THE MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE Australians confronted in 2000 was the implementation of an administratively complicated 10-percent goods-and-services tax. This was expected eventually to cause major problems for the Liberal-National coalition government led by John Howard, but on the whole criticism was less than anticipated, though it grew toward the end of the year as the law was implemented. Through most of the year the governing coalition trailed the opposition Australian Labor Party (ALP) in the polls as the Australian dollar fell to its lowest value ever against the U.S. dollar, oil prices soared, and the economy slowed toward year's end. The next election was due at the end of 2001, with the opposition needing a very small electoral swing to win the few seats it would require to gain power.

Pauline Hanson's far-right One Nation Party continued to confront problems. It had received a grant of $500,000 from the Queensland Electoral Commission for having 11 members elected in the 1998 state elections. However the courts subsequently found that the party was fraudulently registered for funding and it had to give the money back. Responsibility for the payment fell to Pauline Hanson, and she spent most of the year raising the money. Hanson also had a major falling-out with the party's two top functionaries, David Oldfield and David Ettridge. Hanson attempted to expel the "two Davids" from the party for registering two new parties, which, she said, breached the One Nation constitution. They responded that, as directors of the party, they could not be expelled, and a round of recriminations and lockouts followed. Despite Hanson's setbacks the resentment that fueled her popularity still simmered, and she was by no means politically finished.

Mainstream nonindigenous Australians embraced reconciliation with Aboriginals to a greater extent in 2000 than ever before. Reconciliation marches throughout the country during the year drew over a million people, with the largest marches in Sydney in May and in Melbourne in December. A new body, Reconciliation Australia, was formed to further the work of Aboriginal reconciliation. One board member of the new group was Mark Leibler, chairman of AIJAC (Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council). In addition, the federal government appointed Dr. Colin Rubenstein, AIJAC executive director, to the Council for
Multicultural Australia. This body was established to help the government implement its "new agenda for multicultural Australia" announced in December 1999 (see AJYB 2000, p. 406).

The government of the state of Victoria released a discussion paper on the subject of legislation against racial hatred. Victoria remained the only state without such legislation, the national government and all other states having laws of one kind or another in this area.

The September 2000 Olympic Games, which took place in Sydney, were a great success, generating an outpouring of Australian national pride unparalleled since World War II. The community torch relay, which included several Jewish torch carriers, unified the nation behind the games. The events themselves went without a hitch, and at the closing ceremony Juan Antonio Samaranch, president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), described the games as the best ever (see below, pp. 453–54).

Australian army personnel continued their participation in the international peacekeeping force in East Timor, while relations with Indonesia slightly improved. Australia also played a major role in negotiating a resolution to the ethnic-based civil war in the Solomon Islands. Partly as a response to this new role as regional peacekeeper, the government released and held public hearings on a new white paper on defense, which recommended a $24-billion boost in defense spending.

In a move that sparked controversy, the government withdrew from the UN Human Rights Commission system after the UN condemned Australian mandatory sentencing laws while remaining silent on serious human-rights violations by other, nondemocratic regimes. Australia also confronted some of the international problems it had previously been spared, with the expulsion of suspected terrorists in the lead-up to the Olympics and the violent Seattle-like "S11" protests at the World Economic Forum in Melbourne in September.

An area of continuing controversy was the treatment of asylum-seeking illegal immigrants, most of whom arrive by boat and have come, in recent years, mainly from the Middle East and Afghanistan. This year there were riots at and escapes from the isolated detention centers used to house these people, including one mass breakout. There were allegations of abuse at the Woomera Detention Center in South Australia, which critics described as a "hellhole." Australian policy on allowing immigrants into the country came under increasing fire for being too harsh, while the government responded that considerations of security, health, and equity necessitated a thorough and at times lengthy scrutiny of applicants. There were indications that procedures might be liberalized in 2001.

Israel and the Middle East

The Australian government continued to maintain warm relations with Israel, expressing full support for a continuation of the Middle East peace process. Aus-
tralia maintained this posture even after the onset of the new surge of violence in late September, with Foreign Minister Alexander Downer stating that security cooperation between Israelis and the Palestinians must recommence and that the peace process could not be abandoned.

Prime Minister John Howard paid a highly successful state visit to Israel on April 29–May 2, only the third time that an Australian prime minister had visited Israel. Howard’s discussions with Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak ranged over the Middle East peace process, Nazi war criminals, and compensation for the victims of the Maccabiah bridge tragedy (see below). Howard had briefings with leading Israeli industrialists and with high-tech companies that focused on the encouragement of Israeli-Australian joint ventures as well as the establishment of a Binational Industrial Research and Development Fund (BIRD). Howard also met with Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat, whom he described as “a fascinating person to meet... a man who is searching for peace, who is conscious of the extremist elements that seek to overthrow him.”

More than just a diplomatic journey, the visit to Israel was also personally meaningful to Prime Minister Howard, who had maintained close ties to the Jewish community and had been a strong supporter of Israel throughout his political career. In his acceptance speech upon receiving an honorary doctorate from Bar-Ilan University he said: “The personal affection I have for the State of Israel, the personal regard I have for the Jewish people of the world, will never be diminished. It is something I hold dearly, something I value as part of my being and as part of what I have tried to do with my life.”

Howard, back in Australia, further reflected on his trip to Israel when he addressed an AJAC and United Israel Appeal dinner in his honor on November 22. He said, “I don’t believe any prime minister of Israel could have offered more than did Ehud Barak at Camp David in July. It was an offer that should have been accepted and it is tragic in the extreme that it was not accepted.”

There were other high-profile Australian visitors to Israel in 2000. In January an Australian Young Political Leaders Tour, involving eight young and rising political leaders, visited Israel in a program run in cooperation with AJAC. Various successful trade missions took place, one in August led by Federal Education Minister David Kemp, and another in November led by Communications Minister Richard Alston, his second such trip in two years. As a direct outcome of the November mission, Telstra, Australia’s largest telecommunications carrier, made its first venture-capital investment in Israel.

Foreign Minister Downer visited Iran at the end of July and, as on many previous occasions, he spoke to Iranian ministers and officials about the ten Iranian Jews convicted and imprisoned on espionage charges. In September he stated that “while the reduction in their sentences is a step in the right direction, I am disappointed that the prison sentences remain in place and were not overturned. I call upon the Iranian authorities to extend clemency to each of the ten Jews.” Downer’s counterpart in the political opposition, Laurie Brereton, stated
on July 3 that "as a long-standing trading partner of Iran, Australia should make it absolutely clear to the Iranian government that persecution of people as a consequence of their religious beliefs can only damage Iran's international standing and further delay normalization of Iran's relations with much of the world."

Nevertheless, in May the Australian government voted in favor of two loans from the World Bank to Iran totaling $232 million, the first loans the World Bank had made to Iran in more than seven years. The U.S., France, and Canada sought to postpone the loans, but were outvoted.

In April a joint committee of the Federal Parliament conducted the first comprehensive review of Australia's policies in the Middle East in many years. Responding to the committee's request for the submission of testimony, a number of Jewish communal organizations—including AIJAC, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), and the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce—and several Christian-based groups prepared testimony arguing for a strong Australia-Israel relationship. Among the topics covered were the benefits of trade relations with Israel, Australia's role in the peace process and the importance of its continuing pro-Israel stance, Australia's defense relationship with the region, how the UN might promote regional stability, sanctions against Iraq, the dangers inherent in the production and dissemination of weapons of mass destruction, human-rights priorities, and social and cultural links.

In the UN, Australia was one of Israel's earliest supporters in its bid to join WEOG (Western European and Others Group), which would enable Israel to gain membership on the Security Council and other specialized UN bodies, a campaign that succeeded in May, albeit with limitations. With Palestinian violence raging in December, however, Australia voted for resolutions slanted against Israel in the UN General Assembly on "Jerusalem," "peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine," and the "Special Information Programme on Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat." It abstained from voting on anti-Israel resolutions regarding "Syrian Golan," the "Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat," and the "Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People."

Despite this mixed voting record in the General Assembly, Penny Wensley, Australia's ambassador to the UN, said that unbalanced criticism and the singling out of one side only for blame was unhelpful. She strongly supported the call of the International Red Cross for both sides to respect, and to ensure respect for, international humanitarian law, and to protect civilians, medical personnel and the activities of ambulances and hospitals. She further urged all states in the region to become parties to all relevant international arms-control instruments.

In December a delegation of Australian Jews led by Colin Rubenstein, executive director of AIJAC, Nina Bassat, president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, and Ron Weiser, president of the Zionist Federation of Australia, went to Canberra to meet with influential parliamentarians, party officials, and ministerial advisers about matters of concern to the Jewish community, particu-
larly Australian reaction to the new Palestinian war of attrition against Israel. The Jewish leaders reported that senior government and opposition figures expressed understanding and support.

**Media Bias**

Media coverage of issues relating to the Australian Jewish community, extensive and out of proportion to the community’s size, was generally responsible. On some subjects, particularly the unresolved issues emanating from the Nazi Holocaust such as war criminals and compensation, coverage tended to be sympathetic to the Jewish community. However that was not the case with regard to Israel and the Middle East.

A prime example was the Australian version of “Sixty Minutes,” which treated the upsurge of Palestinian violence toward the end of the year as a simple story of Palestinians with rocks and stones confronting Israeli guns and tanks. The entire context of Palestinian incitement against Israel was ignored, as was the fact that Israel had been ready to accept a Palestinian state. The tragic shooting of the young Muhammad al-Dura in a cross fire between Israeli troops and Palestinian fighters was made to seem a simple act of execution; reporter Richard Carleton declared that the “overwhelming evidence is that the boy was targeted, murdered by Israeli soldiers.” He made no mention of any shooting by Palestinians and sought no explanation from the Israeli side.

For some years the government-funded ethnic SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) television had shown bias against Israel. It aired a documentary in June, “Children of Shatilla,” which blamed Israeli policies of expulsion and land seizure for the plight of the Palestinian refugees. In October, with the upcoming American presidential election in the news, SBS screened a BBC report about an American Jewish “lobby,” allegedly “one of the most powerful in the country,” and suggested that Jews control American policy through their donations to political parties. The reporter attributed to Muslims the view that American Jews “are responsible for ensuring that the Palestinians don’t stand a chance.” Despite complaints from viewers, SBS stood by its story. There was, in fact, only one SBS program, “Dateline,” that regularly presented both sides of the Middle East conflict.

On radio, Neil Mitchell, Melbourne’s leading talk-show host, commented on children being shot in the Gaza Strip: “I’d love to hear the Jewish community shouting about it in this country. I’d love to hear the Jewish community, which is so willing to pass judgement on others, telling the Israeli government that perhaps shooting kids isn’t a great idea. Perhaps shooting children isn’t a great way to win friends.” Once again, provocations and context were ignored.

The Australian print media also ran reports, editorials, and opinion pieces with an anti-Israel slant, some by their own journalists and others taken from
overseas publications. Often, sensationalist headlines, photographs, and stories seemed to be of more importance than a balanced review of events. The worst offender was the Canberra Times, the major paper in the national capital.

Not surprisingly, some of the Arabic-language media in Australia combined anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. The Internet magazine al-Moharrer al-Australi claimed that "the will of the United States is being controlled and manipulated by Zionist interests. Taxpayers' money is being siphoned to 'Israel,' the illegitimate state in Palestine." Nida'ul Islam, available both on the Internet and as a magazine, published such comments as "the Jews are extremely arrogant towards Allah" and that they have succeeded in their "infiltration into Hollywood, the Media and Congress."

**Anti-Semitism and Extremism**

Three unique circumstances influenced extremist and anti-Semitic manifestations in 2000.

The first of these was the commencement of "Y2K," the year 2000. A number of millenarian and other extremist organizations received more than their usual share of media limelight, as did the terrorist organizations, which, it was believed in some circles, would seek to capitalize on any disruption of normal life caused by the change of calendar.

Second, the Sydney Olympics in September activated the largest peacetime security operation ever seen in Australia. As a consequence of pre-Olympics investigations, a number of situations came to light that might otherwise have created problems for the Jewish community. For example, careful scrutiny of foreigners entering the country undoubtedly kept out terrorists from the Middle East. And the arrest of a self-styled neo-Nazi white supremacist in possession of weapons and hate literature surely would not have occurred if not for the heightened state of alert connected to the Olympics.

Third, the acceleration of violence in Israel and the territories beginning at the end of September triggered a spate of high-profile incidents across Australia. Among them were the firebombing of a Canberra synagogue; the repeated firebombing of a Sydney rabbi's sukkah and home; and pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Melbourne and Sydney where Israeli and American flags were burned along with posters of Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak, and with the protestors in Sydney trying to storm the American consulate. Such incidents received widespread media coverage and led to the establishment of a special police investigative task force in Sydney. This sad state of affairs culminated in the cancellation of a public Hanukkah candle-lighting ceremony in Sydney, for fear of further anti-Semitic incidents.

For all of 2000, the database of anti-Semitic incidents compiled by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) recorded 327 reports of violence, van-
dalism, intimidation, and harassment directed at Australian Jews and Jewish communal institutions. This was 47 percent higher than the number for 1999 and 62 percent higher than the average for the previous ten years. The incidence of attacks involving physical assault, face-to-face harassment, property damage, and graffiti was 6 percent higher than the ten-year average, and the number of threats—primarily via electronic hate mail—was almost 50 percent higher.

**Extremist Groups**

Extremist and anti-Semitic groups in Australia varied greatly in their memberships, activities, and target audiences. Most of the better-known Australian groups maintained links with foreign extremists such as militia movements in the U.S., Christian Identity churches, the Lyndon LaRouche organization, various groups of conspiracy theorists, the Australian League of Rights, and others that promoted anti-Jewish mythology.

In October the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission ordered one group, the Adelaide Institute—a small organization run by Dr. Frederick Toben devoted to Holocaust denial—to remove offensive material from its Internet Web site. The commission found that this material breached the Racial Discrimination Act by being “vilificatory, bullying, insulting and offensive” to the Jewish population. Dr. Toben was also ordered to prepare a written apology to the Jewish community of Australia, to appear on the Web site’s home page, for “having published materials inciting hatred against the Jewish people.”

The Australian League of Rights, described by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission as “undoubtedly the most influential and effective, as well as the best organized and most substantially financed, racist organization in Australia,” continued to hold meetings, conduct action campaigns, and seek publicity for its anti-Semitic assessments of domestic and international affairs. Under new director Betty Luks, the league published weekly newsletters, monthly magazines, and a quarterly journal. It has also begun advertising its meetings and publications, and has its own Web site.

The Citizens Electoral Councils (CEC) continued to distribute large quantities of literature reflecting the views of their mentor, Lyndon LaRouche. These included bizarre and offensive anti-Semitic conspiracy theories targeting Jewish and other antiracist organizations in Australia. Beside mass mailings, another common tactic was handing out pamphlets and magazines to unsuspecting citizens in shopping areas commonly frequented by Jews. CEC was particularly active in campaigning against the proposal, in Victoria, to outlaw racial hatred (see above, p. 445). Throughout the year, Jews in Victoria, Western Australia, and New South Wales complained about CEC activities.

Small neo-Nazi groups, such as the Sydney-based Southern Cross Hammer Skinheads and their Melbourne counterpart, Blood and Honour, made their
presence felt primarily through the Internet. The largest neo-Nazi group was the Adelaide-based National Action, whose leader claimed on its Web site that he was being persecuted “because he states that he does not think that the plan to exterminate Europe’s Jews in the Second World War is proven.” National Action sued a journalist who called it racist for defamation, but the court ruled that “denial of the Holocaust and failure to condemn the principles espoused by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party” were proof of racism. In December it became known that at least two members of a neo-Nazi band called Blood Oath had been, until recently, members of the Australian army’s parachute battalion, 3RAR.

The deceptively named Australian Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) continued to advocate Holocaust denial, with most of the group’s public announcements aimed at protecting the “rights” of Holocaust deniers and other extremists. Your Rights 2000 was the 26th annual edition of the ACLU’s handbook. Advertised on the front cover were references to such heroes of the organization as Holocaust deniers David Irving and Frederick Toben and war criminal Konrad Kalejs. Irving was promoted as if it were he whose free speech was threatened, rather than that of Professor Deborah Lipstadt, whom he was suing for libel in London (see above, p. 310). The book presented Toben as a “scholar and educator” persecuted for “historical accuracy” and Kalejs as a casualty of “vengeful hunts” while the world ignores “far bigger Holocausts than the Holocaust of the Jews.”

In November AJIAC and the Freilich Foundation—based at the Australian National University—sponsored a two-day conference in Sydney on “Cyberhate: Bigotry and Prejudice on the Internet.” Three of the world’s leading experts in on-line bigotry—David Goldman from the U.S., who established hatewatch.org; Ken McVay from Canada, who set up the Nizkor Holocaust Education Project; and Michael Whine from Great Britain, who wrote and lectured extensively on Internet abuse—discussed how the Internet is used as an unregulated conduit for extremist ideas, how to attack on-line bigotry, and the pros and cons of government regulation.

Nazi War Criminals

Major developments took place in the case of 87-year-old Konrad Kalejs. After being deported from the U.S. and Canada for his involvement in Nazi crimes against humanity in his native Latvia, Kalejs lived in England until he was exposed by the media there late in 1999. Rather than face deportation, Kalejs, who had received Australian citizenship in 1957 by hiding his past, returned to Australia in January 2000. But in August Australia and Latvia signed an extradition treaty, and in December Latvia charged Kalejs with genocide and war crimes, and served a formal request for his extradition. Kalejs was arrested and released on bail, with extradition proceedings to commence in 2001.

Others charged with war crimes—Heinrich Wagner, Karlis Ozols, and Antanas
Gudelis—continued to attract attention. Wagner died late in the year, a free man, eight years after his 1992 trial was aborted following a heart attack and medical testimony indicating that he would not recover if the trial continued. Ozols, another Latvian, was reportedly suffering the effects of old age, but there was a possibility that, with the extradition treaty and the Kalejs precedent, Latvia might also seek to extradite him. Gudelis, a Lithuanian, had been officially under investigation in his home country since 1999. Australia was in the process of negotiating an extradition treaty with Lithuania.

**JEWISH COMMUNITY**

**Demography**

The Australian Jewish community continued to grow through immigration, particularly from South Africa and the former Soviet Union. The total number of Jews was between 110,000 and 125,000 out of a total population of some 19 million. There were probably hundreds of thousands of other Australians who had some ancestral relationship with the Jewish community, largely due to the predominantly male Jewish immigration in the first century of European colonization. Of the Jews born overseas, South African Jews were the largest group, followed by natives of Poland, Russia, Hungary, and Germany. Losses attributable to aliyah and a low birthrate were more than compensated for by immigration. The Jewish community was still heavily concentrated in Melbourne and Sydney, with the Brisbane-Gold Coast area showing the fastest growth.

Census figures—which were approximate, since answering questions on religion was not compulsory—indicated that 15-20 percent of married Jewish men and women had non-Jewish partners in 2000, though anecdotal evidence suggested a considerably higher figure. Compared to members of other religions, Jewish Australians were more likely to marry and to do so at a later age, and they were less likely to cohabit without marriage. The Jewish community included an exceptionally high percentage of elderly members, placing a considerable burden on the community's welfare and service agencies.

There were 14,000-20,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union in Australia, most of them living in Sydney and Melbourne. Australia's Jewish community had received, per capita, more immigrants from the FSU than even Israel, at least double the proportion received by the U.S., and seven times the number that went to Canada. Integrating this community continued to be a major challenge, especially since many of the new arrivals lacked Jewish literacy. Despite the assistance provided by local communities, particularly on the arrival of these Jews in the country, communal leadership remained concerned that these newcomers were finding it easier to assimilate into Australian society than to integrate into its Jewish community.
Communal Affairs

Nina Bassat entered her third and final year as president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), while Ron Weiser served his final year as president of the Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA). Mark Leibler remained national chairman of the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) and also federal president of the United Israel Appeal, and Dr. Colin Rubenstein continued as AIJAC’s executive director. AIJAC continued its close association with the American Jewish Committee.

The year 2000 saw a successful merger in the state of Victoria between the Montefiore Homes, which provided care for the aged, and Jewish Community Services, which offered counseling, assistance to migrants, and community-welfare services. The new combined entity, to be called Jewish Care, would be responsible for all these services combined.

Jews and the Sydney Olympics

Jewish members of the Australian team were synchronized swimmer Irena Olevsky, wrestler Igor Praporshchikov, softball reserve Natalie Shapiro, wrestling coach Alex Sher, and handball manager Tom York, as well as chief physiotherapist Ross Smith. In addition, two Australian Jewish composers—Elena Katz-Chernin and John Foreman—had songs they had written performed at the opening ceremony, while many other Jews held prominent positions on the organizing committee. Israel sent its largest team ever, 39 athletes; Michael Kalganov won bronze in the 500-meter kayaking competition and Eitan Orbach became the first Israeli to make a swimming final. The star Jewish athlete of the games was United States backstroker Lenny Krayzelberg, who won three gold medals. Another notable Jewish athlete from the U.S. was Anthony Ervin, who tied for gold in the 50-meters freestyle. Ervin, Jason Lezak, and Scott Goldblatt won silver as members of U.S. relay teams. South African breaststroker Sarah Poewe and American shot-putter Andy Bloom both came in fourth in their events.

Two weeks after the Olympics, Sydney hosted the equally successful Paralympic Games. Israel won six medals, including three golds for swimmer Keren Leibovitch.

Sydney became the first Olympic city to honor the memory of the 11 Israeli athletes killed at the 1972 Munich Olympics when, in October 1999, memorials were unveiled at the Olympic village by Shane Gould, the Australian swimming gold medalist at the Munich Olympics, the Honorable Jim Spigelman, chief justice of New South Wales, and Brian Sherman, a board member of SOCOG (Sydney Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games). This was a privately funded initiative begun by Sherman and fellow Sydney businessman Geoff Levy, assisted by David Gonski, Fred Sweet, and Peter Ivany, and supported by SOCOG and the Olympic Coordinating Committee.
A second memorial was unveiled on September 26, 2000—the exact anniversary of the killings—at Moriah College, Sydney's largest Jewish day school. It was attended by the entire Israeli team; Matan Vilnai, Israel's sports minister; Walter Tröger, mayor of the Munich Olympic Village; Zvi Yarshaviak, president of the Israeli Olympic Committee; Yoram Oberkovich, secretary general of the International Olympic Committee (IOC); Peter Ryan, police commissioner of New South Wales; members of Australia's 1972 Olympic team; and diplomatic representatives from several countries. The memorial and ceremony were funded by the Jewish National Fund, the Israeli Olympic team, the New South Wales Board of Deputies, the Hakoah Club, the State Zionist Council, and New South Wales Maccabi.

In October Matan Vilnai unveiled yet a third memorial, this one at the Chevra Kadisha Cemetery in Melbourne, consisting of a plaque and an avenue of pines, funded by the Jewish National Fund and the Israeli Olympic Committee.

**Maccabiah Tragedy**

There were further developments in relation to the tragedy that occurred in 1997, when a bridge collapsed at the Maccabiah games in Israel killing four Australian athletes and injuring more than 70 others. A criminal trial of those responsible concluded in Israel in May, with all five defendants found guilty. Four were sentenced to prison terms while the other, the sole Maccabi World Union (MWU) official charged, was sentenced to community service. All five appealed the verdicts. MWU chairman Uzi Netanel resigned immediately, and its president, Ronald Bakalarz, stepped down in August after the Knesset inquiry into the tragedy recommended that he do so.

Maccabi Australia Inc. (MAI), which suspended its membership in the MWU in May, resumed membership in November. By the end of the year adequate safety procedures for future games were in place and 41 of the approximately 60 compensation claims had been settled. But despite ongoing efforts by leaders of the Australian Jewish community, the major compensation claims were unresolved and the MAI still had not reversed its decision to stay away from the 2001 games.

**Education**

More than half of all Jewish children aged 4–18—including almost 70 percent of those aged 4–12—received full-time Jewish education in the 19 Jewish day schools in Australia. Spanning the religious spectrum, these schools continued to rank at the highest level for academic achievement. This reflected the community's major investment in the schools as a means of preserving Jewish continuity. Day-school enrollments continued to grow, despite ongoing concerns over high costs and the challenge to the community to find new sources of funding. In Melbourne alone there were over 5,500 children in Jewish day schools, and in Sydney one school had a waiting list of over 300.
In 2000 the federal government established a new funding system for non-government schools that was based on socioeconomic status (SES). Funding would be calculated by estimating the needs and socioeconomic status of the parents, determined by where the families lived, as opposed to the old system that geared funding to the cost of attending the school. The government argued that the new system was more accurate, transparent, objective, and fair than its predecessor. When the measure passed toward the end of the year, it received support from the main opposition Labor Party, which also promised to keep the new system if it won power at the next election.

The government promised that no school would lose funding under the arrangement, and the Australian Coordinating Committee of Jewish Day Schools supported the new law. But the coordinating committee did produce evidence that many families sending their children to Jewish schools from wealthy neighborhoods were above average size, and that the formula for establishing the SES in these areas, based on average family size, would shortchange several Jewish day schools. The committee requested rectification of this anomaly, and the government pledged to deal with it early in 2001.

There was an increased emphasis on adult education, largely under the influence of the Melton Program, which had nearly 500 students in Sydney and Melbourne. Short-term courses utilizing guest lecturers also proved popular. Top priorities for the future, according to Australian Jewish educators, were expanded Jewish studies on the university level and teacher education to provide quality faculty for the day schools.

**Interfaith Dialogue**

The Australian Jewish community maintained interfaith dialogue on a number of levels. The ECAJ continued its formal, high-level dialogues with the Uniting Church in Australia (biannually), and with the Catholic Bishops’ Conference (annually). The ECAJ and its state affiliates also participated in the activities of the World Conference on Religion and Peace and the Councils of Christians and Jews, bringing Jewish leaders into regular contact with leading representatives of many different faith groups.

Despite positive and constructive interreligious relationships on many issues, significant areas of tension remained, such as the sympathetic attitude of the Anglican Church in New South Wales to the targeted evangelization of Jews, and the pro-Palestinian position taken by a number of Christian bodies.

**Culture**

Australian Jews played a significant role in the artistic and cultural life of the country. Examples in 2000 included Esther Erlich’s painting *Never Been Better*, voted most popular by the public who came to view the portraits entered for the Archibald Prize; Alanah Zitserman’s romantic comedy *Russian Doll*, named best
original screenplay at the Australian Film Institute (AFI) annual awards; David Barda and Stephen Jenner’s *If* magazine, which won a $10,000 award for innovative contribution to the Australian film industry; Jonathan Teplitzky’s film *Better than Sex*, nominated for eight awards, including best film; and comedienne Rachel Berger’s performance, *Not Kosher*, at the Melbourne Comedy Festival. In addition, Sam Lipski, the former editor of the *Jewish News*, was appointed head of the State Library Board of Victoria.

Apart from the extremely valuable contributions to Jewish cultural life made by the Jewish Museum of Australia, the refurbished Holocaust Museum in Melbourne, and the Sydney Jewish Museum—all of which were world-class institutions—the various Australian Jewish film festivals and Jewish theater groups added immeasurably to the cultural life of the community. The Melbourne International Festival of the Arts in 2000 was opened by Israel’s Batsheva dance company.

**Personalia**

The following members of the Jewish community received national honors: Jim Spigelman, eminent achievement and merit in the service of the nation, AC, Australia’s highest honor; Sam Fiszman, service to the tourism industry, AO; Geoffrey Cohen, service to business and commerce, AM; Flora Erna Davis, Ursula Flicker, Catherine Gluck, and Zelda Rosenbaum, communal service, OAM; Ervin Graf, builder and property developer, OAM; Sam Moshinsky and David Smorgon, communal service, OAM.

Australia and the wider Jewish community mourned the death of Rabbi Ronald Lubofsky AM, rabbi emeritus of St. Kilda Synagogue in Melbourne.

*Colin L. Rubenstein*