

Firebombing of Melbourne synagogue used to attack opponents of Gaza genocide

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In the early hours of Friday morning, before dawn, a firebomb was thrown into the Adass Israel Synagogue in the Melbourne suburb of Ripponlea. The ensuing blaze gutted the building and one worshipper suffered injuries.

The arson attack was utterly reactionary. Given the target, there is every reason to suspect that it was motivated by antisemitism. The consequences could have been even more catastrophic, as several people were reportedly in the building at the time of the attack. The incident should be thoroughly investigated by the relevant authorities and the perpetrators held to account.

The response of the entire political and media establishment, however, has been to pre-empt and taint such a necessary investigation. In the most cynical fashion, the major political parties and most of the media have latched onto the firebombing to prosecute their 13-month long vilification of opponents of the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza.

This has been an international campaign, spearheaded by those directly responsible for the mass slaughter of tens or even hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

On Saturday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu posted a condemnation of the arson to X/Twitter. He denounced the firebombing as an “abhorrent act of antisemitism,” adding “I expect the state authorities to use their full weight to prevent such antisemitic acts in the future.”

Having dispensed with the incident itself in a couple of sentences, the Israeli leader proceeded with an unhinged rant.

“Unfortunately, it is impossible to separate this reprehensible act from the extreme anti-Israeli position of the Labor government in Australia,” Netanyahu declared. Among Labor’s attacks on Israel, he cited its “scandalous decision to support the UN resolution calling on Israel ‘to bring an end to its unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as rapidly as possible.’”

In fact, the resolution was a tepid acknowledgement of international law which is crystal clear on the illegality of Israel’s occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Along with Israel and the US, the resolution was voted against by only a handful of states, including tiny countries in the Pacific.

The resolution was a sham, evading the reality that based on

what has been underway for more than a year, much of the Occupied Palestinian Territories are on the path to destruction. Gaza has been levelled and Israel is extending its ethnic-cleansing operation to the West Bank. The imperialist states that voted for the resolution, including Australia, continue to aid these war crimes politically, diplomatically and materially.

In other words, Netanyahu’s outburst was completely unhinged. Its real target, mass popular opposition to the Israeli genocide, was indicated by his concluding declaration that “Anti-Israel sentiment is antisemitism.”

The remarks could have been dismissed as the ravings of an autocrat who is currently evading an International Criminal Court arrest warrant for directing some of the worst imperialist crimes since those of the Nazis.

Instead, Netanyahu’s tirade has largely set the terms of the official discussion in Australia, with the Liberal-National Coalition taking up his position. Not a single senior Labor minister has criticised the fascist Israeli leader’s statement, instead adapting to it. That again underscores the reality that notwithstanding Netanyahu’s remarks, Australian imperialism, including Labor, stands full square behind the criminal Zionist regime.

Coalition leader Peter Dutton has denounced Labor as “soft” on antisemitism. At a press conference this morning, he announced that a Coalition government would establish an “antisemitism taskforce,” bringing together the Australian Federal Police, the domestic political spy agency ASIO and other state agencies.

Dutton has indicated that such a taskforce would target mass opposition to the genocide, including pro-Palestinian demonstrations, on the fraudulent grounds that they are manifestations of antisemitism. He has linked this to an openly racist assertion that many pro-Palestinian supporters are likely foreigners, whose visas should be revoked. Dutton has denounced the government for permitting a handful of Palestinians from Gaza to enter the country after fleeing the genocide.

“It is impossible for me to believe that not a single person on a visa visiting our country has been involved in these protests, has been involved in this antisemitism,” Dutton declared. Several Zionist leaders have demanded that the mass pro-

Palestinian protests, which have been held without incident every week for more than a year, now be banned.

Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese responded by declaring over the weekend that in his opinion, the firebombing was an act of terrorism. That is an aggressive political intervention, preempting any objective determination by relevant policing agencies.

Albanese today convened a meeting of the Australian Federal Police and the Victorian Police which made that formal designation, triggering extensive police powers. He also directly took up Dutton's demand for an "antisemitism taskforce," despite Labor MPs previously noting that it was unnecessary.

This morning, Albanese announced \$32.5 million in funding to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) over the next 18 months. The organisation was provided with \$25 million in October last year.

While ECAJ is involved in providing security to synagogues, it is not a politically-impartial representative body of the Jewish community, but a Zionist lobby group. Since it received \$25 million last year, its executives have been involved in anti-democratic and pro-war activities, including the witch-hunt to have journalist Antoinette Lattouf sacked from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) for noting that Israel was using starvation as a weapon of war against the Palestinians.

The entire affair, as with so much of the official discussion over the past year, has an air of unreality to it. While Dutton is attacking Labor for being "soft" on pro-Palestinian sentiment, in reality, Albanese has led the charge to vilify and attack opponents of the genocide. That included the prime minister branding peaceful anti-genocide encampments of university students as "hateful" displays that did not "have a place" in society, and state Labor administrations repeatedly threatening to ban pro-Palestinian protests.

The continual conflation of opposition to the genocide and antisemitism is false and reactionary. It is itself an antisemitic argument, dissolving Judaism, a private religious faith, into the militarist Israeli state as it commits gross atrocities.

This bogus line, moreover, covers up basic realities. Every major pro-Palestinian protest leader has condemned antisemitism time and time again, and large numbers of anti-Zionist Jews have been prominent in the demonstrations. A number of ultra-Orthodox Jewish denominations explicitly oppose the Israeli state on religious grounds. The Adass Israel group that was targeted in the firebombing is said to eschew questions of politics and international relations.

The false identification of Judaism and Israel is itself a threat to the safety of Jewish people. It is not hard to see how it could influence politically-backward elements, unhinged by the scenes of mass death in Gaza, into taking actions that are antisemitic.

Another obvious issue that has been covered up by the media is that the vast majority of major antisemitic incidents in

Australia have been perpetrated by fascists. Melbourne is the centre of the National Socialist Network, an avowedly Nazi organisation, whose members have previously roamed the city "hunting Jews" and engaged in other acts of politically and racially-motivated violence.

The attempt to associate the firebombing with supporters of Palestine serves as cover for genuine antisemites. It creates a climate in which they could perpetrate attacks with confidence that the authorities will be looking in a different direction.

In a rare breach of the official campaign, ABC commentator Laura Tingle noted the politicised character of the response to the firebombing. She pointed out: "[I]t is also worth noting the very different treatment by our politicians of Muslim communities subject to very similar attacks over the past 10 years by our politicians.

"A 2021 study of 75 mosques across Australia by Charles Sturt University found that, over half (58.2 percent) of participating mosques, or worshippers at them, had experienced targeted violence between 2014 and 2019."

It should also be noted that the most serious incidents of violence in Australia related to the genocide have been perpetrated by supporters of the Israeli state. In January, a homemade bomb was placed on a car outside a home in Sydney that flew the Palestinian flag. David Wise, a Zionist, was later charged and convicted.

In November last year, a Burgertory restaurant in the Melbourne suburb of Caulfield was firebombed after its Palestinian-Australian owner, Hash Tayeh, an outspoken opponent of the genocide, had been subjected to vilification and harassment from Israeli supporters.

Neither Albanese, Dutton nor any other senior figure from the major parties condemned Wise's action, which was never designated as terrorism. Victoria Police asserted continuously that the Burgertory bombing was not politically or racially motivated. Last month, however, it was revealed that one of the alleged perpetrators had told an informant: "The motivation behind the arson was related to the conflict overseas between Palestine and Israel."



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