

Establishment silent on campaign against Palestinian-Australian businessman who opposes Gaza genocide

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As part of its complete support for Israel's genocidal onslaught on Gaza, the Australian political and media establishment is seeking to whip up a hysterical atmosphere. Opposition to Israel's bombardment has repeatedly been branded as antisemitic in a bid to intimidate and silence the mass anger that has resulted in the largest anti-war demonstrations since the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The conflation of Zionism and the Jewish people is an obscene falsification from every standpoint. It is itself antisemitic, falsely equating the garrison state of Israel, currently engaged in horrific war crimes, with all Jewish people, large numbers of whom are horrified by the assault on Gaza and have participated in the anti-war rallies.

Each day, the Australian press publishes assertions of rampant antisemitism, but almost invariably with no evidence. These stories frequently rely on the most pro-Israeli Zionist lobby groups.

An indication of the propagandistic style of the media campaign was provided by the coverage of the mass peaceful pro-Palestinian rallies over the weekend by the Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper. It asserted that the events, involving more than 100,000 people, drew on "Hitler and the Nazis' legacies." The evidence provided was that some placards had compared the war crimes of Israel with those of the Nazis. This is clearly the opposite of an endorsement of the horrors of the Nazi regime.

The relentless official demonisation of those opposing the genocide in Gaza is itself a form of vilification. The clear and foreseeable consequence of it is to foment anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab racism.

Last month, Hash Tayeh, the owner and CEO of Burgertory, a chain of twenty burger restaurants in Melbourne, participated in a pro-Palestinian protest.

Tayeh, who is of Palestinian descent, posted a video of himself leading chants to his Instagram account. The video was picked up by supporters of Israel and featured by the right-wing tabloid *Daily Mail*.

Tayeh issued an open letter to the Jewish community, stressing his empathy for their "trauma." He rejected assertions that the chant he used, "From the River to the Sea," was antisemitic. Instead, it called for liberation and equality for Palestinians throughout Israel and the occupied territories.

Tayeh explained that in the course of Israeli attacks on Palestinians, "I've had 38 family members killed and two orphans I've been sponsoring for the last five years aged seven & nine both killed."

Tayeh has alleged that since the video was posted he has been subjected to a campaign of harassment, threats and intimidation. Last Friday morning, at about 4 a.m., Tayeh's Burgertory store in the south-eastern Melbourne suburb of Caulfield was burnt down.

Police branded the blaze as "suspicious," indicating that it was an act of arson. CCTV footage was published, showing hooded individuals breaking into the store and apparently setting it alight. The police very rapidly declared that the attack "was not religiously or politically motivated." Given that no arrests have been made, it is entirely unclear how they came to that determination.

On Sunday, Tayeh spoke at the mass pro-Palestinian protest in Melbourne. In comments that have scarcely been reported in the press, he told the 50,000 attendees: "In the past weeks I have advocated for peace, immediate ceasefire and the rights of the Palestinian people.

"My own establishment, Burgertory in Caulfield, became a target, staff threatened and harassed, all in an attempt to silence my support. And the other day, in a cruel act of arson, our store was reduced to ashes. To

those who sought to silence us with hate and violence, I say: ‘You will not succeed! Love and unity will always prevail!’”

In a rare breach of the general media disinterest in Tayeh’s ordeal, he was interviewed last night on the “7:30” program of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and elaborated on his experiences.

Tayeh revealed that he had moved his wife and young children to a safe house after receiving an anonymous social media message informing him that he would become a “Shahid,” an Islamic term for a martyr.

Tayeh said that in the lead-up to the arson attack on the Caulfield outlet, “Our staff were getting phone calls daily, saying, ‘You don’t belong here. We’re going to boycott you. We’re going to close you down, your shop’s going to go.’”

He added: “Police are still investigating so I can’t comment on that but what I can say is that whether it was a Muslim, a Jew, a Christian or an atheist, it’s a hate crime, and to say it’s a hate crime is not saying it’s a Jewish person, it’s saying you’ve hurt me, you’ve hurt my livelihood, you’ve hurt the livelihood of my staff.”

Further information about the events at the Caulfield store was provided by Australian Palestinian Advocacy Network president Nasser Mashni, who appeared on an ABC “QandA” program last night.

Mashni stated that the campaign against the Caulfield store began two-and-a-half weeks ago. He said that there would be groups of teenagers, “running into that store, yelling at shop assistants: ‘How can you work for a terrorist?’” Mashni said: “That culminates in an arson attack that police say is not a hate crime.” He noted that police had made that determination “quicker than any CSI [Crime Scene Investigation] show that I’ve seen.”

Pressed by the host, Mashni said that “In the afternoon, there was a baying mob of Australian Jews with Israeli flags, in front of that shop, like a West Bank settler pogrom of clearing a village, reclaiming the dirt.”

Whatever precisely happened to Tayeh’s Caulfield store, and that remains unknown, he and his supporters have clearly stated that the businessman has been the victim of intimidation and vilification. But, amid a purported official campaign against “hate crimes” and politically-motivated harassment, the major political parties and the media have responded to his plight with silence, or a shrug of the shoulders.

After the store burnt down, pro-Palestinian protesters gathered on Friday evening nearby in Caulfield. They were met by pro-Israeli counter-demonstrators. Limited

scuffles ensued, but it appears that nobody was seriously injured. Tayeh had called for the protest not to occur.

The incident was seized upon by sections of the media. The *Australian* noted that Caulfield has a large Jewish population, and declared: “The deliberate provocation to invade the heart of Jewish Melbourne got the response that they must have expected.” Senior politicians, from the federal Labor government and the Liberal-National opposition denounced the “violence” and proclaimed the protest as “unacceptable.” Organisers of the pro-Palestinian rally subsequently apologised.

The official statements about “violence” are drenched in hypocrisy, given that the Labor government and the opposition are full-throated in their support of Israel’s continuous bombardment of the Palestinians in Gaza. In official circles, support for the onslaught is the default position. Even the suggestion of a ceasefire is taboo.

The attacks on Tayeh underscore the fraud of the official campaign surrounding “safety” and “hate,” which has been directed against all opposition to the unfolding genocide. More broadly, this campaign, far from combatting racism, is an attempt to incite communal violence, to reframe the imperialist-backed Israeli onslaught as a religious clash between Jewish people and Muslims.

Those publications and individuals leading this campaign could care less about the safety and security of ordinary Jewish people. They are seeking to inflame conflicts, regardless of their outcome, for the most sordid of political purposes, to legitimise unfolding war crimes.

Workers and young people must adopt an independent standpoint, rejecting all forms of racism and vilification, defending those who come under attack and fighting for the unity of the entire working class in a struggle against the genocide, war and the capitalist system that is responsible.



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