



CHAPTER TEN

A CHANGING JEWISH WORLD 1989-1995

The years after 1989 were marked by dramatic changes in the Jewish world as a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the developments in the Middle East so that the Board found itself faced with many new challenges. At this time, the Board was fortunate to have two talented leaders as it marched towards its Jubilee Year in July 1995: Gerry Levy and Michael Marx, both of whom served as president for four terms.

Gerry Levy was born in Germany in 1924 and so was the second foreign born president after Sidney Muller. In February 1939, at the age of fourteen, he arrived in Australia with his parents as a direct result of the events of Kristallnacht. A decorated soldier from World War I, his father, Ernst, could not believe that the Nazi aberration would last. After Ernst's arrest in November 1938, he finally realised that he and his family had to leave Germany.¹ They managed to migrate to Australia through the efforts of his uncle and aunt, Hans and Hilda Lewin, who had arrived in 1938 and, as soon as they heard of Ernst's arrest, boarded the first train to Canberra and managed to procure landing permits for the family.

The Levy family arrived in Sydney virtually penniless and unprepared for the financial struggle which faced them. Gerry found a job on a poultry farm, working at first in Dural and later in Schofield. After two years on poultry farms, Gerry decided to train as a welder but as soon as he was old enough he enlisted in the army. At first he joined the Third Employment Company but later transferred to a regular Australian army unit in 1945. After the end of the war he spent a further year in the army at Bogan Gate, half way between Sydney and Broken Hill, where he guarded Italian prisoners of war.

After leaving the army, Gerry Levy completed a course in designing and cutting ladies' wear, even though he felt that he had no flair for women's fashion. He then worked for eleven years managing a clothing factory before he decided to buy a hardware shop in Pagewood in 1957. He and his wife Erna [nee Mendels], whom he married in 1948, ran that shop for thirty years until they decided to retire in 1987. So, unlike his predecessors, Levy was retired when he assumed the presidency and was able to devote a lot of time to the work of the Board.

Gerry Levy became Board president after over forty years of communal experience, largely in B'nai B'rith. He had been a member of the first B'nai B'rith Youth Chapter founded in 1945 and later its president, while his wife Erna was president of the Girls' Chapter — in fact that is how they met. When they married they transferred to Sydney Lodge and soon became involved in its executive. At that time executive meetings of Sydney Lodge were run in German and the minutes later translated into English, but Gerry was permitted to speak in English. He rose through the ranks of Sydney Lodge, became District Vice-President (serving with Sidney Muller) and later District 21 President for Australia and New Zealand, representing the district at conventions in the United States and Israel, as well as international vice-president, thereby broadening his horizons. Included in the people

he met in this capacity were Israeli leaders Menachem Begin and Yizhak Rabin, Henry Kissinger, then American Secretary of State, as well as working closely with international B'nai B'rith leaders. He also served on the Australia-Israel Friendship Association, the board of the Great Synagogue and Jewish Community Services (previously Australian Jewish Welfare Society).

In 1977 Levy decided to broaden his communal involvement and became a general franchise deputy and immediately joined the Public Relations Committee. In 1979 he became an ex-officio executive member of the Board, and has remained on the executive ever since. In March 1983 he was elected as a vice-president and served in this capacity under Leslie Caplan and Graham de Vahl Davis. In 1984 he also took on the portfolio of chairman of the Holocaust Remembrance Committee and served in that capacity for two years.

As president, Gerry Levy sought to build a stronger community through a consensus approach and to increase the profile of the Board within the general Jewish community. As he stated in March 1989: 'I regard as my top priority the projection of the work of the Board to our constituent organisations and to ensure that we are there to work with them and to make our resources available'.² He met with boards of management of constituent organisations and attended as many different functions and synagogue services as he could. By this outreach, he hoped that more members of the community would become aware of and understand the Board's work. He worked closely with his two vice-presidents, John Glass and his successor, Michael Marx.



Gerry Levy with Gareth Evans, 12 December 1992.

During the first year of Levy's presidency Geejay Schneeweiss was honorary treasurer and the Board experienced some financial problems so that by March 1990 there was a shortfall of \$60,000.³ Schneeweiss then decided to contest the position of honorary secretary, but he lost to incumbent honorary secretary, Joy Balkind. Gerry Levy then persuaded his long-time colleague from B'nai B'rith, Henry Stricker, to accept the position of treasurer. With Stricker's many years of communal experience he was able to overcome the financial difficulties. One major change which Stricker introduced was to alter the Board's financial year from the calendar year (January to December) to the financial year (June to July), as practised by the JCA. In order to effectively introduce this change, the annual general meeting was moved from March to August, with the first August AGM being held in 1992.



Henry Stricker, the Board's honorary treasurer, 1990 until his death.

At the conclusion of Levy's presidency in 1992, both his vice-presidents decided to contest the election. Throughout the Board's history the position of president had been rarely contested. Aaron Aaron had challenged Leslie Caplan one year for the presidency, but there had not been a vigorous election campaign. This was not the case with the contest between John Glass and Michael Marx where, for the first time in the Board's history, there was a very vigorous campaign. Before the election, the *Australian Jewish News* published a full page article written by journalist Walt Secord, presenting the views of the two different candidates. In an eleven page 'blueprint' which Glass circulated to all the 150 deputies, he stressed the need to strengthen the community from within, advocating 'five fundamentals' to ensure continuity including finding ways to increase the Jewish birthrate, fostering Israel-Diaspora relations and promoting 'Jewish literacy'. He also advocated using the model of the Institute for Jewish Communal Development, which he chaired, for the

way the Board was run. Marx was more concerned with the community's relations with the wider public, stressing that while 'he does not have a plan to "overhaul" the Board of Deputies, he does plan to expand its activities in certain areas, including its fight against racism and antisemitism'.⁴ Michael Marx won the election

While Gerry Levy himself had arrived as a refugee from Germany in 1939, Marx was the next generation — his mother had arrived from France in 1937 and his father from Germany in 1939 as youngsters. They met and married in Sydney, settling on the North Shore. He attended Chatswood primary and high schools and then went on to Macquarie University where he initially enrolled in an Arts degree in 1974 and then, in 1975, joined the first group of law students at the university, graduating from law five years later. He had not initially planned to be a lawyer so his choice of career was 'more by accident than design'.⁵ In 1980 he joined the Legal Aid Commission where he served until 1986 when he was appointed executive assistant to the State Attorney General, Terry Sheehan, who served in the Wran and Unsworth governments. In 1988 Marx decided to return to legal aid as a solicitor in charge of the Bondi Junction Legal Aid Office; in 1990 with his partner, he formed his own company, Chalmers Marx, which is located in Bondi Junction specialising in criminal work.

While Marx's outside world of school, university and friends was largely non-Jewish, his family world was very Jewish. His grandparents were founding members of the North Shore Synagogue, so he came from a traditional family and his mother kept a kosher home. As a child, Marx was a member of the Jewish scout group on the North Shore and when he was in high school he served for a short period as a part-time youth director at North Shore Synagogue during the time when Leslie Caplan was synagogue president.

It was the struggle between AUJS and the Australian Union of Students (AUS) over Israel which propelled Marx into communal leadership. At that time, the majority of the Macquarie University students' union were hard-line PLO supporters, a policy also followed by its newspaper, *Arena*, which was strongly anti-Israel. The community felt that they needed a strong group of Jewish students at the university to combat this position. The Hillel director, Zeev Dar, approached Marx to reactivate the Macquarie University Jewish Students' Union which had been moribund for about ten years and, with a group of his close Jewish friends including current deputies Steven Lewis, Philip Hynek and George Kahane, Marx was able to achieve this. They attracted a student membership of sixty, won the support of a number of Jewish members of staff and soon achieved a high profile, producing their own publications and running for the Union on a Jewish students' ticket. Marx, himself, was a member of the SRC for five of the six years that he attended university. When *Arena* published a provocative article headed by 'Mr Marx is a Liar' in relation to an article he had written in support of Israel's right to exist, he instituted legal proceedings and the paper was forced to retract its statement. Some years later, he became the publisher of *Arena*, the very paper which previously had attacked him. He also became national president of AUJS, serving in that position for two years from 1976-1978 and greatly strengthening the organisation at a national level.





It was while president of AUJS that he became the AUJS delegate to the ECAJ in 1977 and in the same year he joined the Board of Deputies as a general

franchise member, so that he has served on the Board for over twenty years. He also joined the Zionist Federation under Dr Albert Silver, serving as Israel Information Officer, and was on the SZC. On the Board he served initially as youth liaison officer, later joined the Overseas Jewry Committee which he chaired for a year in 1983-4, and in 1984 he was elected chairperson of the Public Relations Committee (PRC), heading this committee for six years.



In 1985 Marx made a 'clandestine trip', without going through the official Intourist groups, to the Soviet Union with fellow deputy Steven Lewis. They were lucky not to be detained by the KGB. The aim of this trip was to meet a number of the refuseniks who had met with Bob Hawke in 1979, to ascertain their situation and see what further moves the Australian government could be urged to make to assist them. Subsequently, he wrote a confidential report about his meetings with eleven refuseniks, as well as his visit to the Australian embassy in Moscow. The report stressed the importance of such visits to provide the London committee for Soviet Jewry with up-to-date information, maintain contact with the various refusenik families and provide them with basic goods to assist them in their financial struggle. It recommended that more Australian Jews should travel to the Soviet Union on similar visits, but that visitors must allow themselves sufficient time to be briefed, as they could endanger the position of the refuseniks if they did not carry out appropriate precautions.⁶ Marx also gave lectures as part of the Board's Speaker Service for ten years to groups within the general community. In 1989 Gerry Levy encouraged him to stand as vice-president and three years later in 1992 he was elected president. At the time he was only 37, making him the second youngest president to be elected.



Michael Marx with Kathryn Greiner and former Premier,
Nick Greiner, at Plenum, 17 November 1992



While the Board has been Marx's major focus over the last twenty years, he has had a number of other communal involvements, both general and Jewish. In 1980 he joined the ALP, has held numerous positions within the party and has participated actively in conference debates, especially in support of Israel. In 1983 he was elected to the Aboriginal Affairs Committee, serving for three years until, in 1986, he was elected to the Legal and Constitutional Committee which he has chaired since 1989. From 1975 to 1988 he served as a member of the Westleigh Bush Fire Brigade, located in Hornsby, working as a firefighter in various parts of Sydney and the Blue Mountains. He has also been active on the Waverley Action Youth Services in Bondi, serving on its committee of management and, from 1987, being its president. This has grown to be the largest youth centre in New South Wales, assisting over 300 youth each week facing manifold problems including homelessness, and drug and alcohol abuse. In 1996 he was appointed a commissioner of the Ethnic Affairs Commission. In 1977 he became its deputy-chair and was also appointed a director of the Centennial and Moore Park Trust. He appeared at the Police Royal Commission from 1994 to 1997. He became a director of Mandelbaum House in 1992 and a director of the Hakoah Club in 1997 and from 1992 to 1996 he was a director of the Macquarie University Centre for Comparative Genocide Studies. He is currently deputy-president of the ECAJ, having been involved in ECAJ work for seventeen years.



As president of the Board, Marx sought to continue Levy's policy of highlighting the Board's work within the Jewish community. During the first year of his presidency he visited 30 of the then 45 constituent organisations of the Board and he also encouraged the affiliation of non-member organisations, resulting in five more organisations joining the Board which, in 1995 had fifty members. He commented that 'every president has one major traumatic event during his presidency, and for me it was the destruction of the Central Synagogue by fire in October 1993'.⁷ It needed to be established very quickly whether the fire was a result of arson or an electrical fault, and it was proved that it was the latter. Marx was very impressed by the way the entire community rallied, with tremendous offers of support also coming from the general community. In his public relations approach, he worked to promote Jewish life and identity in a positive fashion and to argue proactively about Israel, as well as being reactive to negative publicity about Israel or the Jewish community. He believed strongly that one should respond publicly and quickly to such occurrences, opposing the earlier, more conservative Anglo-Jewish approach of not making a public issue of antisemitism or anti-Israel statements.

THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE USSR

On the international scene, the most dramatic developments in the period after 1987 were the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the mass exodus of Soviet Jews to Israel. These changes took place over a four year period from 1987 to 1991. In March 1987 when Russia's Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, visited Australia, the difficulties of Soviet Jewry, with the need to release the refuseniks and Prisoners of Zion, was still very much a concern for Australian Jewry. Yet, within a month, in April 1987 it appeared that with *glasnost* (the Soviet policy of

more openness) many of the refuseniks would be permitted to leave the USSR and that religious freedom, including the right to teach Hebrew, would be granted. In September 1987, after World Jewish Congress vice-chairman, Isi Leibler, was invited to the USSR for *Rosh Hashanah*, the Jewish New Year, as a guest of the Moscow Jewish Communal Centre, he stressed that a new chapter in Soviet-Jewish relations was opening and that there was a need to focus more on human rights than emigration.

In November 1989 there was a further breakthrough when, through the initiative of Isi Leibler, the Soviet authorities agreed to the establishment of a Jewish Cultural Centre in Moscow, to be named after the famous Soviet Jewish actor, Solomon Myhoels. *Jewish Times* associate editor, Vic Alhadeff, accompanied Leibler to the official opening of this Centre which he described as a new era for Soviet Jewry. By the end of 1989 it had become clear that the emigration of Soviet Jewry was to be the major challenge for both Israel and Diaspora Jewry in the coming years. The March 1990 UIA campaign appeals focussed on Exodus II, as the emigration of Soviet Jewry was called, as Israel needed to provide housing, education, employment and health services for the newcomers. At the same time there was concern about the emergence of a virulent, grass-roots antisemitism with the growth of *Pamyat*, an antisemitic organisation in Russia. By 1991, with the virtual collapse of the USSR, 300,000 Soviet Jews had emigrated to Israel and the numbers continued to flow in. In August 1991 the Soviet regime completely collapsed with a revolution which saw the overthrow of Gorbachev and the succession of Boris Yeltsin. The *Jewish News* saw this as 'the victory of liberty over tyranny in the Soviet Union... a cause for celebration around the world'.⁸

All these changes had a dramatic impact on the work of the Board of Deputies. From the late 1960s, initially under Marcus Einfeld, one of the major foci of the Board's work had been its constant campaign for Soviet Jewry. There is no doubt that this campaign on a world-wide basis contributed, in the end, to the breaking down of the barriers against Soviet Jewry's emigration to Israel. With the radical changes within the former USSR, a new priority has been that of providing resources for the rebuilding of Jewish life there. The Board initially undertook to assist the community in Tashkent, a community consisting of 56,000 Jews. The aim was to send Jewish books and other materials to Tashkent, but Australian Jewry soon found that the immense distance to Europe made it difficult for them to contribute effectively in this area. It also did not have the resources to assist in bringing Soviet Jewish children for summer camps in Australia.⁹ Clearly, it was much more effective to contribute to UIA, and for the WZO through its Pedagogic Centre in Jerusalem to assist Jews in the former USSR.

Despite the overall lifting of restrictions of Soviet Jewry, there were still a few hard core cases of refuseniks who were not granted permission to leave and the Board continued to campaign on their behalf. In 1990 Levy attended a harbour cruise organised by the then Premier Nick Greiner for the Soviet Premier, Nikolai Ryzhkov. During this cruise, Levy was able to speak to Ryzhkov for ten minutes and he raised concerns about reported pogroms due to *Pamyat*, as well as the fate of two long term refuseniks. The outcome of this was that Ryzhkov gave Levy a promise to look into the situation with a double handed handshake and assured him that anyone wanting to leave would be able to emigrate as

restrictions would be lifted and that violence against Russian Jews would not be tolerated. These discussions took place in the presence of Greiner and Bob Carr, then Opposition leader.

Further representations were made in person to the Consulate later in 1990 on behalf of an 86 year old professor, Irina Voronkevitch, who was refused permission to join her family in Israel, while in 1992 Levy and Diane Shteinman, chairperson of the Overseas Jewry Committee, met with the new Russian consul-general about the plight of Simon Lifshits who was imprisoned in Vladivostock and whose relatives in Sydney were very concerned about his fate. His case was put on the agenda of activist groups throughout the world. When Levy met with the Russian consul-general, Igor Shtcherbakov, he was very friendly and, as they were leaving, put his hand on Levy's shoulder, indicating an important change in attitude. Another issue which the Board campaigned for in 1990 was direct flights from Russia to Israel. A petition with 7000 signatures was presented by Levy to the Soviet consul-general, Shtcherbakov who gave Levy a handshake of friendship and told the delegation twice that 'my door is always open',¹⁰ while Tim Moore introduced a motion, seconded by Bob Carr, in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly in support of direct flights to Israel. This occurred after the Board's research officer, Neer Korn, approached Moore directly on the issue.

The Board was also concerned about the integration of the increased numbers of Jews from the former USSR who were settling in Sydney. In 1990 a Soviet Jewry Integration Task Force was formed with representatives from twenty-one communal organisations, including the Board, the Australian Jewish Welfare Society and various congregations. The initial meeting to establish this Task Force was organised by Syd Field, president of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society, and Gerry Levy. Initiatives decided on included free membership of the Hakoah Club, WIZO and NCJW for a year, free or subsidised Jewish day school and kindergarten places, more social get-togethers for the newcomers, especially for Jewish festivals; and more assistance with finding employment. An information desk staffed by a Russian speaking volunteer was open every Wednesday at Hakoah; a series of English classes were offered, organised by AJWS and Hakoah; and on Wednesday evenings, different professional groups were available to provide assistance. A regular newsletter in Russian, called the *Messenger*, was launched to provide newcomers with information on the community, the festivals, summer camps and Australian history. Edited by Vladimir Dubossarsky assisted by Margaret Gutman and sponsored by the Board and the AJWS, it was mailed free to 1000 families.

Work for oppressed Jews elsewhere, in Ethiopia and Syria in particular, was also affected by the fact that the USSR was no longer involved in superpower politics. The Board worked to highlight the plight of those Jews who remained in Ethiopia and in October 1990 sponsored the first walkathon to raise funds for scholarships for new Ethiopian immigrants to Israel to further their studies. The first walkathon raised \$4,500, enough for three scholarships, and the walkathon became an annual event with strong support from the Zionist youth movement and AUJS. In 1991 Israel facilitated the airlift of 15,000 Ethiopians within a thirty hour period in what became known as Operation Solomon, and by the end of 1991 there were only 4,500 Jews remaining in Ethiopia.



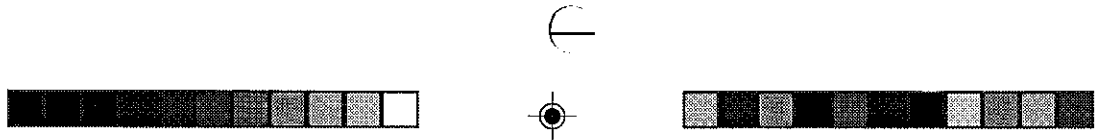
Jewish Welfare and the Board worked to assist the integration of Russian Jews.
Photo by Elaine Kitchener, 1992

After 1989, the Board became very active on behalf of the 4800 members of Syrian Jewry who were virtually trapped, unable to emigrate, with some members of the community being arrested and often imprisoned without a trial for long periods. One example of this was the Sved brothers, Elie and Selim, who were arrested in 1987, imprisoned without a trial until 1991 and subjected to torture. In 1989 Dr Eric Wegman and a newly elected general franchise deputy, Peter Wertheim, established contact with Judy Feld-Carr, director of the national Task Force for Syrian Jewry of the Canadian Jewish Congress, and, based on the information she provided, they were able to produce a comprehensive report on Syrian Jewry and a plan of action. This report was submitted to the plenum in November 1989 with a motion calling for the release of those Jews who had been imprisoned without a trial, the right of emigration for all those who so wished, and for those who chose to remain in Syria, fundamental human rights. The motion then called on the ECAJ 'to send a delegation including two members of the Sephardi community, to meet with the foreign minister, Gareth Evans, to seek the urgent assistance of the Australian government in obtaining these objectives'.¹¹ Aaron Aaron said in speaking for the motion that it had taken the plenum thirty years to pass a resolution on Syrian Jewry and he congratulated Gerry Levy for establishing a new era of cooperation between the Board and the Sephardi Community.¹² Although Gerald Falk questioned the veracity of Aaron's statement, it was true that the Wertheim motion did reflect a more activist position on behalf of Syrian Jewry.



Aaron Aaron, veteran campaigner for Syrian Jewry, with Diane Shteinman (in the foreground)

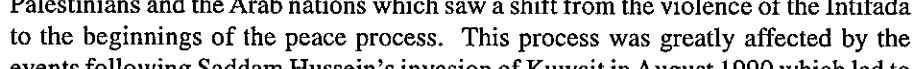
During 1991 the conditions of the imprisoned Jews in Syria improved as a result of the world wide publicity, but the Syrian Jewish community remained trapped. In its efforts to further highlight the issue, the Board presented a petition to Laurie Brereton to be passed on to the Australian government requesting that the matter be



raised at the United Nations. A fifteen-minute video presentation was also shown to a group of fifteen parliamentarians. In March 1992, when it was clear that these efforts had failed, a public vigil was held at West Circular Quay with over 300 people participating. In the wake of the Gulf War, Syria moved its allegiance from the collapsed Soviet Union to the United States and began to ease the restrictions on Jews. By April 1992 all imprisoned Jews, including the Sved brothers, had been released and from June 1992 Jews were gradually permitted to leave Syria, with most joining family in the United States and South America, so that by October 1992 there were only 1200 Jews left in Syria. The Board also campaigned for the 400 Jews left in Iraq, the few hundred Jews remaining in Yemen and the Jewish hostages in Lebanon including Ron Arad who was shot down in 1986. In 1992 a special prayer was composed for all oppressed Jews to be said at Pesach.

By 1995, very few Jews remained in the lands where they had previously been oppressed. The activities of the Committee added to campaigns across the world and were important in highlighting key issues. Under the leadership of Diane Shteinman, the Committee was active and effective and its new members such as Peter Wertheim and Dr Eric Wegman added a new dimension to its work.

THE GULF WAR AND CHANGES IN THE MIDDLE EAST



The dramatic changes which took place on the European continent after 1987 were matched by equally revolutionary changes in the relations between Israel, the Palestinians and the Arab nations which saw a shift from the violence of the Intifada to the beginnings of the peace process. This process was greatly affected by the events following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 which led to the Gulf War of 1990-1991. While Israel, at United States behest, was not directly involved in the Gulf War, great concern was expressed at Hussein's firing of scud missiles at Israel, with the resultant destruction of property, though fortunately there was little loss of life. The UIA launched a crisis appeal which was strongly supported in the pages of the Jewish press.¹³ In December 1990 the Board decided to organise a communal leadership mission to express solidarity with Israel at the time of the Gulf crisis. The group was to include the Caplans, Michael Faktor, Rabbi Franklin, Rabbi Fox, Dr Ian Kern and Bernard Levy, but the visit was postponed from January to May 1991 following the outbreak of war in January 1991. Before the war, the plenum was critical of the mass cancellation of American Jewish tours to Israel, although Sophie and Leslie Caplan did actually go on the visit despite the Gulf War.¹⁴

With the firing of the first scud missiles, the Board organised a solidarity service held at the Great Synagogue on the afternoon of Sunday 20 January in conjunction with the United Israel Appeal, State Zionist Council and Jewish Communal Appeal. This service was attended by 1800 people and proved to be a very unifying experience. At this rally Levy stated: 'We Jews have not forgotten the lessons of history. Each of us bears the memories and scars of the *Shoah* (Holocaust).' Saddam Hussein was compared with Hitler and the dangers of appeasing such dictators stressed by other speakers who included Rabbis Apple and Fox, Josie Lacey, president of Parents of *Olim* (Australians who have settled in Israel) and Dr Ian

Kern, president of the State Zionist Council, who stated that: 'Never again will Jews remain passive as the aggressors seek to destroy them'. This sentiment was shared widely.¹⁵

Sydney 'had the dubious privilege of being the only city in the free world' where Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait led to a protest outside the Israeli consulate.¹⁶ A group of about two hundred and fifty Jewish youth, calling themselves Jewish Youth for Peace, responded to this protest by travelling by bus to Canberra and protesting outside the Iraqi consulate on 24 January; they were joined by about 30 locals, Jews and non-Jews. A spokesperson for the group, Danny Wassner, lamented that while he prayed for the Israeli population, 'peace protesters were protesting not outside the Iraqi Embassy, but outside the Israeli consulate in Sydney'. The Board was directly involved with this protest by assisting financially with the bus hire. Levy also decided to attend the protest, attending in his capacity of acting ECAJ president as Leslie Caplan was in Israel at the time, even though some of his Melbourne colleagues did not support this action. Senator Peter Baume, attending his final day at the Senate, also spoke very forcefully at the protest, stating in regard to Saddam Hussein: 'Your president is a disgrace to humanity and his behaviour outrages every Jew'.¹⁷ Commenting on his attendance at this protest, Levy stated: 'I was very proud to be part of this and glad I went. It was one of the highlights of my presidency'.¹⁸

As soon as the first scuds fell on Israel the Board's office was besieged by the media so that Graham de Vahl Davis, chair of the PR Committee, Robert Klarnet and Adrienne Kern, the Board public affairs officers, and the Women's Action Group under Josie Lacey prepared background briefing materials for the media, and the Board's office worked around the clock responding to the media. Levy, himself, was interviewed on television, radio and reported by the newspapers, as were other Jewish leaders. Bob Carr, leader of the opposition and Stepan Kerkyasharian, chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission both contacted the Board's office, offering help and support. From early February Levy convened a regular weekly communal briefing and planning committee with leaders of the UIA, SZC, JCA and the Board. This team work reflected a maturity of approach in the community's leadership. On 17 February a lunchtime Gulf Background Briefing was held at the Hakoah Club with some 230 people in attendance and a further discussion evening was held at Central Synagogue on 26 February on the topic of Israel and the Gulf War.

With the Gulf War came a spate of attacks on Jewish institutions in Sydney, with five synagogues being affected by arson. The first attack was against the North Shore Temple Emanuel Kindergarten in Chatswood, with a fire apparently started by 'young louts'. Levy rushed to the Temple to find Rabbi Lampert standing there with a Sefer Torah in his arms and one building completely gutted. Levy found the experience traumatic as it reminded him of Kristallnacht when the synagogue in his birthplace of Magdeburg was burnt down.¹⁹ Then, in February and March, there were fires in three Sydney synagogues, possibly linked. The first occurred on 26 February at the Sephardi Synagogue in Woollahra, when petrol was poured into a rear window and set alight causing extensive damage. One week later, there was a fire at the Bankstown War Memorial Synagogue. As a result of the damage, the Bankstown congregation which lacked the funds to rebuild their synagogue basically

disbanded. The last and by far the worst, on 29 March, was at Allawah's Illawarra Synagogue; petrol was spread throughout the building and set alight. The whole inside of the synagogue was destroyed and when Levy arrived there was already a group of reporters on the scene. Another arson attempt, in mid-April at the North Shore Synagogue, was foiled by a security guard.

These arson attacks, which affected a quarter of the synagogues in Sydney, caused great consternation in the community and the Board was very active trying to draw attention to the seriousness of the situation. After the Allawah fire, Levy immediately contacted the Premier, who assured him that the matter was receiving serious attention. At the April 1991 plenum a motion was passed expressing concern about the spate of attacks on Jewish institutions, and expressing the Board's 'anxiety at the apparent lack of concrete proposals by the New South Wales government to date to allocate resources to prevent the repetition of such attacks and to apprehend the culprits'.²⁰ In April, Levy met with Bruce Gibson, the assistant police commissioner and, in May, Levy, Marx and Klarnet met with senior police from the northern and eastern suburbs about these incidents. The Board also invited Irene Moss — the New South Wales Racial Discrimination Commissioner from 1986, who had chaired the Commission's national inquiry into racial violence — to address the Board on this topic. She stressed that: 'The activities of extremist groups, which have become more violent in recent years, constitute a small but significant part of the problem of racist violence in Australia'.²¹

The Sydney Jewish community reacted to the increase in physical violence against community institutions by increasing, at considerable cost, security procedures around all communal buildings. To cover the additional costs, the Board imposed an additional levy on its 49 affiliates. The importance of doing this was further highlighted by the fire bomb attack on Newtown Synagogue which took place in November 1993, shortly after Michael Marx assumed the presidency in August. Marx arrived on the scene shortly after he heard of the attack and helped to remove the *Sifrei Torah* to the Great Synagogue. This experience led him to encourage all synagogues, schools and other communal institutions to spend more money on installing proper electronic security devices and other security surveillance. The cost of this security has been a great concern to community leaders, including Marx. Many believe it is unfair that the Jewish community has to cover such significant security surveillance costs, which no other community in Australia has to bear. But, there is no easy solution to this problem. Politicians have expressed sympathy and understanding, but have been unable to offer any tangible assistance, so that the Jewish community itself has no choice but to bear the brunt of the physical attacks which it has experienced.

By the end of the Gulf War the political dynamics in the area changed and it was agreed by America and her coalition partners that the achievement of peace between Israel and her neighbours would be high on the coalition's post-war agenda. In October 1991 a peace conference was held in Madrid under the auspices of the United States. As the *Jewish News* commented after Madrid: 'The Middle East is a different, and marginally more hopeful, place from what it was just a week ago.' For the first time Israel and Palestinians sat around a table in a formal diplomatic framework to discuss future relations, and even Israel and Syria engaged in direct

talks. This was the first time that Israeli and Arab diplomats faced each other in the same room without intermediaries so that, with Madrid, as Sam Lipski stressed 'it is not wrong... to hope that a real beginning has at last been made'.²²

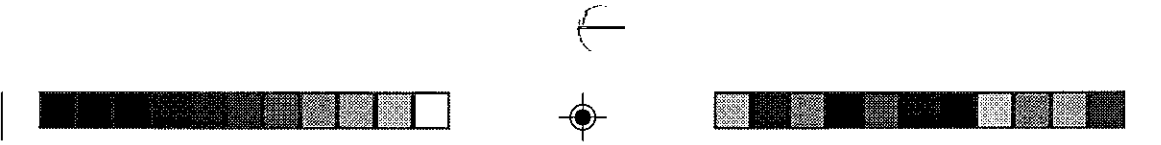
This prediction proved to be correct. After the Israeli elections of June 1992, a Labor coalition government was formed. This was described by the *Jewish News* as 'a great victory for the people of Israel, for peace, for Israel's relations with the United States, its major ally and supporter and other friendly nations'.²³ Once in power, Yitzhak Rabin placed a freeze on Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and agreed to direct negotiations with the PLO. Shortly after this, secret meetings began between Israel and the PLO in Norway, resulting in the Gaza and Jericho First Proposal, ratified in August 1993 by the Israeli cabinet, representing the most significant breakthrough in the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians. The Board welcomed this decision, describing it as historic.²⁴ After further negotiations, Israel eventually withdrew from Gaza and Jericho while a peace treaty was also signed with King Hussein of Jordan in 1994.

Concurrent with these exciting developments, in December 1991, the 'Zionism is racism' resolution passed by the United Nations in 1975 was finally rescinded, with Australia as co-sponsor of the rescission motion. Mark Leibler, as president of the Zionist Federation of Australia, played a central role in this development. The Board passed a resolution congratulating the Australian government and the ECAJ, then under the leadership of Leslie Caplan, for 'its unswerving leadership on this issue'.²⁵

INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH COMMUNAL DEVELOPMENT

A very important development in this period was the creation of the Institute for Jewish Communal Development (IJCD) which, under the leadership of John Glass, took some new and creative initiatives, including highlighting the importance of Jewish communal professionals, developing programs to train local leaders, both lay and professional, and the introduction of the highly successful Melton adult education program. The IJCD was formed during the presidency of de Vahl Davis following a visit by Professor Bernard Reisman of Brandeis University in 1988 as the scholar-in-residence for AUJS. His visit was sponsored by Hillel and Shalom College. As a result of his visit the formation of the IJCD was proposed, involving lay leaders and professionals to examine leadership needs in the community. The IJCD was formally ratified by the plenum in May 1990. In addition, an Association of Jewish Community Professionals was also formed with Rabbi Raymond Apple, Margaret Gutman and Steve Denenberg as co-convenors. Reisman returned to Sydney in June 1990 and ran a number of intensive seminars on leadership development.

The IJCD decided to create a scholarship program to send young professionals with an interest in Jewish community affairs to study for a year at Brandeis and then return to work for the community, with funding coming from the Jewish Communal Appeal (JCA). The first Brandeis scholar was Dr Hilton Immerman who went in 1988-9 and returned to become Master of Shalom College after the departure of Zac Kaye. Subsequent recipients of the scholarship were William Maynard, who was later contracted to the Board of Jewish Education, Guy Bernmel who worked for



Hillel, and Elena Rosin who also worked for Hillel. The Board partially funded one of these Brandeis scholarships. Another IJCD initiative was the running of leadership workshops entitled 'Back to the Future' for the 30s age group, the first of which was offered in November 1990 and included a number of the younger deputies such as Dr Daniel Chalmers, Phillip Hynek, Michael Jaku, George Kahane, Sharonne Phillips and Peter Wertheim. A number of 'Prominent Leaders Programs' were also organised to discuss ways of improving the community's organisational structure. The second PLP utilised Yitz and Blu Greenberg who were brought to Sydney in June 1991 and whose high profile succeeded in attracting excellent audiences.²⁶ A further internationally renowned scholar, Professor Hanan Alexander of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles was brought out in 1992. Thus, within a year of its ratification by the plenum under Glass' leadership the IJCD had managed to actively build bridges between lay and professional leaders.

In 1993 the ICJD introduced two new developments. It created the Womanpower program to maximise women's role in the community and launched it with the holding of a series of eight leadership training sessions for women. The formation of the women's group was largely from the impact of Blu Greenberg, an orthodox Jewish feminist. The concept of the Melton program was decided on in 1992 with an agreement with the Melton Institute at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. At the time, the IJCD was the only communal organisation outside the United States which was licensed to use and offer the Melton program. In August 1992 Susie Klein was appointed as Melton program director, working two days a week, and the first classes were offered in 1993 both at Hakoah and Moriah College, and at Masada College on the north shore. The Melton program, initially planned as a two year intensive course on all aspects of Judaism and Jewish Civilisation, has been such a success that a graduate program had to be devised as students did not wish to leave the program which has continued into a third and fourth year. Whilst Melton began under the Board's auspices, in 1996 it came under the wing of the Hillel Foundation. The success of Melton is another example of how the Board has initiated programs over the years where there have been important gaps within the community's structure and then handed the running of those initiatives to another organisation.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN JEWISH EDUCATION

Following the passing of Harold Nagley in 1989, the Education Committee was chaired by Leon Poddebsky for one year and was then taken over by Judy Shapira who proved to be an able and devoted leader. Judy Shapira was a retired History teacher who had taught for many years in the government school system and so brought to her portfolio knowledge of the state education system, while she also had to time and energy to devote to the position. She continued the Committee's role of supervising and coordinating the Council of Jewish Education in Schools, of promoting Jewish day schools and adult Jewish education, as well as the major role of the committee 'representing the Jewish community to outside organisations, especially to State authorities such as the Department of School Education and the Board of Studies'.²⁷



Judy Shapira, chairperson of the Education Committee, 1991 - 1997

During her chairmanship Shapira continued the Board's policy of running inservice seminars for teachers in both government and non-government schools. A successful seminar on the Arab-Israeli conflict, albeit with a smaller attendance, was held at Chatswood High in August 1990 and a further seminar was held in August 1991, the latter having Board of Studies representative, Albert Marchetto, as the main speaker. In addition, she organised seminars in conjunction with the B'nai B'rith Alfred Dreyfus on Teaching the Holocaust at the Catholic Education Centre at Leichhardt in October 1990. In 1992, after a new edition of the Holocaust Teaching kit was produced (see Chapter 12) and the Sydney Jewish Museum was opened, it was decided that future Holocaust education seminars would be held in conjunction with the Museum. This proved to be a fruitful partnership and in 1993 two successful inservices were held at the Museum with a significant attendance. In addition, Judy Shapira and Bob Selinger assisted the Museum to develop a study guide for visiting school groups.

In June 1990 a further Book Fair was held for one day at the B'nai B'rith Centre with a new focus of selling remainders. Two schools, Moriah College and The Emanuel School, participated with students acting out incidents from Jewish books they had studied in class. But lack of publicity and support from the *Jewish News* meant that the attendance was very poor and the Committee decided to discontinue the book fairs.

An important area of innovation was the new Studies of Religion Syllabus. A Consultative Committee was formed to advise the Board of Studies in relation to the new syllabi, with the core members being Judy Shapira, Rabbi Raymond Apple, Dr Suzanne Rutland, Lionel Link and Max Wahlhaus. In regard to the initial proposals for the Years 7 to 10 Syllabus, the Committee felt that the proposed course appeared

to be presenting Judaism from a Christian point of view. A submission was presented objecting to the perceived bias and proposing a new approach. The proposals in this submission were accepted in full by the Board of Studies. In addition, the Committee provided support materials for the teaching of Judaism in the new HSC Studies of Religion Syllabus which was introduced in 1992.

In August 1992 Shapira commented: 'This is the first time the Jewish community has been in on the ground floor of curriculum designing in New South Wales in this sensitive area of teaching religion'.²⁸ The harmonious relationship between the Board of Studies and the Consultative Committee was in stark contrast to the conflicts of the 1960s, discussed earlier, when parents were so concerned with the content of religion teaching that they withdrew their children from those classes. Following the introduction of the new syllabus, a good relationship also developed with the Catholic Education Office in relation to inservicing Catholic teachers on how to teach Judaism and, in 1995, the Aquinas Academy invited Judy Shapira to assist with Jewish input into their seminars on teaching Judaism.

SPONSORING ARTS AND CULTURE IN THE COMMUNITY

Another area where the Board encouraged new developments was in the field of Jewish arts and culture through assisting the formation of the Sydney Jewish Choral Society, sponsoring Israeli dancing, and the formation of the Jewish Arts and Culture Council. The Sydney Jewish Choral Society was established in May 1986 with the Board's encouragement and support. Sir Zelman Cowen agreed to be the Society's patron-in-chief and John Landerer was its initial patron and president. Renowned musician, Werner Baer was the choir's first musical director, succeeded by Wolfgang Simon, with David Brown chairman and managing director. Over the years the choir has performed at a number of key community events as well as giving special concerts. Monies raised through its concerts have gone to various charities, both Jewish and non-Jewish. The choir entertained the Board itself in December 1987 and David Brown took this opportunity to thank the Board for its support and encouragement.

The Board also assisted the Moadon Israeli dancers led by Shoshana Werner who received a cultural grant from the Department of Ethnic Affairs in 1986. They entered the ethnic dance section of the Sydney Eisteddford with the Board's encouragement and were highly commended.²⁹ They continued to perform at multicultural events, as well as within the community. They performed at the June Shell Folkloric Festival at the Opera House in 1988 and 1989, and in the Carnivale in January 1989.

In March 1989 the Jewish Arts and Culture Council was established with Uri Thernal as its first chairman. Its aims were to foster all cultural functions such as writing, visual arts, Jewish choral work and performance. The Council was launched officially in April 1989 with a mini concert at NCJW's Council House. The Council operates independently, but is still under the Board's auspices. Since its establishment, the Board's executive director, Margaret Gutman, has been very involved, serving as vice-president and later president.



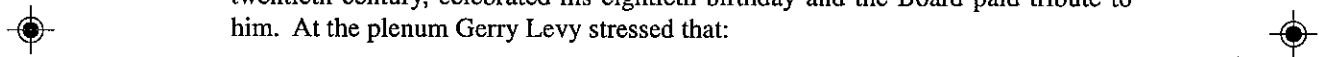
The Moadon Dancers performing in September 1986



THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH AFFAIRS

In 1984 the Australian Institute for Jewish Affairs (AIJA) was formed by a group of Melbourne businessmen led by Isi Leibler and Richard Pratt. It has sponsored a number of seminars such as an international one on antisemitism and human rights held in Melbourne in 1985. While Australian Institute of Jewish Affairs has functioned very successfully in Melbourne, it has had a rather chequered time in Sydney. In November 1989 it was announced that AIJA was to have a permanent Sydney base in the Board of Deputies office. It was felt that this partnership would give Sydney Jewry better access to the range of stimulating and educational functions which AIJA organised, in particular with their program of bringing outstanding Jewish thinkers and scholars to Australia. In August 1990 a public forum sponsored jointly by AIJA and the Board on the 'Who is a Jew?' controversy with Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, Rabbis Raymond Apple, Brian Fox, and Moshe Gutnick participating, attracted over 800 people. This arrangement was of mutual benefit to both organisations and the community. Later, AIJA in Sydney was conducted by Rodney Adler, Joseph Brender and Ron Ferster.

SYDNEY EINFELD'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY



In June 1989 Sydney David Einfeld, one of the giants of Australian Jewry in the twentieth century, celebrated his eightieth birthday and the Board paid tribute to him. At the plenum Gerry Levy stressed that:

Syd's awesome and multifaceted range of achievements encompasses a lifetime of work and dedication both within the Jewish and broader communities...Imbued as he is with enormous warmth, generosity, humanity, astuteness and integrity, Syd Einfeld has established a benchmark in communal service which I doubt will ever be surpassed or even matched... a unique person who never lost the common touch³⁰

Bob Carr, then leader of the opposition, also addressed the Board stressing the outstanding contribution Syd Einfeld had made to consumer affairs, while Sam Karpin reminisced about the early days of the Young Men's Hebrew Association and its work in welcoming Holocaust survivors as they arrived at the Sydney wharves. Tribute was also paid to Billie Einfeld, as her husband's loyal friend and adviser. In addition, a special parliamentary reception was organised by a special sub-committee of the Board consisting of Joy Balkind, Michael Fischer, G.J. Schneeweiss, Margaret Gutman and Erna Levy, with the assistance of the president of the Upper House, John Johnson. This reception was supported by both sides of the parliament, with premier Nick Greiner and Bob Carr speaking and was considered an unqualified success.³¹ It was the first such birthday celebration at Parliament House.

JOINING THE ETHNIC COMMUNITIES COUNCIL

In September 1987 Dr Joachim Schneeweiss addressed the Board on issues of multicultural Australia. He defined multiculturalism as: 'a society... in which persons of differing ethnic heritage are able to relate to each other on equal terms; in which one's position in society is not moulded by one's birthplace or ethnic background'. Schneeweiss then went on to stress that: 'multiculturalism is a policy for all Australians. It aims to ensure that they all have access to government and its services'. He also pointed out that: 'it does not mean in Australia that newcomers can use their ethnic heritage as they like. Multiculturalism promotes mutual acceptance in which diversity is seen as a virtue and a strength'.³² During the discussion following Schneeweiss' address, Professor Sol Encel moved that the Board investigate affiliation with the Ethnic Communities Council (ECC) and this affiliation was authorised in November 1987.

In May 1988 Graham de Vahl Davis, then president of the Board, went with Michael Marx to meet with Carl Harbaum, chairman of the ECC, and his vice-chairman, Ross Tzannes, to discuss the Board's proposed affiliation. The Board's application met with a very positive response and Harbaum stressed that the ECC was looking forward to the Board playing an active role on the Council. At the May plenum Josie Lacey and Ian Lacey, Rabbi Fox and Godfrey Lee were elected as the Board's four representatives for the Council. This decision meant that the Board finally reversed the position taken during the presidency of Sid Muller twelve years earlier that the Jewish community was only a religious and not an ethnic community.

In August 1987 the ECC had its annual elections with the Board's four representatives attending the meeting. Josie Lacey was elected onto the management committee and she was also invited to sit on the New South Wales Government's Coordinating Commission on Migrant Women. This was to begin a long period for Josie Lacey of active service for the ECC. At the October plenum she reported that this was the first time that the Jewish community was represented on an official basis, even though Severyn Pejsachowicz and Aaron Aaron were long time members of the Council. The ECC had over 400 ethnic organisational members, as well as representatives of the Islamic, Christian, Sikh and now Jewish communities. Josie Lacey believed that joining the ECC was a positive move for the Jewish community.

The Board became very active on the Council. In September 1989 Ben Apfelbaum, Peter Wertheim and Ian Lacey were elected to the executive as Board representatives and Josie Lacey was re-elected as a vice-president and member of the management committee. In August 1990, Stepan Kerkyasharian, the Ethnic Affairs Commissioner addressed the plenum on 'Fairer Commentary in the Media' and in September 1990 *Jewish News* editor, Susan Bures, was appointed deputy chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission.

During the Gulf War Josie Lacey was asked by the ECC president to convene an Anti-Racism Task Force to deal with the outbreaks of vilification which were occurring. She recruited Aboriginal, Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Celtic, Jewish, Lebanese and Vietnamese communities to the Task Force, which adopted as its primary objective the need for legislative and regulatory protection against public racial vilification, particularly in the media. Submissions by the Task Force (later

established as a permanent sub-committee) to the government on the various issues were prepared by Ian Lacey and these were complemented by similar submissions by the Board of Deputies.



Peter Wertheim, vice president, 1992 - 1996 and president, 1996

Every effort was made to establish good relations with other ethnic groups. In June 1991 a resolution, moved by Marx, was passed supporting the proposal to construct a mosque at Campbelltown and acknowledging that the 'evident racial and religious prejudice [was] underlying some of the local opposition to this project'.³³ In May 1992 Gerry and Erna Levy attended the Vietnamese celebration for the 2616th birthday of the 'Lord Buddha Shakyamuni' at the Vietnamese Phuoc Hue Temple at Wetherill Park, the largest Buddhist temple in Australasia. Levy offered the Jewish community's support and friendship and commented later that the Jewish community appeared to be the only other ethnic community present.

The original impetus for joining the ECC was probably the reaction of the relevant communities to the War Crimes controversy. In the event, one important result of active participation by Jewish representatives was to convince some communities to refrain from public anti-Jewish expression, and in some cases to seek a *modus vivendi*. Another advantage was the opportunity for Josie Lacey to represent the interests of the community on various bodies such as the National Advisory Council on Migration Services and the Police and Ethnic Communities Advisory Council. She also had the opportunity as an ECC vice-president to speak directly to the premier on issues of concern to the community such as the original failure to proclaim the anti-vilification provisions of the Anti-Discrimination Act or, later, to conduct the promised review of those provisions.

Members of the Board who played an active role in the ECC included Anna Berger, who was actively engaged in the ethnic Multicultural radio station, Michael Jassy and Caroline Haski, who were regular participants, and Peter Wertheim, Ben Apfelbaum and Daniel Hoenig. The various organisations which became affiliated also ensured a continuing Jewish presence.

Without doubt, active Jewish participation on the ECC provided an opportunity for the expansion of the already good relations the community had with many ethnic groups. This was reflected in mutual attendance of formal functions, such as Israel's Independence Day, in the development of personal relationships and in discussions on matters of mutual interest at formal and informal meetings with representatives of the various communities.

CONTINUING ACTIVITIES OF CRAC

In the early 1990s Rabbi Fox continued to chair the Board's CRAC (Community Relations and Advisory Committee), but in 1990 Peter Wertheim, elected as a general franchise member in 1989, was appointed as convenor.³⁴ CRAC continued to deal with non-theological issues which emerged from time to time between the Jewish community and the various churches. For example, in the early 1990s, the Board received a complaint about the manner in which the Anglican Church Mission on the campus of the University of New South Wales was carrying out its missionising activities amongst Jewish students. The Board took up the matter with the newly appointed Anglican Archbishop, Harry Goodhew, and the matter was resolved amicably. Archbishop Goodhew subsequently visited the Sydney Jewish Museum and later travelled to Israel. On his return from Israel, he discussed his experiences there with a meeting of the Council of Christians and Jews. CRAC also spearheaded the formation of solid bilateral relationships at the organisational level between the Jewish community and the Chinese, Afghan, Turkish/Cypriot, Greek and Bangladeshi communities.

During the 1990s there was a flowering of friendship with the Chinese community fostered through CRAC and its convenor, Peter Wertheim. The establishing of a closer connection between the Jewish and Chinese communities began in May 1991 when there was a problem of the publication of some antisemitic remarks in the Chinese Australian daily. The matter was taken up by the Board with the subsequent publication of a detailed apology written in both English and Chinese. Following this, there was a meeting with Henry Tsang, the Deputy Lord Mayor, and members of the Chinese community in December 1992 when it was agreed to form a coalition to deal with common interests such as the problem of racism as evidenced in the film *Romper Stomper*, racial vilification legislation, David Irving, the refugee question and immigration. During 1993 this coalition held three key meetings: in March, in June over a kosher meal at Shalom College at the University of New South Wales³⁵, and in December when Marx, Wertheim and Gutman attended the end of year party of the Australian/Chinese Association and were warmly welcomed by its president, Lawrence Lau. In March 1994, during Marx's presidency, Henry Tsang, the Deputy Lord Mayor, invited a delegation from the Board to meet with members of the Chinese community to further discuss matters of mutual interest.

Representatives of the Royal Agricultural Society were also present to discuss ways of increasing ethnic involvement in the Royal Easter Show.

THE RONA-TRANBY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In 1988 two members of the North Shore Temple Emanuel, Tom and Eva Rona, died tragically in a car accident. Tom Rona was a developer dedicated to inter-community harmony. In Guildford, the large Arab community supported a street name change to Shalom Close proposed by Tom Rona and he was also involved in the construction of a peace memorial involving the participation of members of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths. The Ronas left in their will funds to foster the preservation of Aboriginal culture. Their executor, solicitor Roland Gridiger, approached Margaret Gutman for suggestions as to the best way to utilise these funds. She suggested an oral history project, supported by the Board, as the Jewish community had developed expertise and methodology in oral history through its various Holocaust recording projects and could share this expertise to assist Aborigines to record their precious memories. Tranby College, an independent, cooperative college providing a wide range of adult education services to Australia's Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, was selected as a suitable institute and partner for this project with the Board facilitating the overall program.



Launch of the Rona Tranby Project, September 1991.

L-R: Kevin Tory, chairman of Trustees, Paul Zammit, NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Margaret Gutman,, Rabbi Brian Fox, Roland Gridiger with Gerry Levy, president of the Board and Kevin Cook, director of Tranby College seated.

In September 1991 the Rona Tranby Oral History project was launched in Glebe at the Tranby College. *The Catholic Weekly* commented:

It might seem a strange partnership, but Jews and Aborigines share a strong sense of history and the need to preserve their own culture as well as experiences of dispossession and persecution...Project supporters point out that each time an Aborigine dies, so too does an important part of Aboriginal history and folklore.³⁶

Tranby College advertised to find a suitable subject for the first oral history project which was being developed with the assistance of oral historian, Di Ritch. In July 1992 it was announced that Eliza Kennedy, an Aboriginal elder in her eighties from Wilcannia, would be the first awardee. Through her memories, Mrs Kennedy was able to build a picture of the Aboriginal story of the impact of white settlement since the early colonial period, providing a precious record for historians, educators and students, all from an indigenous perspective. It was felt that this project was mutually beneficial to both communities.

In September 1993 a group of people involved in the project met at the Board's office prior to addressing a plenum meeting. The group first toured the Sydney Jewish Museum and were struck by the commonalities of Jewish and Aboriginal experiences. The involvement of a number of prominent Jews, including Jim Spigelman, Eddy Newman, Sydney Einfeld, Justice Marcus Einfeld, Ron Castan, QC, and Peter Baume was mentioned by Michael Stewart, director general of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, during his address to the plenum.

SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES

The Board continued to be concerned with social justice issues relating to both the Jewish and general communities. In December 1989 a resolution, moved by Michael Marx and seconded by Steven Lewis, was passed which was critical of British policy in Hong Kong 'to forcibly repatriate Vietnamese refugees from Hong Kong to Vietnam'. The resolution called on the British government to 'uphold international convention that opposed forced repatriation of any peoples and to cease their current policy forthwith'.³⁷

The Jewish community responded to the crisis caused by floods in New South Wales in April 1990 and a cheque was presented to premier Greiner at the annual Yom Ha'atzmaut (Israel Independence Day) cocktail party to assist the people of the flood-ravaged town of Nyngan. In June 1991 a resolution was passed stressing support for a humanitarian immigration policy. In March 1992 a resolution, introduced by Jeremy Jones, was passed supporting the introduction of national anti-racist legislation and commending the commitment of the federal government to alleviate the plight of the Australian Aborigines through a series of social measures. In April 1992 a motion introduced by David Knoll was passed opposing the forced repatriation of Cambodian refugees who had entered Australia illegally and were seeking asylum.

In May 1993 Ben Haneman moved that an ad hoc committee be set up to study the workings of the social justice issues committees of the two major Christian Churches and report whether it would be desirable for the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies to have a similar committee. This motion was passed and Peter Wertheim then proposed that a social justice committee be established as a committee of the executive.³⁸ In June 1993 an inaugural meeting of a group interested in social justice issues was held with Wertheim as convenor.³⁹

The problem of the aged in the Jewish community was raised at the plenum by Mark Braham. He believed a Jewish nursing home needed to be established in the eastern suburbs, and a motion was passed supporting this concept with the proviso that the project should take place with the framework of JCA and through a coordinated approach of all involved organisations. Following this, a Task Force was set up under Dr Schneeweiss to investigate the possibility of establishing a Jewish nursing home on the Eastern Suburbs. In 1993, there were tensions at the plenum when Braham claimed that Schneeweiss had not been cooperating with the Nursing Home Clustering Project, an allegation rejected by Marx as president. In December 1993 Braham announced that Jewish Community Services would be operating the clustering scheme under government supervision, with the Centre on Ageing (COA) distributing kosher food.

Another area of concern within the community was domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse — Jewish Community Services revealed that the community was in no way immune from these problems. In 1993 the Board supported the establishment of a Rabbinic Task Force on Domestic Violence and Child Abuse created by Steve Denenberg, executive director of the JCS with Levy as its convenor. Commenting on the formation of the task force, he stated: 'It is clear that our rabbis face many of the social problems on a daily basis. They have considerable knowledge and experience to bring to such a forum, as well as benefiting from the experience and skill of the professional social workers'. He had worked hard to influence the rabbinical leadership on the importance of the issue and the need for orthodox and reform rabbis to work together on these issues. In this way, the Board assisted in the initiation of another important development.

The Social Justice Committee has worked well, especially in relation to issues such as the difficulties faced by the Aboriginal community. The Jewish community has strongly supported the Land Rights issue and has also been concerned about general issues of Aboriginal Reconciliation and welfare. It has shown that the Board is aware of problems within the broader community and is not confined to Jewish issues.

RESOLUTION OF ISSUES RELATING TO KASHRUT

Some of the major problems relating to kashrut were resolved in September 1990 when the Joint New South Wales Kashrut Authority was finally formed following an agreement between the Sydney Beth Din and the Yeshiva Beth Din. As Board president, Gerry Levy had been involved in behind the scenes negotiations to bring this important amalgamation to fruition. In 1989, within two weeks of

being elected president, Levy had offered to bring Beth Din head, Rabbi Dr Yehoshua Kemelman, and Yeshiva dean, Rabbi Pinchus Feldman, together in an attempt to unite the previous two kashrut systems and to resolve a dispute over supervision of Hadassa butchery. While these initial efforts did not bear fruit, they sowed the seeds for the amalgamation which took place in 1990 as the result of cordial meetings between the two groups of rabbis.

Under the new arrangement the rabbinic administrator of the Kashrut Authority was Rabbi Moshe Gutnick, minister of the Mizrachi Synagogue. However, dissatisfaction was still expressed at the plenum in regard to the cost of kosher products. In December 1992 Theo Freilich moved that another committee of inquiry be established by the Board to investigate kashrut and shechitah services. This motion resulted in fiery and prolonged debate. Following some amendments, it was passed by the plenum, but at the next meeting another motion was proposed by Jeremy Jones, seconded by Daniel Hoenig, for the rescission of the motion. Since Theo Freilich was not present at the plenum, this motion was held over. In the meantime, Marx instituted negotiations with the Kashrut Authority which led to the decision to set up a Kosher Consumers' Association and a Board Kashrut Liaison Committee comprising representatives of the Kashrut Authority, the Kosher Consumer Association and the Board. This has helped to deflect concerns over the cost of kashrut without the need for volatile and lengthy debates at the plenum where little progress was made.

FURTHER CONTROVERSIES AND DIFFICULTIES

During this period, proceedings at the plenum were still disrupted by volatile debates relating to both individual and communal issues. One of the first controversies which Levy had to deal with was a public debate between Rabbi Benzion Milecki of South Head Synagogue and Rabbi Brian Fox of Temple Emanuel. The controversy started with Rabbi Fox's public endorsement of euthanasia, which led to Milecki writing to the *Sydney Morning Herald* highly critical of Fox's position. At the April 1989 plenum Levy attempted to introduce a motion calling for community leaders to 'air disputes with courtesy'⁴⁰ but a procedural motion introduced by Robert Goot forced Levy to drop his motion. Goot believed that there needed to be unanimity, which there was not, for the motion to be effective.⁴¹

Relationships between Liberal and Orthodox communities continued to cause difficulties from time to time, particularly in regard to Yom HaShoah. In 1994 there were problems again when Cantor Michael Deutsch participated in the commemoration at Rookwood, causing problems with the Sydney Beth Din. This resulted in much correspondence in the *Australian Jewish News*, with Dr Vera Ranki writing: 'Holocaust Remembrance is not a battlefield and transcends every other consideration'. During the debate at the April 1994 plenum, Levy stated:

I suggested that Rev. Deutsch say *Kaddish* and asked Marika Weinberger, president of the Australian Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors to move so officially which she did and the committee approved the proposal unanimously... not because he is my cantor, which he isn't, not because he is

a very old and dear friend, which he has been for many years, but because he is a survivor who has lost his family in the Shoah and particularly this year when we commemorate the Shoah in Hungary, he is the appropriate person to say *Kaddish* to which he was entitled as a Jew and as a survivor.⁴²

Levy was unhappy with the correspondence published in the *Jewish News*.

In October 1990 Nelson Mandela, at the time deputy president of the African National Congress, visited Australia for three days. Mandela had met with Jewish leaders in June of that year in Geneva and had apologised for any past statements which may have offended Jews. Therefore, the Board planned to send a delegation to represent the community at an ecumenical service which was being organised in Sydney to honour Mandela. However, the night before the service Mandela made further critical comments in regard to Israel, saying that he refused to have any contact with a terrorist state, and he reiterated his oft-expressed solidarity with the PLO at a news conference. *Jewish News* correspondent, Bernie Freedman, informed Levy of these comments and the Board immediately cancelled the delegation's participation as a form of protest.

Another problematic issue was that of tensions between the Jewish Welfare Society (later renamed Jewish Community Services) and the Centre on Aging (COA). This was partly due to a clash of personalities between Sydney Field, then president of the AJWS and Myer Kangan, the first president of CAO. After the sudden and tragic loss of Field who died in November 1989, the new AJWS president, Norton Whitmont decided to make an overture to the COA. Gerry Levy, who was also on the board of management of the AJWS, together with Sam Havin, organised a meeting between the two parties at the Hakoah Club. This meeting started a dialogue between the two organisations which has gradually had beneficial effects.

JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS

In July 1995 the Board celebrated its golden jubilee, marking fifty years of New South Wales Jewry as an organised community and over 200 years since the arrival of the first Jews as convicts on the First Fleet. At the opening plenum of the Jubilee year, three foundation deputies, Sam Karpin, Yehuda Feher and Marise Brass, recalled their experiences at the first meeting of the Board in July 1945.

A special committee led by Gerry Levy and including Joy Balkind, Ben Apfelbaum, Margaret Gutman, Maurice Schlesinger, and Yehuda Feher was created for this occasion. Its program included a civic reception and the fiftieth plenum meeting which was held in the Legislative Council Chamber of the New South Wales parliament in August 1995 with the Governor of New South Wales, Rear-Admiral Peter Sinclair as the guest speaker. The meeting was hosted by Legislative Council president, Max Willis, and four foundation deputies, Ben Cohen, Yehuda Feher, Sam Karpin and Ruby Saulwick, were presented with jubilee medals. Many non-Jewish dignitaries attended. Michael Marx stated:

The symbolism attached to our convening in this chamber gives expression to the Jewish community's longstanding links with the parliament of this

state. It reinforces the description of the Board as 'the parliament of the Jewish community'.⁴³

As part of the Jubilee Year, the Board inaugurated a Jewish Arts Festival in November 1995, co-sponsored by the *Australian Jewish News* which was celebrating its centenary, and the Jewish Arts and Culture Council (JACC) held at various locations including the Powerhouse Museum in Darling Harbour.



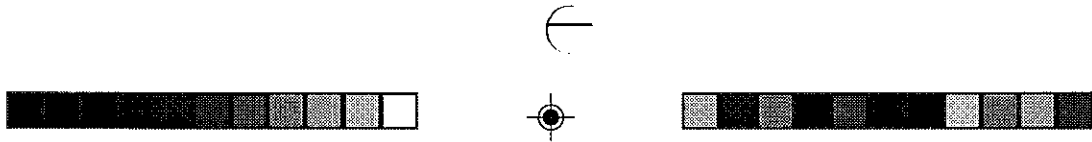
Jubilee Committee

Back, L - R: George Kahane, Yehuda Feher, Gerry Levy, Maurice Schlesinger, Ben Apfelbaum;
Front, L - R: Ros Kaldor, Margaret Gutman, Joy Balkind and Marianne Feher

The Board also established a Commission of Inquiry under the chairmanship of Justice Frank Marks charged with investigating the status of Jewish continuity. The idea was first raised during the visit of Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks, chief rabbi of the Britain in March 1992. Sacks created a Continuity Taskforce in England and in 1994 Clive Lawton, the head of this taskforce, visited Sydney as a Hillel scholar-in-residence. This provided the genesis for the concept of the Continuity Taskforce.



An additional initiative to commemorate the Jubilee was the establishment of a fund in honour of its first president, Saul Symonds, by members of the Symonds' family. This fund is to be used to promote communal development.

The success of the Jubilee celebrations demonstrated the respect with which the Board was regarded in the general community. In summing up the importance of the occasion, Marx commented:



Because of the convergence of the Jewish press, the general press and the electronic media in reporting the Jubilee events, it also provided an example to other ethnic communities that they have nothing to be ashamed of in celebrating their milestones which are seen as historic events. The Board was also able to place itself on record as the most successful organised community representing the Jewish community in Australia.⁴⁴

CONCLUSION



During their presidencies, both Levy and Marx worked hard to develop greater outreach within the general Jewish community and to make the work of the Board more known to the Jewish public of New South Wales. Levy was a team player who worked hard to create a cooperative and cohesive community which is united but still diverse. By acting as mentor to Marx, Gerry Levy also assisted in the shift to a younger leadership of the Board, thereby ensuring that the Board remained relevant to the next generation of Australian Jews. Michael Marx worked to encourage younger people to become deputies, as well as encouraging more women to join the ranks. By the end of his presidency, one third of deputies were under forty, while forty percent were female. The success of this policy was seen in the new leaders who came into office at the end of Marx's term, with Peter Wertheim, a younger leader in his forties who had only joined the Board in 1989 as the new president, and David Knoll and Amanda Gordon as vice-presidents — Amanda Gordon being the second female vice-president of the Board. Both Levy and Marx also developed strong personal relations with political leaders on both sides and with the media. The success of this policy was seen in the fact that Nick Greiner agreed to address the plenum in 1990, the first New South Wales premier to do so. In addition, a luncheon was held to celebrate the opening of the fiftieth parliament in July 1992 and, at Levy's suggestion, the Board presented Parliament House with two volumes of the Tanach (Hebrew Bible). At the same time, funding support from the Jewish Communal Appeal has ensured that the New South Wales Board has been able to operate effectively, without the financial crises which have faced its sister organisations in other states, including Victoria. All this strengthened the position of the Board both within the Jewish and general communities, giving it a very healthy prognosis for the future.

Ever-growing demand
on Board's PR resources

Jews concerned about
European antisemitism

Anti-Zionist Israeli
media Jewish group



Premier
honours
Israel

— Friday, May 15, 1992