





CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CONCLUSION

Over the fifty years of the Board's existence, it has served New South Wales Jewry in a number of capacities, managing to represent the community to outside bodies with a united voice. The Board has not only acted as the community's parliament, engendering lively and, at time, fierce debate on issues facing the community, but it has also fostered the introduction of many new ideas and institutions, especially in the area of education. Since the Board's role is to foster new developments in areas of need within the community and then, after their foundation, hand them onto established organisations, the seminal role which the Board has played in many key communal institutions is often forgotten. This does not mean that the significance of that innovation is any the less. Throughout the period of the Board's history, it has been fortunate to have been served by dedicated, hardworking and inspired leadership which has greatly facilitated its contribution. The appeal of its work can be seen in the fact that members of the younger generation have been challenged to take up the leadership gauntlet. They have continued to facilitate the growth and development of New South Wales' Jewry's roof body.







As has been shown in this history, the impetus for the establishment of the Board came from the horrific events of World War II and the impact of the Jewish refugees from Nazism on the local community in New South Wales. A new, more effective level of community representation was needed in the face of the horrors engulfing the European continent as it came under Nazi domination. The demand for broader community representation was made through the letter signed by the 'eighteen signatories' which was published in the *Australian Jewish Forum* in April 1942. It took many months of conflict and negotiations for the Board of Deputies to be established and the Board and the dream of universal franchise was not initially realised. The Board's first meeting was held at the 'Old Mac' in July 1945 in the presence of 88 deputies representing 23 organisations.

One of the key figures in this period was Dr Hans Kimmel, the stormy petrel, who clashed with presidents Saul Symonds and Horace B. Newman in his demand for the creation of a fully democratic roof body. It was said that it was not uncommon for Dr Kimmel to threaten to toss a glass of water — or even his chair — at the president, resulting in his suspension from the Board on a number of occasions. As a result of his campaign, and the efforts of Sydney Einfeld, general franchise was first introduced for 25% of the deputies in 1949 and this was later increased to 50% in 1955, ten years after the first meeting of the Board.

The Board's main function is to act as the official spokesman for the community on lay matters to government, civic authorities and the news media. In a brochure produced for its twenty-fifth anniversary, it was claimed that:


[The Board] has enjoyed recognition and respect in these areas of the general community for many years.




Whilst the organisations affiliated with the Board retain full autonomy in the conduct of their own affairs, by their acceptance of the Board's constitution, they agree to the principle of full consultation on any problem in which the interests of the community may be affected.

It might be said, in general, that the Board derives its authority from the loyalty of its constituent organisations.¹

Over the years, the Board has maintained that loyalty so that all constituent organisations have recognised its role to speak on their behalf on matters of lay concern with government and other outside bodies. This support has enabled the Board to speak with 'one voice'² as the bona fide representative of the New South Wales Jewish community. This unity is further strengthened by the fact that the Board is in charge of allocating appeal periods throughout the calendar year to its various constituent organisations.



Public Relations is probably the most important aspect of the Board's work and certainly the area which absorbs the largest proportion of its resources. The Board acts both as the spokesman for the community in the public arena and as its watchman, trying the prevent problems emerging. The community has been faced with acts of both overt and covert antisemitism over the fifty years of the Board's history and its vigilance in this area has been extremely important. Whilst the worst extremist antisemitic and racists groups, on both the right and the left, tend to be on the fringes of Australian society, and to number only in the hundreds, their very existence is of concern to the community. In the face of such threats, the Board has been active in supporting racial vilification legislation and, in cases such as *An Nahar*, has launched 'landmark' complaints with the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board and the Australian Press Council.



The Board has been an important outreach to the general community, especially through its Speaker Service which was established in 1965. Since that time over 100,000 people have been addressed on different topics of Jewish interest, while speakers have travelled throughout rural New South Wales on the Board's behalf. It also helped to pioneer Jewish broadcasting in New South Wales and has worked hard to improve the image of Jews and Israel through its publications such as *Probe*, as well as sending leading Australian journalists on intensive tours of Israel, a program pioneered during Leslie Caplan's presidency.

Security is an important part of the Board's activities. The need for better security became more obvious during the early 1980s following the bombings at the Israeli consulate in the Westfield building in the city and at the Hakoah Club in Bondi. However, security procedures did not prove adequate during the Gulf War when five synagogues, a quarter of the Sydney synagogues, experienced arson attacks. Two synagogues, Bankstown and Illawarra were seriously damaged by these attacks. This has necessitated a further tightening of security procedures. At the Board's Jubilee meeting, which was held in the Legislative Council of the New South Wales Parliament House, Michael Marx, then president, commented:

Even as we celebrate 50 years of achievement, we can never accept that our places of worship, schools and cultural institutions must be under constant surveillance with armed guards. It is unacceptable for us and, we believe, unacceptable for the entire community.³

The Board is concerned that to the present day no-one has been charged with these attacks.

Education has been another key area of the Board's activities and there is no doubt that the Board has played a seminal role in the creation and support of many key educational institutions in the community. In the early years of its history, debates on the importance of the day school movement helped to raise community consciousness on this issue. When it was felt that Moriah College did not operate sufficiently as a community school, King David School was founded in 1960. By 1968 the need for two separate schools was no longer felt and they amalgamated in that year. In the 1950s and the 1960s the Board also sought to assist the Board of Jewish Education and to strengthen its position financially. When it was believed that Jewish children were to be disadvantaged by the Primary Social Studies Syllabus in the 1960s, when Christianity was taught in a more formal capacity in primary classrooms, the Board took immediate action, advising parents to withdraw their children from such classes.

Perhaps one of the most seminal contributions of the Board was the decision to hold an inquiry into the state of Jewish Education in 1968. The Report produced by this inquiry under Professor Sam Cohen was a most significant document, since the 'Blue Book' as it was called, dealt with many key issues some of which, such as an effective teacher education program, took almost two decades to develop fully. The most immediate result of the 'Blue Book' was the formation of the Coordinating Committee for Jewish Education under the chairmanship of Dr Ian Kern and the introduction of the Counterpoint Programs which have become an integral and extremely important part of the informal Jewish Studies' programs in all the Jewish day schools for students of Years 10 and 11. It is interesting to note that the young Rabbi Selwyn and Eileen Franklin were among the first Counterpoint team to come to Sydney from Yeshiva University, New York. Rabbi Franklin was later to accept the post of chief rabbi of Central Synagogue.

In the period after 1978, especially during the chairmanship of Leslie Caplan, the Education Committee initiated a number of key developments including the beginnings of a teacher education program, supported by the Inter-Schools' Committee, the formation of a Joint Committee for Tertiary Jewish Studies under the chairmanship of Dr Ivan Cher, and the foundation of Mount Sinai College. In this period Masada College also opened its high school and The Emanuel School was founded. The introduction of the biennial book fairs and surveys of Jewish libraries, as well as the Jewish book collection of Waverley Library were also among the Board's achievements in this period. Later the Institute for Jewish Communal Development under the leadership of John Glass introduced the Melton Adult Education program, which is run through the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This

program has proved to be highly successful, and again the Board has handed on its administration to the Hillel Foundation. Throughout its history the Board has also been concerned about the needs of youth in the community, with a Youth Activities Committee functioning for a number of years and a Junior Board of Deputies in existence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Lack of financial resources to employ a full time youth director has limited the Board's achievements in this area.

The administration of kashrut facilities has been an issue of heated debate at many plenum meetings of the Board, with the problems of high cost and inadequate supplies being constantly raised. Over the years a number of inquiries into kashrut services have been made with Sam Travers in the 1950s and 1960s and later Theodore Freilich being strong advocates of the issue. Although the central problem of the high cost of kosher meat has not been fully overcome, great improvements have been made in the provision of kosher foods and a United Kashrut Administration Committee was finally established in 1990 with Sam Fisher as the first lay leader of this united body.

The Overseas Jewry Committee, later renamed Oppressed Jewry, has a long record of service, highlighting the needs of oppressed Jews in many parts of the world, including the former USSR, Syria, Iran and Ethiopia. The campaign for Soviet Jewry which lasted two decades, beginning with the efforts of Marcus Einfeld who was followed by Robert Goot for the decade from 1968 to 1978 and ending with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1989, was one of the most important and effective areas of the Board's endeavours. Less successful were its endeavours in relation to Jews in Arab Lands, where the community experienced conflicts with the Sephardi Association which actually withdrew from the Board for a short period in 1972 because of its dissatisfaction with the Board's efforts on behalf of Sephardi Jews. Only with the advent of the Syrian Jewry campaign did the Board do effective work in this area.

Remembering the Holocaust is one of the most important newer endeavours of the Board. The establishment of the Holocaust Remembrance Committee as a separate committee in 1982, and not part of the Education Committee, was the result of the endeavours of Gerald Falk who 'fought tooth and nail' for this concept.⁴ Through the work of this committee the community's awareness of the importance of '*Zachor*' to remember has been greatly heightened, with activities developing from an improved format for *Yom HaShoah* to the introduction of the Holocaust Awareness Week. In addition, the Board has played a central role in many other activities including its oral testimony project with Professor Konrad Kwiet and Sophie Caplan, the creation of the Institute for Holocaust Studies, and the Sydney Jewish Museum. It has also sought to support the activities of the Australian Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and assisted with the International Gathering held in 1985. The production of the Board's multimedia Holocaust teaching kit was an important and innovative approach to the issue of improving knowledge about the Holocaust within the general school system.

The community was much slower to recognise the importance of ethnic affairs and multiculturalism. During the presidency of Sid Muller, the Board decided against joining the Ethnic Communities Council, arguing that the community represented a religious and not an ethnic community. It took a full decade for this decision to be





reversed and for the Board to join other key ethnic groups on the Council. Once the decision was reversed, the Board very quickly assumed a high profile within the Council and it has made a valuable contribution there, as well as improving its connections with other ethnic groups such as the Chinese. During the late 1980s and into the mid 1990s the Board's Community Relations Advisory Committee (CRAC) facilitated an outreach campaign to other ethnic and religious groups. This included the joint Aboriginal and Jewish Rona Tranby project.

With the passage of time, social justice issues have come to play a much more important role in the Board's agenda. The Board debated issues such as apartheid which it strongly condemned, and also sought to assist the Vietnamese and other Indo-Chinese refugees. Having experienced the dislocation of war and persecution, the New South Wales Jewish community feels that it is very important for it to assist other refugees who experience the same plight as Jews trying to escape Nazism on the continent in the 1930s and the results of the Shoah. The Board's consistent support for reconciliation with, and justice for, indigenous Australians has also been noted in the Jewish and general media.

Over the fifty years of its existence, the Board grew from consisting of 23 to a total of 56 organisations reflecting a much more diverse and vibrant community. The Board continues to be the only community body in Australia where half the representatives are actually elected by direct franchise. In its early years the Board suffered from severe financial problems and often lived a hand to mouth existence. The financial position began to improve after 1967 when the Jewish Communal Appeal was formed. But financial problems were only fully overcome in the early 1980s when the JCA began to give the Board a more realistic allocation. It was on the basis of this improved financial position, that the Board was able to appoint Margaret Gutman as the first Executive Director and also introduce the new position of Research Officer to assist the Public Relations Director. This expansion of staff has greatly facilitated the Board's public relations work. The higher level of professionalism explains the reason why many more younger members of the community have been attracted to work with the Board.

In 1982 Eve Symon became the first female vice-president and since then the number of women involved in its activities as deputies, as members of the executive and on the various committees has greatly increased. The existence of the Women's Action Group (WAG) has also improved the status of women in the Board.

As with all communal organisations the Board has its problems. Because of the lengthy arguments which have taken place over the years, some members of the community see it merely as a debating forum which fails to achieve positive results. More difficult is the fact that because much of its most important work has to be done quietly, and because it always hands on its new initiatives to other bodies, the majority of the members of New South Wales Jewry are either ignorant of the Board's activities or do not understand its importance. While the Board over the years has worked hard at increasing its profile in the community and has initiated membership drives, these have not been successful to the level which its leaders would have desired. Thus, the Board has only 2000 paid subscribers out of a community of 35,000 - 40,000 members. An interesting comparison is the Hakoah Club which has 11,000 members, most of whom according to its board are Jewish.





The New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies has arisen from the ashes of the Holocaust. Its genesis was conceived during the blackest years of Jewish history by those who had either been personally affected by Nazism or were more recent arrivals from Europe and whose remaining family members were caught up in the horrors of the Holocaust. As Marika Weinberger, president of the Australian Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Descendants commented at the first plenum meeting of the Jubilee year of 1995:

Our people did not share in the general euphoria at the end of the war... We were a party to the war against Hitler, but we were not a party to the victory. For us victory came too late...

Thus the exodus began. Some of us started arriving in Australia, a country which, in the words of Samuel Pizar, healed us physically, psychologically and spiritually.⁵

The role played by the Board of Deputies was part of that healing process, and it was no co-incidence that Sydney Einfeld, one of the greatest leaders of the Board, began his work for the refugees as chairman of its Port and Dock Committee which arranged the reception of the survivors who arrived on the *Johan de Witt*, in March 1947 the largest group of newcomers to arrive in Sydney. Gradually those survivors, who doubled the community in number, began to make their contribution.

Despite these problems as Michael Marx commented in 1995:



Fifty years on, the Board can claim to have come a long way since that inaugural meeting. The roof body of NSW Jewry has pioneered many programs and has become a model not just for other Australian Jewish communities but for the wider community.⁶

There is no doubt that the Board has played a seminal role in the evolution of New South Wales Jewry and that the vision and dreams of its early founders, especially the eighteen signatories, have been largely realised. In all its efforts on behalf of the community which the Board represents to the outside community, it has, indeed, spoken 'with one voice'.