

PART ONE



ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

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BUREAU OF JEWISH AFFAIRS

Australian Jewish Forum

April, 1943.

NUMBER OF SLAIN IS DOUBLED

None Shall Escape

THE HEBREW STANDARD

A "Board of Deputies"

Communal Democracy

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN JEWRY

Thursday, September 28, 1944.



N.S.W. BOARD OF DEPUTIES OUTLINES ITS PLANS

MANUSCRIPTS

WORLD BUREAU

BUREAU OF JEWISH AFFAIRS





CHAPTER ONE

THE BEGINNING YEARS 1932-1945


In 1955 Sydney David Einfeld, a leading figure in Australian Jewry, delivered a major address on pre- and post-war Jewish immigration to Australia to the National Council of Jewish Women in Sydney. As reported in the *Council Bulletin*, he said:

The absorption of Jews from overseas had a tremendous social and cultural impact on the relatively isolated Australian Jewish community which was predominantly of a conservative British outlook . . . The newcomers have served the synagogues, the Jewish Day Schools and Young People's camps and have participated in all communal organisations and appeals, especially for Israel.

Without the coming of these migrants, the Australian Jewish community would have stagnated and perhaps have faded completely. Migration means new life, new vigour and new enthusiasm. When the history of the Australian Jewish community was written, . . . the period of 1934 to 1954 would be aptly and properly described as the time when Jewish life was preserved, enriched and even revitalised by the enormous influence extended by the Jewish migrant from Europe.¹



1934 to 1954 was, indeed, a watershed in Australian Jewish history. The pre- and post-war Jewish migrants brought with them a new, more intensive identification with Judaism and Jewish consciousness, transforming every aspect of Australian Jewry. The pre-war period saw Jewish refugees laying the foundations for changes in Australian Jewish life, the eventual creation of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies being one of the most important outcomes. Subsequently, pre-war developments were built on and extended by the post-war migrants who came in much greater numbers. They added a new dimension to Australian Jewry, influencing and changing the attitudes of the established community. The established community in turn, assisted in the rapid integration of the newcomers into the Australian life-style so that the transformation was a two-way process. These developments were reinforced and to some extent directed by the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies which first met in its newly constituted form on 29 July 1945. The establishment of the Board of Deputies, which took place within the space of a few short years during the war, has been described as Professor W. D. Rubinstein as a 'transformation[which] was so sweeping that the term 'revolution' is certainly not too extreme to describe it'.²



The whole question of official representation for the Jewish community in New South Wales had become more pressing in the 1930s because of events overseas. Before 1931 the president of the Great Synagogue had been the accepted spokesperson for the community. This patriarchal form of leadership had provided a cohesive if undemocratic system of communal representation which was more or less sufficient to deal with the problems of the pre-Nazi era. In the 1930s new issues arose such as

the urgent need for representation to government and official bodies; improved public relations work to counter the growth of organised antisemitism in Australia and the creation of a structure to assist the refugees from Nazism. These required a different approach to leadership. A wider, more comprehensive system of representation to allow for total communal involvement was needed and this gradually emerged in the decade after 1933.

In 1932 the New South Wales Congregational Board was created as a result of the unauthorised activities of Cantor Rakman, the minister of the newly formed Machseeki Hadas [sic] Congregation, which were bitterly opposed by the Sydney *Beth Din*. In February 1932, the *Beth Din* warned the Jewish community against buying meat which was not killed by official *shochetim*, because Rakman was slaughtering animals without *Beth Din* authorisation. In April 1932, Rakman further antagonised the *Beth Din* by accepting a proselyte into the Jewish faith without proper authorisation. This action caused Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen to call a conference of all recognised Jewish ministers and the lay heads of the Great, Newtown, Eastern Suburbs Central and Newcastle Synagogues. Rabbi Israel Brodie, chief minister of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, was also present. The aim of the conference was to facilitate congregational co-operation to prevent the occurrence of such unauthorised activities and to protect orthodox Judaism in New South Wales.

The meeting decided to form the New South Wales Congregational Advisory Board for mutual co-operation and protection. It was to consist of the honorary officers of each congregation which acknowledged allegiance to the Sydney *Beth Din*. The president of the Great Synagogue was to be convenor and chairman, and the secretary of the Great was to be its secretary. The Board could consider any matter affecting the Jewish community in New South Wales or any issue referred to it by the board of a constituent synagogue or other Jewish organisation. It could make any necessary pronouncement to the Jewish or general community. All applications from proselytes were to be referred to the Great Synagogue investigating committee which was to be enlarged by one representative from the other synagogues on the Advisory Board.

A New South Wales Jewish Ecclesiastical Board was also formed, its constituent members being the ministers of the constituent synagogues and any other minister recommended by the British Chief Rabbi and awarded the title 'Reverend' by a recognised Australian *Beth Din*. The Great Synagogue's chief minister was to act as the convenor and president of the Ecclesiastical Board which was to carry out the duties and exercise the prerogatives of a *Beth Din* except that it could not accept a proselyte until the Investigating Committee had favourably recommended the applicant. The Board could confer the title 'Reverend' on candidates who had passed an examination prescribed by the Chief Rabbi. The Board would also verify the credentials of any Jewish religious official before he was appointed to a constituent synagogue.³

The formation of the Advisory Board was the first step towards providing New South Wales with a roof organisation which would also be the official spokesperson for the community. Its scope, however, was limited as it was not elected on a community-wide democratic basis and was largely concerned with the ritual matters which had been the catalyst for its formation.

Events in Germany in 1933 rapidly changed the nature of the Advisory Board's activities. After Hitler came to power in 1933, the Board sent a cable to the British

Board of Deputies supporting its efforts to ameliorate the conditions of German Jewry.⁴ In May 1933, a mass protest meeting was called by the Lord Mayor, Alderman Hogan, at the Sydney Town Hall. Major religious and secular organisations, both Jewish and non-Jewish, were represented and the meeting was supported by the Advisory Board. The State Premier, Bertram Stevens, stressed that :

To deny Jews the right to full citizenship and the right to observe the laws of the country is tantamount to saying they have no right to live. That idea is repugnant to our sense of fair play.⁵

The meeting condemned the treatment of German Jews, establishing a fund to assist Jewish refugees. When the president of the German-Australia Chamber of Commerce, L. Burkard, rose to speak, he was drowned out by hostile demonstrations. The Advisory Board tried to ensure in every way that no action was taken in Australia which would worsen the plight of Jews. Members of the community were told not to send letters to the general press without permission in order to prevent 'irresponsible people publishing letters that would reflect discredit on [the] community'.⁶ In a further development, in 1940 the Advisory Board also informed the community that all appeals for both local and overseas Jewry had to be authorised by the Board. The Zionist Executive asked the Advisory Board to refrain from authorising Zionist appeals, unless they had first been approved by the New South Wales State Zionist Council, and this was agreed to.⁷ This was the first step towards a system of co-ordination of appeals which later became a key concern of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies.

These activities necessitated that the Advisory Board broaden its base of representation. In December 1933, it was decided that no organisation should take public action on any communal matter without approval from the Advisory Board. All Jewish institutions were invited to appoint immediately one delegate to consult with the Board.⁸ The Advisory Board thus no longer represented the synagogues alone and by 1938 it had grown sufficiently to have fifty delegates representing all communal organisations.⁹ Its increasing comprehensiveness, however, was limited by the fact that its members were not elected in a democratic fashion. In addition, the Great Synagogue continued to exert a controlling influence and its president often acted without consulting the other delegates.

The dominant position of the Great Synagogue leaders produced friction with other constituent members of the Board. The Eastern Suburbs Central Synagogue had reservations about joining the Advisory Board in 1932 but decided to do so with the proviso that if the synagogue board was dissatisfied it could withdraw after giving six months' notice.¹⁰ Dissatisfaction developed in 1934 after the death of Rabbi Cohen when the Eastern Suburbs Synagogue felt that Rabbi Dr Wald, their chief minister at the time, was not given full recognition as the only minister with a rabbinical diploma in New South Wales.¹¹ But, when Rabbi Wald suddenly had to return to London, the issue became irrelevant. In 1938 the Eastern Suburbs Central Synagogue Board decided to withdraw from the Advisory Board¹² because they claimed that Advisory Board meetings were called without their Board's representative being invited. Since they believed that they were being ignored, there

was no point in remaining on the Board.¹³ Following a special conference, they rescinded their resignation because the Great Synagogue agreed to improve the channels of communication.

Other organisations associated with the Advisory Board also expressed dissatisfaction with its approach. The Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA) accused the Board of being conservative and its leadership was critical of the Board's efforts against antisemitism. It inaugurated its own anti-Nazi campaign and tried to combat antisemitism in Australia. This independent policy developed largely under the influence of Hans Vidor, an Austrian Jew who became president of the YMHA in December 1936. Through his first-hand knowledge of the situation in Europe he was acutely aware of the danger facing the Jews in Germany and other parts of Europe and was able to arouse the other members of the movement. They organised public meetings, printed pamphlets and published a newsheet in order to create a clearer understanding of the tragic situation of German Jewry.¹⁴ In 1937 the movement intensified its activities in this field but it came into conflict with the leadership of the Advisory Board which considered its policies to be too radical.¹⁵

With the accelerated growth of the community in the late 1930s, the more anglicised Jews found themselves confronted by European refugees who were accustomed to other forms of communal organisation. The migrants experienced a lack of sympathy for their personal problems and they believed that the Sydney Jewish community was insufficiently organised to assist them. Many of them felt that a roof body should not derive its existence from synagogues alone, but should be autonomous and elected democratically. As a result of this sense of dissatisfaction, the wheels were set in motion for the creation of a Jewish Board of Deputies.

At the same time the Jewish press expanded and in June 1939 the *Sydney Jewish News* began publication with the specific intention of catering for the needs of the newcomers who, the editor stressed, would be a great asset to the community.¹⁶ The paper consisted of twelve pages printed in English with a six page Yiddish supplement. It was supported by the Yiddish institutions, such as the Jewish Cultural Home and the Yiddish Young Theatre which welcomed the paper's 'progressive policy' compared with the *Hebrew Standard's* conservatism.¹⁷ The *Sydney Jewish News* was an offshoot of the *Australian Jewish News*, initially named *The Jewish Weekly News*, which had been owned by Leslie Rubinstein since 1933. Rubinstein endeavoured to take a wider view of Australian Jewish problems and the Sydney edition gave the refugees a forum and mouthpiece.

In February 1941 a new monthly journal, the *Australian Jewish Forum*, was established to promote discussion of the many problems facing World Jewry. This journal espoused colonisation outside Palestine (such as Steinberg's Kimberley Scheme) as well as advocating the development of Palestine.¹⁸ The policy of the *Forum* was to recognise all Jews and all ideas that evoked an awareness of Jewish spirit, and to work for a truly democratic community.¹⁹ It was edited by Solomon Stedman who was born in Siberia in Russia in 1894, migrated as a boy to Manchuria and then, as a young man, settled in Australia. He established himself in business, but was determined to become a writer. He completed various courses in English writing and began producing short stories, some of which were published in the *Bulletin*, among other publications.



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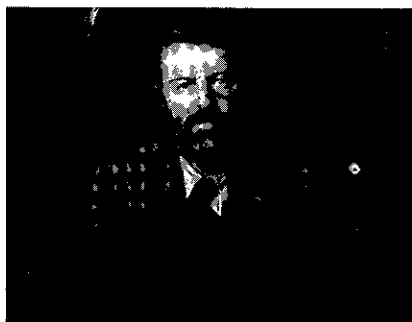


J. B. SAULWICK



OTTO C. RHEUBEN

The Committee of the Young Men's Hebrew Association.



Dr Isaac N Steinberg

A significant force behind the establishment of the *Forum* was Dr I.N. Steinberg, a charismatic world Jewish figure. He had been a leading social revolutionary before the Russian Revolution of 1917 and served as Minister for Justice in Lenin's first government. He was later arrested, fled to Germany, escaping to England in 1933 after Hitler came to power. As secretary of the Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonisation Overseas founded in London in 1935, Steinberg came to Australia after the Kimberley district in Western Australia had been suggested for the development of a Jewish colony. Steinberg's socialist background made him suspect to the authorities, but the Australian High Commissioner in London, Stanley M. Bruce, advised that he had been 'politically quiet for several years and was regarded by the authorities as unexceptional'²⁰ and he was granted an entry permit for three months. He arrived in Western Australia in May 1939 and was caught by the outbreak of World War II and unable to leave. While he was not successful with the Kimberley Scheme, he had an enormous impact on the community by inspiring the establishment of the Folk Centre to foster Yiddish culture, the *Australian Jewish Forum*, and the Board of Deputies.

The urgent need for a more democratic roof body for Sydney Jewry was strongly argued in the second issue of the *Australian Jewish Forum* of March 1941. In a leading article, the *Forum* argued that Australian Jewry would become more important in World Jewry after the war. With the disaster that was occurring in Europe, there was a need to rely much more heavily on the Jews of the English speaking world. The local community had to assist the Jews of Europe to find refuge and to concern itself with the political problems associated with the upbuilding of Palestine and other plans for Jewish survival. There was also a pressing need to negotiate with the Australian government at both state and federal level in relation to these key issues.

The *Forum* believed that Australian Jewry was inadequately organised to deal with the situation facing world Jewry in 1941. It felt that many thousands of Sydney Jews were completely unrepresented on the Congregational Advisory Board. At the 1941 annual general meeting of the Advisory Board no more than a few scores of people had been present, and this was also true of the Welfare Society and the Union of Sydney Zionists. In addition, the article claimed that the community was divided on an economic basis and was splintered by 'the fundamental social abyss between the refugees and old established members'.²¹ Therefore, the community was not united but consisted of different factions based on social status.

In this economically and socially divided community the leadership was monopolised by a small band of workers who, though very dedicated, had failed to involve the broad spectrum of Sydney Jewry. Also, the Jewish youth were not involved, adding to the weakness of community leadership. The article went on:

Is that a living Jewish community, where a group of good-intentioned leaders monopolises the whole responsibility, whereas the masses of the population evade any responsibility at all?

There is only one alternative to this deplorable position, and this is reorganisation of the Community on a democratic basis. In a democratic country such as Australia, a democratically organised Jewish community would be the most natural institution, and would, of course, greatly increase its own prestige . . .

A democratic community would call upon all Jewish men and women 20 years of age (or otherwise, as its Statute would prescribe) to elect in an open and thoroughly prepared campaign the representative organs of the Community. New, fresh blood of youth would stream into the veins of the communal body; new talented men with spirited ideas would come forward. the dismembered sections of the Jewish population would draw nearer to each other in common activity; the indispensable link between leaders and the Community would be established.²²

The *Forum* acknowledged that it was not yet known who the leaders of this newly created body would be. However, when the first Zionist Congresses were held, their democratic nature led to the emergence of outstanding leaders such as Ussishkin, Weizmann, Ben Gurion, Jabotinsky and others. Similarly, it was believed that a democratically constituted representative body for Sydney Jewry would reinvigorate the local community and bring to the helm new, active leadership which would be fully representative of the community and so would invigorate it.

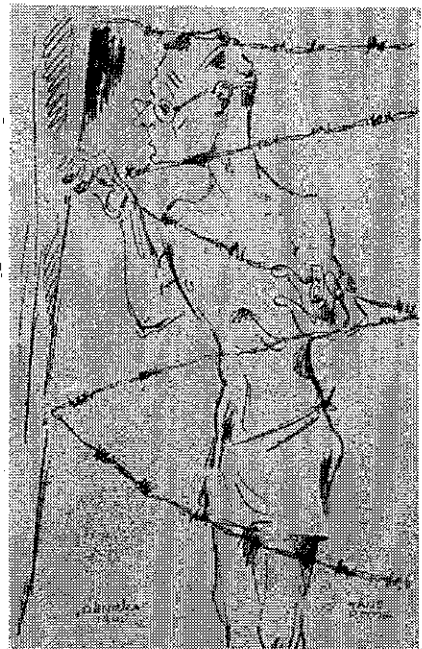
Further articles and letters published in the *Forum* in 1941 stressed the immense problems facing World Jewry and the challenges facing the local leadership. In its New Year message the editor described the year that had just passed as 'the blackest in the annals of humanity' in which 'countless lives had been sacrificed, untold suffering endured, and millions of humans were reduced to slavery and despair'.²³ In spite of the tragedy facing the Jewish people in Europe the editorial committee ended on a positive note, stating that just as the Jewish people had borne witness to the failure of tyrants in the past, so too would they live to see the failure of the present despots. Courage and bravery were needed in the face of the 'struggle against tyranny'.

In addition to focusing on the tragedy overseas, the *Forum* also dealt with the difficulties which the refugees faced in Australia, including restrictions placed on German and Austrian Jews who were classified as 'enemy aliens', resulting in severe restrictions of their movement and activities and, in some cases, actual internment. In November 1941 it published a letter from an internee who wrote:

We are in, but like Tantalus of old we see the foods that are not for our picking. Here we waste away behind wire, while there is a shortage of labour. The war is against the enemies of Jews, nevertheless we are mistreated by our own allies. The fight is for victory, but we who are valuable assets to our allies are pining away behind wire . . .

Even down the ages it has been the Jews' initiative to release their brethren out of their bondage.

We thank our brethren for work done in the Kimberley Scheme. That is for the future; but what about us . . . in the present?²⁴



Man Behind Barbed Wire HMT Dunera, 1940. Pencil on toilet paper by Hans Rothe.

In the same issue an article by Maurice Isaacs reported on antisemitic manifestations in Australia including the publication and distribution of 'fascist inspired literature'. Isaacs argued that the Jewish leaders in their socially secure positions did recognise the reality of the undercurrent of antisemitism which existed in Australia. He stressed:

Yet there are people in our midst who are opposed to initiating any long-sighted activity in this regard. They prefer to delude themselves and others into thinking that these attacks on the Jews are too trivial to warrant any concerted action in reply, or else, for fear of disturbing that sense of security I have mentioned above, refuse to take any action that might in their opinion focus the gaze of the outside world upon, and thus aggravate, the "Jewish problem".²⁵

Isaacs believed there were others in the community who shared his views and that the newcomers, in particular, were deeply concerned about the signs of antisemitism and believed that more drastic action was necessary. He stated that it was important not only to respond to such incidents but also to take preventative steps. Action was necessary not only to protect Australian Jewry but also the democratic fibre of Australia as a whole.

With its strong focus on the problems facing Jewry both in Europe and Australia, and the need for democratic reform for Sydney Jewry to meet these challenges, it is understandable that in April 1942 it was the *Forum* which published

the open letter to the Jews of New South Wales, signed by 18 signatories of various organisations, which challenged the authority of the Advisory Board. This letter was also published on the front page of the *Sydney Jewish News* but was ignored by the *Hebrew Standard*.²⁶ Among the eighteen signatories were Australian Jews, children of immigrants, who had been at the forefront in the fight for change, including Victor Cornfield, Maurice Isaacs, Sam and Julius Karpin (both of whom were very active in the YMHA); Rabbi Bernard Frampton; Polish Jews who had arrived in the 1920s and were central in the push for stronger religious life, including Abraham Rabinovitch, Max Mann, Mottel Phillips, Haim Sher, Meir Simons, M. Wise; the Yiddishists Solomon Stedman, who edited the *Forum*, S. Stoliar, Abraham Stuchynski; and also J. Rothschild, K. Wein and Abraham Wells. As well as being published in the *Forum*, this letter was also sent to all known Jewish adults in Sydney together with a form which the recipients were asked to fill and return.





The 18 signatories reiterated the arguments originally presented in the March 1941 issue of the *Forum*. They stressed that, given the enormous suffering of the Jews in Europe, it was important for the Jews of New South Wales to provide effective leadership and to ensure a strong future by saving as many as could be saved from the European inferno. Any rescue program had to be carried out by the organised Jewish community in New South Wales. Yet, they argued, at present that leadership was inadequate because of the unrepresentative nature of the Advisory Board, unlike the British and South African Boards of Deputies. The signatories claimed:

It is now clear that a democratically elected Jewish body, based on universal Jewish franchise, is the only means of awakening our people to the responsibilities and obligations that face them. All Jews, both male and female, over the age of eighteen years, who proclaim themselves as Jews, without distinction of origin or language, would be enrolled and registered for the purpose of participating in a regular election of a JEWS' REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL. Electorates should be formed, a period allowed to elapse for electioneering purposes, and elections themselves be conducted by secret ballot, without fear or favour, in a true democratic spirit.²⁷

It was stressed that with such a system of elections, new leaders would inject fresh blood into the local leadership and, as a result, the whole community would be invigorated. It would also bring the organisation of New South Wales Jewry into line with democratic Australia and awaken the community in preparation for the coming challenges of peace.

In response to this letter, the Advisory Board admitted the need for a new constitution and invited other organisations to offer suggestions. After much controversy a meeting was held on 7 May 1942, between representatives of the Advisory Board and five delegates of the signatories, who were Isaacs, Frampton, Karpin, Stedman and Steinberg. Steinberg was not one of the 18 signatories but his personal leadership had made him a significant force behind the movement.


The Advisory Board, together with its Public Relations Committee were represented by 15 members, including Rabbi Dr Israel Porush, chief minister of the




Great Synagogue, Rabbi Aisack Leib Falk, second minister of the Great Synagogue, Rabbi Eliezer A. Levi of the Central Synagogue, Saul Symonds, president of the Advisory Board and Cecil Lubet, a communal stalwart and active in the recently created Temple Emanuel. The meeting was a lengthy one, lasting three hours, and there was strong debate. In the end the following resolution was passed:

This meeting decides on the principle of a general democratic election to establish a unified representative body of all Jews in New South Wales, irrespective of membership of existing organisations, and that a commission be appointed to devise ways and means of instituting such elections — such commission, consisting of members from the signatories and the Advisory Board, to make its report within one month'.²⁸

The representatives of the Advisory Board assured the delegates representing the signatories that they would consider this resolution as soon as possible and then inform the signatories of their decision. This undertaking was not honoured and the Advisory Board did not report back to the 18 signatories.



In the June issue of the *Forum*, Dr Aaron Patkin of Melbourne wrote an article entitled 'A Democratic Jewish Community' in which he strongly endorsed the open letter. Patkin outlined the strong impact which the letter had had on Melbourne Jewry, especially among the Jewish youth who, through the Melbourne Jewish Youth Council, had debated the issues raised in the 'stirring appeal' of the signatories.²⁹ At this meeting I. M. Oderberg (known as Manny) (later editor of the *Australian Jewish News*) was strongly critical of the established leadership, referring to the 'self-deceiving complacency of the wealthier class of Australian Jewry'.³⁰ Patkin argued that there was a need for a radical change in Australian Jewry's leadership which had simply usurped power. The inadequacy of community leadership had manifested itself with the poor handling of the pre-war refugee problems by the Sydney and Melbourne Jewish Welfare Societies which had clearly demonstrated the problem of leaving such important matters in the hands of the few. In what was indeed a stirring conclusion, Patkin wrote:



The problems facing us Jews of Australia have now transcended the limits of a local or parochial outlook, They are of "grand design" woven into the pattern of a new coming world, of a new order of things. Our share in this blood struggle for survival of humanity is conspicuous enough to be underestimated.[sic] Our sacrifices must not be in vain! As Jews we have been singled out for attack and onslaughts by the Nazi beasts — as Jews we must demand the reconstitution of our human and national rights.

The struggle is not yet over; it will demand from us still more sacrifices of blood and sweat. Let us be ready when the hour of reckoning with our enemies and balancing accounts with our friends strikes!

Eighteen communal and social workers of Sydney have openly expressed what is in the heart of every Australian Jewish democrat; the Melbourne Jewish youth has responded to that appeal of commonsense with honest candour and simplicity. It is an elementary idea now enshrined in the

hearts of all the United Nations — “Government of the people, for the people, by the people” — and one wonders will those in power find the courage to resist it?³¹

In July 1942, Patkin’s address to the Melbourne Jewish communal workers on ‘Jewish Democratic Community and Cultural Autonomy’, was published in the *Forum*. In this address he presented further arguments for the need to unite the very disconnected Jewish community into a more organised whole which would be represented by a democratically elected body rather than by self-appointed representatives of the wealthy classes.

Following the meeting of May 1942, a whole series of meetings was convened as the signatories pushed for acceptance of their proposals. On 9 August 1942, a mass meeting was held at the Maccabean Hall, attended by 500 people. At this meeting twelve resolutions were presented, including the following:

1. The Jewish Community of Sydney is to be represented by a Board of Deputies, consisting of 50 persons, elected through equal and direct franchise by all registered Jewish men and women of 18 years and over.
2. The Elections are to be instituted and carried out under the supervision of a special Electoral Committee, which shall be formed by a representative conference of all Jewish organisations in Sydney called together by the Advisory Board and/or the 18 signatories.³²

The resolutions included the need for the compilation of electoral rolls of all Jewish men and women, encouraging everyone to register and pay a small registration fee (of one shilling); and announcement of lists of candidates by all communal groups before the elections which were to be held on a Sunday with polling at several locations. The votes were to be totalled and, on the basis of the lists of candidates, each list was to receive as many seats as the necessary average included in the number of votes. The 18 signatories undertook to disband as soon as the election was held and the Advisory Board was to transfer its functions to the newly created Board of Deputies and inform government authorities of the changes in the structure of the community. The resolutions also proposed monthly meetings for the Board’s plenum which were to be open to the public. Its proceedings were to be published in the Jewish press.

Solomon Stedman, editor of the *Forum*, in its September/October issue, applauded the attendance at the meeting and stressed that unless action was taken and the Advisory Board co-operated, the 18 signatories would have to act independently in order to achieve their goals. The hundreds who attended the meeting would need to carry on the campaign.

In December 1942, an open letter to the Melbourne Jewish community was published in the *Forum*. This was signed by many of the newcomers in Melbourne, including leaders of the Association of Jewish Refugees such as Dr E. H Krauss, Walter Lippmann and Dr. I. Weyman; and United Jewish Relief Fund (UJORF) leaders such as Leo Fink, J. Pushett, J. Okno, and A. S. Rose. Leading Yiddish writers and

editors such as Pinchas Goldhar, Joachim Rubinstein and Yasha Sher, as well as communal identities such as Abraham S. Leibler, Aaron Patkin, editor of the *Zionist*, and Solomon Wertheim were also among the 37 signatories. Isaac Ripps, a Russian born Jew who had arrived from Belgium in 1938, was the co-ordinator of the group.



Solomon Stedman

The New South Wales Advisory Board still took time to respond to the challenge; though the 18 signatories were in a hurry, they underestimated the difficulties and vested interests involved in changing the structure of communal leadership. On 4 November 1942 the Advisory Board convened a conference of all Jewish organisations which, by a bare majority of two votes, endorsed the activities of the Advisory Board. Then, in January 1943, the United Emergency Committee for European Jewry was founded by the Board to raise funds to assist the millions of Jews suffering tragically under Nazi rule in Europe. A similar Committee was also formed in Melbourne, with plans to also establish Committees in Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide.

Indeed, in discussing the momentous events of the revolution created by the 18 signatories in the structure of New South Wales Jewry, it is vital to keep in mind the unfolding tragedy of European Jewry. This tragedy was constantly highlighted in the Jewish press, with both the *Sydney Jewish News* and the *Hebrew Standard* stressing the horrendous events occurring in Europe with mass arrests, deportations and destruction. While in those years very few photos were included compared with present day newspapers, because of the issue of expense, there were some graphic visuals published to highlight the tragedy. In November 1942 a public protest meeting was held to protest at the ruthless massacres of millions of defenceless people, Jews and Christians. This meeting was addressed by the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Alderman S.S. Crick, with messages of sympathy read from the Prime Minister, John Curtin, and Herbert Vere Evatt, the Minister for External Affairs and Attorney General, among others.³³ At this meeting the mass slaughter and starvation of civilians was stressed. Shortly after its formation, the United Emergence Committee for European Jewry issued a 'Call to Australian Jews' in February 1943

to assist in raising funds so that as many Jews as possible could be rescued. In this appeal, the Committee stressed:

The terrible acts which led to it must not fade for a single moment from the mind of any Jew, anywhere. It is a fact that Jewish men and women who were first herded in millions into ghettos and enclosed there under unspeakable conditions to starve or perish of disease, are now being dragged in their tens of thousands to unknown destinations. These destinations are the lethal gas chamber[s], the concentration camps of death, the collective graves which they are themselves compelled to dig, and other devilish barbarities of the Nazi order.

Let every Jew who is free, as we happen to be, count over to himself the census of European Jewry - in tens of thousands - in hundreds of thousands - nay, in millions. Let him count to himself two million pitiful, mutilated, convulsed and emaciated bodies - men, women and little children, for whom death was the only release.³⁴

Again, in March 1943 the rabbinical leadership across Australia, issued a 'Pastoral Letter to the Heart of Every Jew' which again stressed the fact that the 'threat of annihilation is *real and immediate*' and that 'what is now going on in Europe is a nightmare surpassing in horror anything known in human history'.³⁵ It is interesting to note that the rabbinical leadership put aside sectarian differences at this time of distress, since the signatories to the letter included both Rabbi Herman Sanger and Rabbi Max Schenk, the two rabbis of the Liberal congregations in Melbourne and Sydney. Professor W. D. Rubinstein has stressed the fact that by 1943 'every Jew in Australia not only knew what had occurred, but had, to a remarkable and uncanny extent, drawn the same implications from the *Shoah* that we do, entailing, above all, a dedication to Jewish identity, survival and rebirth'.³⁶

It was with the backdrop of these events that the formation of the Board of Deputies took place. Finally in March 1943, at the same time that the rabbis issued their pastoral letter, the Advisory Board gave into the pressure from members of the community and called a meeting of all Jewish organisations to ratify the formation of a Board of Deputies. It presented the following resolution:

That this Convention of representatives of Jewish organisations and synagogal bodies recognises the principle of a unified Jewish Community and a single controlling, directing and representing authority as fundamental to the welfare of New South Wales Jewry, and to this end endorses the establishment of a New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies.³⁷

At this meeting attended by the representatives of forty synagogues and organisations an amendment was proposed by Julius Karpin and seconded by Dr Steinberg that the words 'on the principle of a general democratic franchise of all adult Jews of NSW' be added, but the amendment was defeated by a large majority and the original resolution passed.

A provisional committee was formed to draft a constitution for the Board of Deputies and a convention committee established to decide on the eligibility and number of candidates for the new Board. It was hoped that this would be finalised within six months, but the whole process took closer to eighteen months.

The *Forum* was highly critical of the composition of the meeting and claimed that it was not representative of the community. In an article published in April 1943 it analysed the 40 different organisations which were represented and demonstrated the overlapping of membership and ideology of many of the organisations which voted against democracy. The writer was especially critical of the Zionist organisations which voted against the Karpin amendment, even though the structure of the World Zionist Organisation was based on the right of every Jew and Jewess to vote at elections provided they had paid their shekel (valued at 2/- in Australia).

In April 1943, Steinberg left Australia for Canada. He had been a leading figure behind the campaign and his departure may explain the fact that after April 1943 the momentum slowed and the original intention of a fully democratic body was not achieved. In the May/June 1943 issue of the *Forum*, the committee representing the 18 signatories reviewed their achievements since the publication of the open letter. They were highly critical of the proposals as presented to date by the Advisory Board because they failed to incorporate the concept of fully democratic elections. They stated that the proposals suggested did not incorporate any real changes in the community's structure but merely offered a new name. A 'pseudo-democratic constitution' based on indirect representation through the organisational structure would stifle 'the free will of the people'. They proposed a Jewish Democratic League in order to create a true democracy and invited 'every progressively minded man and woman' to join the new League. A meeting for this purpose was held on 20 June 1943.

At the same time the convention committee was elected by forty different Jewish organisations (see Appendix I). This committee included Mrs Marcus Marks, Saul Symonds, Cecil Lubet, Felix Freeman, Silva Steigrad, Sam Karpin, Harold M. Bloom, Max Freilich, Solomon Zander, S. J. Guss, A. Cymerman and Dr Jona M. Machover. Whilst none of the 18 signatories were elected to the committee, there were some newcomers including Zander, Freilich and Cymerman.³⁸

There were many further disputes over the constitution of the Board of Deputies, which had been established in principle at the meeting of March 1943. The provisional committee encountered considerable difficulties in meeting the wishes and requirements of all the different organisations which wished to join the Board of Deputies. On 29 July 1943 the provisional committee called a meeting at which 19 interested organisations were represented by 72 delegates, on the basis of one delegate for every 100 members. At this meeting Saul Symonds was elected president of the provisional committee with Cecil Lubet and Horace B. Newman as vice-presidents. Harold Bloom was honorary secretary and Sydney B. Glass honorary solicitor. Dr Machover, who had been a member of the British Board of Deputies, played a key role and provided much advice. Glass prepared the clauses of the proposed constitution which were considered by the executive and then by the whole of the provisional committee. The name NSW Jewish Board of Deputies was

officially adopted by the provisional committee on 30 August 1943 at a meeting attended by 65 deputies.³⁹

At a meeting of the provisional committee in May 1944 the final draft of the constitution was presented. At this meeting two new and unexpected amendments were moved. Cecil Luber proposed that while the members of the Board be elected on the basis of organisational representation, the Board's executive should be elected by general franchise. The second amendment, proposed by Max Freilich, was for the introduction after the war of direct and general franchise for the Board. Saul Symonds, president of the provisional committee, decided to convene a special meeting to consider these resolutions. The *Forum* welcomed the Freilich amendment and stated: 'Should the clause be inserted into the Constitution the obstacle to real unity will have been removed and a united Community would come into existence'.⁴⁰

The reconvened meeting met on 14 June 1944. At this meeting the constitution of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies was adopted. After considerable discussion, Max Freilich eventually withdrew his motion because of the 'legal difficulties involved', although these difficulties were not explained. Instead a motion that the 'question of introducing a system of general franchise for the election of Deputies be considered by the incoming Board of Deputies' was carried.⁴¹ Thus the proposal for direct and equal franchise was rejected by the provisional committee of the New South Wales Board of Deputies.

On 19 September 1944 another meeting was called to inform the community about plans to inaugurate the Board of Deputies. At this meeting, attended by 200 people, eight speakers outlined the Board's election proposals. The Board's constitution provided for the various organisations to elect representatives on a proportional scale according to membership. Even though the machinery was in place for an election, it took a further ten months for elections to be held because of problems experienced in finalising details. In this time the number of affiliated organisations decreased from 40 to 23 and the number of people who registered for the elections was only 5,182.

The deliberations of the provisional committee and the final constitution were again criticised in the pages of the *Forum*. In December 1944 Dr Hans Kimmel attacked the planned constitution. He stated that it only allowed for indirect elections while a large number of Jews who were not members of any communal organisation were completely deprived of representation. Further criticism was expressed in August 1945, when it was pointed out that the newly constituted Board faced many challenges since it needed to create order and sense out of the chaos and lack of co-ordination within the community, but its first immediate challenge was to introduce free and universal franchise for all Jewish men and women in New South Wales. Only in this way could the community become truly united.⁴²

Over three years passed between the open letter and the first meeting of the Board of Deputies in 1945. While the constitution of the newly formed Board fell far short of the expectations of the 18 signatories, much had been achieved. The foundations for all these developments were laid by the immediate pre-World War II refugee immigration. A number of the eighteen signatories were newcomers while most of the others were children of newcomers. In this way, the refugee migration contributed significantly to this area of communal development.

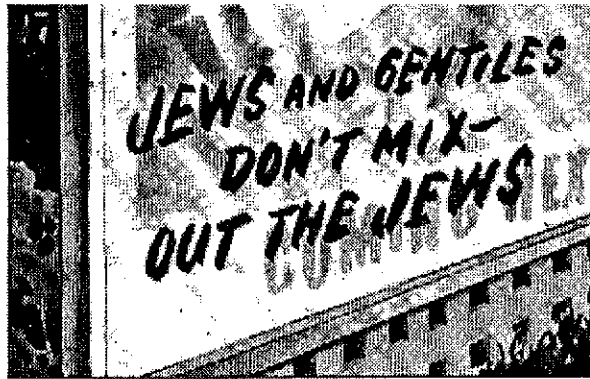
At the same time as the struggle for the creation of a more representative communal body was taking place, there was also great concern about the increasing level of antisemitism in Australia and the need to combat any manifestation of fascism, both in Australia and abroad. In Melbourne this concern resulted in the formation of the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism in May 1942.

In New South Wales during the early years of the war, concern about antisemitism increased, particularly with the activities of the Australia First Movement which was a fascist organisation waiting for either Nazi or Japanese conquest to establish a fascist regime in Australia. These concerns became more real following the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 and Japan's entry into the war. The subsequent threat to Australia, combined with the worsening tragedy of European Jewry, increased the concern felt by Sydney Jewry. In order to deal with this threat, a public relations sub-committee (PRC) of the Advisory Board was created in February 1942. Other organisations not part of the Advisory Board were invited to join the PRC, and the World Jewish Congress, represented by Dr Maurice Laserson, was the first body to apply, followed by the YMHA with Sydney Einfeld as its representative.⁴³ Other members of the PRC included Gerald de Vahl Davis, J.A. Levy, Rabbi Max Schenk, Dr Laserson, Horace B. Newman, Max Freilich, Israel Horwitz, Harold M. Bloom, Rieke Cohen and Dr Fanny Reading. Herbert I. Wolff, secretary of the Great Synagogue, was initially appointed as its secretary.

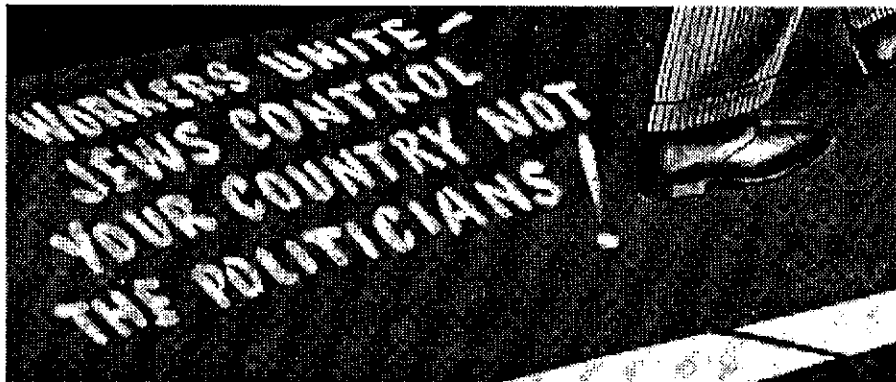
Shortly after the creation of the PRC, in May 1942, it was decided to establish a Bureau of Jewish Affairs to carry out the work of the PRC, under the directorship of Dr Laserson. At the same time the PRC itself was enlarged. The program envisaged for the Bureau was very ambitious. It was to collect and report on all antisemitic statements and publications, including statements made at public meetings, in the trade union movement, in the Domain, in trams and other public places. All instances were to be investigated and appropriate action taken, even to the extent of criminal action. It was felt that the government needed to be urged to amend libel laws to make it an offence to refer to a person's religion in a newspaper article or other published statement. The bureau was to engage in other research activities including a demographic study of the Jewish population, especially in relation to the employment profile, in order to have information to counter negative statements about Jews in the workplace. A program of lectures to interested groups including churches and trade unions was also to be instituted.

In order to support this wide range of activities, an appeal was launched to raise funds. Saul Symonds was chairman of the bureau, with Cecil Luber as honorary treasurer and Sam Karpin as honorary secretary. In July 1942, Sam Karpin wrote a long letter to the *Forum*, urging communal support of the Bureau's work.⁴⁴

Dr Maurice Laserson, as executive director of the Bureau, needed a secretary to assist him and he employed Ilse Sanders who was born in Vienna into a prosperous family. As a university student she started an Arts degree and then decided to learn English which she did from 1934 to 1936. After spending some time travelling, she took on a full time job, so that she did not complete her Bachelor of Arts. Ilse Sanders was working with RKO Pictures in 1938 and they were able to organise a permit for her to migrate to Australia. She arrived in Sydney in January 1939 and continued to work with RKO writing subtitles and helping with publicity. She suffered



These statements were on hoardings in the city. Similar defacements were made on fences, tramway waiting sheds and other hoardings in the Eastern Suburbs. Immediate action was taken by the Bureau of Jewish Affairs to have these offensive words removed.



These were painted in bold letters on the kerbstones in and around William St., and other parts of the city. Immediate action was taken by the Bureau of Jewish Affairs.

Material from a publicity pamphlet produced by the Bureau of Jewish Affairs in July 1943.

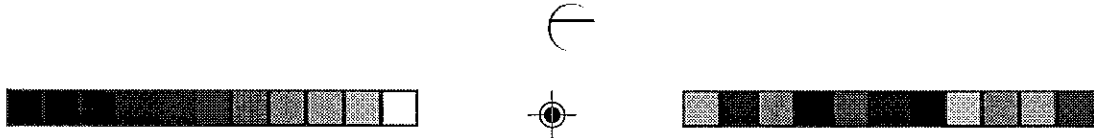
from anti-foreign comments and, with the effects of the war, this area of employment dried up. She was then approached to work with the Bureau of Jewish Affairs, and was employed after an interview with Dr Laserson and Israel Horwitz.

The Bureau did not operate for much more than a year. It experienced financial problems as its supporters failed to raise the necessary funds. The 18 signatories were very critical of it because they felt that a democratically elected Board of Deputies should be created in the first instance. Above all, there was constant conflict between Dr Laserson and the Jewish establishment because of differences of opinion on how the bureau should function. Laserson wished to be much more direct and aggressive, while the executive of the bureau believed in a much more restrained approach. Dr Laserson, who originated from Russia and had been a member of the Kerensky government in 1917, was simply 'too foreign' to deal with the established Australian Jewish leadership.⁴⁵



In 1943, when the provisional committee for the Board of Deputies was created and the bureau was no longer an active body, Ilse Sanders became the secretary of the Provisional Committee. She was to remain as the general secretary of the NSW Board of Deputies until her retirement in 1966, giving a total of 25 years of community service. During this time she married a fellow Austrian refugee, Robey, in 1944 and had a family, but she continued to work for the Board. She proved to be a loyal and dedicated servant of the community.



Ilse and Frederick Robey



Another important development which occurred during this period, also as a result of the impact of the refugees and the events of the Second World War, was the formation of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) in August 1944 as the representative of the community at a federal level. This momentous event, which saw Australian Jewry becoming fully united for the first time, took place at a conference held in Melbourne with 17 delegates from five states attending.⁴⁶ The ECAJ was to consist of representatives elected from the five state bodies on a proportional basis. The president of each Board was automatically a vice-president of the ECAJ. The headquarters including the president and the executive of the ECAJ alternated between Sydney and Melbourne, initially on an annual basis and, after 1952, on a biennial basis.⁴⁷ The ECAJ also established closer links with overseas world Jewish organisations such as the World Jewish Congress (WJC), founded in 1936 in Geneva to represent Diaspora Jewry. In 1941 an Australian section was established with Dr Maurice Laserson as the official representative but at its annual conference in April 1947, the ECAJ leadership decided to affiliate directly with the WJC. Dr Laserson tendered his resignation but there were members of the WJC in Sydney who feared that the ECAJ would not implement WJC principles and a new organisation, the World Jewish Congress Association of Australia, was formed⁴⁸. It was short-lived and was disbanded in December 1948 because of 'the successful collaboration that has [sic] now developed on the official level between Australian Jewry as represented through the ECAJ and the WJC'.⁴⁹



The creation of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies marked a significant break with the previous structure of the community. It provided an organisation which could act as the official representative for Jewish interests and as a forum for discussion. It helped decrease the parochial bitterness and mistrust between the various synagogues and charities and its creation emphasised the fact that the synagogues were no longer the only focal point of Jewish life since, as a result of the secularisation of society, there were different ways in which members of the community identified as Jews.⁵⁰

The struggle for a central communal organisation was partly a struggle for supremacy in which the dominant role of the Great Synagogue was challenged. Before the 1930s the Great Synagogue had acted as the official spokesperson for the community. Even after the creation of the Advisory Board, the Great's influence continued, as its president was also chairman of the Advisory Board. The Board of Deputies' power base, however, was not the synagogues' alone. The newcomers often saw the secular and national organisations as more important to Jewish communal life than the synagogue. The central pivot of the community had started to move away from the Great Synagogue and, as a result, its influence diminished.

However, the Board of Deputies as it was constituted in 1945 did not match up to the ideals of the eighteen signatories. The thrust towards creating a democratically representative body for NSW Jewry had failed. After two years of debate over the constitution for the new Board, the organisation which emerged was based on organisational representation and not on general franchise. The invigoration which the signatories had hoped would occur with a fully elected, democratic body could not occur. The Board which emerged fell far short of the expectations of those who had struggled for a significant change in communal leadership. Nevertheless, it had a significantly broader communal base than its predecessor, the Advisory Board.

