

Issue #12, February 2017 – The Refugee Issue

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Jewish people have experienced persecution and denial of freedom throughout history. This is not true of all Jewish people, though the plight of the refugee informs a great deal of Jewish religious thought and ritual, as well as secular Jewish practices, modern Jewish art, scholarship and private memory. In light of our intimate understanding of the catastrophic effects of living in war-torn countries and attempting to flee but struggling to find asylum, it is only fitting that we should fight for the rights of others undergoing a similar catastrophe. As refugees arriving in Australia are demonised, criminalised, imprisoned indefinitely, tortured, and used as political pawns, we stand as their sisters and brothers, ready to take action in whatever way we can, and fight for their human rights. Our members stand by refugees everywhere.

This is our cause to fight for so many reasons beyond the scope of this newsletter: we live in Australia, a country with an atrocious immigration history and a brutal policy towards asylum seekers; we may now enjoy privileges here as a migrant community, but Jewish immigrants in other places and times in history were not so lucky; Israel's ongoing occupation of land has had Palestinians living as permanent refugees worldwide, most of them in the Occupied Territories and Gaza, but also throughout the Arab world, including Yarmouk, Syria, now devastated. Living on society's margins is something we can all relate to in some way, and each of us bears a responsibility to do something, whichever way we can, to address the unjust treatment of refugees today.

Things you can do right now: help recharge phone cards for detainees on Manus and Nauru. Visit: <https://chuffed.org/project/gifts-for-manus-and-nauru-phone-credit-Feb2017>.

Befriend a child in detention by visiting <https://befriendachildindetention.wordpress.com/>.

Divest from funds that are associated with the detention industry. To find out more visit <https://www.nobusinessinabuse.org/>. Lots more ideas in the articles within, including ways for you to fight the good fight in 2017. Many thanks go out to our contributors in this issue. Get in touch at editor@ajds.org.au and let us know what you are up to.

Yours,

Keren Rubinstein, AJDS Content Editor



Image found on refugeecouncil.org.au

Open Statement calling for immediate action on offshore detention

Successive Australian governments have managed and funded offshore detention camps on Manus Island and Nauru. The people detained there are clearly Australia's responsibility. This situation has reached crisis point, and immediate action must be taken.

Beyond the reports of physical and sexual abuse, including of children; inadequate medical attention; suicides and attempted suicides; even a murder; the extinguishment of hope has pushed people to the edge.

Many of these people have been recognised as refugees. We owe them protection and safety now.

Meanwhile, politicians are spending years engaged in lengthy negotiations as to the fate of these men, women and children. With the US resettlement deal in serious doubt, the most obvious and humane solution is to clear the camps and bring these people to Australia until a safe long term, appropriate outcome for them can be guaranteed.

We do not have years. Australia cannot allow another person to die or suffer because of our actions.

This is a crisis. We are calling on both major parties to form a bipartisan commitment to immediately evacuate the camps and bring these people to safety.

Signed,

The Refugee Council of Australia

Academics for Refugees

ActionAid Australia

Amnesty International Australia

APS Refugee Issues and Psychology Interest Group

Asylum Circle

Asylum Seeker Advocacy Group

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce

Australian Council for International Development

Australian Council of Social Service

Australian Council of Trade Unions

Australian Jewish Democratic Society

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation

Australian Women in Support of Women on Nauru

Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group

Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project

Campaign for Australian Aid – Up To Us

Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum

Centre for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees

Children Out of Immigration Detention (ChilOut)

Doctors for Refugees

Edmund Rice Centre

Free the Children Nauru

GetUp!

Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children

Human Rights for All Pty Ltd

Human Rights Law Centre

Human Rights Watch

Hunter Asylum Seeker Advocacy

Independent Education Union of Australia

International Alliance Against Mandatory Detention

Jubilee Australia

Labor for Refugees

Liberty Victoria

Love Makes A Way

Melbourne Catholic Migrant & Refugee Office

Mums 4 Refugees

New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties

Oxfam Australia

Pax Christi Queensland

People Just Like Us

Plan International Australia

Queensland Council of Unions

Queensland Nurses' Union

Queensland Teachers' Union

Refugee Action Coalition

Refugee Action Network Newcastle

Refugee Advice & Casework Service

Refugee Advocacy Network

RESULTS International Australia

Rural Australians for Refugees

Save the Children Australia

St Vincent de Paul Society National Council

St.Macartan's Social Justice Group Mornington

Supporting Asylum Seekers Sydney

Tasmanian Asylum Seeker Support

Teachers For Refugees

Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia

The Australia Institute

The Bayside Refugee Advocacy and Support Association

The Catholic Justice Justice & Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Brisbane

The National Justice Project

Together Branch of the ASU

Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA

Uniting Church in Australia

Uniting Church in South Australia

Victorian Council of Churches

Welcome to Australia

World Vision Australia

This statement was issued 3/2/17

Trump's Muslim immigration ban: a statement from the AJDS

It was on International Holocaust Memorial Day this year, after issuing a statement that made no mention of Jewish – nor any other – victims of the Holocaust, that Donald Trump signed an Executive Order banning people from 7 predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States. The effects were swift and brutal: people who were born in, or are citizens of, Iraq, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia and Yemen were immediately banned from entering, with the result being that numerous people were detained, deported, and refused permission to fly. Refugees and others, whether migrating or seeking temporary entrance, were refused entry. This was a closing of the borders in a way which is both a continuation of what has come before, but also something new. As a settler-colony and with a slave history, the United States was founded on such murderous violence: this action is the latest, brutal step in this chain.

Encouragingly, the response was also swift: people across the United States and across the world have stood up in opposition and actively campaigned to oppose this measure and act in solidarity with those detained and impacted by the order.

The AJDS stands alongside them. We seek to make clear that we stand in solidarity with Muslim communities, and others, across the world in our outrage and resistance to this new Executive Order. It is a deplorable, racist,

attack on people's abilities to live their lives: it is causing immense violence.

The AJDS also stands opposed to the response issued by the Australian government, and utterly refutes the idea that they should be working closely with Trump to punitively enforce borders, as Julie Bishop and Scott Morrison have said they will. We know well the racism and violence which already characterises Australia's ongoing settler-colonialism and treatment of refugees. Rather than increasing border control, just as the United States must reverse this closure of its borders, and work beyond that to a fairer and more open migration system, so too must Australia vastly change its current conditions.

Like many Jews around the world – many of whom are uniting under the banner of #JewishResistance – we remember the lessons of the Holocaust vastly differently to the meanings that Trump, Steve Bannon and their Nazi and white supremacist allies have sought to give it this year. We remember the devastating violence and loss caused by genocide, and we commit to acting in that memory, and in the knowledge of that history, for a more just world. Some of us carry family histories of being refugees, and we all carry that historical knowledge, and so we stand alongside the world's current refugees in calling for them to be granted access to safety wherever they seek it.

The executive of the AJDS calls on members, supporters, and all Jews who seek justice to actively take a stand against both our government and the US government, and the

ways in which they treat racialised minorities, including refugee, migrant, Muslim, and Indigenous communities. Sign a petition, call a politician, attend a rally, have a conversation, donate money, sign up to an organisation's email list, read new stories, write new narratives: the list of things that each of us can do is endless. If everyone commits to doing one thing everyday, in partnership and solidarity with others around the world, then we can affect serious change. We can only do it together though, acting in solidarity and for justice.

This statement was released by the AJDS 31/1/17

The tradition of Palm Sunday rallies

By Yael Winikoff

Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, celebrates Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. It has come to be traditionally viewed as a time to reflect on victory, joy and peace, and for these reasons has been a date that has been marked with marches and protests on such issues as war, nuclear disarmament and the broader impacts of the nuclear industry.

On Palm Sunday 1982, an estimated 100,000 people attended anti-nuclear rallies across Australia's cities. These rallies grew by the year, with an estimated 350,000 rallying in 1985. The Palm Sunday rallies were part of the anti-nuclear movement which focused on halting Australia's mining, abolishing nuclear weapons, removing foreign military bases from Australia and creating a nuclear-free Pacific. In 1986 some 250,000 people marched, and in Melbourne the

seamen's union boycotted the arrival of foreign nuclear warships.

The Palm Sunday rallies during this era, which were organised by the People for Nuclear Disarmament, reflected a strong and vibrant anti-nuclear movement which was successful in influencing government policy.

In 1984 the ALP introduced the three mine policy, limiting the number of prospective and new uranium mines.

Up until 1990, Palm Sunday attracted large numbers of people taking to the streets, with stalls and family friendly protests. After this time, the movement began to shrink, however Palm Sunday rallies continued to occur, demonstrating against various anti-war and anti-nuclear causes. Many focused on the risk of nuclear war, and throughout the gulf wars, marches were held under the banner "no blood for oil." In Melbourne 2003, 25,000 people marched against the war in Iraq.

In 2014, RAC (Refugee Action Collective) and RAN (Refugee Advocacy Network) canvassed the idea of holding pro refugee rallies on Palm Sunday, reflecting the growing crisis of Australia's cruel treatment of asylum seekers and failed refugee policies. Since then they have attracted a broad network of groups to co-organise these rallies, which have progressively grown in size since 2014. Last year an estimated 15,000 people marched in Melbourne, demanding justice for refugees, closing the camps on Nauru and Manus and permanent protection for asylum seekers. the AJDS participated in the organising committee and invited Jews for Refugees member Sylvie Leber to speak to the march alongside an interfaith panel.

Sylvie Leber addressed the crowd on the Jewish experience of seeking safety and values towards refugees:

"Judaism commands us to recognise the vulnerability of strangers among us, and to treat them with respect and dignity. Indeed, with love, because our people have often been strangers in a strange land, and have stood where they now stand.

We stand in solidarity with people of all faiths across our country who have offered protection and sanctuary for people seeking asylum.

When France was invaded by the Nazis during WW2, my family was assisted and saved by people smugglers, who helped them get false papers and get them to the free French zone. I would not be standing here today, I would not have been born, if it were not for people smugglers."



Sylvie's speech available here: <https://www.facebook.com/colette.leber.5/videos/10156675897560717/>

View more pictures of the Melbourne 2016 Palm Sunday rally:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/109891037@N06/sets/72157664035994764>

Palm Sunday rally 2017

The 2017 Melbourne Walk For Justice For Refugees will be on **Sunday April 9 at 2pm, commencing at the State Library.** AJDS has again been involved in the organising committee, and the rally is endorsed by AJDS and Jews for Refugees.

The demonstration will draw attention to conditions on Nauru and Manus, which was declared illegal in April of last year, and demanding to bring them here.

Organisers have also raised concern over the 30,000 refugees living in the community on Bridging Visas who cannot receive permanent protection, resulting in separation of families, uncertainty and fear of being deported under the government's new fast track assessment process.

We encourage all our members and supporters to join us at this Palm Sunday rally. More details can be found here:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/319469755104081/>

Migrant justice in settler-colonial Australia

By Sam Levnad

This article was originally published in Arena Magazine.

How can we work towards refugee and asylum-seeker rights while acknowledging Aboriginal sovereignty?

The death in September last year of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Kurdish Syrian boy, filled the front pages of international media. Aylan, along with his elder brother, Galip, and his mother, Rehan, drowned at sea after the ferry he was on capsized on the way to the Greek island of Kos. Images of Aylan's body, found on the shores of a Turkish beach, sparked international outrage over his fate, along with that of other Syrian refugees, and saw communities globally extend their welcome to refugees.

Under public pressure, the Australian government agreed to accept 12,000 Syrian refugees; at the same time, it announced an expansion of military operations into Syria in an attempt to curb what has been dubbed the 'refugee crisis'. These military interventions have been criticised within the migrant-justice movement,

pointing to the connections and causalities between growing numbers of asylum seekers and factors such as globalisation, neoliberalism and colonisation. These connections and causalities have produced wars, global wealth disparity, and environmental changes that force people to flee their lands. At the same time, countries that benefit from these global systems and processes, and that promote trade and the movement of goods across borders, invest vast resources to keep asylum seekers out. In Australia we have Operation Sovereign Borders, a military-led program to stop asylum-seeker boats from arriving. But the question remains: whose sovereign borders? What sovereignty is being denied, and perpetuated, through such operations?

In a settler-colonial state in which Indigenous peoples never ceded sovereignty, reparations and treaties have never been made and the impact of colonial dispossession continues, a movement that is centred on humanitarian demands and justice cannot continue to ignore the context of colonisation. Within refugee and asylum-seeker support groups and networks, we need to think and talk more about the ways in which our demands and struggles not only occur within this context but may also unintentionally demean Indigenous resistance and reinforce racist and colonial structures. An example of this can be seen in a slogan adopted by the movement for migrant justice in Australia: 'we are all boat people'. While it sends a poignant message, this slogan makes invisible the Indigenous nations of this land, who are *not* boat people. In so doing it further ascribes an identity to the concept of 'we', because those who assume the position of being able to make these claims—the 'we'—are those who have

accumulated sufficient whiteness, privilege and access to do so.

The same problems exist in the concept of welcoming, which is often referred to by the migrant-justice movement. The act of extending a welcome cannot be separated from a structure of identity. One usually welcomes someone to a space in which one experiences a greater sense of ownership and belonging: one welcomes a visitor into one's home. When this is applied to a whole nation state, not only does it expose the greater privilege experienced by the dominant culture (highlighted especially by the slogan 'real Australians say welcome') but also it further strips away the sovereign rights of the original custodians of this land. Supporting asylum seekers' rights to live in safety should not come at the cost of continuing the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. We must focus our engagement to centre on the voices of asylum seekers and refugees while also being cognisant of Aboriginal rights and sovereignty. And this process requires us to look at the language we employ and how it positions our message.

Networks such as No One Is Illegal and individuals who espouse critiques of nation states, borders and nationalisms also need to consider how their critiques intersect with Indigenous sovereignty. The issue of who gets to welcome whom can be applied to calls for open borders, wherein we need to question who has the agency to call for open borders from within settler-colonial states. Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, in their 2005 paper *Decolonizing Antiracism*, ask that proponents of open borders 'think through how their campaigns can pre-empt the ability of Aboriginal communities to establish title to their traditional lands'.



Colonially established borders and restrictive migration policies have resulted in differential impacts on the lives of settlers, migrants and Indigenous peoples. In border regions across the globe Indigenous people have been disproportionately affected. An example of this is the way that the increasing militarisation of border policies has impacted on the tribes of First Nations people whose lands are situated on and around the United States–Mexico border. This has included restrictions on movement across tribal lands, as well as increased police checks, raids, surveillance, and the destruction of land and sacred sites. Such experiences have informed migrant-rights movements to use slogans such as 'we didn't cross the border; the border crossed us'. Throughout history borders have been arbitrarily drawn to separate nation states, and these borders have bisected Indigenous lands and divided Indigenous communities. In Australia, while the national border encompasses the entire land body, its impact has been equally devastating, as it was imposed with no regard for the pre-existing boundaries that delineated hundreds of Aboriginal tribes, lands and ancestral customs.

The varying impacts of borders and migration control on Indigenous peoples must be considered if we are to engage in a more constructive dialogue about migration to Indigenous land. While a number of Indigenous leaders and elders have extended their welcome to refugees and asylum seekers, Aboriginal people

may have legitimate concerns about migration that should be respected and discussed. As Rev. Rronang Garrawurra, an Aboriginal elder from North East Arnhem Land, stated: 'We are the first people, and as first people, it upsets me that we haven't been asked for our input on any of this'.

Being cognisant of Indigenous sovereignty should lead migrant-justice campaigns to work in solidarity with Indigenous struggles for land rights and sovereignty. By doing this we would not only affirm the importance of addressing the impacts of colonisation, we would also interact in ways that foster conversations about Australia's history of genocide and learn about Indigenous protocols. This would be particularly useful for newly arrived migrants. As Wiradjuri elder Ray Jackson stated, 'Whilst they acknowledge our rights to all the Aboriginal Nations of Australia, we reciprocate by welcoming them into our nations'. Ray Jackson and Gunnai/Mara elder Robbie Thorpe, in a powerful assertion of sovereignty, have organised a number of passport ceremonies in Melbourne and Sydney at which Aboriginal passports have been issued to asylum seekers. In some instances, asylum seekers have directly sought Aboriginal passports. In the words of Robbie Thorpe (when granting Aboriginal passports to a group of Tamil men), 'Indigenous people never ceded sovereignty over Australia. The Australian government has no legitimate right to grant or refuse entry to this country. We are issuing passports to these men because it's what any reasonable, humane society would do. We expect these men to be responsive to traditional law, and respect the Indigenous customs of this land'.

It's time for the Australian migrant-justice movement to more carefully consider its work within the context of land of which

Aboriginal people have been dispossessed, and the ways in which the issues of migrant justice and Aboriginal sovereignty intersect. Our collective success requires us to analyse the ways that we work and communicate, and it depends on our abilities to discuss these issues, imagine bolder possibilities and devise better slogans.

Mum, did you steal any refugees? Sylvie Leber on the Baxter convergence, 2003

The Baxter Detention Centre in South Australia was used for the mandatory detention of asylum seekers between 2002-2007. In 2003 detainees protested and set fire to the facilities over the Easter Weekend protests. This happened again with worse results in 2005, but then Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone said that acts of vandalism and self harm by asylum seekers were "unattractive" protest measures. These protests united the struggle of those inside the detention centre with the fight of Australians who traveled from across the country to camp near the site for the weekend, adding their voices to this movement.

Activist Sylvie Leber was at the Baxter convergence in 2003. She shares her photographs and private notes from the Easter protests of that year (visit our website to watch the slideshow at www.ajds.org.au/2017/02/baxter-convergence-2003/):



I've just returned from the three-day 2003 Baxter convergence. I kept diary notes during this time.

Friday 18th April.

Our first of several spokes council meetings was held at midday in the centre of town (Port Augusta). The local indigenous community had given us a traditional welcome. They were to stick close by us for the next three days.

We decided whether the camp should be on the West or Eastern approach. A consensus was reached without too much trouble. Scouts from Adelaide had done their homework in the previous weeks.

I have come armed with all sorts of art materials and small paper banners. I also had my own version of riot protection gear: swimming goggles and a respirator in case police used pepper spray and tear gas like they did last year at Woomera.

We headed towards Baxter Detention Centre. Baxter is on Federal Military land and adjacent to aboriginal sacred land. Apart from a few sheep grazing on the prickly saltbush and an occasional long train in the distance, and the long water pipe, the backdrop for the Easter weekend was the spectacular Flinders Ranges. The detainees can't see out of the detention centre. They can only see the sky. The police wanted us at least 2KM from the detention centre. Roadblocks had been set up to stop cars that were not police or media from getting through.

The battle with police over where to set up camp ensued, police

flexed their muscle, they were determined to move us. I noted about four different types of uniform. A tall thin man with dreadlocks played violin in front of them. While a group of parents put up tents, their children played nearby with water pistols. The Chief inspector of police warned us to move back. At 4.45pm they brought in the horses and started pushing us back. People in the front line were picked out and arrested. They used unnecessary levels of force and arrested people. Police grabbed possessions as they advanced. Chaos ensued. There was screaming, yelling, young women in tears. My worst fear was that a policeman would split my bare head open with a baton. Throughout all this someone was flying a kite with a love heart painted on it. People were searching for their packs – a young woman who had lost her things spotted her bag and ran and hugged it exclaiming “My baby!” The water pipe was to be an asset for us. It acted as a barrier to the heavily armored police who could not outrun us, was somewhere to hide possessions under as well as being cool to touch, providing shade and acting as a vantage point to film and photograph the events that were unfolding. An older and disabled activist from Melbourne had collapsed during the police violence. There were a handful of physically disabled people amongst us and several sprightly women in their 70s. We had legal observers, medics and couriers (iXpress) on hand. Meanwhile the police were holding their first media briefing in town.

Dejectedly the group moved back up the hill. We all knew we had stuffed up the first day. During the night various small groups tried to breach the police line around Baxter, some got arrested.

Evelyn and I started to chalk the word Freedom in as many languages as we could on the one metre in diameter water pipe

while others set up camp. The sun was harsh, the air was dry. I understand why Dusty is an Aussie outback nickname. Many people wore bandanas and scarves over their nose and mouth. I sensed these bandanas were more than protection from the red dust, some of their significance remained a mystery to me.

Baxter Detention Centre is a high-tech, militarized facility based on the infamous J Ward at Pentridge, which was closed down after six months because the suicide attempt rate was so high.

There are rotating video cameras on high poles – high tech observation towers without the guards. There are two outside fences. The inner one is a 9,000-volt electric fence. There are several detainee compounds each is surrounded by an electric fence. Detainees are under constant video surveillance except in the toilets and showers.

From a distance the detention centre at night is lit like a night football match at the MCG.

At night the detainees could easily hear us and when our protest group was silent after making lots of noise their distant calls were faintly audible. All phone calls have been banned during the lockdown inside.

I spoke to my daughter by mobile. She asked me “Did you get arrested?” (I had warned her that this could happen but that I was not a frontline person. I’m scared of batons splitting my head open.) As our conversation was ending she asked? “Did you steal some refugees?”

I was getting ready for bed when there was a desperate knock on the door. “Sylvie are you in there? It’s A I’ve been arrested and I’m really strung out”. A looked a mess. He was completely covered in red dust. He had been thrown to the ground, held face down with a policeman’s knee on his neck unable to breathe, his arms were

twisted behind his back and handcuffs put on. He showed me the bruises. He’d lost his possessions. It turned out he had been the first to get arrested and had just gotten out on bail. The charge on his bail form was “Fail Cease Loiter” he was to come back in June. A was the most unlikely of arrestees. The doco crew next door kindly lent him some bedding. His bail condition stipulated that he was not to take part in any of the protest activities and that he wasn’t to venture further than the first road block.

Saturday 19th

Today we had a much more successful day. We were no longer a rabble we were strategic and organized at all three of our actions. The police were in overkill mode. A group went down at 9.00pm to hold a candlelight vigil of mourning. People sat quietly and sang. Arrests were made. A young woman had been arrested earlier in the day for flying her kite in a restricted zone near a military airport.

We were a mixed crowd. I enjoyed seeing the colorful appearance of the passionate young people. The Desert Rats without Borders, feral anarchist punks, were the most visually striking group, dressed in black

, interesting tattoos, intricate hair designs, body piercing, some men wearing kilts and a few wearing black bandanas over their mouth and nose. The Greens added an air of respectability. There were several sprightly older women, a couple of New Romantic-looking fellows from the VCA, Melbourne’s elite art school, and many 30 and 40 something women who had left their partners and children behind. The array of T-shirt messages was to be constantly stimulating and entertaining.

There were the Queers for Refugees, Rural Australians for Refugees, the Radical Cheer Squad

who never failed to amuse with their witty routines. Food not Bombs were impressive providing yummy vegetarian food made from “found food”. No One is Illegal had organized the water truck; the Refugee Action Collective organized the concert. Indymedia set up the media tent.

Yesterday a plain-clothes policeman with a backpack had been recognized by one of the local aborigines who had formerly been a policeman himself. A crowd gathered and hounded him out of the camp. We had no idea of how many spies there were amongst us. The police had expected about three thousand of us there was overkill everywhere

It was beyond my expectations to meet two Australian Correctional Management (ACM) building subcontractors, who worked at both Woomera and Baxter, during the concert. Australasian Correctional Management was a private company running several immigration detention centres. The guys seemed to have pretty good communication with the women and children of the housing program and the men in the detention centres. They described how the community of Woomera had done a lot in terms of material assistance to the housing program residents. I found it confronting to meet these two blokes because my feeling was that no one should work for ACM if they had a conscience. They told me that they were part of the protest but they wouldn't take part in any action, as they feared losing their jobs. They were happy to talk to anyone at the camp and answer any questions but would not appear on film. They confirmed that at Woomera the women were still taken shopping by guards.

During the concert we were able to do a mobile phone hook up with one of the detainees over the PA. We learnt that contrary to misinformation before the

protests we had the full support from the people inside.

Sunday 20th

It was meant to be a 7.00 am start as it was the cool time of the day, people from Perth had a 30-hour trip ahead of them and we had to pack and be at the Port Augusta jail by 1.30. A group of us filled balloons with helium and with felt tips wrote messages to detainees. We finally headed off at 8.30 for our last of the five actions at the detention centre. We released our balloons in unison; we hoped some of them would land in the compounds. A Jewish group from Sydney stuck rows of yellow Jewish stars around the entrance and handed yellow flyers to the media pointing out the similarities as well as the differences between Australia's Detention Centres and Nazi Concentration Camps.

We made lots of noise and as we left we tried to get past the police close to the fence, the Darth Vader-like police chased us again, a few more arrests but most of us could easily outrun the police so heavily weighed down by their uniforms.

When we got back we heard about a four-wheel drive full of police armed with machine guns who had driven through the camp. Channel Nine was negotiating with some of us to get our handy cam and Super 8 footage of this. Apparently four hours earlier someone had pointed a tripod at the relentless helicopter that has been hovering above us day and night for the three days.

As the camp was packing up a spectacular whirlwind of red dust swept through the camp sweeping objects up towards the blue sky. Similarly we had swept through Port Augusta and the desert for three days. On the way to the Port Augusta jail solidarity protest (80% of prisoners are aboriginal) we noticed the police having a damage control press conference. They

were being questioned by the media about the machine guns.

I thanked Noelene, the aboriginal elder who had spoken and sang at the Rock Out Against Racism concert the night before, for having us. She replied “Well you know where we are now, come and see us anytime.”

Post script

Coming home I realized that Australians must fight to protect our fragile and eroding freedom and understood that if we are complacent how easily our government will be able to take it away.

For the economic rationalists: the South Australian Government spent \$1,000,000 on the protest. There were about 500 protestors. Each protestor cost them \$2000. It only cost me \$300. It was a worthwhile investment to put refugees in detention back on Australia's agenda.

Thank you to all my fellow protestors and all the people back home who supported the Baxter 2003 convergence in other various ways.

‘A racist pig’: on embroiling children in the war on refugees

By Jordy Silverstein



On March 25, 2004, it was reported by the *Hobart Mercury* that “immigration minister Amanda Vanstone said yesterday she had received letters from primary school children calling her a racist pig.” Apparently, “she said she was not offended by the

abusive letters but annoyed children had been influenced to write such things.” Andrew Bolt was suitably outraged by these letters, with them making him “wonder what hatred some teachers preach in class.” Indeed, the letter-writing campaign was part of a concerted school and Australian Education Union effort, with teachers educating their primary school students about what was going on at that time for those refugees and asylum seekers being held in detention.

Vanstone would continue to express her concern over the politicising of Australian schoolchildren throughout 2004. In July she condemned Morris Gleitzman’s new book *Girl Underground*, “the story of Bridget, an Australian girl with some big family problems of her own, who joins forces with Menzies, a boy whose father is an Australian government minister. Together they become pen friends with Jamal and Bibi,” two boy asylum seekers who “are in a detention centre in the Australian desert.” According to a report in the *Weekend Australian* on July 3, “Senator Vanstone accused Gleitzman of presenting one side of the story.” Vanstone was quoted as saying: “I think that one of the greatest things we can give kids is a childhood... Let them have a childhood as long as they can without burdening them with some of the difficult decisions that have to be made later in life. There’s no political gain to be had here. Kids don’t vote. Why ruin their childhood.” For Gleitzman though, it was important to talk openly with young children about what goes on in the world. The same article quoted him as saying that “We’re doing them a disservice by trying to insulate them from some aspects and pretend they can be kept safely in some magical, innocent place called childhood.”

Indeed, Vanstone also maintained a belief in the importance of educating school children about these issues: in May 2004, the Immigration Department – of which she was the Minister – produced a set of school kits, distributed to approximately 11,000 schools, which “were designed to ‘encourage frank and open debate’ about immigration, and overcome misleading claims by critics of the Government’s policy”. From this we can understand that it was not that Vanstone believed children to be unpoliticised, but rather that she aimed to have greater control on the direction of their political thinking.

From the reporting of these interventions into the education of schoolchildren, it seems evident that the students were keen to learn and participate in developing their knowledge of the ways in which the Australian state treats refugees. Despite Vanstone’s call for children to be unburdened with political knowledge, as Gleitzman says, many children already are attuned to, and interested in, being openly political.

Indeed, if we jump forward twelve or so years, we can turn to the children currently being held in the immigration detention centre in Nauru, who on the 2nd of November 2015 started a Facebook page, Twitter account, and website called ‘Free the Children Nauru’. Explaining that on this page ‘The asylum seeker and refugee children doomed on Nauru speak out and share their dreams and hopes with other children around the world’, the page has, since its creation, provided a space for drawings, images, videos, and words from these children. Followed by almost 39,000 people, the Facebook page has directed a series of different claims – political, activist, emotional, and educational – at

Australian citizens, the Australian media, and Australian politicians.

Two days the facebook page was formed, we received the children’s words for the first time: “The Asylum Seeker and Refugee children will not be silenced any longer. This is our page, with our stories of the hell we have suffered being locked up on Nauru. We have a message coming for all Australian children. So please like and share this page so you will know the truth.” From the very beginning then, the children creating and posting on this page were seeking to communicate directly with Australian children, creating a shared knowledge, a shared sense of community and solidarity.

Indeed, a few days later, on November 11, the children wrote “When we see people like our page and say something in comment we want to scream our happiness because we know you and you know us. We want to say we love you! It is also amazing to see people that did not know us be so kind and know that we hear. Might because we not forgotten childrens. We hope we not forgotten child’s.”

Through the posts on this page – which continued to be provided by the children in detention from its formation until August 29 - the children, as *children*, have challenged entrenched historical ideas of refugee children as particularly voiceless, faceless, and unable to engage in politics. Like citizen children in the examples above, and perhaps even more so, refugee children have been imagined as so fundamentally constituted by their innocence that they are unable to be politically active, to have any power. What would our political discourse look like, I wonder, if we saw all peoples as equally capable of engaging in political speech? What would the actions of adults entail if we took more direction from refugee

children? At this moment in time it is evident that approaches to acting for justice for refugees need new approaches: both in Australia and internationally, we are utterly failing. Perhaps then broadening our ideas of what political action can, and does, look like, could be a useful step.

Why I spend my Friday nights in hell: visiting the Melbourne Immigration and Transit Accommodation centre (MITA)

By Sivan Barak

Every Friday night for the past 60 weeks I've driven out of the 'ghetto', over the river, just 32km south, to the far away land of Broadmeadows. It's a weekly participation in a macabre ritual, the antithesis to Melbourne's dubious title, 'most livable city'. During these visits, I witness what I can only describe as Australia's "banality of evil", Hannah Arendt's confronting and harsh term, coined after witnessing the trial of Adolf Eichmann.

Men and women, who are employed by us, uphold cruel violations of human rights. They maintain they are "just following orders" and "needing to pay their mortgage". It is a surreal experience, as an Australian, to enter a realm, a bubble in our urban space, in which one relinquishes their rights to as simple a request as gifting a book to a detainee, or pointing out administrative incompetence. The desire to visit the detainees, combined with the constant threat of refusal, is manipulated and used against me as leverage to shut down any discussion or query.

MITA (Melbourne Immigration and Transit Accommodation) holds people who are seeking asylum, who have committed no crime.

Most asylum seekers detained here are seeking medical treatment. Yet it is a high security facility with rules and regulations for prisons. No mobile phones, musical instruments, or craft materials are permitted during visits. Visitors are required to sit throughout the two-hour visit, without moving from their seat. If a detainee needs to use the bathroom, their visit is terminated.



Image courtesy of Sivan Barak.

The visitor community is an incredibly diverse group, spanning all ages and genders, united by a deep-set understanding that a terrible injustice, an insidious evil, is being perpetrated in our own name. Our role is to witness lives, to know names, to hug and love and support human beings who could be us, who are now our family. Every week, every visit, my life is enhanced by the trust and love bestowed upon me by my friends inside. I would like to share the thoughts of one young inspiring visitor who wrote this last year:

"Something which I have been thinking of a lot lately is the way the term 'the voiceless' is used. When people refer to people in oppressed situations, they often refer to them as people without a voice or 'voiceless'.

The thing is people aren't voiceless.

People seeking asylum aren't voiceless.

Indigenous people aren't voiceless. The LGBTQI+ community aren't voiceless.

Minority groups aren't voiceless. Those living under war, occupation and military rule aren't voiceless.

Situations, governments, armed forces, militaries and institutions use force, control, media, power, money and violence to keep voices quiet.

These powers do all they can to speak louder, to speak over the top, to control messages, to control people and put them in situations that limit their capacity to be heard.

But people are never voiceless. Sometimes their voices are taken. Sometimes their words are misused.

Sometimes they are silenced. But this doesn't make them voiceless.

Despite all the layers of oppression people continue to speak up, people continue to be strong, to be true, to share their stories and they continue to speak out. We just need to listen better.

We need to put ourselves in the right places so that we hear the truth.

We need to allow ourselves to be confronted by the truth of the world.

We need to be the ones listening to the voices of those being oppressed, as they are being oppressed by the very structures and institutions that many of us benefit from.

We may advocate and speak of the things we see, hear and know as the unjust truths.

But we aren't (or shouldn't be!) speaking of, or for voiceless people.

We are speaking of people who have strong, brave, determined, and unwavering voices.

They're just not being listened to."

--Jasmine Pilbrow 2016

If you want to get involved, there are so many ways. Let me know.

One Nation's cancellation and a letter by Robin Rothfield

Pauline Hanson and Malcolm Roberts' planned Caulfield visit in November, 2016, which was organised by a far Right Jewish group, was cancelled due to a collaborative effort within the broad Jewish community. While the One Nation senators claimed it was the extremist Left that shut them down, as Michael Brull wrote in New Matilda, "It is hard to take those claims seriously. What really happened is that a small but diverse group of Jews intended to protest One Nation. Rather than face a few hundred protestors, One Nation cancelled the event. There is no evidence that any violence was being planned, let alone that the heavy police presence would have been unable to contain it."

Jews Against Fascism, a broad spectrum of locals, organised the diversity picnic in place of the divisive planned talk.



A week earlier, the following was published as the lead letter in The Jewish News; it's relevance hasn't waned since the introduction of Trump's Muslim immigration ban and the ongoing racism of Australia's asylum seeker policy:

You were strangers

For a Jewish group to be hosting a meeting on the dangers of Muslim migration is a contradiction in terms. Let us remember that the injunction "do not oppress the stranger for you yourselves were strangers in the Land of Egypt" is repeated 36 times in the Torah, more often than any other injunction.

But we are told that Muslims pose a terrorist threat. Let us consider the case of the USA. The FBI has issued a report on terrorist attacks on US soil between 1980 and 2005. And it finds that Islamic extremists account for only 6% of these attacks, in other words 94% of the attacks were launched by non-Muslims.

Charles Kurzman, Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina, has found that in the 11 years from 2001 to 2012, 33 Americans have died as a result of terrorism launched by their Muslim neighbors. During that period, 180,000 Americans were murdered for reasons unrelated to terrorism. Kurzman concludes that the Muslim rate of involvement in terrorism is less than 10 per million.

I suggest that Avi Yemini, who has called this meeting with One Nation Senators, inform Senators Pauline Hanson and Malcolm Roberts that at the Evian Conference in 1938, called to discuss the issue of increasing numbers of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution, Australia's Minister for Trade and Custom, Thomas White, said:

"It will no doubt be appreciated also that as we have no real racial

problem, we are not desirous of importing one by encouraging any scheme of large-scale foreign migration."

Then Yemini should ask Hanson and Roberts to comment on this statement.

Robin Rothfield

Alphington Vic.

The AJDS often hosts unique events and gatherings, attended by a diverse crowd that gathers to talk in ways otherwise unavailable. We cherish these moments and always try to keep a record of each as best we can - notes, pictures, and recordings. For this reason, we call upon our members and supporters to dig deep and if possible, spare a few dollars towards our **camcorder fund**. Whatever you can give will go a long way, guaranteeing that what we do is kept on record for posterity.

Founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, Joan Nestle, has said that "the AJDS archives inhabit a contested field of memory," insisting that we must be able to properly record our organisation's work, in order to contest the exile space dismissively allotted to us as a supposedly radical voice.

To donate money, visit our website at ajds.org.au/donate, making sure to clearly state **camcorder fund** before you complete your transaction, or let us know about it by email.

If you have some equipment you would like to donate to the AJDS, get in touch with us here.

If you have some wisdom in this area and wish to share it, please get in touch.

Every bit helps.

Impressions from the anti-Trump rally in Melbourne, February 3 2017

By Larry Stillman

Hello all, I ran home like crazy to try to put in a report about the anti-Trump demo for those who are observant though as far as I can see, the sun is well and truly shining.

Yes, there was a 1/2 hearted from Palestine to Mexico slogan attempt by the young 'chair' of the protest that annoyed me a bit, but there were as far as I can tell, no anti-Israel signs or posters, at least at the state library. I did not stay for the March down Bourke Street (why they felt the need to hold up trams etc. I don't know, but this is masorti).

Only one speaker made strong allusion to Israeli/Palestine as a parallel case of exclusion, and frankly, he said nothing that the 'true' Israeli left or Haaretz would not say.

Richard di Natale spoke first (or was it second?), and nothing he said would have been objected to by anyone who opposes Trump.

And thank you to Sheikh Mohamed Mohideen, of the Islamic Council for such perceptive and kind words about the important role of the Jewish community in the US -- unity being shown- despite differences. I hope this message got through to more than a few people in attendance.



Alexjo Sandra Nissen spoke and was great. The politics of the very factional left organisers may not have been everyone's cup of tea, but I think it is fair to say that Alex was out there, loud, and proud, as an authentic Australian-Israeli activist (yes, not a Zionist, but a believer in bi-nationalism) who does not accept the current mainstream and especially Netanyahu narrative that supports, borders, walls, and discrimination. It took some effort to get the organisers to be inclusive. I think they learned a lesson, and she got a lot of applause.

[Watch the recording on our website.]

And a reflection: decades ago, a lot more protests, particularly on Vietnam War issues, were coordinated by a number of church, union, and other organisations. Such people and structures knew each other very well and used to working through differences and the order and focus of events (maybe students were more anarchic, I think so). And, the division of labour was well, highly gendered. I think most of the key people were men, and women were at home with the kids, or did the typing etc. It's not like that any more. Of course there were exceptions, like Save our Sons.

Innocent, imprisoned, unbroken: Behrouz Boochani

Last year Behrouz Boochani wrote in the Guardian about arriving in Manus Island:

“Twenty-eight months ago, with a shattered body which was ravenously hungry and deeply wounded, with bare feet and exhausted soul, I made the trip to the soil of free territory, to Australia. It was four days after the announcing the 19th of July law. Because of the law, I was exiled to Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, in the heart of the Pacific Ocean; and according to this law, it has been 28 months that I am being under pressure and being tortured.”



He's now been there nearly four years. Behrouz Boochani, 32, was Born in Ilam, Iran. He studied Political Geography and Geopolitics in Tehran and worked as a journalist, becoming a passionate advocate of human rights and in particular, Kurdish culture. For this, he was persecuted, along with other Kurdish activists. In 2013, after months in hiding, he left Iran, hoping to find refuge elsewhere. It was months still, before he would depart Indonesia for Australia with 90 others on a boat, only to be intercepted in the water by the Australian Navy, detained on Christmas Island, then transferred to Manus Island, where he has been ever since. He has continued to write about human rights abuses in Manus, witnessed and

experienced by him and the other 900 men illegally detained there. His work is critical in fighting against the total media blackout and legal restrictions placed on those working on the island, imposed by Australia's Border Force Act of 2015 with its strict disclosure provisions. He's a regular contributor to *The Guardian* and reports and shares photos on Facebook regularly, though his work is severely restricted, not only by the Transfield crew whose job it is to maintain security in the facility. Though he was accorded refugee status by PNG in 2016, he refuses to seek asylum there, insisting on being processed in Australia. "The threat of being resettled on the island", he reasons, "which is devoid of security, causes a severe and ongoing mental pressure in the camp."

"He maintains his sanity between descents into depression with his continuing work as a writer and journalist" writes Arnold Zable, "and his lifeline via various channels with a few advocates in Australia, including Castlemaine resident and refugee advocate Janet Galbraith. She is in touch with him daily, and has arranged for his writings to be translated from Farsi to English. His accounts of his incarceration on Manus Island read like a Kafka nightmare." When he's writing and working he's at his best, able to wrest himself from the abyss of depression. Some days he works over 16 hours, despite poor health and intolerable conditions.

Behrouz was a close friend of Hamid Kehzaei, also from Ilam, before Hamid's untimely death in August, 2014. It has now been shown in court that Hamid's death resulted from medical neglect, enabled by the secretive nature of Australia's immigration practices. And yet, officials repeatedly insist that medical care in Australia's offshore detention centres is 'broadly comparable' - to use the

jargon - with Australia's healthcare, despite consistent and nearly universal rejection of this claim, and the plethora of evidence to the contrary already made available.

In 2016, Behrouz lost another friend in Manus, Sudanese refugee Faysal Ishak Ahmad, who died after ongoing medical neglect of severe infection. Having officially been recognised as a refugee by Australian authorities, Faysal attempted to receive medical attention for months, to no avail. Eventually, Faysal collapsed, having endured so much in his short life, always thinking of his son and wife, displaced in Darfur. "He was a man whose life was full of pain; he spent more than half his life in refugee camps", wrote Boochani.



Behrouz Boochani and Mehdi Savari in Manus Island.

Boochani wrote about Mehdi Savari, another Manus prisoner, an Iranian actor and television presenter, who fled the country in 2013, undertook the difficult journey by boat from Indonesia to Christmas Island, only to be intercepted by Australian authorities. Mehdi is approximately one metre tall, writes Boochani, and his physicality has made his time in Manus particularly difficult, in part

because he faces increased discrimination. Boochani quotes Mehdi for *New Matilda*:

"When I have to use the toilet I feel like I am confronting and battling a giant - sitting on the toilet seat is one of the most difficult things for me and I have fallen off on a number of occasions, resulting in filthy situations. I imagine that the most painful memory that I'll take with me from this prison is my encounters with the toilet seat. They made me feel like a worthless human being."

In addition to this and other daily difficulties, Mehdi suffers from a possibly hereditary, painful eye condition, but "Like many other sick people held in Manus Prison, Mehdi has had to endure his condition without treatment, adding to his sense of humiliation and suffering," writes Boochani:

"During the times of our greatest suffering and misery, just hearing that this actor was in the same prison as me was a blessing, and just knowing that in this prison an artist was close-by gave me comfort. During the most difficult times, when the prisoners of Manus were under intense pressure from G4S officers and Salvation Army workers, he would stage satirical performances for the prisoners in Oscar compound. He staged plays he had acted in many times before for prisoners who had no other salvation other than their fellow inmates."

As disturbed as we are to hear about violent attacks from locals, harassment and abuse from G4s and Transfield staff, medical neglect and physical discomfort, it is perhaps hardest to fathom the mental anguish experienced by these innocent refugees: "The main policy here on Manus is to put asylum seekers in a time tunnel. In other words, none of the asylum seekers are aware of the stage of their own application and others'. They have no idea about the period of time they would be

kept in the detention and what future is waiting for them. They do not even know which country or city they would live after getting released". Self-harm and suicide attempts are commonplace in this senseless torture chamber.

PEN International has issued a call for Behrouz's release and for him to be granted asylum in Australia, immediately.

Last year Behrouz received the Social Justice Award. In presenting the award, event organiser, human rights activist and fellow refugee, Saba Vasefi, described Boochani as 'a citizen of the world, whose reports from detention with a small mobile phone and restricted internet access remind us of the possibilities for resistance.' In response, Boochani said: "I hope the award will encourage notable Australians to criticise their country's system of offshore detention... Why are they silent? I know some of them are trying, but I think the pressure is not enough." Behrouz and other refugee activists have also spoken about the unhelpful tendency to reduce asylum seekers to merely victims. Instead we must let them speak, and acknowledge the agency, courage and initiative they required to free themselves of their oppression and seek freedom.

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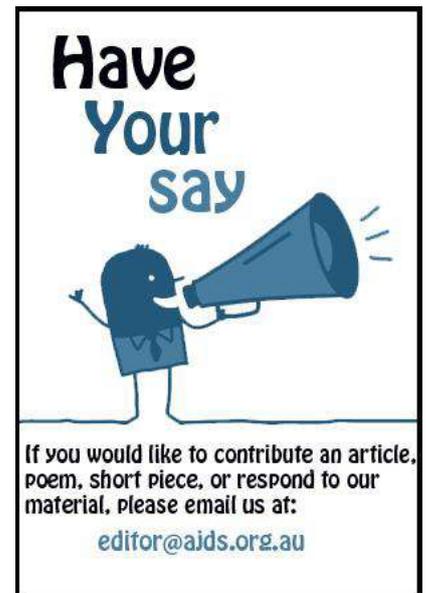
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Feb 11 – Let's talk JNF

Feb 26 – AJDS AGM & lunch

**April 5 – Politics and Parenting in Palestine: Laila El-Haddad
at the Wheeler Centre**

**April 6 – Laila El-Haddad at the Melbourne Food & Wine
Show**

April 9 – Palm Sunday Rally

April 30 – Workshop with Liam Getreu

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JUST VOICES #12, February 2017 – THE REFUGEE ISSUE

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PO Box 450 Elsternwick, VIC 3185, Australia

Tel: (+61) 423 234 069

Email: co@ajds.org.au www.ajds.org.au

