

Australia

National Affairs

AUSTRALIA ENTERED 2002 WITH ITS economy outstripping those of most other free-market democracies and with the conservative Liberal-National coalition government of Prime Minister John Howard riding a wave of popularity after its November 2001 election victory. In contrast, the opposition Labor Party entered a period of soul-searching and internal rancor prompted by its lack of success at the national level, despite its complete dominance of the state and territorial governments.

The year also saw the emergence of the Greens as the most influential minority party, gaining support on a wide range of issues including refugee policy and strident opposition to war with Iraq. The Greens were also helped by the weakness of the Labor Party and the bitter infighting that dogged their ideological cousins, the Australian Democrats.

On the far right, the populist and controversy-ridden party One Nation continued to drift into irrelevance, its founding figurehead Pauline Hanson having already resigned as leader of the party and taking an indefinite break from politics. Ongoing legal action by the Australian Electoral Commission against Hanson and former director David Ettridge for fraudulent party registration in 1997 was the only news of note. Senator Len Harris, elected in 1998, languished as the party's sole representative in Federal Parliament and faced a likely exit at the next election.

The ramifications of September 11 for Australian security were already apparent early in the year when Singaporean investigators thwarted a plot by Islamic extremists to destroy the Australian High Commission in Singapore, along with the embassies of the United States, Israel, and Great Britain. Investigators concluded that a dangerous Southeast Asian offshoot of Al Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiah, was already well established across the region in a loose but coordinated network. This was confirmed in October by the shocking terrorist attack on vacationers in Bali, Indonesia, which resulted in nearly 200 deaths, 88 of them Australians. It was the most deadly terrorist attack yet seen in Southeast Asia and the

most shocking tragedy suffered by Australia since World War II. In response, Australia took a leading role in assisting the Indonesian investigative team that, by year's end, captured the perpetrators. But there was little confidence that the elusive Jemaah Islamiah had been decisively damaged.

As security concerns progressively assumed center stage in political debates—surpassing worries over the worst drought in decades—the government clearly indicated its support for a U.S.-led action to disarm Iraq. With Australian special-forces troops already in Afghanistan and peacekeepers remaining in East Timor, an advance navy contingent was sent to the Persian Gulf. As in the U.S. and Britain, Australia's presence in “the coalition of the willing” generated political division and widespread public demonstrations at home, but the government remained firm in its conviction that Iraq had to be disarmed.

Australia and Israel

There was considerable political discussion about the Middle East during the year both in connection with the Israel-Palestinian conflict and in regard to the debate over the use of military force against Iraq. Both the government and the opposition in Australia remained largely supportive of Israel. However, some Labor backbenchers as well as representatives of smaller parties in the Australian Parliament vociferously condemned Israel.

The strong commitment of the government, and especially Prime Minister Howard, to Israel was recognized at a ceremony in New York on January 30, 2002, where the American Jewish Committee bestowed on him its Award for Excellence in Public Service. On that occasion Howard pledged “unyielding support and a perpetual protection of secure and defensible borders” for Israel. He accurately described himself as “unapologetic and longstanding friend of Israel and of the Jewish community” from a time predating his entry into politics. Similar positive statements came from Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, who pointed out on October 11, in a speech at a pro-Israel function, that “Yasir Arafat walked away from Camp David in 2000 offering nothing,” and defended Israeli responses to Palestinian terrorism.

In the UN General Assembly Australia did vote for resolutions slanted against Israel 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, Bassim Blazey, counselor of the Australian UN mission, said that Australia was committed to the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders. Australia wholeheartedly supported Israel's territorial integrity and its right to live in peace, as well as the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, a Palestinian state being an inevitable part of a peaceful settlement.

On the Labor opposition side, the party's foreign affairs spokesperson, Kevin Rudd, told a Jewish community function that Ehud Barak's proposal to Arafat at Camp David was "a bloody good offer" and called it "a tragedy of history" that Arafat turned it down. He also expressed "a profound sense of solidarity with the experience of so many with the horror and phenomenon of suicide bombings," adding that Labor's policy of supporting the right of Israel to a secure existence was "rock solid." Labor leader Simon Crean also expressed support for Israeli security and understanding for Israel's need to defend itself.

However some Australian Jews criticized Crean for exercising insufficient control over a number of Labor backbenchers who, critical of Israel in the past, stepped up their attacks in 2002, joined by representatives of such smaller parties in the Senate as the Australian Democrats and the Greens. In a speech in early June, one Labor backbencher insisted that both the city of Nablus and the town of Bethlehem had been "destroyed" by Israel in Operation Defensive Shield in April. Two other Laborites compared Israeli prime minister Sharon to Saddam Hussein, and another branded Israel a "rogue state" in a parliamentary debate on Iraq in September.

In November, yet a fourth Labor backbencher introduced a motion calling for Israel "unconditionally" to withdraw to its 1967 borders. He claimed that Israel's failure to do so violated UN Resolution 242 and demanded that a UN peace-keeping force protect the boundaries of a new Palestinian state to be recognized in all the Territories, after which peace negotiations should resume. His proposal failed to mention Palestinian terrorism or make any demands of the Palestinian side. The motion was debated but not voted on. Meanwhile, the foreign affairs spokesperson for the Australian Democrats, which, though a tiny faction, held the balance of power in the Australian Senate, called on the government to "take a much harder line on Israeli aggression in Palestine."

The Australian government continued to pursue improved relations with a number of Middle East nations, some of them sworn enemies of Israel, with the aim of stimulating increased trade, especially in agricultural products but also in some petroleum-related technological goods and services. Relations with Libya, interrupted in 1987, were renewed in 2002, and Trade Minister Mark Vaile led a major trade mission there in July. Vaile stressed particularly the importance of a meeting he had with Saife Qaddafi, son of Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi, which he described as a “watershed event” in Australia-Libya relations.

Australia pursued its long-standing policy of engagement with Iran. Iran’s foreign minister, Dr. Kamal Kharrazi, visited Australia in June 2002, the first such visit by an Iranian foreign minister in a decade, and the two countries agreed to establish a “mechanism” for regular dialogue on human rights and regional issues. Trade Minister Vaile led a delegation of more than 50 Australian businessmen to Iran in September and signed a new Investment Protection and Promotion Agreement designed to broaden Australian investment there.

MEDIA BIAS

Australian media coverage of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians was hardly as anti-Israel as in most European countries, but it still left plenty of room for improvement. There was a general tendency to oversimplify the facts in a way that favored the Palestinian point of view. The myth that Israel was defying UN Security Council Resolution 242 and was therefore “as bad as Iraq” was widely presented as fact.

The year commenced with perennial Israel critic and Arafat biographer Tony Walker, political editor of the *Australian Financial Review*, touring the Middle East. He filed a series of reports that demonized Ariel Sharon, misrepresented Israel’s obligations under the U.S.-sponsored Mitchell Plan, downplayed Yasir Arafat’s support for terrorism, and described the *Karine A* affair (see above, pp. 183–87) as a “damp squib.”

Radio and TV coverage by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the public national broadcaster, tended to favor the Palestinians, often through the use of “experts” hostile to Israel. The radio coverage improved slightly toward the end of the year when correspondent Tim Palmer was reassigned to Indonesia. While stationed in Israel Palmer seemed determined to discredit Israeli tactics in dealing with terror, highlighting perceived failures and downplaying successes while maintaining a constantly critical line in regard to Prime Minister Sharon. On the floor

of the New South Wales parliament Palmer was described as “simply a Palestinian spokesman.” Supporters of Israel also considered radio talk-show hosts Jon Faine of ABC Radio Melbourne and Vivian Schenker of ABC Radio National as biased in favor of the Palestinian side.

ABC TV’s investigative journalism program “Four Corners” replayed a program that was originally aired by the BBC, “The Accused,” which sought to label Ariel Sharon a war criminal for his involvement in the Sabra and Shatilla massacres. AIJAC (the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council) attempted to convince the ABC to provide some balance, such as a panel discussion about responsibility for the massacres. AIJAC’s intervention, in turn, was pilloried by David Marr on his program “Media Watch,” an ABC weekly show that was supposed to highlight inadequacies in the media, not defend them. The following week, AIJAC’s complaints to the ABC about its anti-Israel bias were given similar sarcastic treatment on “Media Watch.”

The ABC’s Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), the public multicultural network, had an even worse record. It provided inaccurate information, stated facts—about Israeli military actions, for example—without providing the context that would make them understandable, and at times highlighted arguments favorable to the Palestinians while remaining silent about other arguments that might strengthen Israel’s position. In September and October, SBS showed a flood of anti-Israel documentaries, the worst of which was veteran Israel-basher John Pilger’s rant, “Palestine Is Still the Question.”

Israel’s Operation Defensive Shield in the spring—and especially the fighting in Jenin—provided a particularly fertile field for anti-Israel bias across the Australian media. The ABC and SBS naturally took a prominent role, and the print media, while far from scrupulously fair, was on the whole more balanced. ABC Radio gave detailed coverage to allegations of Israeli atrocities and massacres in Jenin, but never adequately reported the findings by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the UN that there was, in fact, no massacre, and that few civilians were killed. They also ignored the humanitarian efforts of the Israelis there. As late as August, ABC Radio foreign editor Peter Cave was still adamant that there had been a “massacre” in Jenin, comparing Israeli conduct following the battle to the Chinese cover-up after Tiananmen Square.

Among the newspapers, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Canberra Times* remained the most problematic. The *Morning Herald* and the *Age*, published in Melbourne—generally regarded as the “quality” broadsheets in Australia’s two major cities—consistently used the anti-Israel

British newspaper the *Guardian* as a source for their Middle East coverage. Other papers, such as the *Australian*, the *Herald Sun*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Courier Mail*, were more balanced in their editorials and opinion pieces.

Anti-Semitism and Extremism

During 2002, the Jewish community in Australia logged the highest number of reports of physical assault, property damage, and harassment since annual national records began being tallied. These took several forms: attacks on Jews by groups of assailants, often when the Jews were on their way to or from synagogue; a petrol bomb thrown at a synagogue that had been similarly bombed in 2001, this time requiring a fire brigade to extinguish the blaze; the windows of a Jewish community center smashed by rocks; a fire-cracker thrown at students leaving a Jewish day school; and vandalism of a communal sukkah, the perpetrators screaming, “Kill the Jews” and “Hitler’s a legend.”

The incidents of harassment—recorded at a little over twice the average for the previous 12 years—included verbal abuse of Jewish children walking home from synagogue; anti-Semitic comments to Jewish participants in public forums, including chants of “Kill the Jews”; street marches and rallies where placards included anti-Jewish slogans; harassment of participants in Jewish ceremonies held in public; and Jews being chased by large groups of men who made it clear that they were after potential Jewish victims.

There was also dramatic growth in the amount of anti-Jewish imagery in publications of extremist organizations—especially on the far left—much of it based on theories of Jewish conspiracies. Mainstream media also carried more anti-Semitic matter than in previous years, as the virulence of some public criticism of Israeli actions crossed the line between political commentary and anti-Jewish incitement. As had been the case for some time, the Internet facilitated the dissemination of hostile statements about Jews.

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.

The most vicious anti-Jewish propaganda in Australia was produced by the Adelaide Institute, a loose network of people who admired self-styled Holocaust revisionist Dr. Frederick Toben. Even David Irving, in his *Action Report*, wrote that Toben's Web site was so extreme that it constituted a liability to Holocaust revisionists. In 2002, Toben participated in international gatherings of Holocaust deniers. In addition to his own newsletter and Web site, Toben's material was posted on numerous neo-Nazi and racist sites on the Internet.

The Australian League of Rights was once described by the Australian 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." Its membership—consisting largely of veterans of the moribund Social Credit movement of the 1930s and 1940s—was overwhelmingly elderly, but it continued to hold meetings, conduct action campaigns, and seek publicity for its anti-Semitic assessments of domestic and international affairs. With founder Eric Butler retired and in failing health, Betty Luks, the league's director, continued to publish its weekly newsletters, monthly magazines, and quarterly journal, and to maintain its Web site.

The Citizens Electoral Councils (CEC) continued to distribute large quantities of literature reflecting the views of Lyndon LaRouche. These included allegations of bizarre Jewish conspiracies that also targeted non-Jewish 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. Throughout the year, Jewish leaders in Victoria, Western Australia, and New South Wales complained about CEC activities. An advertisement organized and authorized by the LaRouche cult and signed by hundreds of Australians was published in the *Australian* in June and again in September, claiming that the government wanted to introduce legislation modeled on Hitler's laws.

The deceptively named Australian Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) continued to advocate Holocaust denial, with most of the group's public pronouncements aimed at protecting the "rights" of Holocaust deniers and other extremists. *Your Rights 2002* was the 28th annual edition of the ACLU's handbook. John Bennett, the ACLU's most influential figure, was on the editorial advisory committee of the *Journal of Historical Review*, the Holocaust-denial publication of the notorious Institute for Historical Review in California.

A number of organizations on the neo-Nazi fringe came to attention during 2002. Australian National Action, which declared its enmity toward Jews, non-whites, and immigrants, staged rallies in Melbourne and Adelaide, and published a newsletter. Its members also engaged in direct confrontation with, and harassment of, political opponents. Other similar groups included the Australian Nationalists Movement, White Australian Revolutionaries, the Australian National Socialist Movement, C-18, and the Australian Revolutionary Movement. In most cities there were also small, unorganized groups—little more than gangs—of neo-Nazis, sometimes including violent skinheads. They tended to focus their racist anger on Asian students and on those they perceived to be left-wingers. The Australian public was surprised to learn during the year that three former members of an elite army unit had been members of the Blood Oath, a neo-Nazi band, while serving in the military.

Nazi War Criminals

Australia took no legal action against Nazi war criminals in 2002, despite the fact that in May, the Simon Wiesenthal Center submitted to the authorities a list of 22 suspected Lithuanian Nazi war criminals living in Australia. This same list had previously been supplied to Lithuanian officials, who also passed it on to Australia in 2001. The suspects had entered Australia shortly after World War II. Philip Ruddock, the minister for immigration, stated that these men could not be deprived of their citizenship and deported, but the justice minister, Senator Chris Ellison, promised that the Australian Federal Police would investigate the allegations. In August, the Australian Attorney General's Department informed the Lithuanian prosecutor general that nine of the suspects lived in Australia at known addresses. In December, Attorney General Daryl Williams said that Lithuania had made no extradition requests for any of the suspects, and that the Lithuanians had indicated that they did not have enough evidence to lay charges.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

Results of the 2001 census indicated that Australia's Jewish community was still growing. The census showed some 84,000 Jews in Australia, 4,000 more than in 1996, amounting to about 0.44 percent of the total

population of over 19 million. The actual number of Jews was undoubtedly higher, as the question about religion was optional on the census form and about a quarter of the Australian population did not answer it. Jewish leaders believed that Holocaust survivors might have been particularly reluctant to identify their religion. The actual number of Jews was assumed to be over 100,000.

Melbourne had the nation's largest Jewish population, and Adelaide was the only city to show a decrease in its number of Jews. The census showed that most recent Jewish newcomers were from South Africa. Hebrew was the preferred language for 6,000 Australians and Yiddish for 2,667. Australian Jewish women outnumbered Jewish men, according to the census, 43,600 to 40,300.

Communal Affairs

Jeremy Jones continued in his post as president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), the preeminent Jewish representative body, while Ron Weiser continued as president of the Zionist Federation of Australia. Mark Leibler remained national chairman of the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC), with Dr. Colin Rubenstein as AIJAC's executive director. AIJAC continued its close association with the American Jewish Committee. Stanley Roth continued as federal president of the United Israel Appeal, and Michael Naphtali as head of the Jewish National Fund.

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 train qualified faculty for the day schools.

Interfaith Dialogue

Australian Jewry remained active in interreligious discussions. In most states and territories there was a functioning Council of Christians and Jews. Through its national and regional bodies, the World Conference on Religion and Peace provided a structure for Jewish Australians to engage actively with Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and members of smaller denominations. Faith Communities for Reconciliation, a significant interfaith cooperative venture that brought together official representatives of every substantial religious group in Australia, was chaired by the Jewish community's representative, ECAJ president Jeremy Jones.

For more than a decade the Jewish community and the Uniting Church of Australia—a major Protestant body made up of former Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists—had been conducting a formal “National Dialogue” of top leaders. A similar national dialogue, known as the “Annual Conversation,” had been taking place for six years between the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the ECAJ.

In 2002, representatives of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, the National Council of Churches in Australia, and the ECAJ met formally for the first time, in three separate sessions, to discuss the creation of a structure which would allow for regular and constructive interaction. This inaugural meeting took place in the Great Synagogue Sydney, the second at the Alexandria Mosque, and the third at the headquarters of the Council of Churches.

Personalia

In January 2002, the government conferred Australia Day Honors on several prominent members of the Jewish community. Prof. Geoffrey Opat of Melbourne was appointed Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for his contributions to scientific research and the teaching of science in Australia and overseas. In addition, the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) was awarded to: Eva Engel of Sydney for her work in community welfare, including the establishment of Child Survivors of the Holocaust and her involvement with the Sydney Jewish Museum as a volunteer guide; Tom Goldman of Sydney, former Maccabi Australia president, for service to the community through sport; Dr. Max Lake, a prominent Sydney winemaker, for promoting the boutique wine industry in Australia; Nathan Gutman of Melbourne for his service to music, particularly as a violin performer and teacher; Henry Nissen of Melbourne, a former Australian boxing champion, for assisting and rehabil-

itating disadvantaged youth; and Dr. Solomon Rose of Melbourne for his assistance to Jewish war veterans and their families.

The annual Queen's Birthday Honors, awarded in June 2002, recognized the contributions made by several other members of the Australian Jewish community. Jeanne Pratt received the nation's highest honor, being appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) for outstanding leadership in the arts and service to the community through charitable institutions. Rabbi Pinchus Feldman, dean of the Sydney Yeshivah, was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for service to the Jewish community for his work in developing spiritual, educational, and welfare facilities. High-profile Sydney lawyer and investment banker David Gonski was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in recognition of his service to the visual and performing arts and for developing government policy to encourage philanthropy. Raymond Weinberg of Melbourne, Olympic athlete, athletics administrator, and coach, was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to sport and the community. Former North Shore Temple Emanuel vice president Gary Braude received a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for services to the community and his congregation, of which he had been a member for 40 years. West Australian Dr. Nathan Hoffman, a fellow of Edith Cowan University, was awarded an OAM for services to mathematics education and in recognition of his work for the Jewish community of Perth, which he had served in many capacities, including president of the Perth Hebrew Congregation. Former Sydney High School principal Michael Gold was the recipient of an OAM for his services to education, as was prize-winning sculptor Errol Davis of Sydney for his service to the arts.

In 2002, the Australian Jewish community mourned the passing of: Erwin Graf, a Sydney-based property developer and prominent supporter of AIJAC; Sam Fiszman of Sydney, Holocaust survivor, businessman, political fund-raiser, and philanthropist; Dr. Ben Haneman of Sydney, medical practitioner and supporter of the arts—particularly the work of the State Library of New South Wales—who was remembered for his life-long commitment to social justice and who served for many years on the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies; Louis Kahan of Melbourne, one of Australia's most celebrated artists, who was awarded the prestigious Archibald Prize for portraiture in 1962 for his depiction of Australia's Nobel laureate in literature, Patrick White; Henry Krongold of Melbourne, Polish-born businessman, patron of the arts, philanthropist, and inaugural federal president of the United Israel Appeal; Linda

Phillips of Melbourne, a composer and music critic who died at the age of 102; and Dr. Solomon Rose of Melbourne, a former president of the Victorian Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women (VAJEX), who passed away shortly after having been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, as noted above.

Rabbi Raymond Apple celebrated 30 years of service as chief minister of Australia's oldest congregation, the Great Synagogue Sydney, in 2002, and his deputy, Rabbi Mendel Kastel, was appointed a member of the inaugural multifaith chaplaincy of the New South Wales Police Service.

COLIN L. RUBENSTEIN