Australian governments exploit murky antisemitic incidents to attack democratic rights

Oscar Grenfell
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Australian governments, mostly led by the Labor Party, together with the entire political and media establishment, have seized upon a series of murky graffiti and arson attacks to whip up an atmosphere of national hysteria, demonise opponents of Israel's genocide in Gaza and crack down on civil liberties.

Yesterday, Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese convened an "urgent" meeting of the National Cabinet, an extra-constitutional body established during the pandemic that brings together the federal, state and territory leaders. The purpose of the meeting was to address what Albanese described as a "shocking rise" of antisemitic incidents, with the gathering discussing a nationally coordinated policing and intelligence response.

The meeting was called after a childcare facility in the eastern Sydney suburb of Maroubra was set alight overnight Monday and graffiti was painted on it reading "f*ck the Jews." The childcare centre is not Jewish, so it is entirely unclear why it was targeted or by whom.

Political leaders, the police and the media have stated their belief that the intended target was the Maroubra Synagogue. They have not provided any explanation other than its proximity to the childcare centre. The distance between the two, however, is a not inconsiderable 180 metres.

Before the National Cabinet meeting, Albanese, together with New South Wales (NSW) Labor Premier Chris Minns, rushed to the childcare centre. Minns summed up the inflammatory and hysterical response declaring that "these bastards will be rounded up" by the police and lamenting "that we have animals in our city."

The Maroubra arson followed a similar incident in the eastern Sydney suburb of Dover Heights in the early hours of Friday morning. Four cars were targeted with anti-Jewish and anti-Israel slogans and at least one was set alight.

That day, Alex Ryvchin, the Co-Chief Executive Officer of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) stated publicly that he had formerly owned and lived in the house outside which the arson occurred. ECAJ is a virulently pro-Israel Zionist lobby group, which has backed the genocide in Gaza and denounced all opposition as antisemitism.

The media was full of articles suggesting that the arson was an attack on Ryvchin and even something approaching an attempt on his life. Ryvchin declared that those who had attacked his "beloved ex-house" were animated by the same spirit as the Nazis who perpetrated the Holocaust.

That is how the attacks are being depicted more broadly. While Albanese has virtually declared a "national crisis," federal opposition leader Peter Dutton has denounced the Labor prime minister as weak on antisemitism, together with the Murdoch media and some Zionist leaders.

The same line was advanced in comments by Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister Sharren Haskel to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation this morning. Haskel essentially accused Albanese of being responsible for the attacks, declaring "the attitude of the current Australian government towards Israel is inflaming a lot of these emotions and giving, I guess, some acceptance."

Haskel's ludicrous statement appears to be a reference to Labor's tepid calls for a ceasefire and its occasional references to a "two-state solution." In reality, Labor has backed Israel politically, diplomatically and materially throughout the genocide, and has viciously attacked domestic opposition, including with threats to ban pro-Palestinian protests.

Haskel wanted more, however. "Words are not enough, we've passed that a long time ago," the "Jewish community needs actions." Haskel is a leading member of a lawless regime whose prime minister is evading an International Criminal Court warrant for crimes against humanity. Her own recent work appears to have focussed substantially on an international campaign to defund and criminalise UNRWA, the United Nations agency responsible for providing humanitarian relief to the Palestinians.

Part of what Haskel was likely angling for was pointed to in an article in this morning's *Age*. It revealed that in his capacity as Australian ambassador to the US, former Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd recently met with Abraham Cooper, an American rabbi and Zionist leader. Cooper had asked Rudd to try and forbid pro-Palestinian protests from being held in the city centres of Sydney and Melbourne on the fraudulent grounds that the peaceful demonstrations rendered the cities

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"no-go zone" for Jews.

Cooper could not be ignorant of the fact the pro-Palestinian rallies in Australia, as in the US, include substantial contingents of anti-Zionist Jews. They have been held weekly since the genocide began, without any antisemitic attacks, and protest leaders have always insisted on their opposition to racism.

What Cooper was advancing, in particularly crude form, dominates the political and media discussion in Australia. There is a continual attempt to connect the mass opposition to the genocide and Australia's complicity in Israel's crimes, and the murky antisemitic attacks.

The graffiti attacks that have included anti-Jewish slogans are clearly reactionary and racist in content.

In supporting the genocide, governments and the ruling elite have continually conflated the state of Israel with Judaism and the Jewish people. It is possible that backward elements, including youth, unhinged by the scenes of mass deaths in Gaza and accepting that false conflation, have been motivated to carry out antisemitic acts.

The ABC counts eight major antisemitic incidents in Sydney over the past three months, involving the modus operandi of graffiti and at times arson. A Melbourne synagogue was also burnt down last month.

At least some of the incidents appear designed to demonise supporters of the Palestinians and Muslims.

On January 10, the Southern Sydney Synagogue was defaced with graffiti reading "Hitler on top" and then "Allah hua" broken off. The latter appeared to be a botched attempt to write "Allahu Akbar," the Arabic phrase meaning "God is the greatest," or one of its variants. It seems highly unlikely that a Muslim would not be able to recall the phrase.

In another incident in Woollahra last month, two cars were set alight and graffiti was written on house fences. "Kill Israiel" and "Death 2 Israiel" some of it said. Again, it seems improbable that someone intensely engaged with the Middle East conflict would not know how to spell Israel.

Yesterday, a 34-year-old woman was arrested and charged in connection with that incident. Contrary to the official campaign, she is not Middle Eastern, does not appear to be Islamic and there is no record of her ever having mentioned Gaza online. Part of the evidence against her is that she allegedly was asking around in local Facebook groups for jerry cans shortly before the arson.

A man arrested this morning over the defacement of a Newtown Synagogue earlier this month was also charged with possessing suspected stolen goods and drug cultivation. He also is not Middle Eastern.

In a statement yesterday, Australian Federal Police (AFP) Commissioner Reece Kershaw wrote: "We are looking into whether overseas actors or individuals have paid local criminals in Australia to carry out some of these crimes in our suburbs." The AFP has indicated they think online payments involving crypto currencies are involved.

In the absence of further elaboration or any substantiation, Kershaw's remarks had an inevitably inflammatory effect, with Liberal-National figures and the Murdoch press asking whether a foreign terrorist group or government was orchestrating the attacks.

In reporting Kershaw's statement, the *Sydney Morning Herald* recalled an August warning by Mike Burgess, chief of ASIO the domestic spy agency, of "'twisted' ideologies – including anti-government conspiracy theories, racism, Islamist extremism and neo-Nazism." That the far-right has an affinity for cryptocurrency is well known. Are the groups or individuals referenced by Kershaw, if they exist, connected to the far-right internationally?

Such forces have been emboldened by their official promotion over recent years, including with the election and installation of the fascist Donald Trump as US president. At a rally after his inauguration yesterday, far-right billionaire Elon Musk repeatedly threw up the Nazi salute. The fact that fascists are in power in the US and are being cultivated throughout Europe and internationally, is never mentioned in the official coverage of Sydney's antisemitic incidents.

There is a neo-Nazi movement within Australia, the National Socialist Network (NSN). Publicly, its leaders have stated their enmity to both Jews and Palestinians, in line with their white supremacist racism. Because their abhorrent views are opposed by the vast majority of the population, clandestine graffiti has been a frequent activity of the NSN.

In December, NSN member Christopher Carrig and his girlfriend Taylor Bayly were spared jail, having been convicted of property damage for defacing Sydney's Macquarie University with Nazi graffiti earlier in the year. Other members of the NSN have previously faced similar charges.

In September 2023, i.e., before the current Israeli genocide in Gaza, a house in Kensington, in Sydney's east, where many of the recent attacks have occurred, was defaced with Nazi symbols and phrases. Similar incidents involving Nazi iconography have occurred intermittently in the east, which has a large Jewish population. This includes the 2016 defacement of Maroubra Synagogue with swastikas.

In their frenzy to link the latest attacks with the pro-Palestinian movement, governments and the media have ignored the possibility of Nazi involvement. Meanwhile, Albanese has hailed Trump's election and pledged to work with him. Neither Albanese, nor any other Labor leader, has criticised Musk's Nazi salutes.

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