

Jewish professor who has spoken out against Israeli war crimes assaulted in Sydney

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This week it was reported that Peter Slezak, a well-known Australian academic who is Jewish, was allegedly assaulted on the streets of Sydney in late October in a politically-motivated attack. Slezak has been an outspoken opponent of Israel's genocidal bombardment of Gaza and its broader crimes spanning decades. That is clearly why he was attacked.

The incident, though it occurred over a month ago, is highly revealing. Since the Hamas military operation of October 7, and Israel's carpet bombing of Gaza began, the Australian political and media establishment has been in a frenzy over an alleged crisis of rampant antisemitism.

These assertions, for which virtually no evidence has been provided, have, in fact, been based on equating any opposition to the Israeli government and its crimes with hostility to the Jewish people. The clear aim has been to delegitimise and suppress the mass anger that exists over the unfolding genocide.

Despite the hysterical campaign, which has, as one of its aims, the incitement of communal conflicts and the whipping-up of a hothouse atmosphere, very few violent incidents have been reported or substantiated.

The assault on Slezak, however, is fairly clear-cut. A report in the *Australian* included his account of what occurred.

Slezak was walking down a street in the eastern Sydney suburb of Double Bay on the morning of October 26. He was pushed forcefully in the back by a man he did not know. The alleged assailant then launched a verbal tirade, describing Slezak as a "self-hating f**king Jew."

The man continued to abuse Slezak verbally, and to reference the conflict in the Middle East, even as the professor threatened to call the police. The attacker walked into a shop and shouted, "Do you know who

this guy is?" about Slezak, as though the professor were a notorious figure.

Slezak, though very active, is 76-years-old. The alleged cowardly attack on him, from behind, could have had catastrophic consequences. In a statement, NSW Police confirmed that a complaint had been issued and they had commenced an investigation.

In comments to the *Australian*, Slezak stated: "He was clearly upset because I have a fairly high-visible public profile. I speak at rallies. I'm involved in Palestinian advocacy. I don't know how many people are crazy enough (to assault me), but I get rude remarks from people all the time. People I've known for my whole life. It's been a permanent feature."

Slezak elaborated on an atmosphere in which Jewish people who oppose the crimes of Israel are increasingly marginalised and under pressure. He explained: "I spend a lot of time trying to engage with the Jewish community. It's very hard... Especially now when the feelings are so heightened. It's impossible to have a rational conversation.

"The incident doesn't make me want to stop. It's depressing and worrying because it reflects this huge polarisation where there is so little common ground and understanding. When people abuse me in the street, I say do you want to be rude or do you want to talk to me."

The comments and the incident as a whole point to realities that are suppressed and buried in the phony official campaign over antisemitism. Politicians, together with the media, have constructed a racialised and false narrative that all Jewish people uncritically support the state of Israel and all of its actions. But growing numbers, such as Slezak, do not, and are publicly opposing the onslaught against Gaza. There have also been very significant vigils and protests in

Sydney and Melbourne led by young anti-Zionist Jewish activists.

Another component of the official narrative is the depiction of the most virulent Zionists and supporters of Israel as victims. Prominent Zionists have repeatedly been featured in the press, speaking of fears for their safety, without identifying any tangible threat, and making ludicrous comparisons between modern Australia and Germany in the 1930s. But again, the attack on Slezak and his comments point to the existence of a layer of Zionists who are aggressive and assertive in their backing of Israel, including through the forceful marginalisation of Jews who do not toe the line.

The report in the *Australian* was notable for its restrained and factual character. The Murdoch-owned outlet has been at the forefront of the official hysteria over antisemitism, publishing highly inflammatory accounts ultimately sourced to a small layer of Zionist organisations along with the major political parties that are backing the genocide. That is not unique to the Murdoch-stable, but has extended across the press, including to the state-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

No other publication has even reported the assault against Slezak. Instead, they have presented as antisemitic incidents that clearly were not. Two recent examples exemplify the coverage:

* The media has been in an uproar since three actors at the Sydney Theatre Company (STC) donned keffiyehs, Arabic scarves, during a curtain call on Saturday evening. The actors did not say anything but later posted on social media that their action was in solidarity with the Palestinians.

The STC is in a complete meltdown, cancelling plays, issuing at least three public apologies in a week and suffering the resignation of two board members. The media has presented the wearing of the scarves as something approaching a hate crime. Of course, this line is itself deeply racist, essentially demanding the public erasure of all things potentially associated with the Palestinians as they are facing an ethnic cleansing.

* Last Thursday and Friday, schoolchildren in several cities walked out of class to demand an end to the mass murder of civilians in Gaza. The school strikes proceeded in the face of a barrage of condemnation from politicians, the media and Zionist leaders.

The press uncritically cited one Zionist leader, who adopted military terminology, declaring that “activists” were using the children as “human shields.” Another compared the strikers to the “Hitler Youth.” Those comments, which amounted to the vilification of children, were given a free pass by government authorities and the entire official media.

None of the Zionist organisations involved in the campaign against the STC or the school strike have commented about the assault on Slezak, including those that claim to monitor and compile incidents of antisemitism.

A final point should be made. Slezak was allegedly assaulted on October 26. Less than a fortnight earlier, he had spoken at a Sydney protest in defence of the Palestinians on October 15. Slezak had condemned the bombing, called for an end to the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank and rejected the equation of anti-Zionism and antisemitism.

That October 15 protest went ahead in defiance of threats from the NSW Labor government to ban it. Labor Premier Chris Minns gave police the green light to use extraordinary powers, including stopping and searching everyone in attendance. While those measures were not deployed, the entire atmosphere created was that the protest was illegitimate, its participants potential perpetrators of hate crimes and the like.

It was under conditions of that atmosphere, whipped up by the state and federal Labor governments and the media, that a 76-year-old Jewish professor was violently attacked for criticizing Israel.



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