

Australia

THE DECADE OF THE 1980S SAW Australia playing an increasingly self-confident role on the international scene, in marked contrast to its near-isolationism of earlier years. Domestically, the country struggled to expand its population and strengthen its economy. At the same time, it confronted the issue of justice for the dispossessed aborigines and the integration of a society second only to Israel in its mix of ethnic and cultural subgroups.

For Jews, Australia continued to offer a congenial home, largely free of discrimination, though anti-Zionism showed a worrying increase in recent years. The community's ranks were growing through immigration, and it supported a thriving array of religious, educational, and cultural institutions.

National Affairs

The election in March 1983 of a new Labor government under former trade-union leader—and Rhodes Scholar—Bob Hawke led to a generally pragmatic economic policy that included concessions to industry and big business, despite Labor's theoretical orientation toward the working class, and an even stronger internationalist stance. Hawke believed Australia was vital to U.S. interests in the Pacific region. He also saw the country generally as a leader, with Japan and China, in the Pacific basin, which he and his advisers perceived as of vital geopolitical importance in the future. Despite a minor recession and some concern over free-trade policies because of cheap imports from the region, Australia nurtured strong trading relations with Japan and strengthened relations with China.

The Hawke government strongly encouraged Australia's new image as a multicultural country. The movement toward multiculturalism had begun, reluctantly, with the acceptance of refugees before, during, and after World War II, although they were barely tolerated by the largely Anglo-Celtic majority of the period. In the 1950s, however, mass importation of workers from southern Europe began a flow which increased to a flood, so that by the mid-80s at least one in five Australians was foreign-born or had foreign-born parents. The tensions resulting from mass immigration were addressed vigorously by succeeding governments since the 1970s, with measures ranging from intensive English-as-a-second-language programs to antidefamation laws in many states.

Relations with Israel

Hawke's elevation to Labor party leadership and election as prime minister presented Australian Jewry with a dilemma. Like former prime minister Malcolm Fraser, Hawke was considered to be a firm supporter of Israel. However, while trusting Hawke personally, the Jewish community had reservations about the influence of the Labor party's left-wing pro-Arab minority. These reservations were underlined by a major policy shift perpetrated by the Hawke government only six months after taking office: permission was granted for an Arab League office to be established in Australia and for Australian ambassadors to have diplomatic contacts with PLO representatives. Although the former did not come to pass—the Arabs apparently thought better of it—and the latter proved to be less significant than at first thought, at the time these decisions shook the community badly.

Australia's relations with Israel since 1981 can best be described as uneven. While there was general overall support for Israel, it was marred by periodic troubling issues. On the negative side, Australia's voting record at the United Nations showed only patchy support for Israel. In addition, with Gough Whitlam—former left-wing prime minister—as Australian ambassador to UNESCO for several of these years, that agency was able to win Australian support for many anti-Israel policies. In 1984, when Australia was elected to a seat in the Security Council, where its vote assumed even greater significance, Jewish leaders won a promise from Hawke that he would personally keep a close watch on Middle East issues and keep a stronger hand on Australia's votes on specific resolutions. Also problematic for Jews was Australia's "controversial visitors policy," which allowed prominent Palestinians and American Black Muslim leaders to come on speaking tours. By contrast, a proposed Australian venue for a UN conference on Palestine was diplomatically sidestepped.

On the positive side, there was the state visit to Australia of President Chaim Herzog of Israel at the end of 1986 (and the return visit to Israel of Hawke in early 1987). Herzog's Australian tour, the first by an Israeli president, was well received; he met most of the significant political power brokers, won relatively positive media coverage, and, not surprisingly, endeared himself to Australian Jewry. Foreign Minister Bill Hayden had visited Israel in January 1984, to check on Australia's contingent in the Sinai MFO (Multinational Force and Observers). Several parliamentarians and some of the public were against Australian participation in the force, but such dissension as there was largely died down. Premier Neville Wran of New South Wales and, independently, NSW opposition leader Nick Greiner, visited Israel in 1985.

Another positive development was the unanimous vote by the Australian Parliament in late 1986 to condemn UN Resolution 3379 equating Zionism with racism. This was achieved largely through the efforts of Zionist Federation leader Mark Leibler and because there was general bipartisan understanding of the gross

offensiveness of the equation. The Australian government also moved to end the citizenship problem of Australian immigrants to Israel, so that they would no longer lose their Australian passports upon becoming Israelis under the Law of Return, but could maintain dual citizenship. Given the high percentage of Australian *olim*, the issue had become a thorn in the Australian Zionist side.

Australian-Israeli exchanges of scientific and agricultural technology continued. Israel was teaching Australia about arid-land farming, especially modern irrigation techniques, cotton-growing, and advances in desalination, while Australia sent experts in microsurgery and other specialized medical procedures to Israel. These exchanges were sometimes brought about through Jewish sponsorship of exchange professorships or scholarships.

Australia's trading links with the Arab world, concentrating as they did on primary exports from Australia, with the trade balance very much in Australia's favor, continued to outstrip Australian-Israeli trade relations. Two-way trade between Israel and Australia was at about the \$100-million mark, around 60 percent of it Israeli exports of manufactured goods, industrial machinery, irrigation equipment, plastics, fertilizer, and high technology. Australian exports to Israel were principally primary produce, largely coal, wool, and rice.

The shocking introduction of Middle East-linked terrorism into the South Pacific region began with a bomb blast in December 1982, which severely damaged the Israeli consulate general in Sydney and injured an employee. A second bomb, planted in the parking lot of the Hakoah soccer-social club in Sydney's Bondi district, was defused in time. Libyan influence in the South Pacific, largely within emergent island nations like Vanuatu, was beginning to be of concern.

Nazi War Criminals

As a result of submissions made by the Australian Jewish community, and based on parallel activity being carried out in the United States and Canada, in June 1986 the Australian government commissioned senior civil servant Andrew Menzies to conduct an investigation into charges that Nazi war criminals had found sanctuary in Australia after World War II. Menzies' report, presented to Parliament at the end of 1986, recommended the establishment of a special unit, similar to the U.S. Office of Special Investigations. He proposed that it examine, initially, the 70 individuals whose cases were presented in a closed section of the report. The report also recommended passage of an amendment to the Australian War Crimes Act of 1945 to allow civil (as opposed to military) prosecution for war crimes.

Soviet Jewry

Through Soviet diplomatic channels in Canberra and by way of its own envoys to the USSR, Australia continued to plead the overall cause of human rights in the USSR and the specific case of Soviet Jews.

An Australian parliamentary delegation to the Soviet Union in 1986, led by Australia's first female Speaker, Joan Child, expressed the government's interest in the plight of Jewish refuseniks by presenting a list of cases to Soviet authorities. Prime Minister Hawke had a long-term interest in the issue of Soviet Jewry, dating from a visit to the USSR in 1979, when he tried to have some refuseniks released and was badly let down and embarrassed because the Kremlin reneged on what he believed was a final agreement. The issue remained an emotional one for Hawke.

Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism

Australia was in many ways the fabled "*goldineh medinah*" for Jews: there was no institutionalized anti-Semitism, Jews had over the years held high government positions (including, twice, the highest appointed office, that of governor general), and Jewish communal life was allowed to flourish. The populist anti-Semitism prevalent before the 1940s had pretty much died away, partly out of shock over the horror of the Holocaust but also because of Australia's own transformation into the world's second most multicultural nation (after Israel). By the 1980s ethnicity had even become fashionable, and antidiscrimination policies and legislation were established and accepted.

Multiculturalism was not without problems, however, among them the importation to Australia of ancient feuds and modern political antipathies. On several occasions the Australian Jewish community took various Arabic-language newspapers before the Press Council for condemnation, not only for virulently anti-Israel stands but for grossly offensive anti-Semitic articles, including extracts from the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

"Traditional" anti-Semitic acts such as daubings, synagogue thefts, and, in one case, arson, showed signs of increasing, though not to really troubling levels. Right-wing anti-Semitism, although not significant and largely discredited, persisted, primarily among less educated and sophisticated Australians, particularly those living in rural areas. These were the natural targets of the League of Rights, a group that produced and distributed Holocaust revisionist literature and was known to circulate the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Regarded as being on the lunatic fringe by most Australians, its activities were carefully monitored by the Jewish community and its propaganda usually successfully countered through friendly non-Jewish sources.

More worrying for the Jewish community was the continuing transmutation of anti-Semitism into anti-Zionism, with Israel berated by its critics in unreasonable terms, singled out for abuse that went beyond simple political disagreement. In Australia as elsewhere, Israel's incursion into Lebanon in 1982 produced an outpouring of anti-Israel media coverage disproportionate to the event. Succeeding years saw periodic expressions of anti-Zionism, largely from the left and often expressed as pro-PLO attitudes. The problem was particularly acute on college campuses throughout Australia, where Jewish students worked hard to block

periodic pro-PLO student activities. By 1986, however, the press and electronic media had largely moderated their anti-Israel stance.

Of far greater concern to the Jewish community was the anti-Zionism and, in one case at least, the overt anti-Semitism, of elements within the Christian churches. The community was shocked when the Anglican dean of Perth, David Robards, spoke publicly about Jewish vengeance and the "genocidal God of the Old Testament." Despite attacks from Jewish communal representatives and members of his own church, he remained unrepentant. Anti-Israel sentiment, expressed openly or subtly, was evident in various Protestant denominations, in particular in the Australian Council of Churches.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

As the census question on religion was not compulsory, Australian Jewish population figures were always more a matter for sociologists and demographers than statisticians. The 1981 census, adjusted upward to allow for those who did not answer the question, showed an Australian Jewish population of around 70,000, roughly divided between Sydney and Melbourne, with small numbers in other areas. The 1986 census figures had not yet been processed, but it was thought likely that a new question on "ethnic origin" would help to clarify Jewish statistics. Some Jewish scholars were using a working figure of between 80,000 and 100,000 for the total Jewish population. Whatever the absolute numbers turned out to be, however, the proportion of Jews in Australia was likely to remain at around 0.4 percent.

Plans were being made to undertake major demographic surveys of the Jewish community in 1987, based on the 1986 census and local tabulations of Jewish births, marriages, and deaths. This effort would be part of the international Jewish demographic survey for the year 1990, which had been launched by demographic experts in Israel.

Jewish immigration to Australia from South Africa was estimated to have been around 10,000 during the previous 10 years and was still continuing. From the Soviet Union it had diminished radically, and from other sources, including Israel, it remained constant.

With Jews concentrated so heavily in the two major capital cities of Sydney and Melbourne, the viability of the small communities elsewhere was a matter of concern. As a result, largely, of South African immigration, Perth and Adelaide's Jewish populations had stabilized and even increased; Brisbane, however, remained a small and fragile community, while Hobart had a minuscule Jewish population.

A demographic trend of great concern to communal planners was the rising proportion of Jews at the aged end of the spectrum, twice as high as that of the general population. The growing need for such services as welfare and old-age

homes inevitably competed with other demands on communal resources, in particular capital funds for expansion in education.

The intermarriage rate was steady but low, and seemed to affect primarily the fringes of what was still largely an immigrant and traditional community. The divorce rate, however, was high, reflecting the general trend in the middle class, in which Australian Jewry was firmly located.

Community Relations

The Jewish community, as the oldest and most entrenched of all "ethnic" groups in Australia, was looked to by many of the newer arrivals as a model for minority-group organizing strategies. In the main, the Jewish community was well protected by custom and its own efforts, and many of the antagonisms once directed at Jews were now deflected onto newcomers, particularly Asians. If anything, a certain complacency had seen Jewish representation in Parliament, for example, once quite strong on the federal and state levels, diminish almost to nothing. Sen. Peter Baume, who had been a minister in the government of Malcolm Fraser, and Barry Cohen, a minister in the Hawke government, were the only two Jews on the federal scene, while Joe Berinson, the West Australian attorney general, was the only significant Jewish figure in state politics. New South Wales (NSW) Jewry was proud when Paul Landa became that state's attorney general in 1983, and his premature death after two years was a blow. Another Jewish political figure no longer on the scene was Sir Zelman Cowan, the second Jewish governor general in Australian history, who served from 1975–1980. Cowan was highly successful as a conciliatory figure who diffused the passions generated when his predecessor, Sir John Kerr, dismissed the Whitlam government in November 1975. Sir Zelman subsequently took up the posts of provost of Oriel College at Oxford University and president of the British Press Council, as well as filling certain roles in Israel, including serving on the board of the Van Leer Institute.

Despite the sometimes wavering stance of the Labor party toward Israel and increasing internal fragmentation in the Liberal party, individual politicians maintained extremely friendly relations with the Jewish community. Prime Minister Hawke, for example, launched the Hebrew University's Golda Meir Fellowship Fund in Australia. He also delivered the first in a series of memorial orations following the death of Prof. Julius Stone, a major figure in the field of international law, and negotiated with the Soviet government for the release of Soviet Jews. State premiers and opposition leaders were always to be seen at major Jewish communal gatherings.

For a community its size, Australian Jewry was remarkably visible and influential. On the local front, the Jewish community was in the forefront of the fight to have Anti-Discrimination and Incitement to Racial Hatred legislation introduced into state and federal parliaments. It also succeeded in creating and maintaining bipartisan support for the State of Israel in the various parliaments and in keeping

press criticism of Israel within generally acceptable bounds. It fought for government funding for day schools—an issue which also affected Catholic and major Protestant schools—and was producing a stream of academic and popular histories about Jews in Australia in preparation for the upcoming bicentenary.

Christian-Jewish Relations

A Council of Christians and Jews was established in 1985 in Melbourne, and moves began to form a similar group in Sydney, as forums for discussing mutual concerns, including, but not limited to, the Protestant churches' attitudes to Israel. Leaders of these groups hoped thereby to reduce divisive actions and pronouncements.

Relations between Jewry and the Catholic Church in Australia, by contrast, were cordial, reflecting the general Catholic-Jewish rapprochement begun with Vatican II. Pope John Paul II's visit to Australia at the end of 1986 included a meeting, at his request, with Australian Jewish leaders, in which the pontiff declared that anti-Semitism was "sinful."

Communal Activities

The vibrancy of Australian Jewish life continued to surprise visitors from abroad. Australian Jewry was a very committed community, the vast majority of its members identifying with one organization or another, even if only nominally. Since a growing proportion of Jewish families had at least one child in a Jewish day school, that identification seemed likely to be strengthened.

The Australian Jewish community was structured on basically British lines, with accommodations made for the vast size of the country and its federal system of government. Thus each state had its own board of deputies, and all the boards were grouped under the roof Executive Council of Australian Jewry. The Zionist movement was similarly structured, with state Zionist councils and the Australian Zionist Federation. The two roof bodies worked in parallel, following different agendas. Occasional overlap resulted in conflict, especially on the issue of which body should represent the interests of Israel to government.

Among the many organizations and institutions that had been established over the years, a number celebrated significant anniversaries in the period under review. Among them were the National Council of Jewish Women (60 years), WIZO (50 years), B'nai B'rith (40 years), and the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation (100 years).

Australian Jewry continued to be almost totally Zionist—in the broad sense of providing moral and financial support for the State of Israel—and its financial contributions to Israel were proportionately large. Ties between the two countries were strengthened with the combining, in May 1985, of the *Jerusalem Post* International Edition with the *Australian Jewish Times*, the country's leading Jewish

newspaper, allowing the broad Australian Jewish public, and significant elements of non-Jewish Australia, access to Israel's only English-language newspaper.

One notable development of recent years, reflecting world trends, was an increase in activities relating to the Holocaust. A gathering of Holocaust survivors was held in Sydney in May 1985, attended by international luminaries, including Beate Klarsfeld. A Holocaust museum was established in Melbourne and an institute of Holocaust studies in Sydney. A traveling Holocaust exhibition presented by B'nai B'rith toured major cities in Australia and New Zealand, and a Holocaust teaching kit for use in public high schools was developed by the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies.

A steady flow of prominent Jews and Israelis visited the country, usually invited by communal organizations as speakers. They provided intellectual refreshment for a community keenly aware of its isolation at "the end of the world."

Australian Jewry assumed a leading role in fostering Jewish communal life in the Asian and Pacific regions. The brainchild of Isi Leibler, president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry for part of this period and head of the World Jewish Congress Asia-Pacific section, the Asia-Pacific Jewish Association was formed in May 1980 to bring together the small Jewish communities of the region for mutual assistance and the sharing of ideas and problems. The countries involved were New Zealand, Singapore, Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, India, Korea, the Phillipines, and Hong Kong, with smaller affiliates such as New Caledonia and Sri Lanka.

Another Leibler-inspired project was the introduction of a periodic Asian Jewish Colloquium; the first was held in Singapore in 1984 and the second in Hong Kong in 1987. This academic forum for Asian scholars and their Jewish counterparts from Israel and the Diaspora quickly proved effective in helping to improve Israel's relations with countries in the region.

The historic Sydney-Melbourne communal rivalry—often no more than a series of thinly disguised personality conflicts—and a more recent conflict between the Zionist Federation and the Executive Council over issues related to lobbying the government, had eased considerably toward the end of the period.

On the world Jewish scene, partly through the personal force of Jewish leaders like the Leibler brothers, Australia had a significant presence in the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish Agency, and the World Zionist Organization, where it was seen as a highly successful Zionist community that contributed both funds and *olim* to Israel far in excess of what might be expected of it.

Religion

The perennially simmering religious divisions—between Reform and Orthodox and between centrist (modern) Orthodox and right-wing or ultra-Orthodox—occasionally flared up, but the fires were eventually tamped down, through the exercise of leadership, the passage of time, or just the indifference of most Jews to the issues.

Flare-ups tended to occur over Orthodox and Reform rabbis sharing a platform at communal functions, such as Yom Hashoah commemorations or rallies for Israel during the Lebanon War.

There was no Conservative movement in Australia, and the mainstream or modern Orthodox synagogues were very Anglo-Jewish in custom and ritual. Of the various Hassidic sects, only the Lubavitch-Chabad movement was represented in strength in Australia, while the Adass Yisroel was the most visible of the "*mitnagdish*" ultra-Orthodox groups. Most Australian Jews belonged to or identified with one synagogue or another, even if their identification consisted only of Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur attendance. Membership in the Reform Jewish stream was growing, as was adherence to ultra-Orthodoxy, but the overwhelming majority of Australian Jews were "traditional," which usually meant belonging to a modern Orthodox congregation.

Both the modern Orthodox and Reform movements showed signs of a growing traditionalism. For example, many Reform rabbis were observing Jewish Sabbath laws and introducing more Hebrew and traditional practices into synagogue ritual. Modern Orthodox rabbis, too, were reemphasizing traditional practice, encouraging daily *shul* going where the Sabbath alone had sufficed in the past, or being more rigorous about Sabbath laws, where once they may have, say, turned a blind eye toward congregants driving to synagogue.

There was some divisiveness over the issue of *kashrut* in Sydney, where the procedures of the modern Orthodox *batei din* were challenged, especially by the Chabad. Melbourne avoided such conflict by virtue of having several *kashrut* authorities, including the Chabad and the Adass.

Education

The Jewish day-school movement continued to flourish in Australia, with eight schools in Melbourne, five in Sydney, one each in Adelaide and Perth, and a kindergarten in Brisbane. Several of these, including Carmel College in Perth, offered all grades through high school. An estimated 80 percent of Jewish children in Melbourne attended day schools; in Sydney the figure was around 50 percent and growing. Apart from the Liberal movement's two schools in Sydney and Melbourne, the Jewish day schools were all Orthodox. Government funding for private schools was provided but occasionally threatened; communal leaders made it clear that cessation of state aid would cause a fundamental crisis for the Jewish schools.

Jewish education outside the day-school system and adult Jewish education, until recently poor relations, were both expanding. Jewish community efforts to have Jewish studies offered at the college level were increasingly successful, with modern and classical Hebrew, Jewish history, and Holocaust-related courses offered in several major universities. The problem of training Jewish studies teachers for the day schools was addressed by having special courses introduced into government-controlled teacher-training programs. Preparations were still being made to open

the Mandelbaum College at the University of Sydney, which, on completion, would be a postgraduate center for Jewish and related studies. A Jewish residential college for undergraduates already existed at the University of NSW. The country's one rabbinical college, a *kollel* located in Melbourne, trained Orthodox rabbis. Informal adult education, largely conducted by synagogues, seemed to thrive, though most Australian Jews remained depressingly illiterate in their own heritage.

Personalia

A number of Australian Jews received state honors—from the British Queen (under Liberal governments) or the Australian government (under Labor governments). Sir Asher Joel, a prominent public relations expert and media owner who stage-managed such events as visits by the Queen to Australia, the opening of the Sydney Opera House, and the first tour of Australia by Pope John Paul II, remained the most highly decorated Australian Jew. Many Jews were prominent in the legal world; at one time the Law Reform Commissioners in Sydney and Melbourne were both Jews—Ronald Sackville and Louis Waller, respectively. Professor Waller also headed a Victorian government study into the medical ethics of *in vitro* fertilization. Marcus Einfeld was named a federal court judge, and other Jews sat on the bench at all judicial levels and in most states.

The death of Prof. Julius Stone in 1985 meant the loss of both a great legal mind and a renowned champion of Israel. The great Zionist pioneer Max Freilich, who was instrumental in swaying Australian government opinion to support the creation of the State of Israel, died in 1986. Other prominent Jews who died in recent years were Melbourne communal leader Arnold Bloch (1985) and Sydney leaders Hilary Pryor (1982) and Hannah Kessler (1984).

SUSAN BURES