

Prominent Australian Jewish cultural leader denounces Zionism and Israel's barbarism

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Louise Adler, a widely respected editor, publisher and leading figure in arts organisations, delivered a politically principled and courageous speech in Brisbane last Saturday, condemning the Israeli regime's mass killings in Gaza and outlining the reactionary antisemitic history of Zionism.

Adler, who was the chief executive of Melbourne University Press from 2008 to 2019, is a member of the Jewish Council of Australia advisory committee. She spoke alongside Australian Palestine Advocacy Network president Nasser Mashni, who outlined the history of colonial oppression and Zionist terrorism inflicted on the Palestinian people.

They jointly presented a United Nations Association of Australia 2024 International Day of Peace Brisbane Lecture titled "United for a Just Peace." Some 300 people attended the event at the city's Anglican Christian cathedral, which was also broadcast online.

The speech given by Adler provided a powerful exposure of the myth that the Zionist regime in Israel represents the Jewish people, and of the slanders that any opposition to its fascistic crimes in Palestine and the Middle East is antisemitic. As she recounted, she has been vilified by Zionists for speaking the truth.

Adler began by explaining how her family history had shaped her political views. Her mother and grandparents had fled Berlin in 1938. Had they not been accepted in Australia as asylum seekers, "they would have joined the six million murdered in the Holocaust."

Her paternal grandfather had been rounded up in Paris in 1941 and murdered in the Birkenau Nazi concentration camp. Her father, at the age of 14, joined the Jewish section of the communist resistance in Paris.

"My father's exhortation 'not to look away' was the lesson of his entire life after all that he'd witnessed and lost during World War II and then from the bombing of Hiroshima, the Vietnam War and all the horrors since.

And so, all these years later, the question remains: Who will bear witness if we don't?"

A trip to Israel in 1972 before going to university had dispelled the illusions created by Adler's teenage years in a "socialist Zionist youth movement."

"I imagined that I was landing in a socialist utopia. Instead, the reality of the Zionist project made itself explicit at the airport: European Jews stamped my passport, Middle Eastern Jews manned the luggage carousels while Palestinians swept the floors and cleaned the toilets. So much for the socialist dream."

Adler laid bare another myth. "Israel has long been hailed as the only democracy in the Middle East, which belies the fundamental contradiction: a Jewish state is by definition exclusionary and therefore anti-democratic for everyone who is not Jewish."

She condemned the false identification of Zionism with Jewishness, which saw "the Star of David emblazoned on the uniforms of the IDF [Israel Defense Force] soldiers who humiliate, torture and murder Palestinians."

Adler pointed out that, "as an Australian Jew, I can settle on a kibbutz in southern Israel that was once home to the family of a Palestinian—now confined in Gaza mere kilometres away, who have to break through a barbed wire fence to 'return'—simply because I am a Jew, and he is a Palestinian?"

The speaker recounted how she, like other Jewish opponents of Israel's crimes, had been "repeatedly berated" and threatened for legitimately drawing the parallel between the Holocaust and the Gaza onslaught.

"I have discovered that it is impossible to ask, however hesitantly, whether anyone feels that the images from Gaza on our TV screens are reminiscent of the brutal and now iconic images from last century, of the photos of the Jews rounded up in the Warsaw ghetto. That is to break a taboo. To compare the conduct of the IDF in prosecuting the occupation to the Nazi regime's segregation,

dispossession and persecution of the Jews in World War II is forbidden...

“I have been called a ‘kapo’ (or collaborator), a ‘token Jew’ and received lurid messages: my parents would turn in their graves; I am a ‘denier of Judaism;’ ‘the shame you wear is a suitable crucifix;’ ‘shame on you and all you stand for’ and ‘there are those in the community who wish to do you harm.’ I have been berated in Adelaide’s Pioneer Women’s Memorial Gardens by ‘disgusted’ citizens. I have been glared at buying fruit. I have listened as a Ukrainian Jewish immigrant told me, ‘They’—the Palestinians—‘are not like us.’”

Adler also laid bare the conception that Zionism arose in response to the Holocaust.

“The Holocaust confirmed a collective psychic terror: the deeply ingrained fear that we can never be safe. However, the establishment of a Jewish state didn’t arise as a response to the Holocaust; it was a nationalist project of the 19th century, and its advocates set aside the fact that a Jewish state would entail the denial of an indigenous population.”

She drew a parallel to the dispossession of Australia’s indigenous population, which was accompanied by the British colonial doctrine of “terra nullius” that the continent was an empty land.

“Think of the logic of ‘terra nullius’ transported to the Middle East. The Holocaust has been written into history as a post facto rationale for the establishment of the State of Israel. Rewriting that history is now prosecuted relentlessly to assert that the cure for antisemitism lies in the State of Israel.

“But 75 years later, a succession of wars, countless dead, displaced and deracinated people, the ever-increasing oppression of Palestinians’ lives, years of a reactionary government, and the moral, civil and political cost of denying the rights of another people have added up to what precisely?

“It is incumbent upon us collectively to summon up the lessons of history as we contemplate the reality that successive wars in the Middle East have only produced a terrible loss of innocent lives, be they young people at a rave in Israel or 16,000 children now dead in Gaza, according to Palestinian officials. Shouldn’t our profound pity for the children stay our hands, stop us reaching for weapons of destruction?”

Adler cited a passage from *The Truce* by Primo Levi, an Italian Jewish anti-Zionist, about the terrible plight of children he witnessed as a prisoner in the Auschwitz Nazi death camp.

She placed the events of last October 7 in the historical context of the violent uprooting of Palestinians. “The tragic lesson Israel failed to learn yet again on October 7 is that peace cannot be premised on the subjugation of a people. Violence invariably returns.

“Indeed, every attempt to cover it up—be it with the increasingly fascistic policies of the Israeli government, the ever-increasing restrictive conditions of the occupation, or the hysteria of the Zionist lobby in the diaspora in response to the mildest expression of solidarity with Palestinians—only reveals the terrible and inevitable persistence of violence.”

The violence that Adler references is not just that of Israel. It is the policy of imperialist governments globally. Israel’s slaughter is being funded, supplied and supported by the Biden-Harris administration and all the other imperialist governments, including the Australian Labor government. It is being expanded into Lebanon, with its ultimate target being Iran. This is one war front of a growing global conflagration that includes the NATO/US-instigated war against Russia and the intensifying US-led confrontation with China.

Adler’s remarks underscore the critical importance of the series of lectures and speeches by *World Socialist Web Site* international editorial board chairman David North, published as *The Logic of Zionism: From Nationalist Myth to the Gaza Genocide*. They address the most urgent political questions preoccupying masses of workers and young people throughout the world: What are the causes of the genocide in Gaza, and how can it be stopped?

In one of the lectures, The Israeli state’s fascist ideology and the genocide in Gaza, North deals with the issue of his own Jewish ancestry, and that of his grandfather, the conductor and composer Ignatz Waghalter, in the context of further exposing the reactionary nationalist origins and ideology of Zionism, and the wider plunge into war.



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