

# Australia: Bondi Royal Commission hearings used to attack anti-genocide movement

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The first public hearings of the Royal Commission established by the Labor government in the wake of the Bondi terrorist attack demonstrated the anti-democratic and witch-hunting purpose of the inquiry. The entire focus was to demonise and defame mass opposition to Israel's genocide in Gaza and Australia's complicity in it.

The two weeks of testimony, which concluded last Friday, had almost nothing to do with the antisemitic atrocity of December 14, where two Islamic State-inspired gunmen opened fire on a Hanukkah event, killing fifteen people.

The hearings were held after the release of the Royal Commission's interim report, which buried the many unanswered questions about how the attack was able to occur, given that at least one of the perpetrators had previously been investigated by ASIO, the domestic spy agency, over suspected terrorist connections.

With those issues suppressed on the grounds of "national security," the Commission moved on to its real purpose: to delegitimise and slander the anti-genocide movement. The hearings were ostensibly personal testimony, primarily from Jewish people, about the purported growth of antisemitism in Australia.

The line was set, however, by the leaders of the main Zionist organisations, who have been among the most vociferous defenders of Israel's war crimes against the Palestinians.

Alex Ryvchin, the co-CEO of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), testified on the first day of the hearings. He declared that "when you have, for two and a half years, the incitement against the Jewish community, the characterisation of ordinary Jewish Australians as child killers, as supporters of genocide, of course people will act against us and think they're doing something noble and righteous."

In terms of the mass anti-genocide movement, all of that was simply false. That movement has been explicitly based on a rejection of the conflation of Jewish people with the Israeli state. In reality, it is the Labor government, the corporate press and the Zionist organisations themselves that have continually blurred that fundamental distinction, as a means of legitimising the war crimes.

As for Ryvchin's suggestion of some connection between the perpetrators of the Bondi attack and popular hostility to the genocide, it was no less slanderous. The terrorists were, by all accounts, hardline Islamic State supporters, who would have been intensely hostile to the generally secular, multi-ethnic and multi-

religious character of the mass protests that have been held across the country, and internationally, for the past two-and-a-half years.

In his written submission, Jeremy Liebler, the president of the Zionist Federation of Australia, sounded the same tune. Liebler, whose family has close ties to the Israeli state, wrote: "Antisemitism, unlike other forms of hatred, now arrives wearing the language of human rights. The accusations levelled at Israel and, through Israel, at Jews, are framed in the vocabulary of progressive values: genocide, apartheid, colonialism, ethnic cleansing."

The not-so-thinly veiled message was that any condemnation of Israel is antisemitic and therefore illegitimate. By Liebler's standard, virtually every reputable human rights organisation and international law expert in the world is antisemitic, because they have accurately branded Israel's mass slaughter in Gaza as genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Tali Pinsky, an Israeli academic who migrated to Australia last year, proclaimed that an online post branding the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) as child killers was "definitely" antisemitic. "People go to support their country to defend against terror, which Israel is afflicted with and must defend against," she proclaimed, before adding "I served in the IDF."

That is simply support for the Israeli state and another declaration that criticism of its crimes is unacceptable. The IDF has killed at least 21,000 Palestinian children in Gaza since October 2023.

Some of the testimony was downright provocative. Deborah Conway, a musician whose career peaked 30 years ago, declared: "I think that idea of anti-Zionism is, in fact, a genocidal impulse."

Conway presented herself as a victim of irrational anti-Zionism. One of the primary reasons for public ire against Conway was not touched upon—an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in late 2023, where she was defending Israel's bombardment of Gaza.

When the interviewer raised that many Palestinian children were being killed as a result, Conway responded, "Well, depends on what you call kids." Conway later "clarified" that she was referring to 16 and 17-year-olds purportedly fighting for Hamas, the standard line of the Israeli government in brushing away mass child casualties.

The positions of the Zionist leaders and several public figures were echoed in other testimony, some of which was delivered anonymously. Some of that testimony descended into complete

farce.

An office worker bemoaned the fact that as she was ascending to work in an elevator, she would see television news reports which frequently touched on the bombing of Gaza. The same woman relayed another “experience” of antisemitism: “[M]y friend told me she recently went to a concert. She had a great time and at the end, the performer just said, ‘Thank you and free Palestine’ and I think that happens almost every single day, and, yes, it’s very tiring.”

Other testimony bemoaned opposition to the genocide among students on university campuses. One student testified that “[W]hen I leave the library, there’s a table right bang in front of me as soon as I leave that’s basically anti-Israel, pro-Palestine in which you will have a bunch of people with Arabic words on their shirts and they’re, like, having their signs, like, chanting.” The student acknowledged that “it’s not normally anything specifically antisemitic,” but concluded that such activity was generally “antisemitic” because it delegitimised Israel. Another student was upset by the frequency of “Palestinian bake sales” on campuses.

Such testimony hinted at a reality that was completely covered up in the hearings. The Zionist activists, while presenting themselves as victims, are in reality frothing opponents of democratic rights. At university campuses, they have frequently demanded pro-Palestinian activism to be shut down. Zionists have also viciously attacked anti-Zionist Jewish activists in vile terms, denouncing them as traitors and the equivalent of Nazi collaborators.

The “Loud Jew Collective,” a group of anti-Zionist Jewish activists who have played a prominent role in pro-Palestinian protests, were denied the right to testify. So was the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, which had intended to challenge the false conflation of opposition to Israeli crimes with antisemitism.

The hearings were an exercise in amalgam. Absurd and politically motivated denunciations of opposition to the genocide were combined with the recounting of real instances of antisemitism. That included school children and their parents relaying incidents of antisemitic bullying. Such bullying must and is opposed by all democratically minded and reasonable people.

But the premise of drawing sweeping conclusions of a nationwide surge in antisemitism based on a handful of unverified anecdotes is a dubious one. That is all the more so, under conditions where the Zionist organisations have branded virtually all expressions of opposition to Israel as antisemitism, including in figures that they release.

Several of the more disturbing instances of antisemitism recounted in the hearings appeared to relate, not to pro-Palestinian activists, but to far-right and fascist forces. Such forces are growing, emboldened by their promotion by sections of the political and media establishment, epitomised globally by President Donald Trump’s attempts to establish a fascistic dictatorship in the US.

One of the most disturbing elements of the hearings was the tendency of the Zionist leaders to downplay the danger of actual antisemitism, because of their single-minded focus on defending Israel.

The testimony of Jillian Segal, a former Zionist lobbyist, appointed by the Labor government last year to be its Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, was a case in point.

In a potted history of antisemitism, she declared that anti-Jewish bigotry was initially “based on religion, on the deicide, Jews killing Christ. Then it morphed into race, which we saw in Nazi Germany and now, of course, it is much more concerned with the State of Israel.”

That was an extraordinary statement from a government official ostensibly tasked with combatting antisemitism. Segal was downplaying the threat posed by religious and racial antisemitism, a line that would warm the hearts of fascist bigots everywhere. Segal’s comment could legitimately be described as antisemitic, given that it all but denied the continuing existence of anti-Jewish bigotry.

The deliberate conflation of antisemitism with anti-Zionism and criticism of Israeli state policy is one of the most dishonest and politically sinister operations carried out by the Zionist lobby, Western governments and corporate media in the context of Israel’s ongoing genocide in Gaza. The purpose of this conflation is not to defend Jewish people from genuine bigotry—it is to criminalise dissent, suppress mass opposition to war crimes and provide ideological cover for a genocide being carried out in real time.

It is Zionism itself, and the genocidal conduct of the Israeli state, that most powerfully fuels antisemitism in the world. When the Israeli government and its propagandists insist that Israel speaks for all Jews and that all Jews bear responsibility for its actions, they do the work of antisemites for them.

Segal has focused her tenure on campaigning for a vast crackdown on pro-Palestinian activism and criticism of Israel. The federal Labor government has accepted a report she issued, demanding censorship of the media, the universities and all public institutions, in a chilling assault on civil liberties aimed at suppressing anti-war opposition. That is the real purpose of the Royal Commission.



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