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Better to listen to – then mock – bad ideas than skip Adelaide Writers Week



Dorothy Thompson, US newspaperwoman and writer.

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I am going to Adelaide Writers Week. At this rate, I may be only person there.

I exaggerate, obviously., but there is a protest under way. Some sponsors – specifically, Minter Ellison – have withdrawn, as have some writers, and South Australian Premier Peter Malinauskas says he won't go, either.

I'm not grand enough to imagine it matters whether I go or not – I'm very far from box office – but shouldn't good folk everywhere be protesting the inclusion of two Palestinian writers, whose views are revolting?

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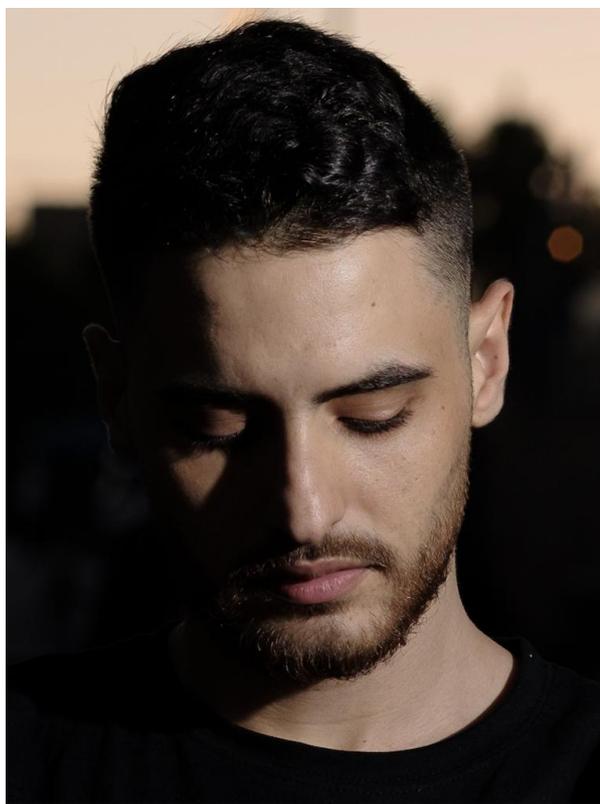
Well, first up, who are they?

[Susan Abulhawa](#) is basically a shill for Putin, which is quite the hill to die on.

[Mohammed El-Kurd](#) has accused Israeli soldiers of “harvesting the organs” of Palestinians, which is Nazi propaganda, and clear-cut anti-Semitism.



Palestinian-American writer Susan Abulhawa. Picture: Chase Burkett



Palestinian poet Mohammed El-Kurd. Picture: Supplied

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These views are abhorrent. But to say that bad ideas, revolting opinions and disgusting diatribe shouldn't be heard is ... well, that's a bad idea.

Bad ideas should be aerated, then mocked.

Here's a fine example, from our recent past: the American journalist Dorothy Thompson was one of few female foreign correspondents working in Europe in the 1920s.

She was not Jewish but quickly recognised the threat to Jews from the rise of Nazism.

A decade or so before the SS began burning books, she read Mein Kampf. She would later say she immediately "recognised it for what it was nonsense. One long speech filled with lunatic diatribes about nations and races."

For years, she campaigned against the rise of anti-Semitism, across Europe.

In 1931, she was invited to interview Hitler for Cosmopolitan magazine. Perhaps they thought she – the so-called First Lady of Journalism with a regular column in Ladies Home Journal – would be a pushover.

Thompson would later say that "in something less than 50 seconds" she had figured out that Hitler was a man of "startling insignificance ... ill poised and insecure."

Never in a million years could she imagine him becoming chancellor. She was wrong about that, but not about the danger he posed.

Shortly after her blistering magazine profile appeared, Hitler had Thompson expelled from Germany. She boarded a train to France, and gave a press conference on the station, denouncing him as a “little man”.

She spent the war years on a sold-out lecture tour, drumming up support for European refugees (Lauren Bacall would in time play her in this role).

“We who are not Jews must speak, speak our sorrow and indignation and disgust in so many voices that they will be heard,” she said.

In time, she made sure that every single one of the readers of her thrice-weekly columns, which were syndicated in 170 newspapers across the US, knew exactly what was at stake in the fight against fascism. She convinced many to donate to the Red Cross, which did the best work when it came to getting people out of Europe.

She continued through the war to turn up at Nazi rallies in New York and laugh at the speakers.

She surely saved thousands of lives.

It would have made no sense to her, I’m sure, to not sit, not listen, not debate, argue, shout down, and mock.

Obviously it’s perfectly fine for people to refuse to go to Adelaide, and nobody has to sponsor events of which they don’t approve.

It’s easy to understand why three writers of Ukrainian heritage felt the need to withdraw. Their loved ones are fighting for their lives, and you want them to biscuits in the green room with a Russian pet? No thank you.

But I think it’s a shame we won’t get to hear from them. In withdrawing, they have given anti-Israel, pro-Russian forces the floor. And they were already bombastic.

CAROLINE OVERINGTON, LITERARY EDITOR

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Caroline Overington has twice won Australia’s most prestigious award for journalism, the Walkley Award for Investigative Journalism; she has also won the Sir Keith Murdoch award for Journalistic Excellence; and t... [Read more](#)



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Hi Rafe Champion



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Terry 48 MINUTES AGO

The last writers' festival I attended was a leftist love-in, as the Adelaide version is this year, and as Melbourne's was last year. How is that diversity of opinion? These are simply marketing tools of the left. There is no diversity, very little talent and no room for a conservative thinker. Attend these things at your peril if you know there is absolutely no balance coming from the podium. I wonder if Albo will take his red carpet to Adelaide?

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james 2 HOURS AGO

Letting them speak gives comfort and apparent legitimacy to some of the most vile and dangerous in our community, thus helping them recruit followers. None of whom are likely to listen to a word you say in trying to counter them. We ban hate speech, why should we allow established hate speakers. The example given is naive and irrelevant.

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GrumpyOldWoman 2 HOURS AGO

True, thanks for the well-argued piece.

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jennifer 3 HOURS AGO

Thanks for the article, Caroline. Will you please tell us how it went?

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Mannheim Rocket 3 HOURS AGO *(Edited)*

Caroline, participants or observers don't 'mock'. They usually come away

with an understanding of the institutional power of the Left, unable to do anything about it.

Report Like 2 Reply

Christina 4 HOURS AGO

Dear Caroline I hope you and other participants do "debate, argue, shout down and mock" these people but I don't think it's very likely. Despite their abhorrent views they're still being invited to and attending Writers' Festivals and being given a platform to spread their poison publicly.

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I'm not mad just disappointed

4 HOURS AGO

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"Mohammed El-Kurd has accused Israeli soldiers of "harvesting the organs" of Palestinians, which is Nazi propaganda, and clear-cut anti-Semitism

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Channel 2 TV reported that in the 1990s, specialists at Abu-Kabir harvested skin, corneas, heart valves and bones from the bodies of Israeli soldiers, Israeli citizens, Palestinians and foreign workers, often without permission from relatives. The Israeli military confirmed to the programme that the practice took place, but added: "This activity ended a decade ago and does not happen any longer."

Israeli soldiers definitely "harvested the organs" of Palestinians in the 1990's. If Mohammed El-Kurd doesn't mention that it happened to Israelis as well, then that is disingenuous.

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Not that anything can condone this behaviour if it's true, however China, and many other countries do this. And what about the activities of Palestine? And Russia? No one can call them innocent.

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Cheryl 4 HOURS AGO

Thank you Carolyn. Of course we should all listen to ideas we disagree with as well as those we applaud. Unfortunately those progressive types only want to listen to like-minded ideas.

I hope you will be going to listen to the views of those reprobates and passing them on to us in your next column.

Report  Like  5 Reply 

Gosling 1 HOUR AGO

I hope she doesn't!

Report  Like  4 Reply 

Heather 4 HOURS AGO

People who disagree should step up and take positions that give them some power from school P and C Associations and boards to other associations and organisations of interest. The Left are taking power while the silent majority whinge in the background. I understand it's because most people on the Right are busy actually contributing to productivity but if you can, put yourself forward.

Report  Like  71 Reply 

Libertarian at large 4 HOURS AGO

Is it not better to hear these opinions, and react accordingly.

Is it not better than we identify the idiots in the room.

The beauty of free speech, my right to be obnoxious, and your right to tell me so.

The results may be ugly, but we must never fall into the mantra of words are violence.

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