

Executive Council of Australian Jewry

הועד הפועל של
יהודי אוסטרליה

The Representative Organisation of Australian Jewry

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Andrew Jaspan
Editor-in-Chief
The Age
PO Box 257C
Melbourne VIC 3001

21 November 2006

Dear Mr Jaspan

As President of the elected roof body of Australian Jewry, I write on behalf of Australia's Jewish community regarding an issue of concern to all members of our community.

You are aware that many local Jews perceive *The Age* as biased in favour of anti-Israel groups in relation to the Middle East conflict. We know that this has been pointed out to you by individual readers and in a meeting between *Age* personnel (including yourself) and Mr Mark Leibler AC and Dr Colin Rubenstein AM. While editorials and letters have generally been even-handed, there has been criticism about skewed reportage, particularly by Ed O'Loughlin, Michael Leunig's cartoons and many articles on the opinion page.

What has prompted my letter, however, is a letter to the editor by a Mr Russell Quill in today's *Age* which read in part:

"I was surprised to read Alan Freedman's claim (Letters, 20/11) that, while poverty has "been around since the world began", terrorism only "came of age five years ago with September 11".

I am not sure in what sense this is a "coming of age". Terrorism has existed since Jewish Zealots began publicly murdering merchants who collaborated with the Roman occupation. It has been with us ever since...."

I have no doubt that there have been many events all around the world, both recorded and unknown, before and after the period referred to in Mr Quill's letter that might qualify as the first act of terror. In effect, however, he is stating that the Jews introduced terror to the world - a classic antisemitic canard that sees Jews as the root of all evil - and *The Age* has given his statement publicity, if not credibility.

It sometimes has been said that Jews are over-sensitive. Nonetheless I contend it is irresponsible, perhaps even inflammatory, for *The Age* to publish such an accusation about any group of people, but particularly about Jews at a time when antisemitism is reaching record heights. The dreadful irony is that Jewish communities world-wide are effectively under siege due to real and threatened terror, and Jewish institutions, including Melbourne's Jewish schools, synagogues, cultural and community centres have been forced to undertake a range of security measures unknown to any other ethnic or faith group.

The Australian Jewish community does not seek special consideration from *The Age*. However your newspaper is a powerful institution. It reaches many hundreds of thousands of readers, both in Australia and internationally, people who are influenced by its contents. Hence we believe it appropriate to ask for sensitivity, thoughtfulness and an acute awareness of the potential implications of your words.

Yours truly

Grahame J. Leonard
President