Australia

National Affairs

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) government of Prime Minister Bob Hawke remained in power in 1989–90, although it was returned in the March 1990 federal election with a reduced majority. Hawke, who was on the right of the ALP, was an avowed ally of Jews and Israel, with a proven record of sympathy extending back many years, and was known to have several close friendships with prominent Jews. In 1989–90, however, his government’s perceived tilt toward a pro-PLO position—mainly a result of left-wing ALP influences but apparently also because of Hawke’s own impatience with the policies of Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir—caused anxiety to Jews and other supporters of Israel.

The bitter and lengthy domestic pilots’ dispute of 1989–90, which grounded the airlines, focused public attention on Hawke’s close friendship with the Jewish transport magnate Sir Peter Abeles, co-owner of one of the airlines. The alacrity with which the Hawke government moved to compensate the crippled airlines and the unprecedented tactics used against striking pilots raised considerable media and public speculation regarding the extent of Sir Peter’s influence in government circles. Although much of the speculation came from antiplutocrats on the Left, it inevitably led to anti-Semitic expressions and allegations of “Jewish” or “Zionist” control by predictable sources, mainly on both the fringe Left and Right.

Relations with Israel

The period 1989–90 witnessed a continued erosion of Australian government support for Israel and an upgrading of contacts with the PLO. These developments did not suggest a drastic or fundamental change in government policy but were nonetheless disturbing.

In 1989 there were two officially sanctioned visits to Australia by official representatives of the PLO. Zebdi Terzi, the PLO’s UN representative, arrived in March, and Dr. Nabil Sha’ath, a close associate of Yasir Arafat, in September. Although both men were so-called moderates within the PLO, their publicized meetings with Australian government ministers and officials would have been highly unlikely in previous years. Dr. Clovis Maksoud, a senior envoy from the Arab League, also visited Australia during 1989.
In early March 1989, Minister for Foreign Affairs Sen. Gareth Evans advised the self-styled Australian representative of the PLO, Ali Kazak, that the federal government had no objection to Kazak’s Canberra headquarters, the Palestine Information Office, being renamed the “Palestine Liberation Organization Office.” Evans stressed, however, that the office could not be accorded diplomatic or consular status and added that certain reported statements of PLO leaders implying a continued dedication to terrorism undermined “the credibility of the PLO position.”

In April 1989, the Australian ambassador to the United Nations, Dr. Peter Wilenski (who happened to be Jewish), delivered an extremely one-sided speech condemning Israeli practices in the occupied territories and criticizing what he claimed was the restricted access of Muslim worshipers to the Al Aksa mosque in Jerusalem. He even offered specific apologies for Israel’s alleged policy at the mosque to Saudi Arabia’s UN ambassador. At the same time, Australia voted with 129 countries to condemn Israeli policy in the West Bank and Gaza.

Following announcement of the Israeli national unity government’s peace plan (dubbed the “Shamir Plan” in the press) in March 1989, and after the Solidarity Conference in Jerusalem at which broad consensus among Jewish leaders from around the world was achieved, the Australian Jewish leadership registered appropriate protests at the erosion of government policy toward Israel. In April, Isi Leibler, president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), had a lengthy personal meeting with Prime Minister Hawke, to whom he had sent a subsequently published open letter protesting the government’s shift. Hawke’s response to the letter was acerbic, but he did condemn Wilenski and Foreign Minister Evans over Wilenski’s UN speech, the one-sidedness of which had distressed him, he said.

In May 1989, ECAJ president Isi Leibler and Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA) president Mark Leibler led an unprecedentedly large delegation of 24 Jewish representatives to Canberra, where they met with Hawke and Evans. Although they found Hawke’s responses to their concerns disappointing, they believed that they had impressed upon him and Evans the fact that their protests reflected the sentiments of the Jewish community, not merely the opinions of “hard-line” leaders, as had been suggested.

Soon after its reelection in March 1990, the Hawke government issued a Middle East policy statement that called on Israel to halt settlements in the West Bank, on the grounds that the settlements violated international law and significantly hindered peace. The statement also recognized the central importance of the Palestinian issue in the peace process; acknowledged the Palestinians’ right of self-determination, including their right to an independent state, if they so chose; and averred that the PLO represented a significant portion of Palestinian opinion and should be party to achieving a comprehensive peace agreement. At the same time, the government—which had never recognized Israel’s annexation of East Jerusalem—now explicitly identified East Jerusalem as part of the West Bank.

In June 1990, Leslie Caplan, new president of the ECAJ, and Mark Leibler, president of the ZFA, jointly called on the Australian government to immediately
suspend contacts with the PLO in view of recent terrorist attacks on Israeli beaches and Arafat's failure to condemn them. The following month a joint delegation led by Caplan and Leibler met with Hawke and Evans in Canberra. The latter reiterated government policy on East Jerusalem, while the Jewish delegation emphasized that the concept of a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty was nonnegotiable. Subsequently, the government issued the following statement:

Australia, like the U.S. and international community generally, does not recognize the annexation of East Jerusalem by Israel in 1967. We regard the final status of the territory as remaining to be determined by negotiation.

Australia would regard an acceptable outcome for these negotiations as being an undivided Jerusalem in which Jews and Arabs were free to live anywhere.

Australia's approach to future high-level dialogue with the PLO representatives is that we will only pursue such contacts where we are satisfied that they will contribute directly and constructively to the achievement of peace in the Middle East.

The Australian government continued to press upon Israel the responsibility to solve the Palestinian problem. In September 1990, the ECAJ and ZFA unavailingly repeated their call to Foreign Minister Evans to halt all dialogue with the PLO in light of the PLO's support for Saddam Hussein.

Throughout this period, Andrew Peacock, leader of the opposition Liberal party until mid-1990, and his successor, Dr. John Hewson, displayed definite pro-Israel sympathies. The Liberal party strongly supported the government's stance on the Gulf crisis. In September 1990, a joint ECAJ-ZFA delegation met with Hewson, who demonstrated a genuine interest in Jewish communal affairs and concerns and displayed a commitment to positive relations with Israel in the spirit of his Liberal predecessors.

Anti-Israel Activity

The number of Muslims in Australia was about 110,000, although the inflated figure of 300,000 was accepted by some politicians, with implications for the Zionist lobby. Most Muslims in Australia came from non-Arab lands, while many Lebanese Arabs were Christians and tended to support Israel. Nevertheless, there was an active pro-Arab lobby in Australia, comprising Arab Muslims and their non-Arab sympathizers. It produced the periodical Free Palestine. The followers of Sheik Taj el-Din Hamed al-Hilaly, leader of the Muslim community (see below, "Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism"), were involved in anti-Israel propaganda: late in 1989, the Sydney University Islamic Society organized a forum entitled "Zionism—the Other Face of Nazism."

In June 1989, Prime Minister Hawke held a lengthy meeting with a 13-member Arab delegation, which protested Israeli actions during the intifada and called on Hawke to pressure Israel to negotiate with the PLO once certain conditions had been met.
In October 1990, at the start of his three-day visit to Australia, Nelson Mandela dubbed Israel a “terrorist state” and made other disparaging remarks that dismayed Australian Jews.

Although in their treatment of foreign affairs the Australian press and media were chiefly preoccupied with other matters such as the turmoil in China, changes in Eastern Europe, and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the Arab-Israeli dispute continued to come under close scrutiny. Israel's policies in the occupied territories repeatedly fell victim to blatantly unfair and biased reporting and commentary.

In 1990 the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) presented a “telemovie” depicting Israeli traitor Mordechai Vanunu as a prisoner of conscience. (Rev. John McKnight, the Sydney Anglican cleric who converted Vanunu to Christianity prior to his crime, was at the time in Britain soliciting support for the jailed Israeli.) Terry Lane's almost consistently hostile interviews on ABC radio, Tony Walker's reportage in the Melbourne Age, and articles and editorials regularly appearing in the Adelaide Advertiser and the Canberra Times also gave cause for concern. In general, editorials appearing in the mainstream press were far more responsible and balanced than stories distributed by international press agencies or those written by journalists writing primarily for the British press.

In 1989 the Australian Institute of Jewish Affairs organized a major seminar on "Israel and the Media: The Reporters' Viewpoint." The speakers included senior Israeli journalist Hirsh Goodman and a wide cross-section of leading journalists from the Australian print and electronic media. The seminar left little doubt that the Jewish public perceived a definite imbalance in media coverage of Israeli affairs, despite some excellent media presentations which countered the negative picture.

Nazi War Criminals

The prosecution of Nazi war criminals living in Australia remained high on the government's agenda, but it proved a highly divisive issue among the public at large. Andrew Peacock, leader of the opposition Liberal party, foreshadowed his party's intention to scrap the War Crimes Commission if it won power.

In December 1988, following a campaign by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the Australian Parliament narrowly passed a controversial War Crimes Act, enabling prosecution of suspected war criminals resident in Australia. The catalyst for this legislation was journalist Mark Aarons's meticulously documented research into the possible entry of Nazi war criminals into Australia in the immediate aftermath of World War II, when thousands of European displaced persons were admitted to the country. Aarons's allegations were broadcast in a series on the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) radio in 1986. (His book based on the series, Sanctuary, was published by William Heinemann Australia in 1989.)

Debate leading to the legislation, frequently acrimonious, was often tinged with overt or covert anti-Semitism. The legislation was viewed in many quarters as a specifically Jewish issue, any resultant investigations and prosecutions being de-
picted as a waste of taxpayers' money. Some opponents of the legislation warned of the difficulties in launching a credible prosecution of alleged offenders after a 50-year time lapse; others deplored what they claimed was a Jewish thirst for vengeance. Vociferous opponents of the legislation included Liberal party senator David Hamer, who declared that the legislation reflected an internationally orchestrated plot by Jews to divert public attention from Israel's troubles; Anglican archbishop Dr. David Penman of Melbourne, who counseled forgiveness; the Melbourne Age conservative columnist Michael Barnard; the periodical News-Weekly, organ of the right-wing Catholic National Civic Council, headed by B.A. Santamaria; and members of Australia's Baltic and Ukrainian communities.

Among Jews, there was broad if discreetly articulated support for the legislation, the only notable Jewish dissenters being Dr. Frank Knopfelmacher, a seasoned controversialist and retired academic whose family had perished in the Holocaust, and political scientist Robert Manne, columnist for the right-wing periodical Quadrant. They argued that the legislation was futile, likely to engender anti-Semitism, and questioned the Soviet evidence that would be involved in any trials. Manne compared Nazi atrocities with the activities of Japanese emperor Hirohito. The subsequent "Quadrant affair," which erupted in 1989, focused on a bitter exchange between Manne and another right-wing commentator, Prof. W.D. Rubinstein, a supporter of the legislation who deplored the "obscene false" Hirohito analogy. Manne had complained that the Hawke government was exhibiting double standards in prosecuting "minor European war criminals" while sending mourners to the funeral of Hirohito, whom "many Australians still regard as the most important Japanese war criminal of them all." Rubinstein responded that, for all its undeniable aggression and brutality between 1931 and 1945 (including atrocities against Australian prisoners of war), "imperial Japan at its worst never engaged in genocide . . ." and in fact refused to kill Jews living in its domains, such as Shanghai. The affair threatened to jeopardize what the president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Isi Leibler, called "the long-standing alliance between a significant element of the intellectual right in Australia" and the Jewish community.

The War Crimes Commission, established in 1987 in anticipation of the legislation, reputedly investigated up to 100 alleged offenders, but by the end of 1990 only one had been charged. In January 1990, 74-year-old Adelaide resident Ivan Timofeyevich Polyukovich was accused of the murder of 24 Jewish men, women, and children in the Ukraine and of complicity in the murders of a further 850 people from the Serniki ghetto between August 1941 and May 1943. The trial of Polyukovich, who was free on bail, was scheduled to begin in Adelaide on July 30, 1990, and the court planned to sit in the Ukraine, Israel, and the United States in order to hear testimony. However, on July 29, Polyukovich was admitted to hospital with gunshot wounds, apparently self-inflicted, and he twice attempted to remove his life-support equipment. Doubt as to whether his trial (and any others) would ever proceed increased following a challenge to the constitutionality of the legislation heard in the High Court in September 1990.
Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism in Australia remained slight. Yet, possibly as a result of publicity surrounding war-crimes legislation and German reunification, 1989 and 1990 witnessed an escalation of organized anti-Semitic vandalism, graffiti and swastika daubings, hooliganism, verbal abuse on the streets, plus actual or threatened violence against Jews, synagogues, and Jewish property. There were many such incidents in Sydney and Melbourne—including desecration of graves—and Perth and Adelaide also experienced their share. Other minority groups, especially Asians, as well as overseas aid organizations, were the targets of similar attacks. Much of this activity was undoubtedly linked to small neo-Nazi skinhead groups, such as White Power and National Action. Attacks in 1989 seemed to peak around Hitler's 100th birthday in April. Many painted slogans, including one in 1990 warning that a Melbourne park was prohibited to Jews, were written in fluent, sophisticated German. This held disturbing echoes for Melbourne's large population of Holocaust survivors and fueled speculation that some of the perpetrators were of German descent. An anti-Semitic and anti-Asian gang of neo-Nazi skinheads was reported to be operating in Brisbane, too, during 1990.

The most potentially worrisome source of anti-Semitism in Australia remained the League of Rights, an extreme right-wing, avowedly Christian organization associated with several ostensibly respectable front groups that published periodicals and ran bookstores, all promoting anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, and Holocaust revisionism. At the league's 1990 convention, its elderly leader, Eric Butler, told his mainly rural followers that "Jewish efforts" to outlaw racism had to be vigorously resisted, and he stressed the priority of exposing the Holocaust as "one of the great myths of our time." During recent years, Jewish leaders and others had made concerted efforts to expose the league for the menace it was, especially as some public figures, apparently unaware of the anti-Semitism and racism it peddled along with less sinister views, occasionally lent it credibility by addressing it. As Australia slid deep into economic recession during 1990, Butler found himself in demand as a speaker, particularly in rural Victoria and Queensland. There, his thinly and not-so-thinly veiled references to a world Jewish conspiracy as an explanation for current economic woes appeared to have fallen on some gullible ears and were parroted from time to time in letters to local newspapers.

In 1989, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry presented a detailed report on anti-Semitism to the National Inquiry on Racial Violence. Prepared by Prof. W.D. Rubinstein, the report included information provided by elected Jewish leaders from each state.

In October 1989, a Racial Vilification Amendment to the New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Act provided that individuals who incited hatred, contempt, or severe ridicule toward a person or group because of their race or nationality would face penalties of up to $1,000 (Australian) and six months in jail. Organizations convicted of racial vilification would face fines of up to $A10,000.
Following extensive lobbying by Doron Ur, president of the Council of Western Australian Jewry, the Western Australian Parliament enacted similar legislation in October 1990. The Criminal Code (Incitement to Racial Hatred) Act came in the wake of five years of aggressive racist activity by the white supremacist Australian Nationalist Movement, which vowed to drive Jews, Asians, and coloreds out of Australia. (In September 1990, the movement's leader and five followers were jailed for a series of criminal offenses, mostly against Asians.) The Criminal Code Act imposed tough penalties of up to two years in jail or a $A2,000-fine on persons found guilty of possessing, distributing, or displaying material "intended to cause racial hatred," which had been exemplified by anti-Semitic and anti-Asian posters in Perth.

In Victoria, Jews joined other ethnic minorities in advocating racial vilification legislation at a specially convened hearing of the federal Human Rights Commission in September 1989. Their concern stemmed from recent cases that included neo-Nazi graffiti on synagogues and other Jewish buildings and the slayings of two young Asians in separate attacks in Melbourne in 1989.

The Victorian government, however, rather than following the examples of New South Wales and Western Australia, seemed to place its faith in education as a means of combating racism. Consequently, in 1990 the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies, invoking local racial vilification legislation, lodged a complaint with their state's Anti-Discrimination Board about a booklet published in Victoria. The booklet, an annual guide to legal rights by Melbourne lawyer John Bennett, contained gross and disturbing anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist comments. Bennett, a leading proponent of Holocaust revisionism with links to the Institute for Historical Review in California, had been publicizing his allegations of "no gas chambers" and Jewish media control and censorship since 1978, attacking several Australian Jewish leaders by name, and causing deep offense to the Jewish community. Meanwhile, in 1990 the Australian Institute of Jewish Affairs, after consulting other ethnic organizations, produced an innovative and acclaimed television commercial aimed at fighting racial stereotyping.

Arab anti-Semitism, as distinct from anti-Zionism, had not generally surfaced in Australia. But in September 1988, Sheik al-Hilaly, imam of a major Sydney mosque, declared before a public function at Sydney University that Jews constituted "a cancer in European society," considered other humans "animals . . . unworthy of living," were the "underlying cause of all wars," and tried "to control the world through sex, sexual perversion, treason, and economic hoarding." Hilaly, who had arrived in Australia from Egypt on a visitor's permit in 1982, constantly flouted Australian immigration laws and made inflammatory statements against Lebanese Christians and moderate Muslim elements in Australia. His election in 1989 as the first Mufti of Australia, despite vigorous opposition from some Muslims, indicated the level of his support.

Calls to deport Hilaly, in which the Jewish community was joined by public figures and newspaper editorials, brought countercharges of denial of free speech
and claims that Islam was under attack. Although Hilaly did not comply with a recommendation made by the chairman of the New South Wales Ethnic Affairs Commission that he apologize to the Jewish community for his 1988 comments, in September 1989 the federal minister for immigration extended Hilaly's visa for a further 12 months, claiming that Hilaly had retracted his anti-Semitic remarks in a letter to Prime Minister Bob Hawke. Hilaly was to be granted permanent residence only on condition that he proved willing to promote “understanding and harmony” between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Although this proviso went unfulfilled, in September 1990, Hilaly was granted permanent residency, partly on the grounds that he had Australian-born dependent children. The government's decision was widely condemned within and without the Jewish community. Anti-Jewish remarks made by Hilaly during the Gulf War only served to enhanced Jewish wariness of him.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Australian Jewry in 1990 continued to be a community at ease with itself and with the wider society. Whereas members of the older Jewish community thoroughly identified with Australia's British outlook, a fact that facilitated their acceptance, the development of multiculturalism over the past two decades enabled contemporary Jews to manifest a distinctiveness unknown to their predecessors. Far more kipot were worn on the streets than 30 years earlier, and owing to the influx of Holocaust survivors following World War II, far more Yiddish was heard in Australia (predominantly Melbourne) than at the turn of the century, when Eastern European newcomers were actively discouraged from speaking “the jargon” by communal leaders fearful of “conspicuousness.” Australian Jewry had become a self-confident ethnic group encompassing all strands of Jewish allegiance and identity, from strict Orthodoxy to secular humanism, from Revisionist Zionism to Bundism. It flourished in its pluralism but was overwhelmingly supportive of Israel. Its numbers and high degree of Jewish commitment were augmented in recent years by immigrants from South Africa, and it boasted an impressive network of Jewish day schools. It had its Cassandras, but overall its prospects seemed bright.

Demography

More evidence became available about Australian Jewry from the 1986 Federal Census and other sources. Australia held a census every five years—most recently in 1981 and 1986—in which there was an optional religion question. The 1986 census revealed 69,089 declared Jews by religion in Australia, distributed by state as follows: Victoria, 32,358; New South Wales, 28,197; Western Australia, 3,919; Queensland, 2,631; South Australia, 1,144; Australian Capital Territory (Canberra), 501; Tasmania, 160; Northern Territory, 98. These figures were known to be sub-
stantial underestimates, however. Many Jews failed to respond to the census question for fear of anti-Semitism, for reasons of privacy, or because their identity as Jews was not religious. Most demographers believed that the actual number of Jews in Australia was 90,000–93,000 in 1986 and over 100,000 by the close of 1990. Support for these estimates was provided by the release, for the first time, of a communal list maintained by the Jewish Welfare Society in Melbourne, which showed that there were 41,276 Jews in Victoria (chiefly Melbourne) in 1988—compared with 32,358 found in the census—a figure which was itself believed to be only 90–95 percent complete.

Jews in Melbourne and Sydney—by far the chief centers of Jewish life in Australia—were mainly clustered in a number of recognizably Jewish neighborhoods, chiefly the Caulfield-East St. Kilda districts of Melbourne and, in Sydney, in two distinct areas, Bondi-Randwick in the eastern suburbs and on the near North Shore. In Melbourne, a new area of Jewish settlement, Doncaster, was being developed in the northeast of the city, chiefly by recent South African settlers.

The majority of Australian Jews were still foreign-born. Even though the generation of Holocaust survivors was dying off, they were being replaced by new migrants from South Africa, the Soviet Union, Israel, and North America. In 1986, 3,830 Australian Jews still spoke Yiddish in the home, according to the census, 2,916 of them in Melbourne. Australian Jewry—according to the census figures—was disproportionately elderly, with over 15 percent of Jews identified in the census being 65 or more. However, recent demographic research by Prof. W.D. Rubinstein (Melbourne) and Gary Eckstein (Sydney) indicated that it was also one of the few Diaspora communities with a birthrate above the replacement level, at least in Melbourne and (less certainly) Sydney.

Most Australian Jews were situated in the upper middle class, and Australia’s “rich lists” in the 1980s consistently included about 25 percent Jews among the country’s 200 wealthiest persons. Most of this group were in Melbourne, chiefly engaged in retailing, property development, finance, light manufacturing, and personal services. Many were immigrant Holocaust survivors who exemplified the traditional “rags-to-riches” story. The majority of Jews were engaged in small and medium-sized businesses and the free professions, such as law and medicine. Australian Jews, especially those in property and finance, suffered heavily in the recession which began in 1990, and there were some spectacular and well-publicized examples of business failures (as there were among Gentiles).

Communal Affairs

At the end of 1989, Isi Leibler of Melbourne ended his term as president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), the community’s national umbrella organization and principal policy-formulating body. Leslie Caplan of Sydney succeeded Leibler as president, and hence as Australian Jewry’s acknowledged spokesperson. During this period, Mark Leibler of Melbourne held the presidency of the
Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA), the umbrella body of Australian Zionist organizations and the principal communal body concerned with Israel.

Despite financial constraints imposed on many of its wealthy backers as a result of the economic recession, the privately funded Australian Institute of Jewish Affairs (founded 1983), a colloquia-sponsoring and report-issuing body, maintained its invaluable role. It continued to bring international Jewish scholars to Australia and was in the forefront of the fight against anti-Semitism and racism. However, the virtual and often absolute lack of female participation in its forums began to provoke open resentment. In particular, the dearth of official female participants in its major 1990 conference on “The Modern Jew in Crisis” drew sharp public condemnation, not only from feminists.

Indeed, despite some inroads, Australian Jewish women continued to be vastly underrepresented on the communal decision-making level. In 1990 some feminists began to confront publicly the middle-class, volunteer-oriented National Council of Jewish Women, questioning its relevance and appropriateness to the lives and aspirations of modern women and suggesting that its existence impeded the involvement of women in the general Jewish leadership.

Religion

The period 1989–90 saw a number of developments in Jewish religious life. Most Jews in Australia, whether Liberal/Progressive (the terms are used interchangeably and correspond to American Reform) or nominally Orthodox, attended synagogue only on the High Holy Days and special occasions. But in both Melbourne and Sydney there were flourishing Adass Israel (primarily Hungarian ultra-Orthodox) and Lubavitcher congregations, and a Chabad presence had been established in Launceston, Tasmania, which had about 50 Jewish residents.

Liberal congregations existed in all major mainland Jewish population centers; their relations with the Orthodox community were inclined to be tense. Although claims were sometimes made in Melbourne that people visibly connected with Liberal congregations could never hope to be elected to the executive of the representative Jewish Community Council of Victoria, in fact Liberal members did sit on the executive, which in the past included Rabbi John Levi, Australia’s senior Liberal rabbi. The traditionally moderate middle ground in Australian Jewish Orthodoxy showed signs of shrinking, owing to incursions made by right-wing Orthodoxy, on the one hand, and the Liberal movement, on the other.

Late in 1989 the Hobart synagogue in Tasmania, dating from 1845, was rededicated. Services were held frequently at the synagogue during 1989–90, with participation by mainland communal leaders, including Lubavitcher figures, but especially Rabbi Daniel Schiff of Melbourne's Temple Beth Israel and members of his congregation.

In February 1990, a third congregation in Perth, which had been informally established during the mid-1980s by South African immigrants and was described
as being of "an Orthodox-Conservative character," was formally constituted. In July 1990, Australian governor-general Bill Hayden opened Adelaide’s new Nathan and Miriam Solomon Center, a complex housing the Orthodox synagogue, social hall, school, and kindergarten, as well as the offices of the State Zionist Council and the meeting room of the Zionist youth group Habonim.

Most descendants of rural pioneers were either lost to Judaism or had relocated to the main urban centers. However, some Jews did reside in remote localities, for professional or other reasons; they included academics at outlying universities. Adherents of the Lubavitcher movement continued their outreach program to such Jews, especially those in rural New South Wales and Victoria.

In July 1990, plans to found a Liberal temple in Cairns, a coastal city and popular tourist resort in northern Queensland, were announced by Rabbi Brian Fox of Sydney, who estimated that 100 Jews lived there. In September 1990, Jews living in various small and isolated rural localities in northern New South Wales decided to establish ongoing contact through the formation of the Northern Rivers Jewish Community.

Soviet Jewry

In February 1989, the Solomon Mikhoels Cultural Center opened in Moscow, largely as a result of the efforts of veteran Soviet Jewry activist Isi Leibler, then vice-president of the World Jewish Congress, who affixed the mezuzah during the opening ceremony. Australian Jews also played major roles in other activities that coincided with the center’s opening, including capacity-crowd concerts in Moscow and Leningrad.

In March 1990, the Australian Institute of Jewish Affairs sponsored the visit of Soviet academic Dr. Sergei Rogov, head of the Department of Military and Political Studies at the USSR Academy of Sciences. He lectured on “The New Russian Anti-Semitism and Glasnost” before audiences in Melbourne and Sydney.

During 1990, with the campaign for Soviet Jewry apparently having achieved success, Australian Jewry’s almost 30-year involvement in this area diminished. However, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry continued to make representations to the Soviet embassy in Canberra on behalf of the last of the refuseniks; for the implementation of direct flights between the Soviet Union and Israel; and for official condemnation of growing Soviet anti-Semitism. The Australian Senate unanimously adopted a resolution introduced by a Jewish member, Sen. Peter Baume, calling on the USSR to facilitate Jewish migration to Israel by honoring “its agreement permitting direct flights. . . .” This resolution was duly conveyed to the Soviet ambassador.

Toward the end of 1989 the Australian government indicated its intention to curtail its program of humanitarian immigration from the Soviet Union to Australia as a result of the liberalization of Soviet immigration policy. The ECAJ supported this stand and officially resolved to encourage all Soviet Jews to emigrate to Israel,
except for intending migrants with relatives already in Australia, to whom the family-reunion principle should be allowed to apply. In official statements, the ECAJ commended the “extraordinary contribution” made by the Lubavitcher movement in the social integration of Soviet Jewish migrants in both Melbourne and Sydney, as well as the role of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society.

The ECAJ also expressed concern for the safety of beleaguered Jews in Syria, Ethiopia, and Iran. Australia’s Sephardim, largely of Egyptian and Iraqi origin, successfully raised public awareness of the continuing plight of Syrian Jewry and made representations to the Australian government about bringing this issue to the United Nations and other international forums.

**Education**

Jewish day-school education continued to expand. In April 1989, the Doncaster Jewish Day School was opened in a Melbourne suburb to serve the children of members of the North Eastern Jewish War Memorial Center. In April 1990, Sinai College, the first Jewish day school in Queensland, was opened in Brisbane. These two new schools brought to 17 the number of Jewish day schools in Australia.

By contrast, Jewish studies at university level were woefully neglected by communal benefactors capable of funding chairs and courses, despite indications of clear interest and an obvious need. Still, the period did see some expansion in Jewish-interest courses at Australian universities as well as adult-education programs arranged by synagogues and other Jewish institutions.

The Australian Association for Jewish Studies, founded in 1988 under the presidency of Adelaide academic Dr. Evan Zuesse, held successful conferences in Melbourne in 1989 and Sydney in 1990. Papers were given on a wide range of topics by academics and others with an interest in Jewish subjects before enthusiastic audiences.

**Jewish-Christian Relations**

In August 1990, the Australian Institute of Jewish Affairs published a substantial and original report on the attitudes of the Australian church press toward Jews, Israel, and anti-Semitism, co-authored by W.D. Rubinstein and Michael Cohen. The report found that “left-wing” church groups were often very hostile to Israel, while “conservative” church groups either demonstrated some residual anti-Semitism or ignored Jews completely. Overall, the Catholic press was consistently more sympathetic to the Jewish people and much more sensitive to Jewish issues than the Protestant press, but with two glaring exceptions. One was the “almost medieval anti-Semitism” contained in an article by a prominent layman in the Victorian Catholic Church’s official weekly, the Advocate (since defunct). The other was the “adamant hostility to Nazi war crimes trials” of News-Weekly, organ of the Catholic political National Civic Council. (Melbourne’s Anglican archbishop, Dr. David
Penman, who died in October 1989, was also the focus of controversy over the war-crimes issue, discussed above.

In March 1989, a senior Uniting Church (a merger of Methodists and Presbyterians) minister with a background of anti-Israel statements, Rev. Dick Wootton, urged Christian clergy to boycott Israeli-sponsored tours of Israel. He advised clergy to identify with the plight of the Palestinians, who "have risen against their Israeli oppressors." His remarks coincided with a tour by Christian clergy of Israel and Egypt led by Rabbi John Levi of Melbourne's Temple Beth Israel. It was the third such tour Levi had led, and Wootton's remarks were denounced by Levi's colleagues and congregants.

Apart from the Council of Christians and Jews (Victoria), two other notable bodies working to promote Jewish-Christian understanding were the long-established Catholic, Melbourne-based Institute of Social Order and the Catholic Sisters of Sion, who recently celebrated 20 years of work in this field. Indeed, the invaluable Archive of Australian Judaica at Sydney University was administered by a member of that order. Additionally, during 1989-90, a Jewish-Christian dialogue group met regularly in the Sydney suburb of Bondi.

Culture

Among the noteworthy cultural events of 1989-90 were the opening of a second ethnic radio station in Melbourne, with six hours weekly of Jewish programming, and the first Australian Jewish play-writing competition. In general, the extraordinary attendance at public meetings addressed by prominent national and international Jewish religious and cultural personalities suggested that there was a strong desire by Australian Jews to become more involved in their religious and cultural heritage.

The Makor Library, a remarkable resource situated at the Beth Weizmann Community Center in Melbourne, continued to provide a high-level information service for Jews and non-Jews interested in Jews, Judaism, and Israel. By 1990 it had become sorely starved of funds, however, heralding a severe diminution of its staff and services and raising fears that non-Jewish inquirers might be forced to seek their information from less impeccable sources.

Publications

Locally produced Jewish books and periodicals continued to thrive.

The most significant such book of 1989 was undoubtedly Mark Aarons's Sanctuary, mentioned above. The Dunera Affair: A Documentary Source Book, coedited by Paul Bartrop and Gabrielle Eisen, published by the Melbourne-based Jewish Museum of Australia in 1990, is devoted to an extraordinary episode involving Britain's deportation to Australia of Jewish refugees from Nazism.

In 1990 Dr. Serge Liberman of Melbourne, an award-winning writer, published
his fourth collection of short stories, *The Battered and the Redeemed*. Melbourne University Press published two books by the acclaimed poet Lily Brett. *After the War* completes a trilogy of her poetic works, while *Things Could Be Worse* is a collection of short stories with a Jewish theme.

In 1990 the Melbourne-based Asia Pacific Jewish Association published the proceedings of the Second Asian-Jewish Colloquium (held March 1987), entitled *The Jews of Asia: Old Societies and New Images*.

In 1989 a new, high-quality cultural periodical, *Generation*, was launched in Melbourne by a group of young communal activists, and in 1990 the Australian Institute of Jewish Affairs launched *Without Prejudice*, a magazine aimed at combating anti-Semitism and religious and ethnic prejudice generally. In 1990 the Melbourne-based Australian Jewish Democratic Society, a leftist group often critical of the Jewish leadership, began publication of a quarterly, *The Australian Jewish Democrat*. The Australian Jewish Historical Society (Victoria) continued to produce its highly regarded journal, inaugurated in 1988 to augment what were seen as the increasingly inadequate issues produced by its parent body, the society in New South Wales, since 1939. And the Australian Association for Jewish Studies, founded in 1988, continued to produce its scholarly journal *Menorah*.

The weekly Jewish press underwent a transformation in 1990. The Sydney-based *Australian Jewish Times* changed its name to the *Australian Jewish News* (Sydney edition), reflecting the national consolidation of the Jewish press. And Melbourne businessman Richard Pratt sold his interest in both the Sydney and Melbourne editions of the paper to the Klein family of Sydney. The Melbourne edition continued to include the optional Yiddish supplement *Di Yidishe Naies*.

**Personalia**

Among the Australian Jews who received honors in 1989–90 was Sir David Iser Smith of Canberra, who had served as official secretary to five governors-general of Australia. Sir David received his knighthood upon his retirement in August 1990.

his services to Soviet Jewry. He became the first person to be honored by an Australian university for devotion to a Jewish cause.

Several prominent personalities, all overseas-born, died during this period: Rabbi Maurice Bernard Benson of Sydney, a founder of the Bankstown and District War Memorial Synagogue in suburban Sydney and a former minister (1949–52) of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation, May 1989, aged 69; Rabbi Dr. Alfred Fabian of Sydney, minister of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation (1940–46), chief minister of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation (1946–62), chief minister of Sydney's North Shore Synagogue (1962–75), and senior Jewish chaplain in Australia (1962–89), October 1989, aged 79; Sydney Alan Field of Sydney, president of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society in New South Wales and founding president of the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce, November 1989, aged 70; Paul Fingereth of Brisbane, president of the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies (1982–86 and again since 1988), April 1990, aged 54; Mina Fink of Melbourne, instrumental in providing humanitarian aid to victims of the Nazis, a former president and a life governor of the National Council of Jewish Women in Australia and an honorary member of the executive of the International Council of Jewish Women, May 1990, aged 76; Abram Landa of Sydney, a former member of the New South Wales Parliament (1930–32, 1941–65) and New South Wales Agent-General in London (1965–70), who played a pivotal role in persuading Australian statesman Dr. H.V. Evatt, then chairman of the ad hoc Committee on Palestine at the United Nations, to commit Australia to support the creation of Israel, July 1989, aged 87; Dr. Wolf Simon Matsdorf, formerly of Sydney, president of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society in New South Wales (1951–59) and a leading analyst of Australian Jewry, who settled in Israel in 1971, in Jerusalem, September 1989, aged 82; Sir Paul Strasser of Sydney, generous benefactor of Jewish educational institutions in Australia, including Shalom College at the University of New South Wales and the Emanuel School, Sydney, March 1989, aged 77; Robert Zablud of Melbourne, a former president of the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies, of the State Zionist Council of Victoria, and of the Zionist Federation of Australia, and a vice-president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, September 1989, aged 76.

HILARY RUBINSTEIN