Australia

The Australian economic situation deteriorated during the year under review (July 1951 through June 1952); the wool crop brought only half the record sum reached the previous year. The basic wage continued to rise (in the fifteen months from July 1, 1951, to September 30, 1952, it rose from $19.40 to $25.00 a week), and the government’s policy was essentially directed against inflation. Credit restrictions and import cuts were rigorously enforced, and as a consequence there was a slight economic recession. This was reflected in the increased unemployment figures and in the retrenchment policy followed both by government and private firms. Many major public projects had to be interrupted or curtailed.

The appearance of unemployment particularly affected the newcomers, many of whom were unskilled laborers or elderly people who experienced great difficulty in finding work. The Jewish community was concerned about this, since many Jewish migrants fell within these categories. Jewish welfare societies had to give supplementary aid to unemployed newcomers.

Jewish Immigration

The flow of Jewish migrants to Australia continued, but on a diminished scale. During the period from July 1, 1951, to June 30, 1952, 1,615 migrants came through the Hebrew Immigrant and Sheltering Aid Society and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and probably another 400 came independently, on the basis of private applications and guarantees. The government still adhered to its policy that persons born behind the Iron Curtain could be granted permits only if relatives or friends in Australia gave guarantees for good reputation and bonafides. The Federation of Jewish Welfare Societies maintained fourteen hostels to house the migrants guaranteed by the Federation until they were able to make their own arrangements.

Form 40, the government’s application form for migrants, still contained the question, “Are You Jewish?”, and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry had made renewed representation to the government to have this question removed.

Early in 1952, the United Jewish Overseas Relief Fund in Sydney merged into the Welfare Society, which was now the sole organization dealing specifically with the needs of the newcomers.
Religious Activities

An outstanding communal event was the pastoral tour of the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, Israel Brodie, who spent more than three months in New Zealand and Australia. In the former country, he was the guest of the government. Rabbi Brodie visited every congregation, large or small, in the two Dominions. His very extensive program included calls on the Governor General, and the Prime Minister, as well as state governors and premiers. There were numerous official receptions by governmental and civic authorities. Rabbi Brodie addressed many non-Jewish gatherings and broadcast over the national network, in addition to delivering numerous sermons and addresses to Jewish organizations, youth groups, and schools. He opened or laid the cornerstones of several communal institutions and presided over the Second Australian Jewish Ministers’ Conference in Sydney in March, 1952. At this conference an Association of Jewish Ministers of Australia was formed, with Rabbi Israel Porush as president.

The Chief Rabbi's visit strengthened the ties between British Jewry and the communities of Australia and New Zealand. The Chief Rabbi was also able to initiate closer cooperation between the traditional synagogues.

The Australian rabbinate was strengthened by the arrival of Rabbi Isaac Louis Swift as chief minister of the Central Synagogue of Sydney, and of Rabbi I. Rapaport as chief minister of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation. The former rabbi of the Melbourne congregation, H. Stransky, accepted a call from the Wellington Hebrew Congregation.

The religious life of the community was strengthened by the formation of several new congregations in Sydney and Melbourne. The number of organized services during the 1951 High Holy Days was the greatest ever. While the process of assimilation continued relentlessly and was causing great concern to the religious leaders of the community, just as the manifest communal apathy caused concern to the lay leaders of Australian Jewry, there was nonetheless a greater consciousness of the paramount need for Jewish education, and greater emphasis was laid on the importance of youth work. But there was a serious dearth of leaders and facilities.

The cleavage between Orthodox Jewry and Reform became more pronounced and was given expression in public statements; each camp had become more conscious of its principles.

The holding of youth camps was becoming rather popular. In 1953, in Sydney there was to be a National Camp Conference of Jewish students from all over Australia and New Zealand.

Educational Activity

The idea of the Jewish Day School had become more and more popular. In Melbourne, the Mount Scopus College, founded in 1949, already had an enrollment of 560, and in 1953 it was expected to be able to accommodate
only a portion of the new applicants. This institution included a preschool and primary classes as well as the beginnings of a high school. It had purchased a new property of fifteen acres, and a project was contemplated which would involve the expenditure of half a million pounds. But for financial reasons the College could proceed in the near future only with a small section of the new building program. The school was conducted along traditional lines, with Jewish studies occupying seven and a half hours per week. The finances of the College were none too strong in spite of the high school fees, but the community had rallied to its appeal.

In Sydney, the North Bondi Hebrew School bought a new property which would be ready for use at the beginning of 1953. However, the efforts to amalgamate this school with the projected Hillel College of the New South Wales Board of Jewish Education had not succeeded. Hillel College had had to interrupt its building program because of lack of funds. Only a portion of the building was likely to be ready in the near future. There was a serious lack of funds for educational agencies in spite of considerable subsidies by some synagogues. The Community Chest in New South Wales, which combined the appeal of eleven communal institutions, reached only half its target in 1951–52, and most institutions were short of funds.

The only yeshivah in Australia, which was attached to the small community of Shepparton, Victoria, had been transferred to its own premises in Melbourne. The result was an increase in students and a greater interest on the part of the community. It was attended by some twenty-five full-time students, as well as additional part-time students during school holidays.

Cultural Life

The Interstate Sports Carnival, an important feature of Jewish youth work in Australia and New Zealand, developed into a rallying point for hundreds of young people.

The Conference of Jewish Ex-Servicemen Associations in Australia decided at its conference in June 1952, to proceed with a compilation of a history of Australian Jewry during World War II.

Judah Waten’s book, Alien Son, telling the story of a Jewish migrant family in Australia early in the twentieth century, was well received by the public. In recognition Waten received a Commonwealth Literary Scholarship in March 1952, to allow him to write a novel on Australian Jewish life.

Communal Organization

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the lay spokesman of the whole community, held its conference in Sydney in June, 1952, and Sydney D. Einfeld was elected president. The Council continued its affiliation with the World Jewish Congress.

As representative of the Executive Council, Rabbi Herman Max Sanger of Melbourne attended the South East Asian Regional Conference of nongov-
environmental organizations to consider the question of United Nations Information in Bali, Indonesia, in July 1952.

Anti-Semitism and German Migration

While vigilance against anti-Semitic manifestations was necessary, especially in view of the arrival of many prejudiced migrants from Europe, the situation had not changed substantially. There was no doubt that among the newcomers from Europe there were some who were infected with anti-Semitic bias, and from time to time instances of anti-Semitic feeling were manifest, but there had been no major incident.

The relationship between Australia and West Germany, and German migration to Australia in particular, was a prominent problem for Jewish communal relations. The major political developments in the world arena in regard to West Germany and her inclusion in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization made opposition on the part of the Jewish community rather difficult. The Minister of Immigration, Harold Edward Holt, announced early in 1952, that the immigration program of the government, which had been curtailed for economic reasons from 170,000 to 80,000 migrants per annum, would include a portion from Western Germany; no definite figures were mentioned. The number of German workers already in Australia on special governmental projects was estimated at 5,000.

The Executive Council renewed its declaration opposing large-scale German migration at its conference in June 1952, and a statement was sent to the Minister. It was also decided to continue the campaign of enlightenment of the Australian public regarding the migration of nondemocratic elements.

In March 1952 a German mission visited Australia and New Zealand to study the problem of migration, and in September 1952, the Australian Minister for Immigration announced the conclusion of an agreement with West Germany on organized migration. The Executive Council voiced its opposition, but little could be done about this fait accompli. However, protest meetings were planned for the near future.

The general press obviously favored German migration on the basis of screening. The press also stood solidly behind the pianist Walter Gieseking, suspect of Nazi collaboration, who in March 1952, gave several concerts in Australia under the auspices of the Australian Broadcasting Commission. A demonstration was organized in Melbourne against his appearance, but this was contrary to the advice given by the official bodies of the Jewish community. Some of these confined themselves to advising Jews to refrain from attending the concerts.

The tenor of the press was also unmistakably friendly towards Germany when the first German ship since 1939 arrived in Sydney, and when diplomatic representation was exchanged between Australia and West Germany. When the German Ambassador, Walther Hess, arrived in Australia in June 1952, the Executive Council reiterated its protest to the government, but took no other public steps. The Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism in Melbourne, which was affiliated with the Public Relations Com-
mittee of the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies, participated in a demonstra-
tion against Hess, in defiance of the Board’s decision. The Board there-
upon decided to disaffiliate the Council.

The attitude of the Executive Council, after prolonged discussion, crystal-
lized in favor of the negotiations at The Hague between Germany and Israel
on the question of reparations. The Executive Council became a founding
member of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

Israel and Zionism

In September 1951 a trade agreement was concluded between Australia
and Israel including a most favored nation clause.

The Israel Minister to Australia, J. I. Linton, who had served in Australia
for over two years, was transferred to Japan in September 1952. The Consul
General, Gabriel Doron, left Australia for Israel in December 1951, and his
place was taken by Arieh Lapid.

In general, there was a weaker response to the 1951–52 United Israel Ap-
peal. The Australian contribution totalled £135,000 ($302,400), and New
Zealand yielded the sum of £15,000 ($33,600).

The Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Richard Gardiner Casey, stated
in Parliament that he had asked the Australian Minister in Israel to convey
the Australian government’s concern over the transfer of the Foreign Office
to Jerusalem. The Executive Council wrote to Casey explaining the Jewish
viewpoint.

The Sydney State Zionist Council purchased a house to accommodate its
offices and act, at the same time, as a youth and cultural center.

Personalia

The Australian community suffered a great loss through the death of sev-
eral outstanding leaders: Saul Symonds, of Sydney, who died on May 16,
1952, had been president of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies
and of the Federation of Jewish Welfare Societies in Australia, and former
president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and of the Sydney
Great Synagogue. Symonds took a leading part in many other philanthropic,
educational and communal institutions for more than twenty years. For fif-
ten years before his death, he was the chief Jewish negotiator with the gov-
ernment in matters of Jewish immigration.

Silva Steigrad, of Sydney, who died on May 21, 1952, had been a veteran
Zionist leader, and president of the State Zionist Council of New South
Wales.

Abraham H. Sicree, of Melbourne, had been president of the Jewish Na-
tional Fund of Australia and New Zealand and of the Elwood Synagogue
and Talmud Torah.

New Zealand lost S. Reynolds, president of the Auckland Hebrew Congre-
gation, a veteran communal worker.

Israel Porush