

Dispute erupts over Rothman's Labor candidacy

AVVA BARD

COMMUNITY leader Mark Leibler has criticised NSW Jewish Board of Deputies president Stephen Rothman over his Labor Party preselection nomination for the federal seat of Dobell on the Central Coast – alleging that his handling of the Ashrawi affair could have been perceived as a conflict of interest.

The Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) national chairman was speaking in the aftermath of Dr Hanan Ashrawi receiving the Sydney Peace Prize and the negative fall-out for the community over the manner in which opposition to the prize was expressed.

Differences of opinion have emerged among communal leaders, with Rothman charging AIJAC and the Jewish Community Council of Victoria with turning "a cleverly-devised strategy into a *balagan*".

Rejecting this claim, Leibler pointed to Rothman's political foray as being potentially contrary to the interests of the community, saying he was "appalled" that Rothman "hadn't disclosed this" to the community and that



ark Leibler ... "Had his nomination been disclosed, the community and Rothman's colleagues could have made a judgment as to whether he should have been on the lead role [over Ashrawi]."

his behaviour was "inexcusable".

Rothman refuted the claim as "insingenuous", saying he informed the Jewish Socialist Federation of Australia president Ron Weiser, United Israel Appeal federal president Stanley Roth, the board's honorary officers "and most of the executive" of his ALP nomination.

"I reject any suggestion that my actions were tempered by my preselection," he said. "I expressed exactly the views of the Board executive when I met Carr formally and informally."

Leibler: "It's not so much the conflict of interest, it's the perception.

"Had his nomination been disclosed to the community, the community and Rothman's colleagues could have made a judgment as to whether he should have taken the



National Library of Australia

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article263053617>

Australian Jewish News (Sydney, NSW : 1990 - 2008), Friday 14 November 2003, page 3

whether he should have taken the lead role [over Ashrawi], but they were never given the opportunity."

Rothman's conduct "has been erratic and incomprehensible", Leibler charged. "I'm not accusing him of being influenced by the fact that he nominated for preselection. It's critical, if there are potential conflicts of interest, that they're disclosed and then they can be managed. If not, no-one can make a judgment."

Rothman asserted that had a conflict of interest existed, "I would have stood down from the Board or from preselection. My party affiliation is well known and has never interfered."

The preselection issue "was raised in July on the basis that the ALP needed members of the Jewish community to stand to improve the

Stephen Rothman ... "The proposition that there was a conflict of interest suggests I have been softer on the Premier than I should have been. That is totally rejected."

relationship between the community and the ALP, and to assist Michael Danby [Member for Melbourne Ports] in promulgating understanding of the community and Israel in Federal Parliament", he said.

"Standing for preselection would enable a level of discussion with members of the party, including the



Stephen Rothman ... "The proposition
National Library of Australia

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article263053617>

left, which otherwise would not have been as available.

"At the time I decided to stand, the tactics determined by the community on Ashrawi had been well in place.

"The difference between AIJAC and the Board on how to approach the Premier was debated at the Board plenum. At no stage did the fact that I was a pre-selection candidate have any impact upon decisions taken as to the tactics to be adopted in relation to Ashrawi.

"The proposition that there was a conflict of interest suggests I have been softer on the Premier and the ALP than I should have been. That is totally rejected."

Board vice-president David Knoll said Rothman "made the correct judgment" in his handling of the issue. "There was only one vote against the motion [which called on the Premier to reconsider]; you can't get a clearer sign of support."

Rothman's bid for preselection was unsuccessful.

National Library of Australia

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article263053617>

