THE AGE

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Orthodox uproar over invitation to convicted spy

By **Stephen Brook** and **Samantha Hutchinson**

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Melbourne's Orthodox Jewish community is in uproar after a convicted spy was invited to be the keynote speaker at an event on Sunday marking the annual Jerusalem Day.

Fingers are being pointed at two senior members of the Orthodox community after **Jonathan Pollard**, a US citizen who spied for Israel and other countries and served 30 years in jail, was invited to deliver an online address to mark the anniversary of the reunification of the Old City of Jerusalem during the 1967 Six-Day War.

Pollard, who emigrated to Jerusalem after his release from the US, is a polarising figure in Jewish circles.

He was invited to speak by prominent dentist **Danny Lamm**, outgoing president of Synagogue Mizrachi in Caulfield.

David Mond, the former Victorian Liberal Party treasurer who is president of the board of Caulfield Shule, agreed to host the event, prompting a rift with Rabbi **Ralph Genende**, the senior Caulfield Shule rabbi, who was not consulted and fired off an angry missive describing the action as "misguided and potentially damaging".

"It sends a message to the Jewish community and especially to young Jews, that it is acceptable to betray one's country, one's staunchest ally and friend."

The controversy has gone global, with **Jeremy Leibler**, president of the Zionist Federation of Australia, telling Israel's *Haaretz* newspaper that "one has to question the judgment of selecting him as a keynote speaker for such an event".

Lamm told CBD that he invited Pollard to speak at a religious event. "My invitation to him was not a political message whatsoever. On the basis of his love of Jerusalem, I invited him to speak."

Feminists align

If the blowback from the invitation is one sign of the changing Orthodox community, another sign will occur with the launch of an Australian chapter of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance,

following existing chapters in the United States and United Kingdom. The organisation's president is **Nomi Kaltmann** and the 100 spaces reserved for the event, also on Sunday, have been booked out.

President of the National Council of Jewish Women Australia **Melinda Jones** is one of many prominent women who has also thrown her support behind JOFAA.

Society job

It is the question everyone in Melbourne wants answered. No, not when Premier **Dan Andrews** is retiring, but when is **Chris Lucas** opening his oft-delayed opulent mega restaurant Society?

The answer is July 1, after earlier false starts in March and April/May.

It's been three years in the making for hospitality impresario Lucas, owner of Chin Chin, Kisume and Baby, after he instituted a cross-border poaching raid on Sydney restaurant darlings **Martin Benn** and **Vicki Wild** of Sepia.

Now the dining establishment at 80 Collins Street is ready to go, with a 100-seat art deco dining room, a terrace named for the legendary Collins Street denizen, Lillian Wightman, overlooking her former couture salon, Le Louvre, as well as a lounge bar and private rooms. Lucas has personally been showing gawking admirers around the soaring ceilings, banquette seating, and big-city views.

Chris Lucas and Justin Hemmes JOHN SHAKESPEARE

But there is one sticking point for the restaurant and its companion Australian-Japanese grill Yakimono, which will follow in a few months. Both restaurants need about 450 total staff and, while senior members have been hired, there are still plenty of wait staff, kitchen porters and runners needed by the company that has launched an aggressive recruitment drive. It's an industry-wide problem after many experienced hospitality staff left the country to return home last year during the COVID lockdown.

The July 1 opening will no doubt concentrate minds already sharpened by the imminent arrival of Sydney hotelier **Justin Hemmes'** Merivale Empire, which has bought the 1853-built Tomasetti House on Flinders Lane. It brings the number of Merivale venues outside Sydney to precisely two. We doubt Hemmes will settle for that for long. The bar tsar was spotted two months ago checking out the exterior of the city's historic Mitre Tavern, operating since 1968 in Melbourne's oldest building. Could he have been window shopping or simply looking for a cold beer?

Basketball case

Like those two cowboys in *Brokeback Mountain*, try as we might, this column just can't quit the Stonnington Council.

And this is after we thought all had settled down under new mayor **Kate Hely** post that fractious election battle, the purchase of the $65,000 Tesla 3 for the mayor, the details of a highly confidential council briefing mentioned in a "gossip column in *The Age"* (who, us?), oh and the lowering of the council flag to half mast to honour a convicted sex offender.

But Monday night's council meeting over whether to build the $27 million netball and basketball stadium at Percy Treyvaud Memorial Park proved particularly fractious, with accusations, points of order and complaints about correct procedures.

First-term Liberal councillor **Alexander Lew**, who is a principal solicitor for the Office of Public Prosecutions, succeeded in getting novice Mayor Hely turfed out of the chair on two occasions due to points of order. She wasn't best pleased.

The previous Council preferred the Percy Treyvaud Memorial Park option, and fought off a Supreme Court challenge by locals fuming at the mooted destruction of their local park.

But now council has agreed to examine if two alternative sites at Chadstone Shopping Centre and Homesglen TAFE are viable alternatives, which – unlike the park – are not owned by the council. Meanwhile the long wait for any indoor netball courts in the area not owned by private schools continues.

Beached MPs

International Development Minister **Zed Seselja** has joined the ranks of parliamentarians snapping up beach houses, paying with his dietician wife **Roslyn** just over $875,000 for a five-bedroom holiday home in the very *en vogue* NSW South Coast hamlet of Merimbula. Home Affairs Minister **Karen Andrews** snapped up a Gold Coast investment property in April while fellow Queensland Senator **Gerard Rennick,** a keen longboarder , bought a beach house in the NSW coastal haunt of Cabarita Beach in September – his favourite surf break.

Meanwhile, West Australian Liberal Senator **Ben Small**, who ditched his corporate gig with Woodside Petroleum to replace former finance minister **Mathias Cormann** in the Senate has added to his rather extensive small business interests by starting Tailgate Smokehouse with developer **Michael Prosser** – the son of WA rich lister (and former federal Liberal pollie) **Geoff Prosser.**

It's not the first time the pair have teamed up. Prosser is also a co-owner of Small's Bar and Bites in Bunbury – the MP's not-so-small 250-seat restaurant in the coastal town 150 kilometres south of Perth.

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