

## The results in Marrickville are a win for community harmony in NSW

Yair Miller | The Australian Jewish News | 29 March 2011

There are some valuable lessons to be learnt from last Saturday's state election for the New South Wales inner-west seat of Marrickville. Although the polls had for some weeks been predicting a win for the NSW Greens, it was not to be.

What has become obvious is how widespread the community opposition was to Marrickville Council's resolution to "boycott all goods made in Israel and any sporting, institutional academic, government or institutional cultural exchanges" and Mayor Fiona Byrne's role in it – both as Mayor and as a politician who supports the NSW Greens' anti-Israel boycott policy.

Council's boycott decision played out badly with the electorate – because it saw a local council dabbling in foreign policy, which is not within its mandate; because it threatened to inject the rancour of an overseas conflict into a peaceful and harmonious local community and create divisions; and because it took an extreme and uninformed position on an overseas conflict which most Australians reject. There was also no community consultation and the Council got involved in this issue blindly.

The Council resolution however has had a silver lining mobilising extensive grassroots support from the local Jewish community at levels rarely seen. After a large public meeting of local residents in late January, the Inner West Jewish Community and Friends Peace Alliance (IWJFAFA) was formed. Like the Inner West Chavurah, members of Newtown Synagogue, volunteers from AUJS and numerous other activists, it has worked independently, talking to Councillors, including Byrne, and highlighting to them and to the wider public how unfair and counter-productive the boycott resolution is. Their efforts were supported and complemented by the work of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies and ECAJ with the media and politicians.

The boycott resolution has also attracted broad-based opposition from many unexpected quarters well beyond the Jewish community. ALP Left parliamentarians Anthony Albanese and Luke Foley lambasted

the Greens for their “self-indulgence” and “extremism”. Senior Liberal Chris Hartcher called the council’s waste of resources on this issue “simply staggering”.

The Chair of the Ethnic Communities Council of NSW (ECC) Jack Passaris called on Byrne to rescind the resolution, saying: “We are ..., concerned that locally, your resolution undermines the principles of multiculturalism.”

And Parramatta City Councillor Chiang Lim of the Chinese Australia Forum urged the council to scrap the resolution. Support has also come from Randwick Council and the Australian Senate who have condemned the Marrickville decision. The message for the NSW Greens is that their actions threatened harmonious community relations and are unacceptable to the majority of the electorate.

Adding to the anger from voters and commentators were Byrne’s contradictory public statements about where she really stood on the issue and how far she planned to take the boycott idea if she was elected to State Parliament, among other matters.

The public backlash against Marrickville Council’s boycott was only one of several reasons for Byrne’s electoral failure, but it was significant, as even the Greens national leader, Bob Brown subsequently acknowledged saying, “it’s no doubt something that the NSW Greens will be looking at”.

Our community will continue to fight for a harmonious and consultative way to support efforts by anybody who genuinely seeks to further peace in the Middle East.

There should be no doubt: the Jewish community in Australia is committed to a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict – the State of Israel as the State of the Jewish people living in peace alongside a state of Palestine. But the NSW Greens and Marrickville resolutions are not about helping the Palestinians constructively; they are instead aimed at demonizing, isolating and eventually destroying Israel. And they have caused tension and disharmony within the Marrickville community. Marrickville voters, and the wider community, understood that. The NSW Greens and pro-boycott Marrickville councillors need to heed the message the voters have sent them.