

Australian right-wing launches witch-hunt against anti-Zionist Jewish leader

Oscar Grenfell
28 January 2025

A protracted campaign by the Australian establishment to tar all opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza as antisemitism has found an improbable new target: a prominent anti-Zionist Jewish leader and her remarks at an anti-racism conference.

The attempt to brand Sarah Schwartz, a human rights lawyer and the Executive Officer of the Jewish Council of Australia, as some sort of anti-Jewish bigot is a particularly sharp exposure of the bogus character of this broader campaign. Schwartz, a longstanding opponent of all forms of racism, is being targeted by right-wing forces with a record of racist dogwhistling.

The confected hysteria is over a “National Symposium on Unifying Anti-Racist Research and Action,” held at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) on January 23 and 24. Speakers included academics and activists, some of them indigenous, as well as independent federal parliamentarian Lidia Thorpe. Macquarie University academic Randa Abdel-Fattah, who has repeatedly been the target of Zionist witch-hunts spoke, as did Schwartz.

Despite the conference running for two days, the outrage by leading politicians, Zionist organisations and the media focuses almost exclusively on a still photo of Schwartz speaking with a slide behind her headlined “Dutton’s Jew.” That was a reference to Peter Dutton, leader of the federal Liberal-National Coalition.

The slide, which Schwartz has noted was satirical, included a number of attributes, such as “promotes ‘Judeo-Christian’ values;” “hates ‘the radical left;” “scared of protesters,” “Hates Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims;” “Hates immigrants,” etc.

In a humorous manner, Schwartz was pointing to the obviously fraudulent character of the Coalition’s intense and sudden preoccupation with antisemitism. That preoccupation does not extend to any other form of racism, or even the threat posed by genuine far-right antisemites, some of whom are in the periphery of the

Coalition, but focuses exclusively on slandering opponents of the Israeli war crimes.

And it is being overseen by Dutton, himself a right-wing figure, whose entire career has been bound up with attacks on refugees and immigrants, as well as racial dog whistling on “law and order” issues.

In 2008, Dutton walked out of parliament to protest the then Labor government’s apology to the “stolen generation,” Indigenous people who were kidnapped from their parents by the state as part of an effort to eradicate the Aboriginal population. The apology was a sham, covering for ongoing attacks on oppressed indigenous people, but Dutton’s objection to even this token acknowledgement makes clear enough his own “anti-racist” credentials.

Schwartz was also highlighting the opportunist and reactionary character of Zionist organisations aligning with Dutton over their shared support for Israel and its genocide.

Willfully ignoring those points, Schwartz’s detractors have presented the slide as something approaching a hate crime. Dutton labelled the event a “disgrace.” The New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies, a Zionist outfit, declared: “The presentation would not have been out of place in antisemitic gatherings throughout the ages.”

Zionist groups have been virulently hostile to Schwartz since she played a key role in establishing the Jewish Council of Australia last year to provide Jewish people with an alternative to the myriad other bodies, which while claiming to be representative, are generally hardline defenders of the Israeli state.

Predictably, given the corporatised character of the universities, QUT has immediately bowed to the witch-hunt. Its vice-chancellor, Professor Margaret Sheil, rushed to issue a grovelling apology on Friday afternoon, i.e., the day the conference concluded, and menacingly promised to “review the circumstances of this presentation and take

any action necessary.”

Amid a deluge of phony outrage, two other responses were particularly noteworthy.

Prominent Indigenous academic Marcia Langton issued a vicious attack on Schwartz in the Murdoch-owned *Australian*. “Her claim to being satirical is deluded,” Langton wrote. “She presented a series of hateful stereotypes of Jewish people that have been used to persecute them for centuries and justify genocide... She deeply offended Jewish Australians and other Australians, including me.”

Langton personifies the reactionary character of a layer of the indigenous elite cultivated by successive governments, Labor and Liberal-National alike. This layer has nothing to do with oppressed Indigenous people, instead seeking to advance its own interests within the corridors of the political and corporate elite by exploiting Aboriginal identity politics.

In November, 2023, Langton published another opinion piece in the *Australian*, hailing Israel’s onslaught against Gaza, denouncing any comparison between the oppression of Aboriginals and Palestinians and depicting the victims of Israeli bombs as “human shields” largely responsible for their plight.

In her diatribe against Schwartz, Langton drew a distinction between “academic freedom” and “freedom of speech.” The crux of her argument was that the two are not the same, and that “academic freedom” entails academics being subordinate to the dictates of university management.

That was the thrust of the other significant response, from the federal Labor government. Leading Labor MPs immediately invoked their bipartisan parliamentary inquiry into antisemitism on university campuses, a McCarthyite mechanism to suppress opposition to the genocide among students and academics.

Josh Burns, a Labor MP on the committee and an ardent Zionist, branded the anti-racism conference as “shocking and personally, I have seen some truly stupid things, but that was about as irresponsible as I’ve seen in the last 18 months.”

Under the banner of combatting antisemitism, the government and the entire establishment is going on the offensive against free speech, and any opposition to the unprecedented war crimes by the far right Israeli regime that they are complicit in.

Perhaps the greatest irony of the current furore is that the only Jewish individual under actual political attack, in connection with the QUT conference, is Schwartz herself.

In the name of combatting antisemitism, government and opposition leaders and the media are persecuting a Jewish person, because of her opposition to genocide, in a clear bid to silence her and others with similar opinions.

Schwartz, importantly, has not backed down. In an opinion piece in the *Guardian* yesterday, she elaborated on the point made in her satirical slide. Schwartz located Dutton’s posturing over antisemitism in the context of a broader trend among far-right and even fascistic forces internationally. They supported Israel for imperialist geo-strategic reasons, but also used their backing of it to further a right-wing campaign against Muslims and immigrants, with the Zionist state presented as being on the frontline of a “civilisational conflict.”

With regards to Dutton, for instance, she noted: “When comparing Hamas to the Nazis during his argument for Australia to refuse temporary visitor visas to Palestinians fleeing persecution in Gaza, Dutton appeared to suggest the Nazis at least felt guilt because they tried to conceal their crimes. In parliament, he was criticised for linking antisemitism to the high court’s decision to ban indefinite immigration detention.

“He has pushed draconian measures such as mandatory sentencing, which has no evidence of reducing hate, in response to rising antisemitism. He has referred to the weekly anti-war protests in support of a ceasefire and Palestinian rights as ‘anti-Jewish protests,’ ignoring the multicultural nature of these rallies and the large number of Jews like me who attend them.”

Pointing to global developments, Schwartz wrote: “Trump appeared happy to host neo-Nazis and Holocaust deniers at Mar-a-Lago for dinner. His right-hand man, Elon Musk, gave two fascist-style salutes at Trump’s inauguration and has recently endorsed the extreme far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) political party. I don’t believe that Trump and the far right could care less about the threat these groups pose to actual Jewish people...”

Her article can be read here.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)