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MELBOURNE

*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

“[T]he Australian Jewish community has been a powerhouse of great Australians”

In 1853 Louis Monash and his wife Bertha Manasse made the momentous decision to emigrate from Prussia to Melbourne. Like every decision of emigration, which underpins in such a significant way the nation we live in today, it was difficult and momentous.

While for this young Jewish couple it was a decision made for themselves, the beneficiaries of it would be thousands of Australian soldiers and ultimately the country itself.

In 1865 Bertha gave birth to their son John who would grow up to become Australia’s greatest military figure and one of the giants in the Allied cause of the Great War.

Simcha Baeviski arrived in Melbourne as a Russian refugee in 1899 at the age of 21. Along with his brother Elcon they set up a drapery store in Bendigo. An early adherent to the adage “*that the customer is always right*”, combined with a steadfast honesty, saw Simcha, who later changed his name to Sydney Myer, build up a department store empire that stands today. His efforts to keep his staff working during the Great Depression are now a part of national legend. After his sudden death in 1934 a hundred thousand mourners lined the streets of Melbourne to give thanks to a man who had given so much to so many Australians.

From John Monash and Sydney Myer to their present day successors such as Frank Lowy, David Gonski, Solomon Lew, the Pratt's and the Liebler's: the Australian Jewish community has been a powerhouse of great Australians who have played a colossal role in the building of our country.

Among their number are an estimated 25,000 Jews who emigrated to Australia between 1945 and 1961 and in the process doubled the Australian Jewish community.

Proportionate to Australia's population only Israel received more Holocaust survivors after the Second World War than Australia.

It is a particular story of emigration which binds our two nations together.

“The Australian Labor Party has ... been the beneficiary”

The Australian Labor Party has also been the beneficiary of this contribution.

From earlier figures like Senator Sam Cohen, who was the first Jew elected to the Senate, to Barry Cohen who served as a Minister in the Hawke Government through to Mark who is with me today and who served as Australia's Attorney-General in the Gillard Government and we very much hope will be the next Attorney-General in a Shorten Labor Government, the Jewish community has contributed greatly to the Australian Labor story.

To these names one can add Marsha Thomson and Phil Dalidakis who have both served as Victorian Ministers, indeed Phil continues to do so, Mike Frelander, Jennifer Huppert, Syd Einfield and the indomitable Michael Danby who has been a mentor to me.

“In 1989 I was fortunate enough to visit Israel for the first time”

In 1989, in part thanks to Michael, I was fortunate enough to visit Israel for the first time as a member of a Young Political Leaders Tour. This was a program specifically designed for non-Jews.

As a young person, politically motivated, living in this country where politics is not really the subject of many discussions around the dinner table, to see Israel and the vibrancy of its political discourse was truly wondrous.

There was an animated textured debate about settlements in the West Bank. There were differing opinions about the way in which Israel should deal with the Palestinians and its neighbours.

There were also discussions on every topic from hyper-inflation, to the role of the kibbutz, to the development of agriculture, to access to tertiary education.

In the midst of all this was a sense of total national unity about the right of Israel to exist, about the importance of building a Jewish nation in that part of the

world.

That this nation be democratic seemed to be at the essence of the Israeli project. Fiery debate, voicing of opinions by everyone, freedom of speech, holding government to account, all of this was seen as a national obligation for every citizen.

There was also a complete understanding, that for the ideal of a Jewish democratic nation, every Israeli was willing to commit their life and put it on the line. That in a sense this is what the current generation owed to the generations past who had suffered so greatly in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

There was a palpable sense of cause about the country which for me was utterly intoxicating.

During the visit we went to Yad Vashem. In Blanche d'Alpuget's biography of Bob Hawke she writes:

"Inside the buildings there is a collection of photographs and objects of surreal horror. They are displayed simply, with low-key, informative captions. Some people walk through the museum, read the captions, look at the display and after half-an-hour continue on the next part of their tour. Others are struck dumb with an inner howl of rage and shame. Hawke was among the latter. [His] ... face was very grave. He sat in the back of the taxi and lent his head against it and couldn't speak. ... there were tears running out of the sides of his eyes."

This was how I felt too.

During our visit we were given a lecture about the Holocaust, which to this day, is the most powerful speech or talk I have ever heard. My sense of these events was illuminated and in the process my sense of humanity and our moment in history was irrevocably changed.

The poignancy of this has been felt again in the last two days as we remember the 80th Anniversary of Kristallnacht. And the connection with Australia is also echoed in this moment as we recall William Cooper, an aboriginal leader here in Melbourne, who led the only private protest against Nazi Germany following Kristallnacht anywhere in the world.

There are responsibilities that those of us who are alive today, within a single lifespan of the Holocaust, have about these events being remembered, about their legacy being understood, and about trying to shape the world in a way such that they never happen again.

And the need for Jews around the world to have their place, where they are safe, and where Jewish culture is celebrated appeared obvious and critical.

So on this trip it became clear to me that Israel mattered not just for Israelis but for global Jewry and for global justice.

“[T]he creation of Israel became a cause of moral justice”

I understand that the birth of Israel and the cause which underpinned it is better understood by this audience than any in the country. But I want you to understand this history is also understood in the Australian Labor Party and is critical to forming the view of many of us. So please, indulge me.

Modern Zionism, as founded by Theodor Herzl in 1897, pre-dates the Holocaust. A desire to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine meant that by the outbreak of the Second World War about 400,000 Jews lived in the region.

In 1939 the British Government published a White Paper about the establishment of a single Palestinian State after a ten year period. But most critically, from the point of view of the Zionist movement, a limit was proposed upon Jewish emigration to Palestine of 75,000 people over five years with this immigration also being subject to Arab acquiescence which was unlikely ever to be provided.

The British policy of limiting Jewish emigration to Palestine placed the Holocaust in an even sharper focus.

At war's end as hundreds of thousands of European Jews gave forth with a collective searing existential cry, the helplessness of those Jews in Palestine who wanted only to embrace this community and provide a haven was palpable. For the tens of thousands of Palestinian Jews who had served in the British Army during the War one can only imagine the unique sense of outrage they must have felt.

And so as the full horrors of the Holocaust were revealed and the emigration stalemate continued by the time of the 22nd Zionist Congress in Basel in 1946 the cause for the creation of Israel became a cause of moral justice.

“[D]emocracy, collectivism, and social justice were at the heart of the Israeli nation”

From the outset, democracy, collectivism, and social justice were at the heart of the Israeli nation. The Histadrut – the Israeli trade union movement – had existed thirty years prior to the creation of Israel and was a leading institution in putting forward the framework for an Israeli state.

The first Secretary-General of the Histadrut, David Ben-Gurion, became the founding father of Israel and its first Prime Minister.

He was a socialist but very clearly a democrat with a high, albeit grudging, regard for American and British political institutions.

In his small bungalow where Ben-Gurion spent his retirement on a kibbutz – Sde Boker – in the Negev desert, two portraits adorned his walls. One was of Abraham Lincoln, the Great Emancipator and protector of democracy, and one

was of Mahatma Gandhi an independence leader who understood the abiding power of moral dignity in bringing about lasting change.

These images, these people and these ideals stand as a testament to what Ben-Gurion was about and what he sought to instil in the Israeli state from the very beginning.

“[T]he paths of two countries ... crossed”

In April 1947 Britain referred the question of Palestine to the newly formed United Nations.

At this moment serendipity meant that the paths of two countries on opposite sides of the world crossed.

Australia's Foreign Minister and future Labor leader Doc Evatt had played a critical role in the establishment of the United Nations and would become the President of the General Assembly in 1948.

But prior to that, as a leading figure within the UN, Doc Evatt was asked to chair the *Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question*.

In this role Doc Evatt was the driving force behind the resolution on partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel. He was a tour de force who acted in the face of opposition by some, ambivalence by others and even the trepidation of the United States. But he, more than any other player within the UN, made it happen.

In the aftermath of the UN vote, the US de facto recognised the State of Israel. But Doc Evatt made sure, by contrast, that Australia gave full recognition to the newly created state.

He was later to say in his memoirs that:

“I regard the establishment of [Israel](#) as a great victory of the United Nations.”

Doc Evatt always said that what he was able to do at the UN was the product of the tireless efforts of members of the Australian Jewish community and the Zionist Federation of Australia including people like John Monash, Alex Masel, Max Freilich, Horace Newman, Rabbi Max Schank, Ruby Cohen and Abe Landa.

It is also clear that his efforts and the role Australia played was, in an Australian context, celebrated and entirely uncontroversial.

“[A] fraternal relationship grew between the Israeli Labor Party and the Australian Labor Party

Perhaps through the efforts of Doc Evatt and because of the historic role Israeli

Labor had played in the creation of the State of Israel a fraternal relationship grew between the Israeli Labor Party and the Australian Labor Party which continues to this day.

Bob Hawke was a frequent visitor to Israel during the 1970's and played a key role in facilitating the emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel. Indeed he even acted as an intermediary between the Israeli and Soviet Governments.

Through this time he built up close friendships with many in the Israeli Labor movement including Golda Meir.

The example of Hawke and Evatt has continued through the succeeding decades to the present day.

Bougie Herzog the recent former leader of the Israeli Labor Party has built a strong connection with Bill and Chloe Shorten. Bougie was just in Australia back in July.

Merav Michaeli, a Labor member of the Knesset and former TV identity, was also here in September last year and met with a number of Australian Labor figures about Israel and Palestine but about social policy in general. And the current Secretary-General of the Israeli Labor Party, Hilik Bar, is known as a friend to many of us.

“[A] negotiated two state solution”

During the late 1960's Israel and Palestine became a much more controversial issue within the ALP and other parts of Australian society.

As a wave of independence movements around the world saw an unprecedented number of new nations born, the cause of the Palestinian people and their right to self determination naturally rose to the fore.

Terrorist tactics and a stated opposition to the very existence of Israel made their cause more complex. But the existence of a community of people without a nation, who sought a nation could not be denied.

I understand the desire for Palestinian statehood and sympathise with it. If global justice is to be our measure it will not have been fulfilled until the Palestinian people have the opportunity to live within a fully fledged nation of their own. I know that there are many Israelis who share this view.

On that same initial visit to Israel it struck me that the movement to establish Jewish settlements within the occupied territories was counterproductive to long term peace, a view shared emphatically by our Israeli host.

And so, while I do not agree with the precise positions about Palestinian recognition which are advanced by some within the ALP today, I do understand the sincerity with which these arguments are made.

That said Israel has a right to live in peace with security. The ever present threat of Islamic extremist terrorism is a fact of life in Israel but it shouldn't have to be. And Israel deals with this while it also faces other regional threats such as that posed by Iran.

The governmental task of providing national security to its people is on a scale that is unimaginable for us. But Israel, like any country, has a right to protect its population.

For a long time Labor has supported, what is an orthodox international position, of a negotiated two state solution. This is the position of the Coalition and has been the settled foreign policy of Australia for decades.

But there is a frustration on the part of many in the ALP about the progress of negotiations toward a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and the apparent lack of intent on the part of the Netanyahu Government toward achieving this outcome. I also understand that frustration.

But at the end of the day, while I would like eventually to see the recognition of a Palestinian State, in my view this has to be the product of a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. For while I understand the relevance of global opinion, in this instance ultimately peace lies in the discourse between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and not the deliberations of those of us here.

In differing ways both Israelis and Palestinians have feelings of insecurity about their lives and the antidote to that insecurity lies in the undertakings that each people must give: in a recognition by each in the nationhood and the security of the other.

So the question for any Australian Government is whether recognition of a Palestinian state will help or hinder that goal.

And right now my view is that this test for the recognition of Palestine has not been met.

“[T]here is so much to be gained for Australia in building the bilateral relationships with both the Palestinian Authority and Israel”

In the meantime there is so much to be gained for Australia in building bilateral relationships with both the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

Consistent with Australia's commitment to work on development we should, and Australia has, played a development assistance role within the Palestinian Authority which seeks to build prosperity among the Palestinian people and improve their social indicators.

And with Israel we have so much to learn from a country which has such a dynamic cultural relationship with science and technology.

Defence industry companies Elbit, Rafael and IAI have a combined workforce of 34,000 people. The vast bulk of this number are scientists. We can only dream of having companies which gather together even a fraction of this number of scientists in Australia and yet Israel is a country with less than half the GDP of our own.

And the start-up culture in Israel, that has its roots in defence industry, is nothing short of a phenomenon.

Much of our contemporary relationship with Israel lies in an examination of its technological base. Whereas in the 1990's we saw an average of one trade mission to Israel from Australia per year, in 2018 alone there have been forty.

So technological cooperation is where the future of our bilateral relationship lies.

“Australia as Israel’s best friend”

To me it feels like the efforts of Doc Evatt and the enduring fondness between Israel and Australia ever since, have given rise to a special relationship between our countries.

To that end I once asked a senior Israeli official how Australia was seen in the Israeli world view.

He made the observation that obviously we are not the most important country in Israel’s future, nor are we significant trading partners. And yet the longstanding friendship and particular place of Australia in Israel’s formation, coming from a country a long way away, and without any particular agenda, was valued intensely.

Indeed there was a purity in the relationship which perhaps qualified Australia as Israel’s best friend.

It’s a nice thought and I hope it’s true. But it is most definitely a sentiment that should be a guiding light in the way the peoples of both nations proceed into the future.

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