

ABC chief caves in after no-confidence vote

SOPHIE ELSWORTH
MEDIA WRITER

ABC managing director David Anderson has succumbed to pressure and will meet disgruntled staff over their grievances on the taxpayer-funded broadcaster's coverage of the Israel-Hamas war and the sacking of fill-in radio host Antoinette Lattouf.

The ABC's internal crisis grew on Monday after about 200 staff met via an online union meeting on Monday and passed a vote of no confidence in Mr Anderson.

Sources at the meeting told The Australian that the ABC's global affairs editor, John Lyons, dominated the meeting, voicing annoyance at the handling of coverage of the Israel-Hamas war and even changes in directions to the use of the word "genocide" in stories that meant it should not be reported without challenge.

Lattouf's sacking was also discussed at the union meeting.

The Australian can reveal that just three days before she signed

Teachers' group vows to push pro-Palestine messages in class

A Victorian Teachers and School Staff for Palestine group has vowed to "break the silence the Victorian government is trying to impose" on educators amid the conflict in Gaza.

About 70 people involved with the group met on Monday for a forum discussion on "Why there's no 'neutrality' in genocide".

The forum, which opposition MPs pressured the state

government to cancel, included attendees discussing how to "(use) our 'teacher voices' to show solidarity with Palestine in our schools and classrooms".

A high school teacher at the forum vowed to continue to share pro-Palestinian stories with her students. "I 100 per cent have a mandate to teach about Palestine," Lucy Honan, who has also been involved with the Teachers for Refugees movement, said.

She said it was "absurd" teachers were even being asked to consider the question of neutrality when it came to teaching students about Israel's

military actions in Gaza.

In November, Victorian Education Minister Ben Carroll warned teachers against displaying pro-Palestine messages or wearing the traditional Palestinian keffiyeh in classrooms. He described such actions as "divisive and inflammatory" and insisted teachers stick to the curriculum.

Speakers at the forum accused him of being selective in his demands for teachers to maintain neutrality. "When Ben Carroll says in his statement that teachers have a code of conduct of being unbiased ... he didn't make that statement about

teaching the Holocaust or World War I or the war in Ukraine," Palestinian playwright Samah Sabawi said. "He was deceptively responding to teachers, not even teaching ... but simply wearing a Palestinian national symbol."

Organisers of the event said the state government's demands for teachers to maintain neutrality were hypocritical because of its apparent ties with Israel. "Ben Carroll is calling on us to be neutral when he went to Israel ... to negotiate with arms manufacturers," Ms Honan said, in reference to a visit Mr Carroll made to Israel in March 2023.

One aim of that trip was "pursuing defence industry opportunities", according to a travel report on the Victorian government website.

Ms Sabawi also told Monday's audience that educators had a duty to inform students about the lives of children in Palestine. "Students in Australian classrooms must be made aware of the challenges other children their age endure in their educational journey," she said. "What is life like for an eight-year-old student in Gaza?"

ANGUS MCINTYRE

WORLD P8



MARTIN OLLMAN/NCA NEWSWIRE
David Anderson

job prospects, so if somebody doesn't want to work with me because I care about dozens of journalists who have been slaughtered by (sic) doing their work, because I care about the 1000s and 1000s of children who have been killed and civilians harmed ... then honestly f.k them."

Lattouf was asked to be a fill-in radio presenter to replace ABC Sydney radio's mornings host Sarah Macdonald for five days from December 18, but she was sacked after three shifts on December 20.

She shared a Human Rights Watch post about the Israel-Gaza war that read: "The Israeli government is using starvation of civilians as a weapon of war in Gaza."

She says she was sacked because of her ethnicity.

She has lodged a claim with the Fair Work Commission claiming she was unlawfully terminated from her employment.

On Monday, the law firm representing Lattouf said in a media release the ABC now claimed she was "not sacked from her role".

Labor warned on 'golden visas'

EXCLUSIVE

STEPHEN RICE
NSW EDITOR

The Productivity Commission has welcomed the scrapping of the "golden visa" business program, saying the scheme had not promoted innovation or genuine entrepreneurship, but Labor faces a strong pushback from the multi-billion-dollar investment visa industry over the axing.

Productivity Commission deputy chair Alex Robson said that while the Business Innovation and Investment Program visas were intended to attract foreign investment, they had not achieved this outcome and had failed to promote innovation or genuine entrepreneurship.

"Compared to skilled worker visa holders, migrants using BIIP visas have lower incomes, lower skills, poorer English language proficiency and are older," Mr Robson told The Australian, adding that evidence suggests the visas were associated with "significant negative fiscal impacts".

On Monday The Australian revealed the entire Business Innovation and Investment Program has been quietly closed to new applications over claims it has had a profoundly negative impact on the economy.

Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil said on Monday the red-carpet visa program was part of a "broken" migration system Labor had inherited.

"It has been obvious for years that this visa is not delivering what our country and economy needs from a migration system," Ms O'Neil said.

"The investor visa is one of many aspects of the system which we are reforming to create a system which delivers for our country."

The BIIP scheme, which makes up a quarter of all migration allocations, included a Significant Investor Visa allowing wealthy foreigners an automatic right of permanent residence in Australia if they make investments of at least \$5m.

It targeted Chinese citizens, with the visa subclass given the number 888 – which signifies triple good luck in Chinese numerology.

The abolition of the BIIP schemes has angered many in the multibillion-dollar investment visa industry, where fund managers, migration agents, banks and specialist firms have reaped huge rewards for more than a decade.

Some industry sources were

confident a form of the Significant Investor Visa would be retained under a new name and with new conditions, probably requiring a minimum investment of \$10m into more targeted venture capital projects.

The visa has been widely criticised because investors could gain citizenship even if they spent only 40 days a year in Australia and, unlike other visa holders, were not required to learn or speak English. There was also no upper age limit.

The government has fore-shadowed that a much more tightly controlled Talent and Innovation Visa would create a single, streamlined pathway "to attract relatively small numbers of highly talented migrants to Australia".

The crackdown follows revelations by The Australian that foreign criminals and corrupt regime officials have used the red-carpet schemes to acquire Australian citizenship.

Immigration lawyer Chris Johnston, from Work Visa Lawyers, said the government had closed the program "by stealth" and argued the BIIP visas were "a huge benefit to Australia in terms of bringing in capital, which is put into complying investments and those benefits are not going to be gained if the program's not open".

The Migration Review, spearheaded by public service chief Martin Parkinson, found that skilled migrants contribute \$300,000 more in benefits over their lifetime than those who buy their way into the country.

But Mr Johnston said the Parkinson Review had wrongly measured the economic benefit to Australia because it looked just at the personal income tax paid by business and investor visa applicants but didn't measure what tax was paid on the investments that they made, or measure the benefits of the investments that they made.

Mr Johnston said the government already had the power to investigate applicants and the source of their funds so axing the program to stop wealthy foreign criminals obtaining visas was "an overblown reaction".

He argued that instead of the visas being scrapped, investor funds could be directed to an affordable housing stream to help the housing crisis, which is currently the biggest drag on the migration system.

"We shouldn't just be saying 'it's not working, let's get rid of it', we should be asking how to make it fit the needs of Australia right now, in 2024," Mr Johnston said.

China poison accused snapped on ski trip



Property investor Shiyen 'Jasmine' Sun at Nagano Shinkansen Station in Japan

EXCLUSIVE

LIAM MENDES

The woman at the centre of one of China's most intriguing unsolved poisoning cases has been pictured – while overseas on holiday – for the first time since it was revealed she had started a new life in Australia.

Millionaire property investor Shiyen 'Jasmine' Sun, who is accused of being at the centre of a mysterious and deadly poisoning that has enthralled millions in China for 30 years, was spotted at a luxury Japanese ski town three days after The Australian uncovered her new life in the Port Stephens region in NSW.

On Monday at around 1pm, local time, Ms Sun was pictured at Nagano Shinkansen Station, headed to Hakuba ski resort. It is believed she had just arrived on a bullet train from Tokyo.

"She seemed a bit impatient as her husband (Xie), pushing the luggage, was taking a long time to catch up," a woman who identified herself as Kayee told The Australian. "She gestured with her fingers to indicate the number three to the staff, saying they were three people," said Kayee, who recognised Ms Sun after reading The Australian's reporting last week.

"Xie looked somewhat ruefully as he smiled, dragging two suitcases by himself while Sun had her hands free. She seemed like a very assertive woman," Kayee said.

Ms Sun is the woman millions of people in China believe holds the key to the mystery of what happened to Zhu Ling, who passed away in China on December 22 after being poisoned with highly toxic thallium in the mid-1990s.

The poisoning left Zhu paralysed, almost blind and with the mental capacity of a six-year-old requiring 24-hour care for almost 30 years.

Ms Sun, who internet sleuths believe changed her name to shed her previous life as Sun Wei, was studying chemistry at university and is thought to have had access to thallium.

Photographs of Ms Sun in Port Stephens captured by The Australian are believed to be the first images of her publicly released in 20 years.

After reviewing them, Zhu's father, Wu Chengzhi, 84, who now lives in a nursing home with his wife, remarked with a faint smile that she "seems quite rich".

They hold out hope that one day justice might be served.

Obsessed stalker's claim on killing

LIAM BEATTY

An obsessed stalker who killed his young co-worker has dumped his second legal team, saying he now wants to "contest" parts of the murder case.

Luay Nader Sako told the Victorian Supreme Court on Monday that he now wished to represent himself at a plea hearing next week.

Last year, he pleaded guilty to the stabbing murder of Celeste Manno, 23, at her Mernda home northeast of Melbourne in November 2020.

The pair had worked together in a call centre, with Sako stalking her for a year after she comforted him when he was sacked.

Just months after pleading guilty in April last year, Sako dumped his lawyers and said he wanted to change his plea before later reversing that decision.

On Monday, judge Jane Dixon was told Sako had withdrawn instructions for barrister Tim Marsh and wanted to represent himself in court.

Sako said he now wished to dispute "a lot of the arguments" put forward by the prosecution, but his key issue was expert evidence that Manno was stabbed 23 times during the early morning break-in.

"I know and believe I only inflicted two, and the 21 other wounds were a result of glass-inflicted injuries," he said.

"There is evidence from within the brief that corroborates my claim ... my opinion is that 21 of the 23 wounds could only have been caused by glass.

"In his report, there's no evidence about the weapon."

Prosecutor Pat Bourke said the crown "certainly takes issue" with the claim Sako inflicted only two wounds and would call a forensic pathologist to give evidence at the plea hearing.

Mr Marsh, who appeared as a friend of the court, noted that while Sako was "clearly articulate", his recently sacked legal team held "great concerns" about his ability to represent himself.

"I have great concern whether or not the issues that are important to the court are issues that Mr Sako has turned his mind to, or will be capable of running," he said.

"This is a serious matter and the range of sentences available are among the most serious."

"I and the rest of Mr Sako's legal team retain great concerns about whether those issues can be properly articulated."

During a plea hearing, prosecutors will outline the facts of the case and make submissions on an appropriate sentence.

The defence will argue how a judge should interpret the evidence and what personal factors should be taken into account.

The court was told Mr Marsh would make himself available next week if Sako were to change his mind and want to have legal representation.

Sako will return to court on Monday for the three-day pre-sentence hearing.

NCA NEWSWIRE

Teacher training blamed as students' mathematics anxiety multiplies

MIKAELA MULVENEY

Anxiety over maths is on the increase and is now experienced by more than 60 per cent of students, with researchers laying part of the blame on poor teaching of foundational skills in primary school.

New research by the Centre for Independent Studies has identified increasing levels of maths anxiety among students over the past two decades.

CIS education program director Glenn Fahey said 15-year-old

students in Australia, surveyed as part of a triannual global survey, were more concerned about maths than any other subject.

The Program for International Student Assessment study found 61 per cent of students feel anxious about failing in maths, 66 per cent worry they will get poor marks and 58 per cent report they often worry maths will be difficult.

"Australia is almost spot on with the international average when it comes to maths anxiety," he said. "But one of the troubling trends over the past two decades is

that Australian students have suffered among the most steep and consistent decline in overall maths achievement."

Mr Fahey said poorly educated teachers were partly to blame for the rise in anxiety.

"There are real problems in the way we prepare teachers, and we need to teach them better in what practices work best in the classroom and what managing a classroom looks like," he said.

Mr Fahey said the anxiety seemed to develop as children stepped up the difficulty of maths

in late primary school and into secondary school. "This tells us that mastering the foundational and fundamental skills are really critical in preparing children for success in maths," he said.

However, due to very few primary maths teachers having studied the subject through school and into university, the content has not been properly taught.

Mr Fahey said there needed to be some real discussions into whether the current curriculum supported best-practice teaching.

"We need to do a lot more if we

want to make a big impact on practices in the classroom and professional development," he said.

While the improvement of teacher education was imperative, Mr Fahey said another intervention that could lessen maths anxiety was one-on-one tutoring.

"The tutoring environment works when it comes to maths anxiety is because it gives teachers the opportunity to work closely with the student ... and provide a heavier dose of instruction."

Australian Tutoring Association chief executive Mohan

Dhall said maths was the subject in highest demand and was causing children the most stress.

"We see 30 to 50 per cent of all students suffer from this anxiety," he said. "One-to-one tutoring can help, however the tutor needs to cross the threshold of that anxiety. So they need to really understand kids and the content."

He added maths was not well taught to cater for the diversity of learners in Australian schools and that the association had seen a large increase in tutoring requests. "We are seeing more anxious

kids in school and where there is anxiety there is less learning," he said. "Whether primary school teachers are skilled enough to teach them well is just one issue."

The ATA conducted a national survey last year of 120 tutors and tutoring companies, and 85 per cent said they saw an increase in enrolment growth in 2023.

"We were surprised it was so high and most of them taught maths," Mr Dhall said.

"You can see this growth evidenced in the expansion of (companies) across the country."