AUSTRALIA ENTERED THE OFFICIAL BEGINNING of the 21st century amid anxiety about a predicted economic downturn and anticipation of an end-of-year election that threatened the continuation of the Liberal-National coalition government of Prime Minister John Howard, which had held power since 1996. The signs were not good for the prime minister early in the year, as the combination of an unpopular consumption tax, high fuel prices, and a record low value for the Australian dollar contributed to the government’s shocking by-election loss in one of its safest seats. Looking every inch the prime-minister-in-waiting, opposition leader Kim Beazley of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) steered a cautious path, making his major policy initiative an ambitious educational program called “Knowledge Nation.”

As time passed, the government seemed to regain some support when the consumption tax was simplified and the economy stabilized. Then came two unforeseen events: the *Tampa*, and September 11.

In July, the growing problem of illegal immigration was dramatically illustrated when a boatload of mainly Afghan refugees rescued by the Norwegian-registered cargo vessel MV *Tampa* was denied permission to seek asylum at the nearest Australian territory, Christmas Island. Australian navy personnel boarded the boat, and, after several days of stand-off, the asylum-seekers were directed to a hastily improvised processing camp in Nauru, an independent country, with the expenses paid for by Australia. The government’s firm stand caused consternation in some quarters, including Indonesia, from where the refugees had boarded their dilapidated vessel. But the great majority of Australians supported the decision to insist on an orderly refugee and asylum policy, and the government enjoyed a surge in popularity.

On September 11, Prime Minister Howard was in Washington, D.C. for a series of meetings when the hijacked planes hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon killing thousands, several Australians among them.
Howard immediately voiced his full support for concerted international action to confront terrorism, and later, invoking the ANZUS Treaty (a 1952 mutual-security pact between Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S.), committed a substantial number of Australian troops to assist the U.S.-led operation in Afghanistan. Australia also continued to play a significant role in the naval blockade of Iraq. This tough stand solidified support for the government, and even though the opposition also supported the asylum-seeker and post-September-11 policies, on November 10 John Howard was comfortably reelected to a third term.

The election also capped a disastrous year for the far-right populist Pauline Hanson and her controversy-riddled party, One Nation. With Hanson outside Parliament, her party was beset by a lack of direction. It won three seats in the Queensland state election in February, a significant reduction from the 11 members elected in 1998. Legal action launched by the Australian Electoral Commission against Hanson and former One Nation director David Ettridge for fraud distracted the party in its preparations for the federal election in the fall. Amid the sense of crisis generated by September 11, the party was correctly perceived as irrelevant. Hanson and new recruit Graeme Campbell, a former Australian Labor Party MP and sympathizer with the far-right League of Rights, were high-profile Senate candidates in Queensland and Western Australia, respectively, but both fell well short of their goal. This left Senator Len Harris, elected in 1998, the party’s sole representative in the Federal Parliament. Hanson subsequently resigned as leader of One Nation.

Australian army personnel continued their participation in the international peacekeeping force in East Timor as the fledgling state advanced towards independence, scheduled for May 2002. Relations with Indonesia improved marginally, although tensions arose with the new administration of Megawati Sukarnoputri over the issue of illegal asylum-seekers. Just as the government negotiated for the Tampa refugees to be taken for processing to a third country, Nauru, similar agreements were negotiated with other Pacific governments to house refugees on a temporary basis—a policy soon dubbed “the Pacific solution.”

The Australian policy of mandatory detention in special centers of those arriving in the country illegally came under increasing fire from some quarters for excessive harshness. The government countered that maintaining the integrity of Australian borders necessitated a thorough and lengthy scrutiny of applicants both from a security standpoint and in terms of health, especially as many unauthorized arrivals had no documents. Riots and incidents of self-harm continued to bedevil the
immigration-detention centers. Conditions at the Woomera facility in remote South Australia were the most heavily criticized.

**Australia and Israel**

Both the government and the opposition were largely supportive of Israel. Leading figures from both sides of the political divide decried the use of violence to achieve political goals, condemned Palestinian terror attacks, acknowledged the right of Israelis to live in peace and security, and bemoaned the opportunities passed up by Yasir Arafat and his repeated breaches of cease-fires. Prime Minister Howard described himself in Parliament in February as “a long-standing friend of Israel,” adding, “I know there are many in the House who would be happy to carry that label.” There was a successful delegation to Israel of five MPs from the opposition ALP in April, including four shadow ministers, led by Simon Crean (deputy ALP leader at the time, who became leader after the November election), as well as other political visits. Parliamentary Friends of Israel groups, federally and in Victoria and New South Wales, continued to flourish.

On the debit side, a solid core of backbenchers, as well as minor-party legislators, consistently condemned Israel. A report issued in September by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade on “Australia’s Relations with the Middle East” gave cause for concern. The multiparty committee, whose membership included three shadow ministers, recommended “that all Australian political and official public statements condemning terrorism and violence in the context of the Middle East conflict continue to be framed in terms which clearly apply to all parties in the conflict.” There were also many findings of “fact” in the main body of the report that upset supporters of Israel, and eight Liberal members of the committee released a dissenting minority report to correct them.

In the UN, Australia generally showed its sympathy for Israel, usually by abstaining on resolutions hostile to the Jewish state. At the August–September UN Durban Conference Against Racism, the Australian delegation conducted itself with distinction. After the early departure of the United States and Israel, it was generally the Australian delegation that spoke out in opposition to the anti-Israel and anti-Semitic resolutions that were advanced. John Dauth, Australia’s ambassador to the UN, used a right of reply to point out that the declaration passed by the parallel NGO (nongovernmental organization) forum was unacceptable and
a discredit to all those identified with it, as several sections were “deplorable” (see above, pp. 100-04). Australia boycotted the conference held in Geneva in December, where the contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention met for the purpose of condemning Israel.

**MEDIA BIAS**

Significant elements of the Australian media continued to demonstrate bias against Israel, portraying it as the prime aggressor in the conflict with the Palestinians, or, at best, as being equally at fault. Often, these media neglected to provide the context necessary for a full understanding of events. The major electronic media used a preponderance of commentators and academics whose hostility to Israel was evident. A serious imbalance was evident in interviews, as pro-Israel interviewees were often subjected to a hostile pattern of questioning and badgering, while Palestinian representatives and their supporters were given considerably friendlier treatment.

There were many examples of such bias in the government-owned Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). Its news program, covering the Israeli bombing of a building in August, said “an Israeli attack on a Palestinian building left eight dead including two children,” without mentioning that the building was a Hamas headquarters. Israel’s targeted killings were generally described as “assassinations” (on one day, three separate ABC Radio reports referred to one instance as “murder”), while Palestinian terrorists were termed “militants,” “extremists,” “activists,” or even “officials,” but very rarely “terrorists.” ABC’s Middle East correspondent, Tim Palmer, had a way of repeatedly “spinning” the news to cast criticism on Israeli behavior.

Similarly, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), the multicultural network, in its television news and current-affairs programming, highlighted Israeli reactions to violence rather than the Palestinian attacks that caused them—at times not even mentioning the initial provocation. Longer in-depth pieces on the Middle East shown on both ABC and SBS almost invariably focused disproportionately on Palestinian suffering and one-sided attribution of blame to Israel. Philip Adams on ABC Radio responded to a comment by Professor Gerald Steinberg of Bar-Ilan University about “the language of hate” coming from mosques by angrily saying: “We also hear the language of hate from synagogues as well.”

The Channel 9 Australian public-affairs program “Sixty Minutes” also
caused concern. Reporter Richard Carleton, who had done something similar in reporting on the onset of the intifada in 2000, made inaccurate and provocative statements in a story about Israel and the territories, such as describing the West Bank as “Palestinian territory Israel has illegally occupied now for 34 years.” In what was to have been an interview with Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres, Carleton instead argued with Peres, telling him that Israel would regain the moral high ground if it “no longer occupied this country.”

In the print media, one of the worst offenders continued to be the leading daily newspaper in the national capital, the Canberra Times, whose editorials and opinion pieces were overwhelmingly anti-Israel. There were problems with most of the other major newspapers as well. Two journalists who stood out for their informative and balanced work were Greg Sheridan, foreign editor of the Australian Financial Review, and Ross Dunn, Middle East correspondent for the Fairfax newspapers.

Anti-Semitism and Extremism

For all of 2001, the database of anti-Semitic incidents compiled by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) recorded more than 30 reports per month of violence, vandalism, intimidation or harassment directed at Jewish community members and communal institutions, with synagogues being targeted more than in previous years. Incidents of assault, arson, and vandalism were up over 60 percent as compared to the average in recent years, and more than 10 percent above the previous record year, 1991, the year of the Gulf War. Threats by telephone, mail, leaflets, posters, or e-mail were more than 65 percent above average, and were at the second highest level since records began being collected.

Among the most disturbing incidents reported were:

- A series of firebomb attacks at a synagogue and community center, including one while people were inside;
- Assaults on young Jewish men, including one which resulted in the victim requiring serious surgery;
- Petrol bombs thrown into private homes of Jewish religious leaders;
- The smashing of windows at synagogues and other communal institutions through the use of heavy implements;
- Vandalizing of private Jewish homes and communal offices in three Australian states;
• Assaults on Jews on their way to or from synagogue, with eggs, rocks, bottles, or firecrackers being thrown;
• Jews in private vehicles being harassed, intimidated, and threatened by occupants of other vehicles with extreme anti-Semitic invective;
• Direct threats made by youths to Jewish schoolchildren and officials of communal organizations; and
• Harassment of Jewish participants in public forums.

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.

In 1996, the ECAJ had lodged a complaint with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission about the content of the Internet site of the Adelaide Institute—a small organization devoted to Holocaust denial run by Dr. Frederick Toben. More complaints about the site from other Jewish organizations continued to accumulate, and, in October 2001, the hearing commissioner released her findings. She concluded that material on the Web site contained insulting expressions in relation to Jews and the Holocaust that were clearly intended to be offensive and intimidating, and that caused offence and anxiety. Furthermore, she noted, none of the material on the Adelaide Institute site was historically, intellectually, or scientifically persuasive.

The commission found that Fredrick Toben had engaged in unlawful conduct and ordered him to “remove the contents of the Adelaide Institute Web site from the World Wide Web and not republish the content of that Web site in public elsewhere.” Toben was also required to make a public apology and publish it on the World Wide Web, and to undertake not to “publish any such material in the future.”

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 perspective on domestic and international affairs. With founder Eric Butler
now retired and in failing health, the league, under director Betty Luks, published its weekly newsletters, monthly magazines, and a quarterly journal, and maintained its Web site.

As in years past, the Citizens Electoral Councils (CEC) distributed 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 (unsuccessfully) against legislation passed by the state of Victoria outlawing the incitement and perpetration of racially motivated violence. Throughout the year, Jewish leaders in Victoria, Western Australia, and New South Wales complained about CEC activities. The CEC also established a new political party, the Curtin Labor Alliance, in an attempt to attract votes away from the Labor Party in the 2001 federal election. Leading Labor figures condemned the move, using the opportunity to highlight the dangers of the LaRouche cult.

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. Its leader, Michael Brander, claimed on his 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.” Brander sued a journalist who called him a racist for defamation, but the Adelaide magistrate threw out his case, noting that “denial of the Holocaust and failure to condemn the principles espoused by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party” were proof of his racism.

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 2001 was the 27th annual edition of the ACLU’s handbook. Various editions of the book had attacked multiculturalism and Asian immigration, promoted the likes of Pauline Hanson and Fredrick Toben, and strongly criticized a range of behaviors that the ACLU attributed to the Jewish community.
Nazi War Criminals

The major war-crimes case in Australia in 2001 was that of Konrad Kalejs. A Latvian-born Australian citizen, Kalejs had been deported from the U.S. and Canada for his involvement in Nazi crimes, fled to Great Britain, and, after being exposed by the media there, arrived back in Australia in December 1999. Australian authorities arrested Kalejs in December 2000 following an extradition request from the government of Latvia. At the initial hearing of the request in May 2001, a magistrate found that Kalejs should be extradited, as all the formalities had been observed and the request was genuinely for the stated purpose. In the course of her judgment, the magistrate said, “It seems to me that the lapse of time means little given the offences for which extradition is sought.” Kalejs appealed both against the magistrate’s decision and against the initial decision of the minister for justice to allow extradition proceedings. The appeal against the minister for justice was heard in September, with the judge reserving decision. Kalejs, however, died on November 8.

Another prominent suspect living in Australia, Antanas Gudelis, had been under investigation by Lithuanian authorities since 1999, but he died in August, though the fact was not revealed until September 12.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

The Australian Jewish community continued to grow through immigration, particularly from South Africa and the former Soviet Union (FSU). 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 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 growing steadily.

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 spouses in 2001, 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 a disproportionately high percentage of elderly people.

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. Despite the assistance provided by local communities, particularly on the arrival of these Jews in the country, communal leadership remained concerned that, while these newcomers were integrating well into Australian society, they were not similarly integrating into the Jewish community.

Communal Affairs

Jeremy Jones was elected executive vice president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), the most important Jewish representative body in the country, succeeding Nina Bassat. Ron Weiser continued as president of the Zionist Federation of Australia, and Stanley Roth became federal president of the United Israel Appeal. Mark Leibler remained national chairman of the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC), which continued its close association with the American Jewish Committee, and Dr. Colin Rubenstein continued as its executive director.

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.

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. During 2001, the ECAJ participated in two national dialogues, one with representatives of the Uniting Church in Australia, and the other its annual dialogue with the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference. The ECAJ, its affiliates, and a number of senior rabbis participated in the activities of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and members of the Jewish community around Australia participated in local councils of Christians and Jews.

Jeremy Jones continued as chair of the Advisory Group of Faith Communities on Aboriginal Reconciliation, a body that brings together leaders of a number of Christian denominations, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and Baha'is on a regular basis to coordinate activities against racism and on behalf of indigenous Australians.

While there was no formal dialogue program with Muslim bodies during 2001, after September 11, the ECAJ, the National Council of Churches of Australia, and the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils issued a joint statement. Also, there were a number of public activities in which Jews, Muslims, and others worked together.

Culture

Australian Jews played a significant role in the artistic and cultural life of the country. An example was the one-act multimedia production, *And Then They Came for Me—Remembering the World of Anne Frank*. Directed by Ira Hal Seidenstein, it related the story of Anne Frank and her family through the reminiscences of two survivors who knew Anne during the Nazi occupation of Holland. Two important books by Jewish Australians were Arnold Zable's highly acclaimed *Café Scheherazade*, and Diane Armstrong's *The Voyage of Their Life: The Story of the SS Derna and Its Passengers*, which charted the journey of a ship that carried Jewish Holocaust-survivor emigrés from Marseilles to Australia. An acclaimed contribution to literature on the Holocaust was Ruth Wajnryb's
The Silence: How Tragedy Speaks, an examination of the linguistic practices of victims of trauma, based upon the experiences of the children of Holocaust survivors.

The Sydney Jewish Museum continued its tradition of providing valuable contributions to Jewish cultural life and to the wider community with its exhibition, Crossroads: Shanghai and the Jews in China. The city of Shanghai provided a safe haven for 18,000 Jews fleeing Nazi Germany and Austria in November 1938. A decade later, 2,500 of these Jews made it to Australia, and the exhibition documented their experiences. The Melbourne Jewish Museum similarly maintained its high standards of exhibition, and also organized guided tours of areas of significance to the history of Jews in the city.

Personalia

Several members of the Jewish community received commendations on the Queen’s Birthday Honor Roll in 2001. David Baffsky, industry leader and philanthropist, Jeffrey Mahemoff, a former Bialik College president, and Dr. Paul Zimmet, a specialist in the treatment of diabetes, were all inducted into the Officers of the Order of Australia. Other honors went to Prof. Michael Besser (AM), for service to medicine as a clinician, teacher, and administrator; Prof. Fred Ehrlich, for work on rehabilitation and care for the aged and people with disabilities, and for community service; Rabbi David Rogut of North Shore Synagogue, for his service to the Jewish community and education; Estelle Gold, for 51 years of work with meals-on-wheels and the National Council of Jewish Women; Cecile Herman, for 34 years of service to the community through meals-on-wheels and her association with the Benevolent Society; Dr. Peter Sheridan for his service to the community through providing access to information resources for those stricken with multiple sclerosis; and Steven Rich, for services provided to the development of Papua New Guinea and as deputy chairman of the Salvation Army for 25 years.

The following were made Members of the Order of Australia: Israel Herzog, for his service to the Jews of Victoria; Dr. Geoffrey Metz for his involvement with the Royal Australasian College of Physicians; Leon Mow for his support for the International Diabetes Institute and other research institutes; Jacob Kronhill, awarded posthumously, for outreach for cancer patients as well as his work in human rights and aboriginal reconciliation; and Harvey Shaw, the former president of the Federation of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women.
Dr. Bryan Gaensler, 27 years old, became the youngest person ever called upon to deliver the national Australia Day address. He used the opportunity publicly to embrace his dual heritage—Jewish and Australian.

Australia and the wider Jewish community mourned the death of long-time Jewish community activist and businessman Paul Alexander Morawetz; ophthalmologist Dr. Reuben Hertzberg; anti-Hitler resistance fighter and academic Dr. Ruth Blatt; art lover Adrian Rawlins; philanthropist Ernest Lunzer; food-technology pioneer Fritz Reuter; and Holocaust survivor and Yiddish intellectual Wolf Besser.

COLIN L. RUBENSTEIN