

## WILL HE JETTISON 'ANTI-ZIONIST RADICALISM'?

## New Greens leader Bandt faces a choice

TED  
LAPKIN

IT'S been said that the most dangerous place in Parliament House is anywhere between an Australian Greens parliamentarian and a TV camera. And last month, Tasmanian Senator Nick McKim put the pedal to the metal as he dashed through the red carpeted corridors of the press gallery towards the Sky News studio.

McKim was raring to go on camera in his capacity as Greens spokesman on immigration. He wasted no air time singing the praises of *Love v Commonwealth*, the High Court ruling that prohibited the Australian government from deporting foreign criminals of "Aboriginal descent".

"Despite the circumstance of birth in another country, an Aboriginal Australian cannot be said to belong to another place," declared Justice Virginia Bell for the court majority. "The cultural and spiritual dimensions of the distinctive connection between Indigenous peoples and their traditional lands" must be recognised.

The words of Justice Bell's ruling were music to Nick McKim's ears. "The Greens welcome the High Court's decision," he trumpeted in a press release.

Fair enough. An application for membership in Australian Friends of Likud has been posted to the senator's office. After all, the case for a distinctive connection between the Jewish people and their traditional land is beyond all rational dispute.

As 'Exhibit A', I present the words of Simon HaHashmonai as recorded over 2000 years ago in the First Book of the Maccabees:

"The land over which we have restored



Adam Bandt in the House of Representatives at Parliament House. Photo: AAP Image/Mick Tsikas

our sovereignty was the property of our fathers and no foreigner has claim to its ownership or its inheritance. Our enemies sinfully and unjustly robbed us of our patrimony. But now that God has bestowed success upon us we have reclaimed and resettled the inheritance of our fathers."

Simon's declaration of independence was conveyed in a letter to Seleucid King Antiochus IV who was busy during the second century BCE waging a war of antisemitic cultural genocide. But the Seleucids lost. And ever since, the Jews have celebrated their victory at the festival of Chanukah.

It's not only Simon HaHashmonai. From Roman historian Tacitus, through turncoat chronicler Josephus Flavius to the New Testament itself, the classical documentary record of a thriving Jewish commonwealth in Land of Israel is copious.

Even after the Emperor Hadrian ordered the expulsion of the Jews from the Land of Israel, the link between people and homeland endured the two bitter mil-

lennia of exile that followed. Prayers for a reconstituted Jewish commonwealth were intoned daily in synagogues from Minsk to Marrakesh. On the first and second nights of each Passover, the seder ceremony would climax with the chant "next year in a rebuilt Jerusalem!"

By the 19th century, the enduring plague of antisemitism convinced even non-observant Jews that a return to the Land of Israel was the only solution to their oppression. Thus, modern Zionism was born.

The catastrophe of the Second World War pushed internal opposition to Zionism to the margins of the Jewish world. Beyond a small fringe of hardcore Marxists and extreme ultra-Orthodox sects that believe the Messiah must arrive before a Jewish state can be established, Israel enjoys strong support among Jewish communities throughout the globe.

A comprehensive opinion survey conducted by the American Jewish Committee in 2019 found 72 per cent support for the

statement that a thriving Israel is vital to long-term Jewish survival. Here in Australia, a study by Monash University found a whopping 75 per cent of Jews aged 18 to 29 proudly defined themselves as Zionist.

Jews throughout the world are also converting Zionist sentiment into action by voting with their feet. Over 34,000 Jews 'made aliyah' to Israel in 2019, the highest number of immigrants in almost two decades.

So there you have it – 'distinctive connection' between Jews and the Jewish state. All of which means that if the Greens had a modicum of intellectual coherence they'd be the most passionate advocates for Zionism in Australian politics.

But Adam Bandt appears to view the cause of Jewish national self-determination with animus and contempt. He used the bully pulpit of the Australian Parliament in 2018 to effectively call for the ethnic erasure of the Jewish state through an influx into Israel's heartland of six million Arabs steeped in antisemitic hatred.

No surprise, then, that most Australian Jews view the Greens with profound distrust. Yet none of Bandt's predecessors showed any interest in ameliorating this situation, favouring their radical bona fides over constructive dialogue with the Jewish community.

Adam Bandt now faces a choice. He can blithely continue along the present path that leads the Greens into antisemitic infamy. Or, he can jettison his party's anti-Zionist radicalism, thereby laying the groundwork for a productive relationship with Australian Jewry.

His move.

Ted Lapkin is executive director of the Australian Jewish Association.

## NAOMI CHAZAN FELLOWSHIP

## Striving to be faithful to Israel's founding principles

JARED WILK,  
ADAM LISKOWSKI,  
ARI TURKIA &  
TAMAR HOFFMAN

IT was a peculiar kind of discomfort we were feeling. It was not the searing heat or the long bus ride. No, this irritation was caused by the rare presence of utter clarity. We were staring down at the marble tomb of Baruch Goldstein, who killed 29 Palestinians and wounded another 125 at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in 1994. Unlike virtually every other topic we engaged with on the New Israel Fund (NIF) Naomi Chazan Fellowship, no special nuance was required on that issue. A diverse international cohort embarked on the trip last July. Our aim was to learn more about human rights and democracy in Israel and the occupied territories, both the triumphs and tragedies, from the Israelis who know them best. Our hosts were a diverse group of civil society organisations, populated by lawyers, musicians, and even grandmothers.

We Australians were all raised as Zionists at home or at school. Our relationships with Israel run deep, strengthened by family and friends there. Being in Israel felt like coming home and changing into pyjamas; a warm sense of ease, of being at home.

And then, a jolt.

We arrived in Hebron. This holy city has

become a potent symbol of Israel's 52-year occupation. In the years since Goldstein's massacre, the IDF has controlled Hebron's downtown ever more tightly. Once a thriving market, Al-Shahuda Street is now, to use the IDF's term, 'sterile' of Palestinians.

Hebron highlighted the hermetically sealed narratives existing simultaneously in these lands, both of which contain some truth. The settler who impolitely followed us around that day may have seemed radical, but he was not evil to ask, "Why can't Jews live here, among our fallen fathers? We lived here for thousands of years, in David's former capital, until we were massacred in 1929."

Likewise, our Palestinian guide Izat, from local NGO 'Youth Against Settlements', was not evil to pointedly decry the injustice of a status quo in which the IDF refused to allow his neighbour in cardiac arrest to access an ambulance on the other side of a checkpoint, with fatal consequences.

The three days our group spent in the West Bank were certainly the most confronting of the trip. They underscored the injustices of the occupation regime, in which Palestinians have no democratic voice.

NGO Yesh Din ('There is law') highlighted the inequalities of planning law in Area C. A modern Jewish settlement, equipped with trampolines and swimming pools, was juxtaposed with a neighbouring Palestinian village disconnected from



Last year's NIF Naomi Chazan fellows in East Jerusalem.

running water and electricity, where even unobtrusive and flimsy town structures had demolition notices attached.

In the West Bank, we learnt about Machsom Watch, a group of Israeli nans who spend long days at checkpoints observing soldiers, ensuring that they do not violate Israeli law or insult the dignity of Palestinians coming in to Israel to work, study or seek healthcare.

The occupied territories were only a partial focus of our trip. We spent other days being edified on a range of issues within Israel proper by experts in their fields, whether it was politics, religion and state issues, law and civil rights, public housing or refugees.

A major focus was the fully-fledged crisis of liberal democracy facing Israel in the Netanyahu era, exemplified by attacks on the judiciary, separation of powers, the rights of minorities and vulnerable people and serious corruption allegations

against the Prime Minister (against which he wants to secure his immunity). What struck us most was how familiar many of these issues seemed to us from back home, albeit at less critical status.

If we fight for social justice, equality, democracy and the rule of law at home, should we not do so in Israel too?

NIF and others who seek to genuinely improve life for all 14 million people from the river to the sea are the best advocates for Israel. The path to greater uptake of the pro-Israel cause will come from those who have an honest and full engagement with Israeli society, and promote what we want for Israel: a free and open civil space, an inclusive society for minorities and a vibrant democracy.

Unfortunately, what should be obvious bears repeating: that to be critical is not to hate. In fact, the ability to criticise in good faith is crucial to any relationship. No one would seriously suggest that criticism of Australia's offshore detention policies, or its treatment of Indigenous peoples, makes one anti-Australian.

NIF seeks to improve Israel precisely because it believes in Israel's potential. It is merely faithful to Israel's founding principles of freedom, justice, and complete equality of social and political rights to all inhabitants, as expressed in its Declaration of Independence.

The authors were participants in the 2019 New Israel Fund Naomi Chazan Fellowship.