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INQUIRY RECOMMENDS OUTLAWING PUBLIC DISPLAY OF NAZI SYMBOLS

SWASTIKAS TO BE BANNED?

REBECCA DAVIS

THE public display of the swastika and other Nazi images could soon be banned and deemed a criminal offence in Victoria following recommendations delivered in a report by a state parliamentary committee on Wednesday.

The bipartisan committee – consisting of seven parliamentarians including Caulfield MP David Southwick – stated, “[It is] important to send a clear message to the community that Nazi symbolism is not acceptable in any form and has wide-ranging, negative societal impacts.

“It recommends that the Victorian government establish a criminal offence that prohibits the display of symbols of Nazi ideology, including the Nazi swastika, with considered exceptions to the law,” the report read.

This adoption of the recommendation into law would see strengthened powers for Victoria Police, allowing for the immediate removal of Nazi symbols that are on deliberate display to vilify targeted communities.

While 90-year-old Melbourne Holocaust survivor Irma Hanner welcomed the development, she lamented, “They should have done it a long time ago.”

Calling the display of Nazi symbols “disgusting”, Hanner told *The AJN*, “It makes me very upset.”

Born in Germany, Hanner survived Theresienstadt, and narrowly avoided a transfer to Auschwitz due to sheer “luck”.

Having read of the recent neo-Nazi gathering in the Grampians, she said, “I couldn’t sleep all night ... we live in a very dangerous time.”



A Nazi flag was seen flying in the Victorian town of Beulah in January, 2020.

The committee also heard that a key area for preventing vilification is school-based education, with critical importance placed on proactively targeting prejudice in early schooling years to ensure that it does not become further entrenched and systemic.

Of particular relevance to the Jewish community in the wake of an alarming series of reported antisemitic bullying incidents that plagued multiple state schools over the past 18 months – with the testimonies of two parents of victims heard at the inquiry – came the recommendation of “clearer understanding among educators and school leadership on preventing and responding to hate conduct within schools, including the pro-

fessional development, policies and strategies”.

Further, the report calls for a lowering of the legal threshold for incitement-based vilification, recommending lessening the threshold from “conduct that incites” to “conduct that is likely to incite”, therefore improving victims’ ability to substantiate a complaint.

Deeming the report, “an important first step in reforming Victoria’s toothless anti-vilification laws”, Southwick said, “I’m pleased the committee has followed the Victorian Liberals’ policy of banning the Nazi swastika and addressing antisemitism in schools through early education.”

Chair of the Anti-Defamation Commission, Dr Dvir Abramovich,

who has campaigned for years for the public outlawing of Nazi symbols, said, “With this announcement, the committee has declared in a clear voice that the ultimate emblems of inhumanity, genocide and racism, that are meant to break our spirit and instil fear, will never find a refuge in our state.”

The sentiment was echoed by Jewish Holocaust Centre museum director and CEO Jayne Josen, who said, “Banning the swastika sends a strong message to the community that an ideology of hate and extreme prejudice is unacceptable in our multicultural, diverse and inclusive society.”

While co-CEO of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and key contributor in the inquiry Peter Wertheim applauded the recommendations, he said, “Such legislation would not obviate the need for a much more systematic, whole-of-government approach to address the problem of extremism, both through legislation and, most especially, through education.”

Citing the report’s recommendation that the government work with the Online Hate Prevention Institute (OHPi), the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and Office of the eSafety Commissioner “to develop a strategy to reduce and prevent vilification online”, OHPi CEO Dr Andre Oboler called the step forward “particularly welcome”.

While the government has a six-month period to respond to the report, *The AJN* understands the Opposition are engaged in discussions with them to expedite the recommendations into law as soon as possible.

FLAG IN BENDIGO

‘Stop this grisly trade’

ZEDDY LAWRENCE

A NAZIflag has been pulled from sale at a top tourist attraction in Bendigo after a shocked Jewish visitor filmed it being unfurled by a saleswoman and then contacted the Anti-Defamation Commission (ADC).

“There are around 40 independent stallholders in the Antiques & Collectables Centre at Bendigo Pottery who stock their own sites,” venue owner Sally Thomson explained to *The AJN* on Tuesday, adding, “We were not aware of the presence of this flag in our centre until advised of the news report on Sunday evening. We immediately removed the item before opening Monday.”

ADC chair Dvir Abramovich told *The AJN*, “This grisly trade must be stopped. This flag is an emblem of evil, representing a brutal regime responsible for the deaths of thousands of Australian soldiers, six million Jews and millions of others. This is not who we are as a people, and such sales desecrate not only the memory of the victims but tear to shreds our shared values.”

Thomson concurred. “We agree with Dvir Abramovich’s response and are sorry that the inadvertent inclusion of this item has caused offence,” she said.

“Its presence certainly does not reflect our views and values. We are contacting all stallholders to prevent this happening again.”

Watch the video
Online at www.jewishnews.com.au
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