

Ku Klux Klan: On fear and furore

AUSTRALIANS were taken aback last Wednesday when they were confronted by the sinister spectacle of three white-hooded members of the Ku Klux Klan splashed across the front page of *The Age*, complete with flags and logos representing the blood of Jesus and a black Christian cross.

A 130-year-old American organisation which epitomises race hatred and bigotry, with murder and terror as its methods of operation, the KKK has come to Australia.

Lest anyone be tempted to dismiss the KKK as an anachronistic curiosity, just a few months ago in the obscure American town of Jasper, Texas, two skinheads chained James Byrd — a 49-year-old African-American — to the rear of a pick-up truck and dragged him for two kilometres along a dirt track. His body smashed into a culvert, the impact severing his head, right arm and shoulder. One of the skinheads, 24-year-old John King, who was sentenced to death for the hideous deed, had planned to establish a branch of the KKK in Jasper and had been intent on making a political statement.

Lest anyone harbour any illusions about the extent of the scope of the KKK's racist agenda, a recent publication put out by the Imperial Klans of America articulated the organisation's stance on Jews beyond any doubt.

"Basically, a Jew is a mongrel," it stated. Jews are "chosen to be burnt, consumed by fire;" they are "evil and wicked;" and "God condones the genocide of the

Jewish race." The KKK's target list of hate groups includes Jews, Catholics, gays, various ethnic communities and Communists, while a number of allied Australian groups have proclaimed Hitler's ideology to be "the soul of our movement," while promoting the concept of a "racial holy war" and extolling the virtues of "gassing the Jews."

The objective of drawing attention to this insidious organisation and its credo is not to sow undue alarm within the community. Indeed, there is a strong case to be made — and it has been repeatedly during the past week in regard to the extensive media coverage that the KKK has been receiving since its presence in this country was exposed — that by according it the oxygen of publicity, the media is playing directly into its hands, effectively acting as a recruiting agent and providing a vehicle through which its message is being actively promoted. All true. Indeed, it is quite likely that the KKK will have attracted additional members as a result of its dogma being trumpeted far and wide in the past week.

This issue of whether to give publicity

to undesirable elements in our society, and if so, how much is reasonable and how much is excessive is a perennial dilemma for responsible media outlets. There is no question that the avalanche of media attention which Pauline Hanson received in the wake of her inaugural parliamentary speech propelled her into the forefront of public awareness and boosted her standing far in excess of that which she warranted, in the process generating support for her cause.

BUT WE must not lose sight of the bigger picture. It is imperative that the existence of an organisation in our midst such as the KKK be known, and that its bigoted message be exposed and understood in all its implications and ramifications. The Imperial Klans of America, which are based in Kentucky, have established branches in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland; a second KKK group, the New Order Knights, based in Montana, is also believed to be planning to set up a chapter in Australia.

Secrecy lies at the heart of the KKK's

modus operandi; the very reason that Klansmen adopted the practice of wearing robes, sheets and hoods was to conceal their identity during their murderous attacks on African Americans, white sympathisers and civil rights workers during the latter years of the 19th century. Shedding light on such organisations — on their ideology, on their beliefs, on their membership and on their operations — can only serve to forewarn and forearm those who could be the targets of their hate, not to mention the authorities and society itself, whose very fabric is threatened by their noxious presence.

Also illustrative is the subtext at work here — the tacit connection between the KKK and One Nation. While One Nation took steps to expel Exalted Cyclops Peter Coleman once his KKK ties were publicised, there is no question that the party's strong performance in both the recent NSW and federal elections was built on the identical fertile territory which the KKK is now exploiting in establishing a beachhead in Australia, each complementing the other's implicit and explicit messages.

As a number of Jewish leaders have cautioned, it is important not to lose perspective. There is no cause for consternation. But it does not require large numbers to spread hate nor create unrest. The KKK in our midst is a malignant presence which needs to be closely watched.

letters

The place for a P'sak

THE ISSUE of a P'sak Halacha with respect to the admission of Aleph to the JCCV only highlights the bankruptcy of leadership by our Rabbis. The ruling is an exercise in unparalleled hypocrisy! Lest there be any mistake, were I a delegate to the JCCV I would have voted against the admission of Aleph — but on halachic grounds? What a joke!

The Rabbis seek to exert leadership but where are they on any of the major issues of our community? Where were these same Rabbinic voices when there were the problems of street parties? Where were these Rabbinic rulings with respect to drugs and hopelessness? Where were these Rabbinic rulings with respect to Jewish Education? Where were Rabbinic rulings with respect to compensation for the victims of the Maccabiah? Where was the Rabbinic involvement in a whole host of issues affecting our Jewish community? Of course the answer is that our Rabbis are so busy that there was just no time for these less important matters. There are greater issues such as when

the Moshiach will come, or perhaps whether women ought to touch the Torah.

The JCCV is not a religious organization but a body representing the diverse interests of the Jewish Community. Is the Victorian Union for Progressive Judaism an organisation that our orthodox Rabbis would accept as a proponent of Torah Law? I think not! Does Maccabi play sport on Shabbat? Yes! Sorry, Maccabi, you are also not an organisation that is a proponent of Torah Law. What about the Bund? Could anyone seriously suggest that the Bund is a proponent of Torah Law! Perhaps our new found Rabbinic leadership may care to write some more P'sakim!

I have no problem with a Rabbi ruling against an individual homosexual from say being called to the Torah. That is a valid religious question. But to interfere in a non-religious communal issue under the guise of religion is hypocrisy in the extreme.

Technically therefore our Rabbis ought to rule on a wide variety of matters — not just individual but communal. The sad truth is that when it really counts they are silent, reserving

their thunder for the pulpit where their words mainly fall on deaf ears.

Michael Lipshutz
North Caulfield

On tolerance

I WAS horrified to learn of the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan in Australia last week, but can't help wondering how much more tolerant our own Jewish community is, of those who don't fit into our mainstream society. Perhaps we should ask members of Aleph what they think?

J. Sher
Caulfield

REGARDING the controversy about Aleph and the JCCV. Surely no one chooses to be a minority group!

We Jews have been discriminated against throughout the ages as a minority group!

Should we not show some understanding and compassion for another minority group!

Did not the Nazis bracket us together with gypsies and homosexuals!

We should be in the forefront of fighting discrimination, not the instigators! We have actively denounced clubs and groups who deny us membership and who discriminate against us, how can we deny and discriminate ourselves!

Are we perhaps in breach of anti-discrimination legislation?

What happened to love thy neighbour as thyself?

I feel sure if the entire Jewish community had a vote and not just the delegates to the JCCV then Aleph would have been accepted as a member of that organisation and of our community.

Hopefully compassion, understanding and common sense will eventually prevail and a terrible wrong will be righted.

Leon Haskin
Richmond

I WRITE to express my dismay at the JCCV's decision to reject the Aleph gay group as an affiliate member.

As a consequence of prejudice and intolerance, Jews, gypsies and homosexuals were persecuted and, during the Holocaust, slaughtered wholesale.

Deemed 'undesirable elements' and separated only by barbed wire in extermination camps, these groups of people were brutally eliminated because in some ways they were not quite like the majority.

As a former undesirable Jewish 'element' but a survivor, I hoped that more than any other attitude, tolerance would be imprinted on the collective Jewish psyche.

Halina Strnad
Box Hill South

Representation and the JCCV

IT IS very troubling indeed when the non-elected, non-representative but self declared roof-body of Victorian Jewry, the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV) acts against the interests of democracy. Last month it was the rejection of the right of membership of the JCCV to a duly constituted and legitimate Jewish organisation — Aleph Melbourne. This was in part due to the threatened walk-out of the Orthodox constituents and a Psak-Din of the Rabbinate.

Perhaps even of greater long term concern is the fact that at the June meeting the JCCV refused to even put to the vote a motion reinforcing its "commitment to the support of freedom of speech and plurality of opinion within the Jewish community".

The broader Jewish community needs to know what is so frightening about freedom of speech and plurality of opinion that the overwhelming majority of this non-elected, non-representative, male-dominated JCCV was too alarmed to even discuss the issue and applied what in effect was "the gag" to prevent any further discussion!

As an observer of the meeting I was appalled by the domination of the floor by a very small number of speakers, who time and time again bullied, harangued and harassed those in favour of genuine debate. Their continued interjections were obviously accepted by the chair of the meeting.

Is it no wonder that the JCCV has lost so much credibility within the Jewish community at large?

David Zygier
Glen Iris



Jewish News

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The recommended retail price of *The Australian Jewish News* in NSW and Queensland is \$2.90. Published by *Australian Jewish Press Pty Ltd* and Printed by Rural Press (Vic) Printing for *The Australian Jewish News*, 193 Balaclava Road, Caulfield North, 3161. Telephone 9525-8833. Fax 9525-9060. — Printpost No. 349181/00161.

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