

Departing ALP member tells of deep Zionist influence in party

Posted By [Antony Loewenstein](#) On 10 August 2010 @ 5:51 pm In [Israel](#) | [32 Comments](#)

My following article appears in today's [Crikey](#) ^[1]:

The departing Labor member for Fowler, Julia Irwin, has revealed the deep influence of the Zionist lobby on the ALP and the inner workings of her party towards the Middle East in an exclusive interview with [Crikey](#).

Irwin says Israel must engage with Hamas, argues that the two-state solution may be a lost cause, remains open to backing a cultural and academic boycott of Israel and provides unprecedented details about the Zionist lobby's capture of newly minted Labor MPs.

Irwin claims that her statements on the Israel/Palestine conflict over the years "have been broadly in line" with party policy and urges "an active role for the United Nations in the peace process". Such a view "upset Israel supporters in Caucus" from 2002 onwards. Irwin comments that the UN is generally backed by the ALP—note the party's opposition to the Iraq war due to a lack of UN support—but the Middle East crisis is seemingly different.

"When I put the question of UN involvement to [current Israeli Defence Minister] Ehud Barak when he visited Australia, he almost exploded," she says.

Irwin stands firm on her belief that the UN is central to solving the conflict.

When asked to explain why virtually every Labor MP backs Israel uncritically, Irwin responds that Zionist lobby free trips to Israel are central to cementing views. "Many members and senators from right-wing unions have had close links with the Israeli union movement over the years and have maintained entrenched views."

AWU boss and Labor aspirant Paul Howes is constantly [backing Israeli unions](#) ^[2] in the public sphere, despite the call by Palestinian civil society to boycott such groups due to their connection to maintenance of the West Bank occupation.

Irwin tells me that her critical stance—best revealed in two recent speeches in parliament, one calling for a full investigation of the massacre on the [Mavi Marmara](#) ^[3] and the other [condemning increased Israeli colonisation in Palestine](#) ^[4]—has cost her some friends in the ALP. "I should add that many of my colleagues these days begin a conversation with the remark, 'I know we don't see eye to eye on the Middle East but' ..."

She repeated her claim in a recent [Sydney Morning Herald article](#) ^[5] that Labor power-broker Mark Arbib [alongside ALP officials and NSW Jewish treasurer Eric Roozendaal] have demanded her speeches be vetted before presentation. But she reveals to [Crikey](#) that it went further:

"[I was told I should] visit the Holocaust Museum, visit Israel and meet with members of various Jewish organisations [but] these requests have not been followed up. After one speech on Palestine, the ALP chief whip tore up my application for leave from the House when I was to attend an Inter Parliamentary Union meeting in Geneva. This was later approved but not before some emotional displays on both sides."

Significantly, Irwin says that she "enjoyed strong support from many rank-and-file members of the ALP" after a speech or statement on Israel/Palestine and would receive mountains of positive letters and emails. "There is obviously a strong groundswell of support within the ALP for a more independent position when it comes to the Israel/Palestine conflict."

There is no evidence that Prime Minister Julia Gillard is even willing to entertain this issue, placing blind backing for Israel as one of her key [foreign policy objectives](#) ^[6]. Opposition leader Tony [Abbott is no different](#) ^[7].

Irwin says that former leader Simon Crean called her many years ago to briefly discuss the Middle East but until recently neither Kevin Rudd nor Julia Gillard had approached her:

"Then, strangely, at the Caucus meeting on the Tuesday before he was deposed as Prime Minister, I had gone up to Kevin to ask him to sign a hardback edition of *The True Believers* which had been signed by all Party leaders from Gough Whitlam. Kevin was surprisingly friendly and inquired about the reaction of supporters of the Palestinian cause to the government's handling of the expulsion of an Israeli diplomat over the theft of Australian passports and his statement calling for an inquiry into the *Mavi Marmara* incident. His remarks led me to believe that there had been some change in the government's position with regard to Israel even if it was only a small step from being totally uncritical."

Irwin laments the lack of MPs speaking out on Palestine (except Victorian MP Maria Vamvakinou and West Australian MP Melissa Parke) and blames enormous pressure from ALP officials. Furthermore, "most members regard Foreign Affairs as a specialist policy area and rarely make public statements on these matters. Tibet, Burma and Zimbabwe would be exceptions". But Irwin continually spoke out over Palestine.

Irwin's departure from parliament will leave virtually nobody from the major parties to speak critically about the Middle East.

She tells [Crikey](#), without revealing the name, that "at least one ALP member receives big donations from Palestinian interests but is silent on the issue." Irwin says she has never received donations from groups with "direct links to Palestinian interests".

Irwin cites the belief within the party that "support for Palestine will swiftly end any prospect of a front bench position. Even a hint of offence can result in an immediate unconditional apology." She continues:

"For all MPs there is the desire to 'play it safe'. Why make enemies over an issue which does not directly affect your local community? And I have to add that many Labor members have an intense dislike of Arabic people. That's something that comes across in their less-guarded moments. They will talk about human rights abuse in every corner of the world, but not Palestine."

One of the least understood realities of modern politics is the insidious influence of unelected lobbyists on the political process. Irwin is remarkably forthcoming in detailing how the Zionist lobby operates within the ALP:

"On the Labor side (and as far as I know the same applies to the Liberals), a newly selected member for a winnable seat is hosted to a private fund raising dinner. A table full of Jewish businessmen are happy to hand over \$10,000 for the candidate's first campaign. That's a big bonus for a new member and many never forget the generosity. I was never afforded such an honour but I can say that I would have been suspicious of the motive."

Irwin also cites the never-ending free trips to Israel—"a visit to Israel is almost a rite of passage for new MPs and Senators" and display by hosts of "backward Arabs threatening such an enlightened society"—and acknowledges that the lobby needs backing across the political aisle. "It cannot afford to snub Labor even if most Jewish voters live in blue ribbon Liberal seats." Labor's closeness to the lobby is [well documented](#) ^[8].

She tells [Crikey](#) that although she survived four terms in parliament, "I have no doubt that senior ALP figures have promised to end my career on more than one occasion. At the grass roots level, in the branches and the wider electorate, the lobby has no influence. Only at the highest levels can a member be threatened. But a party which allows that to happen is not worthy of public support."

Once a strong believer in the two-state solution, today Irwin wonders if Israel has "passed the point of no return" with ongoing colonisation across the [West Bank](#) ^[9] and isolation of [Gaza](#) ^[10]. "There can be no ethnic cleansing of the occupied territories," she warns and urges "unconditional engagement" with Hamas to facilitate a peace treaty. She remains pessimistic of future prospects. "Despite the belief of the Israeli leadership, time is not on their side."

Irwin raises the possibility of backing the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign, a [growing global movement](#) ^[11] to non-violently pressure Israel to embrace true democracy in Israel and Palestine or face [increasing isolation](#) ^[12].

The departing MP says that she grew up greatly admiring Jews and was shamed "at our complicity of abuse and discrimination against Jewish people" but "now I ask, what has changed? How could such a people condone the oppression of others?"

Irwin believes Israel can survive economic isolation but, like apartheid South Africa, the Jewish state "cannot survive a cultural and academic boycott ... While politically Israel lurches further to the right, Israelis must come to realise that they are all judged by the actions of their leaders."

While both major political parties continue pandering to Israel's pro-settler fringe, the BDS movement is exploding everywhere, [including Australia](#) ^[13].

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URLs in this post:

[1] [Crikey: http://www.crikey.com.au/](http://www.crikey.com.au/)

[2] [backing Israeli unions: http://www.theage.com.au/national/union-leader-refuses-to-support-israel-boycott-20090204-7xxi.html](http://www.theage.com.au/national/union-leader-refuses-to-support-israel-boycott-20090204-7xxi.html)

[3] [Mavi Marmara: http://antonyloewenstein.com/2010/06/19/with-irwin-gone-australian-parliament-is-totally-pro-israel/](http://antonyloewenstein.com/2010/06/19/with-irwin-gone-australian-parliament-is-totally-pro-israel/)

[4] [condemning increased Israeli colonisation in Palestine: http://antonyloewenstein.com/2010/06/25/looking-in-vain-for-a-brave-parliamentarian-who-calls-things-as-they-are/](http://antonyloewenstein.com/2010/06/25/looking-in-vain-for-a-brave-parliamentarian-who-calls-things-as-they-are/)

[5] article : <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-election/in-richos-footsteps-labors-new-mr-fixit-20100729-10y5j.html?skin=text-only>

[6] foreign policy objectives: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/gillard-rejects-rudds-asia-vision-20100704-zvxx.html>

[7] Abbott is no different: <http://jewishnews.net.au/news/2010/07/22/abbotts-swipe-at-alp-israel-policy/14445>

[8] well documented: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/gillard-stands-by-partner-over-israel-job-link-20100629-zjcx.html>

[9] West Bank : <http://palestinote.com/cs/blogs/news/archive/2010/08/05/settlement-watchdog-launches-new-youtube-campaign.aspx>

[10] Gaza: <http://www.gazagateway.org/2010/08/not-making-the-mark-in-economic-recovery/>

[11] growing global movement: <http://mondoweiss.net/2010/08/why-i-support-the-olympia-co-op-boycott.html>

[12] increasing isolation: <http://www.bitterlemons-international.org/previous.php?opt=1&id=316>

[13] including Australia: <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11382.shtml>

[14] Image: <http://twitter.com/home?status=Departing%20ALP%20member%20tells%20of%20deep%20Zionist%20influence%20in%20party%20-%20http%3A%2F%2Ffantonyloewenstein.com%2F2010%2F08%2F10%2Fdeparting-alp-member-tells-of-deep-zionist-influence-in-party%2F>

[15] Image: <http://www.friendfeed.com/share?title=Departing%20ALP%20member%20tells%20of%20deep%20Zionist%20influence%20in%20party&link=http%3A%2F%2Ffantonyloewenstein.com%2F2010%2F08%2F10%2Fdeparting-alp-member-tells-of-deep-zionist-influence-in-party%2F>

[16] Image: <http://delicious.com/post?url=http%3A%2F%2Ffantonyloewenstein.com%2F2010%2F08%2F10%2Fdeparting-alp-member-tells-of-deep-zionist-influence-in-party%2F&title=Departing%20ALP%20member%20tells%20of%20deep%20Zionist%20influence%20in%20party¬es=My%20following%20article%20appears%20in%20today%27s%20Crikey%3A%0D%0AThe%20departing%20Labor%20member%20for%20Fowler%2C%20Julia%20Irwin%2C%20has%20revealed%20the%20%20deep%20influence%20of%20the%20Zionist%20lobby%20on%20the%20ALP%20and%20the%20inner%20workings%20of%20%20her%20party%20towards%20the%20Middle%20East%20in%20an%20exclusive%20intervi>

[17] Image: <http://www.facebook.com/share.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Ffantonyloewenstein.com%2F2010%2F08%2F10%2Fdeparting-alp-member-tells-of-deep-zionist-influence-in-party%2F&t=Departing%20ALP%20member%20tells%20of%20deep%20Zionist%20influence%20in%20party>

[18] Image: <http://digg.com/submit?phase=2&url=http%3A%2F%2Ffantonyloewenstein.com%2F2010%2F08%2F10%2Fdeparting-alp-member-tells-of-deep-zionist-influence-in-party%2F&title=Departing%20ALP%20member%20tells%20of%20deep%20Zionist%20influence%20in%20party&bodytext=My%20following%20article%20appears%20in%20today%27s%20Crikey%3A%0D%0AThe%20departing%20Labor%20member%20for%20Fowler%2C%20Julia%20Irwin%2C%20has%20revealed%20the%20%20deep%20influence%20of%20the%20Zionist%20lobby%20on%20the%20ALP%20and%20the%20inner%20workings%20of%20%20her%20party%20towards%20the%20Middle%20East%20in%20an%20exclusive%20intervi>