

Antisemites ‘blur the lines’ to attack Jewish identity, royal commission told

By [JAMES DOWLING](#)

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Antisemites intentionally “blur the lines” between criticism of Israel’s existence and its actions, one of Australia’s most eminent Jewish lawyers says, arguing that Jewish Australians have been forced to choose between their morals and their livelihoods.

Arnold Bloch Leibler partner Jeremy Leibler was one of a dozen witnesses who testified in the [Antisemitism and Social Cohesion Royal Commission on Wednesday](#), along with a 13-year-old girl traumatised by the Bondi Beach massacre.

Royal commissioner Virginia Bell challenged Mr Leibler to distinguish between delegitimising Israel and the critical views of well-intentioned non-Jewish Australians of the actions of Israel.

“I don’t believe that it is difficult to draw the line,” Mr Leibler said. “I believe that there are many that have an agenda to make it very difficult, in order to blur the lines.

“It is perfectly acceptable to criticise Israel’s conduct of the war. It is not legitimate, it is not acceptable, and it does cross the line to describe the Jewish right to self-determination as something that is inherently evil or immoral.”

Mr Leibler, whose firm is acting for Jewish organisations in the royal commission, said ABL had taken on dozens of pro bono legal clients since October 7, 2023, who

[saw their livelihoods threatened for refusing to disavow Zionism.](#)

“My phone was ringing off the hook after the 7th of October, and it was almost always from traumatised members of the community asking for help because of antisemitism, isolation, exclusion, discrimination,” he said. “It was particularly bad within the arts, within progressive spaces, within academia, but it was everywhere.

“Jewish artists ... were having venues cancelled, often ... not because the venue ideologically wanted to. Often the cancellation would be accompanied by: ‘I’m so sorry, but I’ve been told that there’s going to be a BDS boycott campaign if we allow you to perform, and we’re a small business, and we just can’t afford to be attacked online.’”

Mr Leibler said the rise in antisemitism proved to successful Jewish Australians that their seat at the table “was conditional on them rejecting a core part of their Jewish identity”. “Their success, their contribution to this country, bought them a seat at the table, not with special treatment, but as an equal,” he said. “And they discovered after the 7th of October, very quickly, that that seat was conditional on them rejecting a core part of their Jewish identity: that being their Zionism, their belief in the right of Jewish people to have their own homeland.”

Witnesses repeatedly [lamented the failures of institutions to hold antisemites to account](#), or take their concerns seriously.

The mother of a Jewish schoolboy pelted with antisemitic slurs on a school excursion at a museum said she was misled by education officials after a months-long complaint process.

High school students had taunted her 10-year-old son and his classmates with calls of “free Palestine”, “free Hezbollah” and “dirty Jews”, and multiple witnesses said the high school’s teacher and the museum failed to intervene.

The woman, referred to as AAU, took her son’s case to the department. “They said that they were going to investigate the incident and that the school was in touch with my son’s school, and that the school had provided a written apology,” she told the commission. AAU followed up her complaint to see what action had been taken, but

the query went unanswered. Finally, in March, she received a letter saying there was a delay in identifying the offending students and teacher.

“The department also informed me that the school engaged (antisemitism education non-profit) Courage to Care to provide some educative services to the school,” AAU said.

“I know people that work at Courage to Care, so I contacted them directly. The CEO expressly told me in writing that they have never been engaged by this high school to provide any educative process. I’m still very disappointed that an independent statutory body provided me with misleading information.”

The 13-year-old girl had been at a bat mitzvah at Bondi Pavilion on December 14 last year. “I did not see or hear any shooting, but I could see through the glass doors of the venue, hundreds of people running away and screaming,” she said. “I had to be in lockdown at the venue. It was terrifying. My mum could not get to pick me up because the roads were closed. When I eventually got home, I was shaking and sweating and crying.

“I am so sad about all the people who died, especially Matilda, because she was just a kid and she did nothing wrong.”

She has spent months trying to recover from what she saw, and recalled how a close friend refused to go to her bat mitzvah because “her parents don’t like Jews”.

Many parents and teachers told the commission how antisemitism had calcified in schools amid rising criticism of Israel. A former Tasmanian public high school teacher said students developed “a fascination with Hitler”, would perform Nazi salutes. “The hatred of Israel ... seemed something that they didn’t really know a whole lot about and were parroting from perhaps what they’d seen from online or family,” she said.

A 13-year-old was subjected to such intense antisemitic bullying he was forced to move from his Darwin high school, his father said, only to be subjected to more abuse at his second school. “Yesterday, he rang up his mother and asked her to come and pick him up from school in the middle of the day,” he said. “I knew straight away what had happened.”