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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**Federation Chamber**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Australia-Israel Labor Dialogue**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 17 March 2016**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 17 March 2016  
**Page** 122  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Danby, Michael, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr DANBY** (Melbourne Ports) (11:36): One of the rights of parliamentarians is parliamentary privilege. Its purpose is to allow elected parliamentarians to speak freely on matters of importance to the Australian public, without which they might not know the full picture of politics or some of the developments in this country. It is my duty, therefore, to today use privilege to explain the background to yesterday's front-page attack on a small group of New South Wales Labor activists by the associate editor of *The Australian*, John Lyons, and his confederate, Bob Carr.

Firstly, the Australia-Israel Labor Dialogue has a pure purpose, which is to enhance the longstanding ties between Australian and Israeli Labor. They are certainly not Netanyahu supporters. My friend Hilik Barr, the deputy leader of Israel Labor, visited Australia a couple of years ago on a program that successfully renewed those ties. One person helpful with the tiny New South Wales AILD is Mary Easson, who also has a professional life as a consultant. One of her contracts is with Elbit, an Israeli defence manufacturer. Mr Lyons, the associate editor of *The Australian*, has a longstanding animus in the Israel-Palestinian conflict and he conflated Ms Easson's professional capacity with her role as an individual active within the Australian Labor Party. As a matter of fact, both AILD and Elbit have confirmed that no defence contractor has contributed a dollar to the visits of Australian Labor activists to Israel or to the AILD.

As I follow Australian defence procurements, like my friend the member for Hunter, I am aware that Elbit's main business in Australia is providing integrated communications for various arms of the Australian military forces—hardly the exaggerated image drawn by that bitter partisan Mr Lyons in *The Australian*. He implies that Labor officials who went over the last few years to visit Israel on programs largely devoted to innovation were somehow funded by Ms Easson's company. I repeat: Elbit does not donate to AILD—something buried in the middle of *The Australian* article in a statement by its Australian chairman, Mr Dan Webster. AILD, as most people familiar with it know, is a Victoria and New South Wales based organisation with no full-time staff, run by volunteers. It is a tiny organisation whose funding comes from Australian Jewish organisations and individuals and is designated to pay for those overseas visits. It is an organisation so small that I did not even know that it had an executive. It is true that Mary is a supporter of Israel and the New South Wales AILD and an activist in the Australian Labor Party, but no credible link can be drawn between her support for these organisations and her professional endeavours.

In its sensationalist front page yesterday, *The Australian* juxtaposed pictures of New South Wales recipients of AILD grants with Israeli weapons systems produced by Elbit but not sold in Australia. Given the fact that no link can be drawn between Elbit and this tiny AILD organisation, this front page seems designed purely to smear those Labor activists who have been on these innovation visits to Israel. This exaggerated coverage is in sharp contrast with Mr Lyons's soft sell of Bob Carr's activities at the University of Technology in Sydney. Earlier than 7 March, Mr Lyons was supplied with a long research paper from the Parliamentary Library which details the multimillion-dollar funding—all documented from open sources—by an organisation directed by the international department of the Chinese Communist Party.

As China is the most important issue of Australia's foreign policy, documenting donations of millions of dollars to organisations and institutions in Australia which are considered by Beijing to enhance Australian foreign policy is of course of great interest to all Australians. Yet all references to this paper provided to Mr Lyons were totally censored in his report of Mr Carr and the profile that he wrote in the *Australian*. The different treatment—with the aggressive speculation about a tiny organisation of volunteers—by Lyons contrasts with his decision to cover up the millions earmarked for his mate Bob Carr. This is particularly outrageous given his cover-up of this organisation documented in this paper which I seek leave to table. We had permission from the opposition to do that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is leave granted to table the document by the member for Melbourne Ports?

Leave granted.

**Mr DANBY:** Lyons, as a Jerusalem based correspondent, produced a documentary about Palestinian teenagers who were arrested for throwing rocks through the windshields of Israeli vehicles transiting the West Bank. After the events in Parramatta and Endeavour Hills, there would be less sympathy these days for those activities because the activities of very young people are quite well known. Lyons's report in yesterday's *Australian* is a beat-up designed to embarrass pro-Israel activists in New South Wales. It is a stark contrast with the *Weekend Australian* several weekends ago. *(Time expired)*