

Uproar as deputy attacked over gay issues

AT THE BOARD

STEFAN
BIALOGUSKI



THE sparsely-attended NSW Jewish Board of Deputies April plenum degenerated into a near-slanging match last week after deputy Phillip Hynek sparked an attack on fellow-deputy Eliana Freydel Miller.

The criticisms of Ms Miller, who did not attend the meeting, related to her activities regarding Jewish-gay issues in recent weeks.

Board president Peter Wertheim was forced to rule on several points of order and to remind deputies not to descend into personal attacks while pursuing their right to criticise the legitimately expressed views of their colleagues.

Mr Hynek, who did not mention Ms Miller by name, said: "I don't know whether to laugh or cry at the shenanigans and ructions within our community over the past month, much of it as a result of the actions of one of this Board's deputies."

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The "ructions" included The Shalom Institute's hosting of a Shabbat dinner for gay Jews and the head of the organisation being summoned to the Beth Din; the *Australian Jewish News* being "castigated for publishing a picture and articles concerning Jewish representation at the Mardi Gras"; Mr Wertheim being called to the Beth Din because Ms Miller laid three charges ("only one in the slightest way comprehensible") against him; and Ms Miller lodging a submission to a Senate committee discussing the Anti-Genocide Bill, in which she urged it to ignore what she described as "immoral" Jewish submissions which would extend the crime of genocide to include groups defined by gender, sexuality, political affiliation or disability.

"In taking the undemocratic actions that she did, one of our deputies has, I contend, brought the Beth Din into disrepute," Mr Hynek said.

Concerning her submission to the Senate committee, he said: "What an outrage! The community has had its views considered by government because we speak with a unified voice. We now have a deputy who has acted to change this. I wish to express dismay at the damage one of our deputies has attempted to engineer to our well-respected communal organisations."

Deputy Otto Waldman "If a member of the Board has strong feelings on Jewish values, she or he should be allowed to express those views. It's abhorrent that the voices against Orthodoxy have been so incredibly aggressive and allowed to carry out unbelievably obnoxious expression in the *Jewish News* and the community without



Gerry Levy

interference from this president of the Board, who hasn't tried to bring any sense of balance."

Deputy Annette Johnson expressed discomfort that such criticism be levelled at someone who was not present.

A distressed Board honorary life member Gerry Levy said he had never attended a meeting like it. "We have to keep in mind that we're here to strengthen the community. I don't think we're here to pass judgment on this Jew or that. I urge deputies to desist further discussing this and to work together, rather than denigrate sections of [the community]. This was an aberration of a meeting, and I hope I don't see the like of it again."

Pursuing justice

Mr Wertheim said the past month had been a good one for justice with the guilty verdict against all five defendants in the Maccabiah bridge collapse trial and the backfiring of David Irving's libel case against Deborah Lipstadt. "Hopefully, the [Maccabiah] verdict will assist the parties to expedite the proceedings so the families don't have to undergo the added trauma of further litigation."

Executive Council of Australian Jewry national vice-president Jeremy Jones said Prime Minister John Howard had formally requested that Australia be granted observer status at the trial of the 13 Iranian Jews when it resumes on May 1. He and Mr Wertheim praised the government's raising of the issue privately with Iran. Mr Wertheim added that it was being urged to make public representations as well as consider economic sanctions.

Wesley practices

The Uniting Church has written to the ECAJ, saying non-Christians will not be discriminated against by its publicly-funded job agency, Wesley Uniting Employment.



Eliana Freydel Miller

Mr Jones said the Church's associate general secretary, Wendie Wilkie, had written to him, clarifying that a controversial article by Sydney Wesley Mission's David McGovern in the *Sydney Morning Herald* declaring that Christians made the best employees "did not reflect accurately the policies of the Uniting Church in Australia or Wesley Mission, Sydney. We apologise for any offence they caused to your community ... All the agencies that won contracts as part of Wesley Uniting Employment are required by the Church and by the government to have non-discriminatory policies and practices in carrying out this work."

Ms Wilkie said Wesley Mission Sydney no longer asked prospective staff to "affirm their acceptance of Christian values", but ask whether they were "happy working in an organisation that had those values".

"All employment assistance programs will be conducted in public and community buildings, rather than church buildings. The logo that was designed for use by Wesley Uniting Employment was carefully done so as not to include any overt Christian symbolism."

Mr Jones noted that the letter was the result of two Jewish delegations meeting the Church to discuss the issue.

Kosovar motion

The Jewish community was urged to speak up on behalf of the Kosovar refugees who were forcibly repatriated.

Michelle Stein-Evers proposed a motion that was seconded and placed on notice until after Pesach. It read: "That the Board of Deputies calls on the ECAJ to protest strongly the Federal Government's move to forcibly repatriate the Kosovars ...; calls on the Federal Government to respect and adhere to the advice of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' representatives on the ground in Kosovo and other parts of the former Yugoslavia, in respect to the adverse conditions there; urges the Federal Government not to further breach Australia's obligations under the Refugee Convention ... and enable asylum seekers to have applications determined properly and in accordance with the law."

Holocaust study tour

Deputies were urged to support a Holocaust Study Tour being organised by the Australasian Union of Jewish Students. The two-week tour of Shoah sites in Eastern Europe and Israel in July will have 15 places for 21-25-year-olds with a proven interest in the Shoah, leadership skills, community involvement and a willingness to share their acquired knowledge with the community. Mr Wertheim asked deputies to go to their respective organisations to ascertain whether financial support could be made available. The study tour costs \$5000.