

Australia

Political Developments

THE PERIOD UNDER REVIEW (May 1975–June 1980) was not as momentous a time of change for Australia as was the decade which preceded it (see AJYB, Vol. 76, 1976, pp. 425–433). But it was not without its own drama. On November 11, 1975 the governor-general, Sir John Kerr, dismissed the Labor government of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam after an unprecedented constitutional crisis. A divisive general election followed in which the coalition of the Liberal and National Country parties, led by Malcolm Fraser, won a landslide majority. This government went to the polls once again in December 1977, and was returned to power comfortably. Gough Whitlam retired from politics at that point, and was succeeded by Bill Hayden as leader of the opposition. Another federal election was scheduled for December 1980.

During a stormy three years in office, the Whitlam government had moved toward a more neutral policy in international affairs; away from Australia's traditional involvement with the United States, Britain, and Western Europe and toward a greater attachment to the developing nations of the third world, as well as to China and the Soviet Union. The Whitlam government also paid much greater attention to economic and political ties with the Arab countries of the Middle East and tilted increasingly toward the Afro-Asian position on Israel in the United Nations. The Labor government voted for a resolution which associated Zionism with racism at the International Women's Conference in Mexico. However, it opposed a similar resolution when it was brought up at the UN general assembly in late 1975.

The disillusionment in the Jewish community with Whitlam was deepened when it was revealed after the 1975 elections that he had considered accepting a secret campaign donation of \$500,000 from the Iraqi Ba'ath party. The proposed transaction was discovered by Labor party officials before the money was received; Whitlam was strongly censured and it was the beginning of the end for him as party leader.

Whitlam's replacement as leader, Bill Hayden, at first made overtures to the Jewish community in the hope of re-establishing the traditional close links which had existed before Whitlam's policies led to an erosion of Jewish support. But in June 1980 Hayden announced that he would visit the Middle East and meet with PLO chief Yasir Arafat in Beirut, a move which was strongly condemned by the

Jewish leadership. Although Jewish voters in Australia were influential in only two or three of the 124 seats contested in the House of Representatives, they played a disproportionate role as donors, fund-raisers, and party activists within the Labor party, and the policies of Whitlam and Hayden greatly weakened this involvement.

The Fraser government generally supported Israel in the United Nations and in its specialized agencies when extreme one-sided resolutions were proposed by the Arab or pro-Soviet bloc. Its record in this area was an improvement on that of the Whitlam government. Furthermore, Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock consistently restated the government's view that Israel could not be expected to negotiate with the PLO until the latter had abandoned its objective of destroying Israel and extended recognition to the Jewish state.

At the same time, however, there were increasing signs of pressure on the government to modify its policy so as to conform more closely with the West European position as expressed at the Venice meeting in June 1980. Although Australia remained 70 per cent self-sufficient in oil supplies, it nevertheless imported nearly one-third of its requirements from Saudi Arabia and other Arab sources. Furthermore, a lucrative trade had opened up in recent years with the Arab world; it was expected to be worth one billion dollars by 1982 and three times that figure by 1985. Both the department of foreign affairs and the department of trade were therefore lobbying intensively for a policy which would mollify Arab interests.

Domestically, Fraser went out of his way to show friendship for the Jewish community. He opened a number of synagogues and other Jewish institutions; he took a personal interest in the problems of Soviet Jewry; and he was fully accessible to Jewish leadership.

Fraser's appointment of Sir Zelman Cowen as governor-general, to succeed John Kerr in 1978, was warmly received within the Jewish community. Zelman had a distinguished career as a legal scholar, and was vice-chancellor of the University of Queensland at the time of his appointment. A member of the academic board of governors of the Hebrew University, Zelman had long been active in Jewish communal life in Melbourne, where he was born and educated. After the divisiveness of Kerr's involvement in the 1975 constitutional crisis, Zelman's appointment was widely welcomed by Australian public opinion; he had a healing influence on the political scene.

Zelman was the second Australian-born Jew to hold the position of governor-general; the first was Sir Isaac Isaacs in the 1930's. Isaacs had also been a distinguished legal scholar and a member of the high court before assuming office. In the 1940's he was the leading anti-Zionist voice in Australia and bitterly opposed the establishment of Israel. Zelman was Isaacs' biographer; but by contrast he was a committed Zionist.

Joseph Berinson (Labor), a minister in the Whitlam government, lost his seat in the 1975 landslide, but was elected to the legislative council in the state of Western Australia. Walter Jona (Liberal) served as minister for immigration and ethnic affairs and more recently as minister for community welfare services in the Victorian state government. Sydney Einfield (Labor), a former president of the Executive

Council of Australian Jewry, was minister for consumer affairs in the New South Wales state government; Paul Landa (Labor) served as minister for education in the same government. Derek Freeman (Liberal) held a seat in the New South Wales legislative council; Margaret Davis (Liberal) and Sir Asher Joel (Liberal) were no longer members.

At the municipal level, Irvin Rockman was twice elected lord mayor of Melbourne (1977–1978, 1978–1979). The late Leo Port was lord mayor of Sydney for two years until his death in 1978.

Soviet Jewry

In an unprecedented move late in 1977, Parliament voted to inquire into human rights in the Soviet Union, and in particular into the situation of Soviet Jewry. Under the chairmanship of Senator John Wheeldon (Labor), a sub-committee of the joint parliamentary foreign affairs and defense committee heard testimony from Soviet dissidents, research scholars, and members of the Jewish community with particular expertise. The report on the matter, which was issued in October 1979, was widely hailed as a major contribution to the study and understanding of human rights problems in the Soviet Union. It was the first such document to carry the imprimatur of a Western parliament.

Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism

Since the mid-1970's the main concern of the Jewish community had been the increasingly militant anti-Zionism of the extreme left, rather than the traditional antisemitism of the extreme right. Inevitably, the anti-Zionist campaign turned into the new antisemitism. A clear case in point was community radio station 3CR in Melbourne, which was dominated by Maoist and pro-PLO organizations. The station broadcast seven weekly radio programs putting forward the Arab rejectionist point of view in the most vituperative language. Despite protests from the Jewish community, the station refused to allow an alternative point of view to be presented on the ground that the United Nations had declared Zionism to be racism and the station could not allow a racist point of view to be broadcast. In 1979 the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies took the case to the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, and after drawn-out proceedings a compromise agreement was reached between the Board and 3CR. The tone of the anti-Israel programs was somewhat modified—earlier programs had called for the expulsion of “all Zionists” from Australia, radical action against the “Zionist-controlled media,” and revolutionary justice for “the Zionist imperialists” who exploited Australian workers—but a pro-Israel point of view was still barred. The Jewish community was expected to oppose a renewal of the station's license when it came up for review early in 1981.

The extreme left and the extreme right came together in bizarre fashion in 1979 when a Melbourne lawyer, John Bennett, launched a one-man campaign to promote the thesis of Arthur Butz, author of *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*. In denying

that there had ever been a Holocaust, Bennett argued that the claim about six million Jewish dead during World War II was fabricated by "the Zionists" to justify Israel's existence. The Jewish community's opposition to pro-PLO views on radio station 3CR, Bennett argued, was further proof that "the Zionists" would do anything to prevent the true story from being told. Meanwhile, the radio station was broadcasting a weekly series of programs designed to prove that the Zionists had collaborated with the Nazis in the liquidation of the six million Jews.

The Bennett and 3CR incidents had a disturbing impact on the Melbourne Jewish community, 60 per cent of which was composed of Holocaust survivors or their children. Many Jews were shocked by Bennett's ability to get widespread media attention for his views.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

Australia's Jewish population increased through some immigration from the Soviet Union, South Africa, and Israel at the end of the 1970's. Otherwise a decline would have occurred. There were 70,000 Jews in Australia, and 4,000 in New Zealand.

Communal Life

A younger Australian-born generation was beginning to have an impact on the leadership and policies of the community. This was particularly true of the leaders of the Australian Union of Jewish Students, who, aroused by an extreme left pro-PLO campaign on the campuses, emerged as mature and articulate spokesmen for Israel and Jewish interests. They brought a new level of political awareness into the main forums of Jewish community discussion.

There was a marked increase in the number of university and high school students traveling to Israel on study missions organized during the December-March summer vacation period. Of an estimated 5,000 Jewish students on Australian campuses, more than ten per cent traveled to Israel each summer.

The intermarriage rate continued to rise, and was estimated to be 15-20 per cent in the larger communities of Sydney and Melbourne, and as high as 40-50 per cent in the smaller areas of Adelaide and Perth.

Despite the growth in day school education, the Jewish community still suffered from the lack of significant input by Jewish intellectuals. Young Jewish intellectuals found Jewish life in Australia limiting and, in many ways, arid. If they did not go on *aliyah*, they were often lost to organized Jewish life because there were few forums available for their participation.

Against these negative features a number of positive trends were evident. There was a return to Orthodoxy among students and younger academics, many of whom

were attracted to the Chabbad movement, which had a significant impact, particularly on the Melbourne Jewish community. There were weekly Jewish radio programs in Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth, generally of a much higher standard than their print counterparts. Cultural events, such as the annual hasidic song festival and Yiddish language concerts, drew large crowds.

Jewish Education

If there was a distinctive feature which marked Australian Jewry, it was its continued emphasis on Jewish day school education. Enrollments continued to increase, and new schools were established. In Melbourne it was estimated that some 80 per cent of Jewish children of primary school age and nearly 50 per cent of those of secondary school age attended day schools. Melbourne had eight schools on 14 campuses: Mt. Scopus College (traditional) with an enrollment of 2,200 from kindergarten through secondary school; Yeshiva College and Beth Rivka (Chabbad) with a combined enrollment of 700; Adass Yisroel (Congregation of Hungarian Jews), 70; Sholem Aleichem College (Yiddish), 120; Bialik College (Zionist), 350; Yavneh College (Mizrachi), 450; and King David School (the first day school established by a Liberal congregation in Australia), 150.

The establishment of King David School in 1978 followed a lengthy debate within the Liberal congregations (who were affiliated with the World Union for Progressive Judaism) over the advisability of day school training. Until recently the majority view within the Liberal congregations had been that day schools ran counter to the interests of Jews in an open society, which called for full participation by its citizenry, regardless of religion. But a new generation of Australian-born rabbis, in particular Rabbi John Levi, chief minister of Melbourne's Temple Beth Israel, developed a different climate of opinion amongst parents under 40, who were the main supporters of the new school.

Although Sydney had only three schools compared with Melbourne's eight, and only one which went to the full secondary level, the rate of increase in attendance at Jewish day schools there was even more marked than in Melbourne. It was estimated that in Sydney more than 40 per cent of Jewish children attended such primary schools, and that 25 per cent continued to the secondary level. Moriah College had an enrollment of close to 1,000; Massadah College and the Sydney Talmudical College had over 600 pupils between them.

In Perth, Carmel School added a high school to serve more than 250 students. Adelaide established Massadah College, now in its fourth year as a primary school.

Although there was no doubt about the academic success of the Jewish day schools in general subjects, the record in Jewish and Hebrew studies was more mixed. As elsewhere, the main problem in this regard was the lack of sufficiently qualified Jewish studies teachers. Most schools remained dependent on short-term appointments of Israeli teachers. However, there was an effort to recruit Australian graduates and teachers to Jewish studies.

At the tertiary level, Prahran College of Advanced Education in Melbourne introduced a full diploma course in Jewish studies in 1976. E. Paltiel, formerly of Temple University in the United States, was the senior lecturer in charge of the course, which attracted strong support from Jewish and non-Jewish students.

Immigration and Social Welfare

Since 1973 Australia had accepted some 4,000 Jews from the Soviet Union. Most of these arrivals came in the years 1977–1980. Most Soviet Jews settling in Australia were members of young families under 40, and although few had much contact with any form of Jewish identification, the community was relatively successful in attracting their children to Jewish day schools. In Melbourne, for example, more than 50 per cent of Jewish children from the Soviet Union attended these schools. Generally, their parents, who had professional qualifications, had little difficulty in obtaining employment and were well integrated into the general community.

Growing numbers of South African Jews were settling in Australia, although precise figures were difficult to obtain. Most South African Jews did not require the assistance of communal welfare agencies and were quickly absorbed into both the mainstream and Jewish communities. It was estimated that 3,000–4,000 Jews from South Africa settled in Australia between 1975 and 1980.

Personalia

Isador Magid, chairman of the UIA-Keren Hayesod and a member of the board of governors of the Jewish Agency, was awarded the Bublick Prize by the Hebrew University, the first Australian to be so honored. Isi J. Leibler, president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and a member of the executive of the World Jewish Congress, was made a Commander of the British Empire, as was Henry Krongold, philanthropist and former president of UIA-Keren Hayesod. Rabbi Alfred Fabian of Sydney was awarded the Order of the British Empire, as was Hilary Pryor, former president of Australian B'nai B'rith. Earl Owen received the Order of Australia for his contribution to microsurgery. Rabbi Raymond Apple, chief minister of the Great Synagogue in Sydney, was made a Member of Australia, as was Sid Muller, former president of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies. Justice Gordon Samuels of the New South Wales supreme court was appointed chancellor of the University of New South Wales. Judge Harvey Cooper was named to the bench of the Sydney district court.

The Sydney Jewish community suffered a significant loss with the death in 1975 of Louis Klein, former president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and chairman of the UIA-Keren Hayesod. Maurice Allen died in 1976 while serving as president of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies. Harry Goldstein, former president of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies, died in 1978.