

Police knew attack on Palestinian-Australian restaurant may have been politically motivated

Oscar Grenfell

17 November 2024

An article in the *Age* on Thursday raised troubling questions about the official statements of Victoria Police about the firebombing of a Burgertory restaurant in the Melbourne suburb of Caulfield on November 10 last year.

The victim of the attack, Hash Tayeh, is a prominent Palestinian-Australian who has been repeatedly targeted by Zionists for his forthright condemnations of the Israeli genocide in Gaza. Tayeh, along with store staff, stated that the Caulfield restaurant had, in the weeks preceding the bombing, been subjected to racist vilification and intimidation by Israeli supporters.

Almost as soon as news of the arson was made public, however, Victoria Police declared that it was not politically motivated. The very day of the attack, Inspector Scott Dwyer stated: “I want to tell people I am very confident that this is not linked to a religious or political incident.”

At the time, the WSWWS, along with other opponents of the genocide, noted the unusual character of these statements. At the very least, how could the police have been able to rule out a political motive so definitively under conditions where they did not know who the perpetrators of the attack were?

On January 31, police arrested two men, subsequently charging them with arson and a range of other offences in relation to the attack. The media crudely highlighted the African ancestry of the two alleged perpetrators, while representatives of Victoria Police again insisted that there was no political angle to the crime.

As court hearings proceeded, however, it emerged that the men had allegedly been paid for the crime and thus were acting as middle men for forces whose identity and motives are publicly unknown.

Thursday's *Age* report was in ~~th~~based previously hidden 500-page brief of evidence against the accused prepared by the police and prosecutors. It revealed that Victoria Police had deployed undercover operatives to gather evidence against one of the alleged perpetrators, Habib Musa.

A summary in the brief of alleged conversations between Musa and the police operatives stated: “The motivation behind the arson was related to the conflict overseas between Palestine and Israel.” In addition, the *Age* reported “Musa had outlined how many other offenders were allegedly involved in the attack, what they were paid and what evidence they believed they left behind.”

It is hard to conceive of an innocent explanation for the complete contradiction between Musa's alleged statement of motive and the public declarations of Victoria Police.

The *Age* does not indicate when the conversations between Musa and the police operatives occurred. But, given that he was arrested in January and has been denied bail since, it is likely that the encounters occurred at least ten months ago. As the *Age* noted, Musa's comments about a political motive have not been revealed in any court hearings, including a July appearance at which police successfully fought off a bail application.

In a statement to the *Age* before the story was published, Victoria Police again maintained there was no political motive but would not elaborate or address the new material.

The alleged perpetrators have stated that they were paid \$20,000. That, together with the seriousness of the attack, indicates a degree of coordination and

determination that unquestionably poses an ongoing risk to the community.

In an open letter to Victoria Police published on X, Tayeh responded to the *Age* revelations describing them as having “ripped open a wound that’s been festering for over a year. It’s a harsh reminder of the injustice I’ve faced—a justice system that has failed, a police force that has betrayed, and a community left vulnerable.”

The firebombing, he wrote, had been “an act of arson and hatred that should have been taken as a serious threat to our safety. And yet, despite the severity, police downplayed the attack, stubbornly refusing to classify it as a hate crime, and refusing to pursue justice on our behalf.”

Tayeh noted that this was not a one off, but formed part of a pattern. He had repeatedly been targeted with violence and Victoria Police had repeatedly downplayed the incidents.

A pig’s heart had been left at the door to Tayeh’s home in a disturbing act of intimidation. Tayeh stated that police had dismissed this as mere “littering.”

Then, in April Tayeh’s home was firebombed. He wrote that a molotov cocktail had erupted at the front door of the house, “setting the entryway on fire beneath the room where my two-year-old child sleeps. I have CCTV footage of this, a blatant act of terror against my family, yet the police called it ‘minor damage to a door.’ They downplayed an attack that could have killed my family as if it were nothing—just another incident to ignore.” No arrests were ever made and the investigation has ended.

Victoria Police have not only displayed an indifference to what appears to be a concerted campaign of violence against Tayeh. They have themselves targeted him. In July, Tayeh was arrested and interrogated over allegations that he had breached the state’s Racial and Religious Tolerance Act.

Tayeh had delivered a speech at a weekly pro-Gaza demonstration in Melbourne, as he has on many occasions, and had used the chant “All Zionists are terrorists.” In his public addresses, Tayeh has repeatedly rejected the fraudulent identification of Zionism and Judaism, noting that the neo-colonial political ideology has nothing to do with the Jewish faith. He has spoken alongside and collaborated with Jewish opponents of the Israeli mass murder.

The questions about Tayeh’s treatment go beyond the role of the police. Given how high-profile the attacks against him have been and the unprecedented nature of his own arrest and questioning for “hate crimes,” political forces have undoubtedly been involved.

For more than a year, the federal Labor government has supported Israel politically, diplomatically and materially. While occasionally issuing weasel-words of “concern” over the mass deaths in Gaza, Labor has insisted on Israel’s “right to defend itself,” through the bombardment of defenceless Palestinians, the onslaught against Lebanon and the threats of war against Iran.

The Labor government in Victoria has been particularly vociferous in its backing of Israel, especially for a state administration. Premier Jacinta Allen has repeatedly taken to social media with deranged rants against pro-Palestinian protesters who she has slandered as antisemites and threats to “social cohesion.”

Politically, the downplaying of the attacks against Tayeh serve to reinforce the official narrative. Throughout the genocide, the entire political and media establishment have vilified supporters of the Palestinians. At the same time, the most vociferous and bellicose Zionist activists have been given endless uncritical coverage and have been presented as victims, without any evidence or even any incidents to point to. The campaign of terror against a prominent pro-Palestinian activist up-ends this narrative.

As Tayeh raised in his open letter, the inevitable question that emerges is what else are Victoria Police and other state agencies concealing about the attacks against him?



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact