24.4.2024

USYD Experience on Campus

Since October last year the experience of being a Jewish student at USYD has been an unpleasant one. Whether it is witnessing students deface posters of hostages or anti-Zionist discussions in my Anthropology tutorials, there is something constantly going on. Each time I am on campus (four times a week) I am met with a new array of defamatory posters with strong anti-Israel sentiment. There are groups of students (most often of Anglo-Celtic Australian origin) wearing keffiyehs, handing out flyers for their various upcoming rallies titled such things as "USYD to Cut Ties with Israel", "Why the West hates Iran" (in reference to the very recent Iranian attacks on Israel) or my personal favourite "Who are Hamas: Palestine, National Liberation & Socialism".

The discomfort extends beyond my walk to and from class. About a month ago in one of my Anthropology 1001 tutorials (with mainly new high school leavers and international students present) my tutor suggested, after alluding to Palestine multiple times throughout the tutorial, that we conduct our first fieldwork project on "the Zionist, *not Jewish* lobby". I mentioned this to the lecturer of the subject who happens to be Jewish (I probably wouldn't have brought it up with him if he weren't). He handled it decently, however he mentioned to me "for full disclosure I am an anti-Zionist Jew". Nothing consequential has happened to my former tutor after that report that I am aware of. After that incident I moved tutorials to a much less convenient time, making an additional 1.5 hr roundtrip to campus on a day I wouldn't otherwise be there. However it has been worthwhile to avoid being subjected to more of this tutor's remarks.

On another day weeks later, I had reached a limit after various demonstrations were going on that day. Then I saw a poster calling for "USYD to Cut Ties with Israel" among other posters without the mention of Israel. At the time (about a month ago) this was a novel rhetoric that I had not seen before in posters on campus, only a Palestine-focused one without any explicit mention of Israel. Out of sheer frustration, worry for my Israeli teachers (who I had built a close rapport with over the past two years), worry for my future exchange opportunities and general concern around this blind vilification of the people of Israel, I took down one conspicuously placed poster. As I quickly took it down, a loud "Fuck you!" was yelled at me from behind as I was entering the main entrance of Fisher Library. I didn't turn around or respond, I just kept walking but admittedly was scared they would follow me and attempt to intimidate me further.

Most recently, among other Australian and New Zealander university students I was invited to attend a Zoom meeting organised by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to outline exchange opportunities in the coming months. It was an unfortunate experience as the meeting was corrupted by various protestors loudly interjecting with the usual buzzword-filled script every 10 or so minutes. We were also met with eyerolls from one individual when the host acknowledged Jewish students' experienced of increased antisemitism on university campuses around the world. The academic running the meeting said she had never experienced this even after hosting a large info session with hundreds of people aimed at students based in the U.S.*

I worry I will have more of these experiences on campus each time I am there, and each time I arrive with a somewhat nihilistic, defeatist "here we go again" attitude as it simply feels like there is no consequence for these people's actions. Going forward, I

24.4.2024

too fear these events will become increasingly prevalent and these actions of students and teachers unions will morph into something more dangerous.

*from memory it was the US, my memory got away from me and it may have been elsewhere however I am fairly confident it was the U.S.