue in Sydney's eastern suburbs was abused by four men in a passing vehicle, who called out "fucking Jew" and then threw a water bottle at him, hitting him on his leg. (2/10).**

The incidents of harassment which did not include assault were reported at a rate more than three times the previous average and at the highest volume ever recorded.

Amongst these incidents were:

*** A passing pedestrian shouted "fucking Jews, the Holocaust should have burnt you all" at men standing outside synagogue in Sydney. (10/09).**

*** Jewish family walking home from synagogue in Sydney's north shore abused by passengers in car with megaphone, yelling "You fucking Jews". (11/09).**

*** Metal objects thrown from passing vehicle at Jewish family walking to synagogue in Melbourne. (3/10).**

*** Group of six males in park in central Sydney yelled antisemitic abuse at rabbi and congregants walking to synagogue. (3/10).**

*** Passengers of passing vehicle yelled "Heil Hitler" and honked horn, repeatedly harassing Jewish people walking to synagogue in Perth. (5/10).**

*** Jewish school students taking part in a careers day at university in Sydney abused for wearing "fucking skullcaps" to the point where some left the campus (out of fear). (6/10).**

* **Jewish woman shopping in Sydney's eastern suburbs harassed by another woman shopper who said she didn't "believe the Holocaust", "Hitler was right" and "Jews wanted to take over the world". (6/10).**

* Driver of vehicle in Perth stopped near people walking home from synagogue and unprompted shouted "you can all get fucked". (9/10).

* **Occupants of vehicle passing synagogue in Melbourne shouted abuse and threw an egg at congregants. (9/10).**

3.4 Telephone Intimidation and Hate Mail

Columnist Danny Katz wrote in the Age (13/5/10) "'Bastard Jew! Zionist piece of \$#@\$@!Ya%\$\$ \$Jew!!!!' This was the opening line of a letter I got this week, just scrawled on the back of one of my newspaper columns, with no name or address or anything – ...". **Reports of threats conveyed to the Jewish community through telephone calls or through the mail were received at a rate of just over twenty percent of the average over the previous twenty years. Hate mail was recorded at the lowest ever rate and telephone calls, which often contained extreme antisemitic abuse, were recorded at a rate of under fifty percent of the previous period.**

Examples of incidents in these categories included:

* Jewish man in Canberra received series of antisemitic abusive telephone calls. (12/09 x 2, 12/09). Jewish family in Sydney with same surname received similar calls. (12/09 x 3).

* Series of telephone calls with antisemitic messages left on answering machine of Jewish organisation in Sydney. (2/10).

* Antisemitic message left on answering machine of synagogue in Melbourne "You people are so evil". (5/10).

* Telephone call to Jewish organisation in Sydney from caller who said she hated Jews, that Australia hates Jews and that Jews are now the same as Nazis. (6/10).

* **Bomb threat made to distinctly Jewish business in Gold Coast. (6/10).**

* **Letter “Kill All Bloody Jews” and other abuse received at Jewish organisation in Sydney sent from a Queensland post office. (6/10).**

* **Hate mail received at Jewish organisation in Sydney with comments such as “Bring back Hitler” and “Jews out of Australia”. (6/10).**

3.5 Graffiti

There is a particular concern when graffiti is daubed on synagogues and other Jewish communal institutions, as this not only has the potential to offend and intimidate a large number of people but also as it could represent desecration of religious sites. During the period in review incidents of graffiti were reported at **sixty percent of the average** for all years and at the **lowest rate since 2000**.

Amongst the graffiti incidents in the past year were:

* **Antisemitic graffiti painted on billboards in Melbourne suburb with large Jewish population. (12/09).**

* **Offensive graffiti daubed on outer wall of synagogue in Sydney’s eastern suburbs. (1/10).**

* **Swastika and words “we’ll be back” daubed on building near Jewish community offices in Sydney. (2/10).**

* **Swastika drawn on entrance of Jewish day school in Sydney’s eastern suburbs. (2/10).**

* **Antisemitic graffiti in Gold Coast suburb “No Jews” and swastikas. (3/10).**

* **Large swastika daubed on outer wall of synagogue in Melbourne. (5/10).**

* **Antisemitic graffiti on fence of Jewish school in Melbourne. (6/10).**

- * Antisemitic graffiti at railway station in Melbourne. (6/10).
- * Jewish business in Melbourne daubed with offensive graffiti. (6/10).
- * Antisemitic graffiti in Melbourne park in suburb with substantial Jewish population. (6/10).
- * Graffiti including “Jews” daubed on synagogue in Sydney’s eastern suburbs. (6/10).
- * **Graffiti “Jew dog” on factory wall in Sydney’s southern suburbs. (7/10).**
- * Neo-Nazi graffiti on building next to synagogue in Sydney’s eastern suburbs. (7/10).
- * **Graffiti “no Jews” scrawled on wall of park near synagogue on Sydney’s north shore. (9/10).**
- * **Graffiti “Fuck Fuck The Jews” daubed on installation three meters from synagogue in Sydney’s eastern suburbs. (9/10).**

3.6 Hate Email

In 1995 the Jewish community received its first report of harassment of a member through the use of electronic mail.

The ability of a person to remain anonymous and to send messages cheaply has made email the favoured means of communicating hate messages by Australian antisemites. **During the period in review over forty-two percent of all incidents reported were emails.** There is no discernible difference in the themes contained in email messages to those sent through the postal service or communicated by telephone.

The receipt of abusive, threatening and other antisemitic email sent to individuals and communal offices was reported at a rate of over three times a week in the year in review. **The total during this reporting period was twenty four percent below the average.**

Examples of email harassment and abuse included:

* Abusive email “**We won’t be slaves to our Jewish masters for much longer**” sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney. (11/09).

* Email “**Jews are murderers and liars. They are also ugly as shit**” sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney. (11/09).

* Email attacking “Bloody Jews” and asking “why are Jews thieves?” sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney. (11/09).

* Email from antijewlies@jew.org critical of memorialising the Shoah received by Jewish organisation in Sydney. (11/09).

* Email “You Jews are real shockers and that’s an understatement . . . You shameless rats” sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney. (12/09).

* Email “Zionists are doing what the Nazis did to them 100% and now we have our ‘leaders’ bowing to Zionists” etc. sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney. (12/09).

* Email alleging Israel involved in systematic stealing of body organs from Palestinians sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney. (1/10).

* Email from antisemitic activist containing series of extreme anti-Israel comments sent to Jewish community leader in Sydney. (1/10).

* Email sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney beginning “**what are jews afraid of the truth the holocaust is all bullshit so jews can get money of (sic) the germans**” and including “**a good jew is a dead jew**” and “**jews are a cancer on the world**”. (2/10).

* Email sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney referring to Jews as “**THESE FILTHY PEOPLE**” and a “**BUNCH OF LIERS (sic)**”. (2/10).

* Email sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney beginning “**Jews are the scum of the earth and should be prevented from any say**” and including other slurs. (2/10).

* Long antisemitic email blaming Jews for Haiti earthquake sent to Jewish organisations in Sydney. (2/10 x 3).

* Antisemitic email beginning “Jews are evil” and saying **Jews start all wars, manipulate money markets, “stole palestain” (sic) and should be rounded up and sterilised**, sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney. (3/10).

* Email signed uglyjew@arab.com with text “Jews are ugly as shit” received by Jewish organisation in Sydney. (3/10).

* Email claiming Jews involved in “economic terrorism” and had placed the USA in “Economic and Political Slavery”, received by Jewish organisations in Sydney. (3/10 x 3).

* Long antisemitic email attacking alleged Jewish “paymaster of Australian foreign policy” sent to Jewish leaders in Sydney (x 2) and Melbourne (x 5) (5/10).

* Two hate emails with antisemitic statements and comments such as “just die” received by Jewish organisation in Sydney. (5/10 x 2).

* Email from “Colin Wellstead” signed “Just a Goyim” sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney attacking Jews alleged negative racial traits. (6/10).

* Email claiming “Hitler would be proud of you Jewish Shite” and other anti-Jewish comments sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney. (6/10).

* Antisemitic email justifying people who “mistrust, fear and detest Jews” including “**Anti-Semitism is a disease that you catch from being around Jews**” sent to Jewish organisation in Sydney. (7/10).

3.7 Leaflets, Posters and Other Miscellaneous Harassment

In addition to the modes of harassment and intimidation identified above, the Jewish community receives reports on a regular basis of the receipt of **text messages, leaflets and other material placed in private letterboxes by hand, the sighting of posters with anti-Jewish themes, stickers on buildings and telegraph poles and other similar forms of dissemination of anti-Jewish propaganda and vandalism**. Reports of material in these categories were received in the twelve

months in review **at a rate less than thirty percent of the average and at the second lowest rate ever.** Examples of reports in this category include:

* Antisemitic leaflet letterboxed in Sydney's eastern suburbs. (12/09).

* Web site of Jewish organisation in Sydney hacked with slogans such as "fuck U Jewish". (12/09).

* Leaflet by person claiming to have been "trodden on by the Jews" distributed on the Gold Coast. The leaflet alleged "**Not only have they [Jews] attempted to annihilate all the peoples of the Arab world in their attempt to control the entire region but they have also embarked on a world wide crusade (sic) of political and financial domination.**" **Included in a series of other allegations against Jews was that "they bombard us with their lies of antisemitism".** (2/10, 2/10).

* A man flew a Nazi flag in a regional NSW city "specifically to gauge a reaction", before complaints by neighbours after which he removed it. (4/10).

* A poster consisting of a Star of David made up by a series of smaller swastikas displayed on a building opposite a synagogue in Sydney's eastern suburbs. (5/10).

* Antisemitic posters such as "Zionism is the path to anti-Christ" with historic anti-Jewish imagery at anti-Israel demonstration in Brisbane. (6/10).

* Hand-drawn antisemitic poster displayed near synagogue in Sydney's eastern suburbs. (6/10).