

Australian Indigenous leader Nova Peris promotes fascistic Zionism, calls for pro-Palestinian activists to be “imprisoned”

Oscar Grenfell**12 February 2024**

In Australia, as internationally, there is mass shock and anger over Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza.

The opposition is such that the federal Labor government, which has backed and aided the Israeli assault, has cynically sought to distance itself from the consequences, shedding crocodile tears over the mass civilian deaths while continuing to support the Israeli regime.

In this context, it is striking that the most rabid defenders of the Israeli war crimes, aside from out and out Zionists, are a layer of prominent Indigenous leaders. Their aggressive support for a genocide, in real time, exposes the fraud that these figures speak on behalf of oppressed Aboriginal people. Instead, they are representatives of a corrupt and privileged elite, tied in to the corporate, state and military structures of capitalist rule.

In the latest example of this trend, Nova Peris, a former Olympian, Labor Party parliamentarian and Indigenous leader, put out a social media video last week, defending Israel and branding any opposition to it as antisemitic. The video, which is being boosted through paid advertising, is presented as a “grassroots” initiative. It was clearly developed in conjunction with Zionist organisations, which are promoting it.

Since then, Peris has gone on a media blitz, including with an interview where she called for pro-Palestinian activists to be imprisoned.

In the comments from the video that have received the most media attention, Peris denounced pro-Palestinian protesters for flying the Australian Indigenous flag. Adopting the tone of an exasperated lawyer, about to launch action for a copyright infringement, Peris demanded to know: “Who gave free, outright, prior and informed consent to use our flag for your cause?”

There is an obvious irony, in that Peris played a leading role in a successful campaign to end copyright restrictions on the flag several years ago.

The media focus on the flag issue has been used to obscure the extraordinary character of the video as a whole. It is among the clearest public articulations in Australia over the past four months of the ethno-nationalist and fascist program underlying the Israeli onslaught on Gaza. There is nothing in Peris' diatribe with which hardened Israeli/Zionist settlers who steal Palestinian land and chant “death to the Arabs” would disagree.

Peris begins with a potted history of the role played by Jewish

lawyers in Indigenous legal cases, including those establishing Aboriginal land rights. Native title and land rights have been used by the Indigenous elite to amass substantial funds through access deals with mining and other corporations, while the vast majority of Indigenous people have remained in abject poverty.

That aside, the fact that some of the lawyers who took land rights cases happened to be Jewish would be of limited interest to anyone who did not have an unhealthy obsession with race and ethnicity.

But Peris is such a racialist. Her entire argument is premised on a complete identification of Judaism and the Jewish people with Israel. This line, opposed by a growing number of Jews around the world, is itself antisemitic, associating the Jewish people with a militarist and authoritarian state as it perpetrates heinous war crimes.

Peris references the doctrine of *terra nullius*, Latin for “land belonging to nobody,” which was used to justify the British colonisation of Australia and the dispossession of its Indigenous population. *Terra nullius* formed a key component of vicious anti-Aboriginal racism, and denied any significance to the continuous Indigenous presence in Australia, which is thought to span 60,000 years or more.

That is all true, but one may ask, what on earth does it have to do with defending Israel as it is ethnically-cleansing Indigenous Palestinians?

Peris, in fact, decided to turn reality on its head. It was not the Palestinians who were under assault, but Israel.

Peris was committed to “helping your people overturn a similar lie which is now being told against the Jewish people. That they have no connection to the land of Israel, that they are ‘settler colonists.’ It is clear that enemies of the Jewish people now seek to impose a myth of *terra nullius* on the Jewish people, the indigenous inhabitants of the land of Israel.”

To justify these assertions, Peris declared: “It is historically and archaeologically proven that they were there fighting for their freedom in Israel before the birth of Christ and over a thousand years before the advent of Islam.”

Those remarks are a combination of historical falsification, religious obscurantism and ethno-supremacism straight out of the fascist playbook.

No one who is honest, or on the level, denies that the Palestinians have continuously occupied the land that is now Israel

for generations and generations, spanning thousands of years.

Zionism, a right-wing ethno-nationalist movement, emerged in Europe in the latter part of the 19th century. Its development was a modern phenomenon, far more connected to political events in Europe than anything that had occurred in the Middle East millennia before. For decades, Zionism was a fringe movement, with far greater numbers of Jewish people adhering to the internationalist perspective of the socialist movement.

It took the betrayals of Stalinism, including those that led to the victory of Hitler, and then the horrors of the Holocaust for Zionism to establish a mass base of support among Jewish people.

The state of Israel was formed in 1948 as an imperialist outpost. Its establishment was based on the brutal ethnic cleansing of Palestinians through terror and mass murder. This was justified with a doctrine very similar to *terra nullius*, with Zionists claiming that Palestinian villages, which had been there for centuries, were transient and, in any event, that they weren't putting the land to great use.

In other words, there are clear and distinct parallels between the colonial dispossession of the Australian Aboriginal people and the neo-colonial dispossession of the Palestinians.

Peris was simply mouthing Zionist talking points. The claim that a substantial Jewish presence in what is now Israel, some 2,000 years ago, justifies the establishment of an exclusively Jewish nation-state 2,000 years later, is a reactionary absurdity. Peris did not say, but the foundation of this argument is religious, not "archaeological" or "historical," in the line that the Jewish people deserve the state of Israel, because it was purportedly promised to them by God.

The entire premise is a mythical and ethno-nationalist one. Historical experiences, in the ancient past, before modern nation-states were even known, are marshaled as the pretext for maintaining an ethnically-exclusive nation-state in the 21st century. Peris' line about a Jewish presence in Israel predating the birth of Christ and the creation of Islam was clearly aimed at justifying the doctrine of Jewish racial domination that is the foundation of the Israeli state.

Peris' arguments are the same as those advanced by far-right Zionists, who insist on a providential Jewish right to conquer and occupy Gaza, the West Bank and other parts of a supposed greater Israel, including territory in Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Iraq. It should be noted that the Australian Jewish Association, which has thanked Peris for her video and aggressively promoted it, has ties to settler organisations in Israel. It is these forces whose bidding Peris is doing.

In an interview yesterday on the right-wing "Sky News," Peris made another remarkable intervention.

Last week, the contents of a secret WhatsApp chat group was leaked and published online. Among other things, the group, involving Jewish creatives and pro-Israel activists, plotted to dox Palestinians and to have them fired from their jobs for opposing the assault on Gaza. The Zionists have sought to bury this, instead presenting the leak of the chat as a violation of privacy and the publication of a "Jew list."

Peris repeated these talking points to Sky, but went further than most. The leaking had incited "racial harassment," "pain" and

"violence," she asserted without a shred of evidence. This necessitated "harsh measures." "I would call for a prison sentence," Peris declared.

The former athlete is not only supporting a genocide, but is also calling for police-state repression against those who oppose it.

Peris' reactionary positions are not an aberration. In October, another Indigenous leader Professor Marcia Langton branded all opposition to the Israeli onslaught as antisemitic and rejected any identification between the historic oppression of the Aboriginal people and the Palestinians. Speaking to the Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper, Langton declared that the Palestinians were effectively responsible for their own slaughter, because they elected Hamas in 2006. Other Indigenous leaders have put forward similar positions.

Undoubtedly, crass and opportunist interests are a factor, including of the monetary variety.

Mark Leibler, one of the most prominent Zionist lobbyists in the country, was also a founding board member and then co-chair of Reconciliation Australia, which purports to advance the interests of Indigenous people. He has a close relationship with Langton and several other Indigenous leaders.

But more fundamental than that is the class position of the Aboriginal leaders. They are representatives of an elite that has been cultivated for years and that has its own selfish and predatory interests, distinct from and opposed to those of ordinary people, Indigenous and non-indigenous. The intensely hostile attitude of figures such as Peris and Langton to the Palestinians is not fundamentally different to their attitude to impoverished Indigenous Australians.

Peris, it should be recalled, sought a political career with Labor, a party that has been involved in every attack on Indigenous people over the past century or more. Langton was a defender of the Northern Territory Intervention, a brutal military-police occupation of Aboriginal lands.

Their aim is to promote division on every front. The only means by which the onslaught against the Palestinians in Gaza can be stopped is through the mobilisation of the working class on an international scale against war and capitalism. The same is true for ending the oppression of Indigenous people in Australia.



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