

Leaked messages expose pro-Israel campaign to sack Australian journalist

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An article published by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) yesterday showed conclusively that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's sacking of journalist Antoinette Lattouf last month followed a coordinated campaign by influential pro-Israeli lobbyists.

They were hostile to Lattouf because she had previously posted factual material to social media about the Zionist regime's genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza. Prior to her Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) role, Lattouf had also conducted investigative reporting for other outlets which critically scrutinised the claims of a Zionist group.

Lattouf, who was fired three days into a week-long fill-in position on ABC Sydney Radio, has initiated unlawful termination proceedings in the Fair Work industrial tribunal. Lattouf's complaint alleges she was sacked for her political opinions, as well as her race, and has asserted that ABC management was influenced by pro-Israeli forces.

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) is specifically named in the complaint as having been involved in the campaign against Lattouf. When that was reported on by the *Herald* late last week, an ECAJ leader said the claim was "total bullshit," without any factual basis.

But yesterday's SMH article alleges that ECAJ deputy president Robert Goot was heavily engaged in coordinating baseless complaints to the ABC, explicitly aimed at securing Lattouf's termination.

Goot was part of a secret WhatsApp group of the Lawyers for Israel organisation. The SMH reported that on just the second day of Lattouf's appointment, the WhatsApp group was used to orchestrate "a stream of letters."

On the third day of Lattouf's employment, the day she was sacked, Nicky Stein, a Sydney conveyancing lawyer, posted a "call to action" in the WhatsApp group. "It is

important ABC hears not just from individuals in the community but specifically lawyers so they feel there is an actual legal threat," Stein wrote.

"I have basically written to them and told them I expect a proper response, not a generic one, by [close of business] today or I would look to engage a senior counsel. I know there is probably no actionable offence against ABC but I didn't say I would be taking one—just investigating one. I have said that they should be terminating her employment immediately."

In her letter to ABC management and the federal Labor government's Communications Minister Michelle Rowland, Stein wrote: "Anything short of terminating [Lattouf's] position would not be sufficient." By the end of that day, on December 20, Lattouf was indeed summarily fired. The stated reason was that she had shared on social media a post from the US-based Human Rights Watch, warning that Israel was using hunger and starvation as a weapon of war in Gaza.

In comments to the *Herald*, Stein and other members of the WhatsApp group denied any coordinated campaign, despite the alleged messages clearly showing otherwise. In addition to those messages cited in the *Herald* article, others have been posted to Twitter/X.

The episode is revealing from several standpoints.

The ABC is notoriously impervious to complaints from the public. For ordinary people, its in-house complaints mechanism is a road to nowhere, but members of the Lawyers for Israel group were receiving immediate responses from the highest levels of ABC management, including the chair of its board, Ita Buttrose. They were also, the messages indicate, obtaining information from other sources within the ABC about the progress of their campaign.

In the messages published, there is no indication that Lattouf had committed any wrongdoing or that anyone thought she had. In discussions about the prospects of her

sacking early on December 20, Goot wrote, “I understand she will be gone from morning radio from Friday.” Stein complained that those additional three days of Lattouf on air were “too long.” Another individual asked if Lattouf would be sacked “Due to her stance on Israel or other reasons?” Goot replied: “Israel.”

In their public statements, the ECAJ claims to represent the Jewish community and to combat antisemitism. In these private exchanges, however, there was no suggestion that Lattouf was an antisemite. Instead, those organising the campaign made clear they were doing so purely because of what they perceived to be her position on the Israeli state, its actions in Gaza and elsewhere.

In doing so, at least some within the group appear to have discussed conduct they may wish was not subjected to scrutiny. Comments on social media have noted that sending or intimating legal threats, while privately admitting there is “no actionable offence,” falls decidedly in the grey area of ethical legal conduct.

Jewish individuals also came into the group’s crosshairs. For the “crime” of representing Lattouf after her sacking, lawyer Josh Bornstein was slandered in the group as a “traitor” [sic].

The revelations about the Lawyers for Israel group have further inflamed anger over Lattouf’s sacking. That includes at the ABC, where around 80 staff held a meeting in Sydney yesterday, to demand answers from senior management about the sacking. They reportedly discussed the possibility of industrial action if satisfactory replies were not forthcoming.

More generally, the leaked messages shed light on much of official politics over the past three months.

During that time, the Australian political and media establishment has sought to slander opposition to Israel’s onslaught against Gaza as antisemitism. In this campaign, bound up with the support of the ruling class for the genocide and for US imperialism’s broader war drive in the Middle East, Zionist organisations have been front and centre.

Representatives from groups such as the ECAJ have been cited in the press on an almost daily basis. They have asserted that the primary issue in society is a new wave of antisemitism which they associate with any criticism of Israel. Within the mainstream media, including the ABC, there has been virtually no critical scrutiny of these claims, even though they are generally not substantiated by any factual evidence.

The bona fides of the Zionist leaders, as concerned representatives of the Jewish community, are taken at face

value. The fact that they are proponents of a virulently ethno-nationalist and even fascistic ideology, opposed by many Jewish people, is elided. Their undoubted ties to the Israeli state and its agencies are never probed.

The question inevitably emerges: how many of the beat-ups, phony campaigns and witch-hunts of the past period can be traced back to shady, conspiratorial activities, such as the WhatsApp group that targeted Lattouf? Artists, athletes and other prominent figures who have shown the slightest opposition to the onslaught against Gaza have been the subject of venomous attacks which clearly involve some degree of behind-the-scenes coordination.

In late October, six former Australian prime ministers issued an open letter backing Israel as it was raining down bombs on Gaza and asserting mass antisemitism. The coordination of the letter and its origins remain murky. Paul Keating, the only former prime minister not to have appended his name to the letter, alleged that it had actually been written by Mark Liebler, a representative of one of the main Zionist lobbyists in the country.

Then in late November, an open letter was released, signed by more than 600 prominent individuals, including dozens of politicians and corporate chiefs. The strange document alleged an “unprecedented” wave of antisemitism, which its signatories pledged to fight. While the letter included a throw-away reference to Islamophobia, the thrust was clear by its linking to a website entitled “Say No to Antisemitism.” Who created the website remains unclear.

In context, the letter was part of the broader push to equate mass opposition to the Gaza genocide with antisemitism. The letter, which cited unsubstantiated ECAJ statistics on a rise in antisemitism and was coordinated through private WhatsApp groups, had the character of a petition by the rich and powerful against the general population.

The turn to frame-ups, dirty tricks and politically-motivated victimisations goes beyond the immediate issue of the Israeli onslaught on Gaza. It is part of a broader erosion of democratic rights and civil liberties, amid an eruption of militarism and war and massive social inequality.



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