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## CHAPTER TWO


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### THE FOUNDATION YEARS 1945 - 1952

From 1945, with the creation of the NSW Board of Deputies, NSW Jewry had a representative roof body which could act as its spokesman, counter antisemitism, foster progress and provide co-ordination in many different areas of communal life. Over the years, its representation was gradually broadened so that the Board more effectively reflected the whole spectrum of Jewish life instead of being largely based on the few, well established synagogues. The expansion of communal organisation did not follow completely the lines of the *Kultusgemeinde* of Central European Jewry but it resulted in a change from a 'communal life built on paternal benevolence'<sup>1</sup>. These changes did not occur smoothly. Many small organisations demanded specific rights and, especially between 1945 and 1952, a number of conflicts resulted in heated debates and communal tension. These tensions held back progress and jeopardised communal unity. In the early 1950s, the Jewish community experienced a significant defeat on the issue of non-Jewish German immigration to Australia. In addition, the Board had constant financial problems. Yet, in spite of these problems, the Board of Deputies and through it the ECAJ, did produce significant results for the Jewish community at large.



From its earliest days, the Board has dealt with Jewish immigration, support of Israel, co-ordination of appeals, the integration of ex-servicemen and public relations (involving defence work against the growth of antisemitism, and the promotion of goodwill between Jews and non-Jews). In addition, it is concerned with developments in overseas Jewry. In this way, it covers a wide variety of communal activities representing a broad spectrum of Jewish activities in Australia.

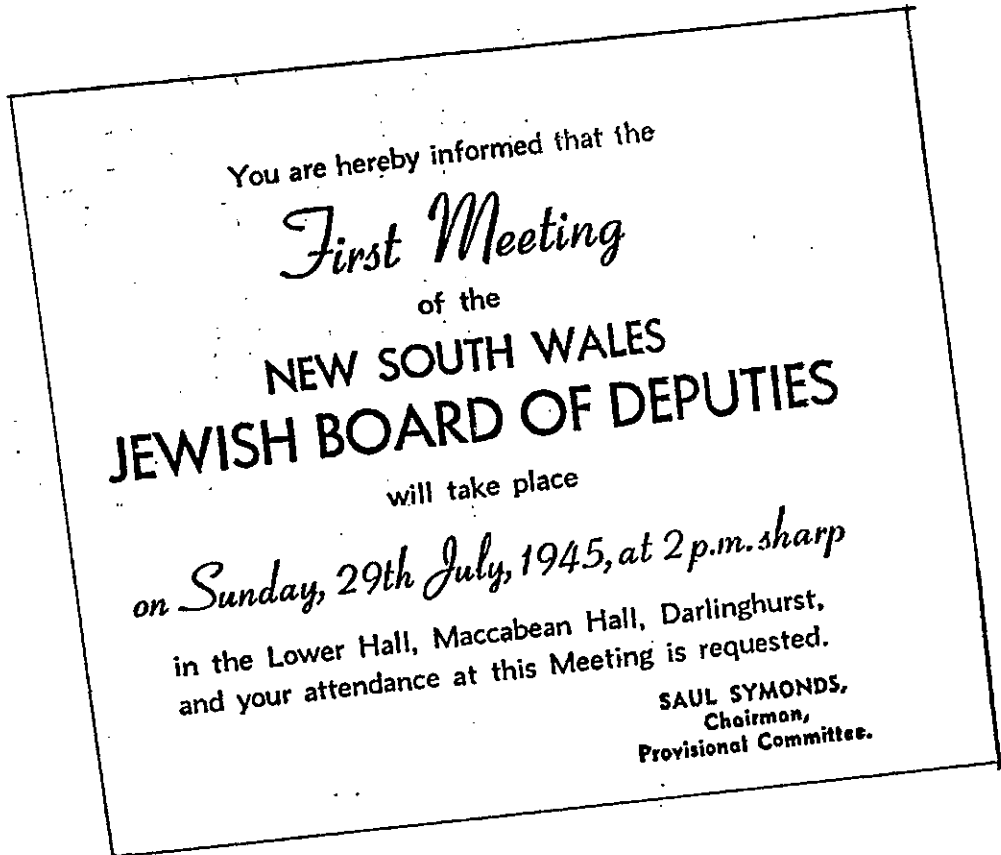


The official aims of the Board at its foundation were:

- 1) To promote unity of endeavour and action within the Jewish community of New South Wales.
- 2) To safeguard the religious, political, economic, civil and cultural rights of Jewish citizens.
- 3) To act in association with other bodies for the rescue, rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced Jews in Europe.
- 4) To take steps in association with the Zionist Federation towards the establishment of the rights of the Jewish people in respect to Palestine under the Balfour Declaration and the Palestinian mandate.
- 5) To co-operate in any social, cultural, philanthropic, charitable or other public movement.
- 6) To promote understanding and goodwill between Jews and citizens of other faiths<sup>2</sup>

The Board assumed responsibility for work previously carried out by the NSW Jewish Advisory Board, the Public Relations Sub-Committee, the Bureau of Jewish Affairs,

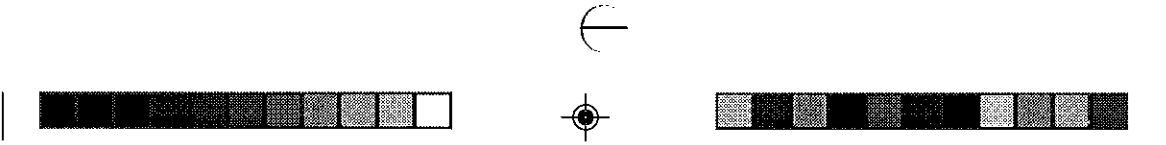
the United Emergency Committee and the War Services Committee. In the first elections held in 1945, 23 organisations were represented and the contest was portrayed as the synagogues opposing the Zionists.<sup>3</sup>



Invitation for Inaugural Board Meeting

### THE FIRST MEETING

The first meeting of the Board was held on Sunday afternoon, 29 July 1945, and lasted three hours. The main business was the election of the executive, though there were time-consuming deliberations over standing orders. Saul Symonds, who had been president of the Advisory Board, was elected the first president of the



Board with Cecil A. Luber and Horace B. Newman as vice-presidents. Felix Freeman was the treasurer and Harold M. Bloom the honorary secretary. After the elections, the meeting was opened to the public and the various messages of congratulations were read. These included good wishes from the British and South African Boards. Symonds then addressed the meeting, stating:

This is a milestone in the history of New South Wales Jewry. The New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies has been established. The task of consolidating the position is still before us and it is only by our joint efforts that we shall make a success of the Institution.

It is only fitting that we should pay homage to the efforts of the Jewish pioneers, who came to this country many years ago and laid the foundations of this Community, of which the Board is now the official spokesman. In taking over as representative body of New South Wales Jewry it is also fitting that we pay tribute to those Bodies who have previously worked for the benefit of this community. The New South Wales Advisory Board, which is now merged in this Board, has during the period of its existence always spoken with a united voice on behalf of the Community and thanks are due to the founders of that Body and to those who have so faithfully served on it during its existence. Let us carry on their tradition and so serve the community as a whole and let us express hope that eventually every member of the Community will be represented on the Board.

The success of our work will depend on the efforts made by its various Committees and by the individual Deputies. There are many aspects which have to be watched closely, particularly the rise of anti-Semitism which must be combated . . .

With regard to the Constituent Bodies of the Board I would like to stress that the Board does not intend and has not the power to interfere with the internal activities of the various Bodies, but it is hoped that regarding policy concerning the Community generally the various Organisations will consult and co-operate with the Board, so that views expressed represent the joint opinion of all. In the various discussions that will take place let us determine that every issue will be decided on its merits and that personalities and politics will play no part . . .

In conclusion I would like to extend an invitation to all sections of the Community, who are not now represented on the Board, to take steps to organise themselves so that the Board shall cover as wide a field of representation as possible and at the same time giving the Board the benefit of the wisdom and experience of many qualified persons who are as yet not members of the Board. With the support both moral and financial of the whole Community I feel sure that the Board which is set up to-day will be to the greatest benefit to all.<sup>4</sup>

Symonds also thanked the individual committees which were subsumed in the Board of Deputies, including the Public Relations Committee, so strongly supported by Sam Karpin, Sydney D. Einfeld, Hans Vidor and Israel Horwitz; the Jewish War Services Committee, which had been chaired by Cecil Lubet; and the United Emergency Committee for European Jewry which had been supported by Professor Julius Stone, Gladys Marks and Bernard Sugerma, K. C. Symonds also paid tribute to Rabbi Dr Israel Porush, of the Great Synagogue, Ilse Robey and Sydney B. Glass for their hard work and significant contributions. After this address, Rabbi Porush paid tribute to Saul Symonds and wished the Board every success, and his words were seconded by Rabbi Leib A. Falk. As Harold M. Bloom stated that afternoon, New South Wales Jewry had 'come of age'.<sup>5</sup>

AUGUST 30, 1945. THE HEBREW STANDARD

**"FOUNDATION" EXECUTIVE OF N.S.W. BOARD OF DEPUTIES**



MR. S. SYMONDS, PRESIDENT.



MR. C. LUBET, VICE-PRESIDENT.

In the near future, the New South Wales Board of Deputies will elect committees for public relations, overseas Jewry, Jewish war services, finance, constitution and standing orders, and publicity, information and statistics. The chairmen of these committees will go on to the executive of the Board, there to join the officials here depicted.

Owing to unforeseen circumstances we were unable to procure the block of Mr. H. B. Newman, one of the vice-chairmen of the Board.



MR. H. BLOOM, HON. SECRETARY.



MR. F. FREEMAN, HON. TREASURER.

Members of the Board's first executive





## THE FIRST PRESIDENT



Saul Symonds


The first president, Saul Symonds was from the old patrician leadership of the Great Synagogue. Born in Sydney in 1894, he was the second son of Morris Symonds, an immigrant to Sydney from Lithuania who had established a successful furniture business. Morris Symonds became involved in communal leadership, served as president of the Great Synagogue and was an ardent Zionist, donating 6,500 pounds to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1926 when he was actually present at the university's official opening in Jerusalem. He passed on his Jewish commitment to his three sons, Reuben (Reub), Saul and Ralph, although it was Saul who became most active in communal leadership.

From 1926 Morris Symonds lived in Bowral and commuted to Sydney to run his furniture business. He disagreed with his eldest son, Reuben (Reub), the businessman in the family, who believed that his father needed to change his business strategy. Morris Symonds believed in selling only traditional solid furniture, while Reuben felt that the business should introduce the latest furniture made out of veneered plywood. In the early 1930s Morris became ill and could no longer travel to Sydney. As a result of the disagreement with his father Reub had left the business, so Saul tried to assist. He found it difficult trying to run his law practice while also attending to the furniture business, and he gave up the law. In 1933 Morris Symonds died and his eldest son Reub returned to run the family business. By this time, at the height of the depression, Saul, who had retired from the Bar, would have found it difficult to return to the law. He, therefore, decided to stay with the family business and this enabled him to devote most of his time to communal affairs. From his small office in Pitt Street Saul Symonds ran the business of the community.




Saul Symonds had been an outstanding student at Sydney Grammar School and at the University of Sydney, where he studied for a BA, and was awarded the University Medal for French and German. He was rejected for the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) on medical grounds, but served in the Sydney University Regiment where he was a lieutenant in the Signals. In 1916 he returned to his old school as senior languages master and, while teaching, read for the Bar. He graduated in law and in 1921 began to practise as a barrister.

In 1917 he married Lorna Trenn and in the mid-1920s he built a house on a three acre piece of land at Wahroonga and turned the bush on the property into a magnificent garden. For the rest of Symonds' life caring for his garden, notably his orchids, and his animals, was his main hobby and form of escape from the pressures of communal leadership; during World War II, when the family no longer had outside help, Saul Symonds would milk the cow (Daisy) every day when he returned from his meetings. He was also a scholar, a lover of music and a patron of the arts. He developed a valuable collection of works by the Australian painter, Elioth Gruner, on whom it was claimed he had an important influence.<sup>6</sup>



By the late 1930s Symonds was deeply involved in the Great Synagogue, the Australian Jewish Welfare Society and the Advisory Board, later succeeding Sir Samuel Cohen as president of all three organisations. He served for 29 years on the synagogue board, being president for nine years; was honorary treasurer of the AJWS from 1938 to 1948 when he succeeded Sir Samuel Cohen as president; and he was president of the Advisory Board during the war years. During the war he was very active with the ANZAC Buffet, the Australian Comforts Fund and UJORF (United Jewish Overseas Relief Fund). He also served on the New South Wales Board of Jewish Education from 1920 to 1941 and was its honorary secretary, vice-president and president. He was an executive member of the Zionist organisation and was, at one stage, president of the Union of Sydney Zionists. It was only later, with the conflict over the British government's decisions during the period of the mandate, that he withdrew from active Zionist work. Ilse Robey who worked with him from 1942 until his death in 1952 described him as follows:



Saul Symonds was, without doubt, one of the kindest people I have ever known. He was very patient and very tolerant and in all the years I worked with him, there were very few instances when he lost his temper. With all that, he did not take kindly to people who, although they could not speak English well, talked an awful lot. Symonds was very concise in his speech. He knew exactly what he wanted to say. It was a pleasure to take notes when he spoke at meetings because it all flowed so nicely. Yet, he never gave himself airs. One realised what a great man he was mainly by observing his modesty.<sup>7</sup>

His office was in close proximity to the Great Synagogue and the office of the Board of Deputies and to this little room the employees of various Jewish organisations came for help and advice. Ilse Robey would see him every day and often twice a day. She felt he had a wonderful sense of humour and was an excellent chairman, and that the community benefited greatly from his legal training.

Every day Saul Symonds would travel to the city by train, unless there was a communal function. In that case he and Lorna would load the car with masses of flowers and other home produce. He dedicated his life to the Jewish community and worked day and night for Jewish affairs, taking very few holidays and very little time out from his endeavours on behalf of the Jewish people.

Saul was ably assisted by his wife, Lorna, especially in entertaining community leaders and visiting dignitaries. From an early age Lorna was active in the Jewish Girls' Guild and the Jewish Maternity Society. She was a foundation member of the Council of Jewish Women in 1923 and served for many years as a member of the Women's Auxiliary of the Great Synagogue, serving as its president when it became a more representative organisation of the congregation. During the Second World War she helped prepare parcels for the Bundles for Britain depot at the Great Synagogue and also served at the Anzac Buffet at Hyde Park, while after the war she assisted her husband with meeting Jewish refugees at the docks. She was very dedicated to her children, Naomi (Nonie), Bruce and Leonard, and was a devoted life partner to her husband Saul.

While Saul Symonds was an extremely dedicated, kind and loyal worker for the Jewish community, his leadership of the Board of Deputies resulted in much controversy. Following the Board's inaugural meeting in July 1945 the *Sydney Jewish News* was critical of the composition of the Board, claiming that 'the present constitution of the Board is the work of careful endeavour to perpetuate the status quo in the community. This object has been gained'.<sup>8</sup> Symonds' leadership led to continual tensions between the newcomers and the established Australian Jews. In November 1945 he would not permit a veteran social worker, S. Zander, to remain at a Board meeting as an observer, a decision which provoked much controversy especially amongst the newcomers. Symonds' authoritarian and strict style of running Board meetings led to the claim in the Jewish press that the executive of the Board 'consider the Board a rubber stamp for their activities and bully members into acceptance of this point of view'.<sup>9</sup>

Over the years there were criticisms of Symonds' manner and a number of motions critical of his behaviour were proposed. The result was acrimonious debate and heated tensions and Board meetings ended in uproar. One of the best known of these incidents was in late 1947 when, at the September meeting, after another acrimonious debate with Max Freilich, one of the leading Zionists, Symonds said: 'It is not that I don't like you Max, but I am allergic to you'. At the December Board meeting a motion was put that 'this NSW Board of Jewish Deputies disapproves the attitude taken by Mr Saul Symonds towards Mr Max Freilich'. During the debate a number of deputies including John Goulston, David Benjamin and Max Freilich himself, asked for the motion to be withdrawn, but a number of the Zionists including Rabbi Schenk, Paul Ungar and Horace Newman resented the attitude of Symonds. During the debate, Einfeld expressed his strong support for Symonds and, in the end, the motion was defeated by 14 to 20 votes with a number of deputies abstaining.

In May 1948 there was further uproar at the Board plenum when Symonds stated to Rabbi Dr Eliezer Berkovits of Central Synagogue, 'We don't do that in Australia', and the newcomers interpreted this as a discriminating and offensive comment which belittled the Jews from Europe. Kimmel wrote in his 'Sydney Diary' column in the *Sydney Jewish News*:

Within a fifteen minute period he used from the chair the words 'Chutzpah' towards Mr Wolfers, 'impertinent and cowardly' towards Rabbi Berkovits, in addition to the offensive comment 'We don't do that in Australia...' We are not so naive as to think that Mr Symonds will drop overnight his bad habits of showering liberal discourtesies on the Deputies, but we hope that he will introduce a system of rationing. One excessive remark at every meeting is sufficient to prove his superiority as an Australian Jew over the Jews from other countries'.<sup>10</sup>

Again, the censure motion against Saul Symonds was defeated.

The executive of the Board was so disturbed by these events, as well as by Kimmel's criticism published in the *Jewish News*, that it produced a statement expressing the executive's disappointment with the Deputies, pinpointing 'the absence of constructive debate and practical suggestions' and the fact that they felt that too much time was spent on 'trivial matters' at the monthly meetings. They also denied that the executive was a 'clique', stressing that the present executive represented all shades of religious and political opinion and that it was freely elected. In regard to Symonds and the newcomers, the statement stressed:

We deprecate and strongly repudiate accusations made by Deputies and repeated in the Press concerning the attitude of our President, Mr Saul Symonds, towards new-comers.

We remind you that the President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society, Mr Symonds, has spent endless time in working for the admission and re-establishment of those very people to whom, it is alleged, he believes himself to be superior.

It is contended that such allegations are most dangerous and tend to create the impression both within and outside the Jewish community that there is a tendency within the Executive to regard new comers as a separate section of the community.

This is absolutely false.

In conclusion we would again remind Deputies that this Board was established for the specific purpose of serving the needs of the Jewish community. We strongly urge that this thought be kept uppermost at all times in the minds of every member of this Board.<sup>11</sup>

This statement was read to the plenum at the meeting of 18 May 1948 by Cecil Luber who, Kimmel claimed, 'spoke in the earnest tone of a headmaster whose pupils did not pass the exam'.<sup>12</sup>

## COMMITTEES OF THE BOARD

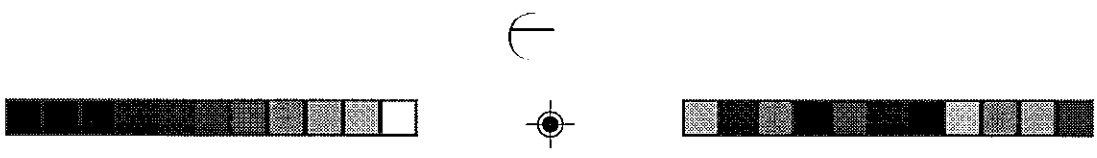
From the beginning, the running of the Board's affairs was based on sub-committees. In 1945, five main sub-committees were established. They were Constitutional and Standing Orders Committee; Publicity, Information and Statistics Committee; Jewish War Services Committee; Committee for Overseas Jewry; Public

Relations Committee (PRC); and Finance. Over the years additional sub-committees were created to meet specific needs, such as the Port and Dock Committee to assist in the integration of the European Jewish migrants, while other committees changed their names or were phased out. Thus, the Jewish War Services Committee which had been created during the war years as a separate committee to meet the needs of Jewish servicemen was no longer required once most servicemen had been demobilised, and it was renamed the Jewish Ex-Servicemen Rehabilitation Committee. As its activities tended to overlap with those of NAJEX, a constituent organisation of the Board, it was eventually phased out.



Sydney David Einfeld

The Constitutional and Standing Orders Committee had the task of reviewing the constitution, especially in relation to the issue of general franchise. Its first chairman was Sydney David Einfeld who, as noted in Saul Symonds' inaugural address, had already played a key role on the Public Relations Committee of the Advisory Board. In the late 1940s Sydney Einfeld was very involved with the Board's work as a representative of the Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA). His active involvement in the ECAJ, especially after 1952, meant that he continued to be involved in the work of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, serving as vice-president of the Board from 1952 to 1966 and often stepping in to assist the president during difficult periods.



Einfeld was born on 17 June 1909, three weeks after his parents, the Rev. and Mrs Marcus Einfeld, arrived in Sydney - hence he was given the name Sydney, although in the community he was always affectionately known as 'Syd'. After completing his schooling at Fort Street Boys' High School, he would have liked to have entered university but, because of his father's comparatively meagre salary, he felt that he should join the work force immediately. During the war years he established a metal parts factory in Granville under the auspices of the Essential War Services Department and after the war he went into wholesale women's clothing. In his business endeavours Einfeld did not find his true vocation as 'he was meant to be a person serving the people', so he devoted his inexhaustible energies to the needs of the general community through the ALP which he joined in 1934, and of his Jewish brethren, through Jewish communal involvement.<sup>13</sup>

Initially, Einfeld was involved in Australian Labor Party party organisation and was not interested in becoming a parliamentarian, as he was more interested in promoting the cause than himself. He was campaign manager for Abe Landa from 1940 and president of the Bondi Labor Party Branch from 1944 to 1955, and for nine of those eleven years he was president of the Wentworth Federal Electoral Council, during which time he was also campaign manager for Jessie Street. He was president of the Phillip State Electorate for fourteen years. In 1961 he began a distinguished parliamentary career as member for Phillip in the House of Representatives (1961-1963), and then member for Bondi in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, a position he held until 1971 when he became member for Waverley for ten years.<sup>14</sup>

Syd Einfeld's early communal work was in sports and youth groups and he soon followed his older brothers in becoming actively involved in the YMHA which he served as vice-president and then president in the late 1940s. At the same time, he became active in immigration work as the 'Y' played a central role in immigration reception.

Einfeld's complete dedication to Jewish communal work made his election to the ECAJ presidency in 1952, at the age of 43, a foregone conclusion. His first trip overseas was in 1954 as ECAJ representative to the Claims Conference and in 1956/7 he spent eleven weeks overseas, visiting Morocco with Walter Brand on behalf of the Jewish community there; Vienna, to assist the Hungarian escapees; New York for the Claims Conference; and then Europe and London. In all he served four terms as president of the ECAJ, with four alternating terms as senior vice president, spanning the years 1952 to 1966. After 1952 he served as vice-president of the Board and was a key figure in its history. At the most formative time in the history of Australian Jewry when the community not only absorbed 25,000 Jewish refugees, doubling its size, but also experienced a transformation in every aspect of communal endeavour, it was fortunate to have at its helm leaders of Sydney Einfeld's calibre.



Dr Hans Kimmel

A strong advocate for democratic reform was Dr Hans Kimmel, Sydney's stormy petrel, who demanded 'direct and universal franchise' and claimed that the community was run by an 'oligarchy (who) governed the community without democratic mandate'.<sup>15</sup> There was constant conflict between Kimmel and the Board executive, first with Symonds and later with Horace B. Newman. Even though Kimmel disrupted many Board meetings, his outbursts did hasten moves towards democratic reform.

Hans Kimmel was born at Monasterzyska, then in Austria, on 26 February 1889. He qualified as a doctor of law and settled in Vienna where he married Emmy. In 1938 he was severely affected by the Nazi Anschluss and in early 1939 suffered a nervous breakdown. He had managed to acquire landing permits for himself and his family to migrate to Australia through the Jewish Welfare Society, but initially thought he would need to send his family on ahead because of his illness. He wrote to the Department of Interior requesting permission for his wife and two children to travel ahead of him, since his wife would be 'the business head of the family as she is a machinist and will bring her own machinery to Australia'.<sup>16</sup> Emmy Kimmel was given permission to proceed to Australia without her husband, but in the end the family travelled together on the *SS Strathhallen*, arriving in Sydney on 19 July 1939.

In his first few years in Sydney, Kimmel continued to suffer from illness and spent time in hospital. Emmy supported the family by making string bags for a business in Pitt Street as well as giving private piano and singing lessons. They lived initially at Maroubra and then moved to Pennant Hills, where they lived for the rest of their time in Sydney. The family experienced further tragedy when their son, Friedrich George, who had enlisted in the Australian army after he turned eighteen and became a corporal, was killed in a road accident shortly after he had been discharged from the army in 1945.

Kimmel had planned to become a dress manufacturer in Sydney and the family brought with them knitting machines from Europe, but he was not able to establish himself. He was not able to practise as a lawyer as this would have required requalifying at university. He started to write for the Jewish papers under the *nom de plume* of Dr Joseph Staedter, and his column, 'The Sydney Jewish Diary' was published in the *Sydney Jewish News* and later the *Hebrew Standard*. In 1953/4 he published a selection of his writings in two volumes entitled *Sydney's Jewish Community: Materials for a Post-War (II) History*. The Kimmels left Sydney in 1957 to join their daughter, Elisabeth, who had settled in London.

From the beginning of the struggle for the creation of a Jewish Board of Deputies, Kimmel was a leading advocate of the need for universal franchise, initially publishing his views in the *Australian Jewish Forum*. When the Board was created in 1945, based on indirect franchise through organisational representation, Kimmel continued his battle for constitutional reform.

## DEMOCRACY AND THE BOARD OF DEPUTIES

The issue of general members of the community having the right to vote for deputies directly was an extremely significant one. After great constitutional debate, general franchise was gradually introduced into the New South Wales Board which is the only roof body in Australia to have general franchise as part of its constitution.

Wider franchise of the general Jewish community had been strongly endorsed by the 18 signatories,<sup>17</sup> and many of the newcomers believed that the constitution of the Board would be unsatisfactory as long as the delegates of the Board of Deputies were chosen on the basis of indirect elections through the constituent organisations, and not freely elected by popular vote. From the beginning, the Yiddish-based Jewish Folk Centre had decided to boycott the Board of Deputies until democratic reforms were introduced.<sup>18</sup> In December 1947 members of the Folk Centre debated this decision. Some such as A. Cymerman, Rabbi Frampton and Sam Travers believed that the Folk Centre should join the Board and fight for its democratisation from within, while others preferred to continue the boycott in order to hasten moves towards a truly democratic Board. In April 1948, the Folk Centre decided to join the Board, because moves towards democratisation were being made.

Sydney Einfeld was also committed to bringing about constitutional reform, but it took four years from the establishment of the Board before some form of general franchise was introduced. When the Constitutional Committee was first convened Einfeld was concerned with drawing up standing orders for meetings. This was achieved by November 1945, when the proposals were accepted by the plenum. In January 1946 Einfeld reported to the Board that the matter of universal franchise was being considered and in February 1946 Max Freilich gave notice that he planned to raise the issue at the plenum. However, there were no further developments at this stage, perhaps because the Board's energies were involved in the more pressing concerns of immigration, antisemitism and Palestine.

In May 1948 the *Sydney Jewish News* published an editorial critical of Saul Symonds' chairmanship and again raising the issue of the democratisation of the Board. It stated:

If the Board is to obtain and retain the trust of the community in a wider sense, their meetings must preserve a standing of decorum befitting such a body. This implies a conduct of all meetings in strict accordance of democratic procedure.<sup>19</sup>

Shortly after this editorial was published Einfeld announced that the Constitutional Committee had started work on democratisation and new proposals would soon be ready. He acknowledged useful suggestions of Abraham Stuchynski and Sam Travers. In July 1948 Einfeld set out a plan for a system of general franchise. However, it was not until April 1949, more than nine months later, that the specific proposals were placed before the Board. Kimmel claimed that the delay had been because the five member committee had not met and that the 'whole task had been allotted to or arrogated by Syd Einfeld'.<sup>20</sup>

The proposals granted universal franchise to all Jews (men and women) in New South Wales over the age of 18 who were financial members of a constituent organisation or were registered with the Board by the payment of a fee of 5/- per annum (\$10 in today's currency). They were placed before the plenum in April 1949 and voted on at the May 1949 meeting. After a debate which lasted two and a half hours there were 29 votes for and 27 votes against, but since all constitutional amendments required a two thirds majority, the proposal was defeated. Only two members of the executive, Einfeld and Ben Caplan, voted in favour of the proposals, as did Max Freilich who had been elected as chairman of the Committee for Overseas Jewry at this meeting. The Board's decision at this meeting was strongly criticised by Kimmel in his 'Sydney Diary' and by Joachim Schneeweiss, a medical student who was working in a part-time capacity as editor of the *Sydney Jewish News*. Schneeweiss stated:

The rejection of Einfeld's proposals constitutes a serious threat to the continued existence of the Board and undermines its very foundations. The conservative executive of the Board is out of touch with the great majority of the general community. By seeking to maintain the status quo, they are seriously prejudicing the position of the Board as spokesman for the community... Our so called 'communal leaders' have not as yet risen above their personal ambitions and petty jealousies in attaining a breadth of vision that will serve the future.<sup>21</sup>

In subsequent issues of the *News* Kimmel continued to write about the issue, advocating the need for democratic reform.

The Zionist movement was also affected by the rejection of Einfeld's constitutional amendments and an extraordinary meeting of the State Zionist Council (SZC) was called for 22 June at the Tarbuth, a Zionist cultural and social centre in George Street in the city, following the written request of ten of the Council's members. At this meeting there was fiery discussion because of the split in the Zionist vote over Einfeld's proposals, with some leading Zionists such as Freilich voting in support and others, such as Horace Newman, voting against. When the meeting insisted on discussing this split, Max Freilich vacated the chair and Paul

Ungar, honorary treasurer, took over the chairmanship. After much discussion, a motion of confidence in Newman as president of the Zionist Federation was passed, with seven people abstaining. The following motion was then proposed by Marcel Sigalla, seconded by Joachim Schneeweiss:

1. That this Council expresses the desire that immediate efforts should be made to introduce into the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies alterations of its Constitution to provide for general and universal franchise with direct and secret ballot.
2. That a sub-committee of five be established which, within a fortnight, should investigate how the first part of this resolution can be implemented immediately.
3. That a further special meeting of the Council should be called within three weeks.

This motion was carried unanimously and provided a basis for continued constitutional reform of the Board over the next few years.

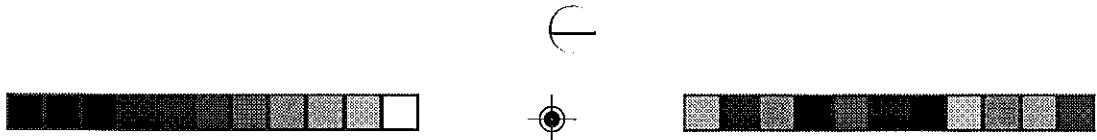
With support from the SZC, Einfeld continued to deal with the issue and to seek a compromise which would receive sufficient support to be passed by the plenum. At the July 1949 meeting he proposed the following plan:

1. Registration of non-affiliated members of the community.
2. The holding of elections in the constituent bodies by postal ballot conducted by the Board and with nominations to be called by it.
3. A general community vote to be taken by postal ballot for the election of additional deputies equal to a quarter of the total number of deputies from the constituent bodies. In this poll every member of constituent bodies as well as 'general regrestrees' would participate

This plan was finally passed by the required two-thirds majority at the meeting of August 1949 when there was only minimum debate. To register as a voter one had to pay 5/- per annum, or be a financial member of a constituent body, and any person so registered for a period of three months could nominate to be elected as a deputy. Such elections would be held every three years. Thus, the constitution was changed so that 25 per cent of deputies were elected by general franchise and the remainder by the member organisations.<sup>22</sup>

For some time after this the matter of further constitutional change was not discussed. In 1950 the first general franchise election was held and the *Sydney Jewish News* paid tribute to Sydney Einfeld's efforts to ensure that the election was conducted smoothly. The editor noted that 'the ground work for universal suffrage has been laid by a courageous few who overcame real obstructionists in 1949 and 1950'.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1950 elections 79 people nominated as general franchise candidates, including many well-known community leaders. Most of the nominees were seen as part of either the 'Zionist bloc' or the 'non-Zionist bloc'.<sup>24</sup> Of a possible 8,600



voters (based on the total membership of all the constituent organisations), 2,300 votes were returned, with 14 Zionists, and 14 non-Zionists being elected and 4 'floating' deputies. Veteran Zionist leader, Silva Steigrad, topped the polls, followed by Syd Einfeld and Julian Rose. In his 'Sydney Diary', Kimmel was critical of these results, claiming the fact that only 25% of deputies were elected by general franchise meant that the Zionists had failed to gain a majority and that the conservatives had retained control of the Board. Of the 128 deputies, 96 represented communal organisations and only 32 were general franchise representatives. It is interesting to note that while Saul Symonds retained his top position in the list of 32, Cecil Luber was placed in the middle of the list and Harold Bloom was near the bottom.

## POST-WAR IMMIGRATION

The termination of the Second World War had resulted in a new influx of migrants to Australia. Between 1947 and 1954 the Jewish population of New South Wales increased from 13,220 to 19,637.<sup>25</sup> The issue of immigration of the displaced persons (DPs) in Europe was a key issue which dominated the concerns of the Board during the first few years of its existence. At the Board's inaugural meeting Harold Bloom indicated the heightened awareness in the community that many displaced persons would wish to immigrate to Australia. Bloom was reported as stating:

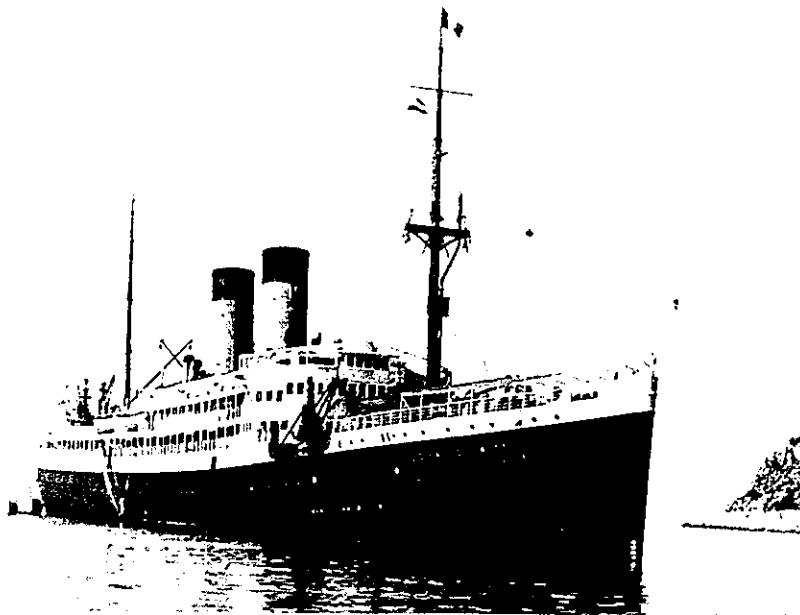
... it was impossible to anticipate the numbers of Jewish Immigrants who would come to this country during the next few years. It was the paramount duty of the Board not only to carry on the day to day administration of Communal affairs, but also to prepare in advance such plans as would be fully adequate to receive and absorb into the Community whatever number of our brethren might seek a new home in our midst.

The Board did take this program very seriously and, in the initial phase of post war immigration, was to play a central role in the reception of migrants.

In Sydney reception facilities were organised for those arriving by ship or plane from Europe to settle permanently and also for those from Shanghai on their way to Melbourne. Possibly because of the negative image of the pre-war Welfare Society, the Board of Deputies assumed responsibility for meeting the ships, and in February 1947, shortly after the first boats arrived from Europe, a Migrant Reception Committee (initially called the Port and Dock Committee) was established with Sydney Einfeld as chairman.<sup>26</sup> The YMHA, of which Einfeld was vice-president and later president, played a central role in providing personnel and cars to meet the boats and, later the planes, while the Sydney National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) under Dr Fanny Reading's leadership undertook responsibility for the provision of food. A buffet was often organised at the dockside while passengers in transit to Melbourne were taken to the Council Rooms in Young Street, where they were fed and entertained.

The largest group of newcomers arrived on the *Johan de Witt*, the reception of which was organised by Einfeld. A contemporary account described the scene:

The organisation, as we said, was excellent. Everywhere there were notices, in all languages, announcements and instructions coming over loudspeakers. The NCJW quickly arranged a buffet on the wharf, served sandwiches, soft drinks and ice cream free of charge. Through all the anxiety and uncertainty, one felt an air of happiness, of spontaneous and heartfelt welcome.<sup>27</sup>



The *Johan de Witt*

David Abzacs, honorary secretary of United Jewish Overseas Relief Fund, Melbourne, who had come to Sydney to assist the Welfare Society, wrote congratulating Einfeld. In 1948 Einfeld was co-opted onto the executive of the AJWS, Sydney, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the Migrant Reception Committee.<sup>28</sup> Four years later he became president of the AJWS after Saul Symonds' death and he remained in that position for 25 years. Under his leadership, the AJWS assumed responsibility for reception of immigrants and the Migrant Reception Committee was disbanded.

Among the immigrants from Europe were over 300 hundred orphaned children and youths who came to Australia sponsored by the Save the Children's Committee and the Welfare Guardian Society. Many of these children settled in Sydney. Care of the children and youths in both Sydney and Melbourne posed many problems from the point of view of psychological and emotional development. It had been hoped to bring out younger children but most of those sponsored were in the older age bracket with the average age being between 15 and 17. There were great controversies over their religious education and in each city there were complaints at the lack of support of the rabbinate. The Sydney committee commented that Rev. William Katz was the only minister to regularly visit the Isabella Lazarus Home.<sup>29</sup> In 1948 there was a stormy session at the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies

at which Rabbi Berkovits of the Central Synagogue walked out, angered by comments of Saul Symonds, who criticised the rabbis for their failure to assist adequately with the Jewish orphans.<sup>30</sup>

Despite these tensions, Sydney Jewry did as much as it could to assist the newcomers to settle into their new life in Australia and the Board of Deputies did everything in its power to assist in these endeavours. There were, however, sections of the established community which continued to fear an influx of Jewish refugees. In a 1945 editorial entitled 'Welcome and Warning', the *Hebrew Standard* stated:

Unfortunately there are mounting proofs that not all of those who, in recent years, have come to Australia have not and will not learn to accept these obligations. There are too many examples of what Australians would regard as Hun arrogance; too many cases of slick industrial and business trickery and flaunting ostentatiousness.<sup>31</sup>

Statements such as this aroused the ire of many of the members of the Jewish community. Saul Symonds dissociated the Board of Deputies from such unfair sentiments which cast aspersions on migrants even before they arrived in Australia.<sup>32</sup>

The executive of the Board of Deputies felt strongly that the editorial was 'at variance with the outlook and policy of Australian Jewry' and decided that it should interview Norman Ellison, at the time the editor of the *Hebrew Standard*. At a meeting on 4 September 1945 between Ellison and the Board's executive, which outlined the possible negative ramifications of his actions, Ellison promised in future to consult with the executive of the Board before publishing anything controversial. This action was reported at the next meeting of the plenum on 11 September, but a number of Board members were still concerned. Rieke Cohen, president of WIZO in NSW, and a leading advocate of the needs of the newcomers, wrote a letter co-signed by ten other Board members<sup>33</sup> calling for the matter to be raised at a general meeting.

Saul Symonds felt that a public airing of the issue, given the general level of antisemitism in Australia at the time, could be disadvantageous and instead called a meeting with representatives of the executive, the Public Relations Committee, and the signatories of the letter. Both the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Bulletin* had published adverse comments in relation to the editorial. Following this, Norman Ellison agreed to make a statement that he had been in error, that he 'fully realised now the dangerous consequences of that error', and he sincerely regretted the whole incident.<sup>34</sup> He made this statement expressing his sincere regret at a special meeting held on 8 October 1945 and a resolution was passed accepting his statement.

One overseas emissary, Mrs A. Silverman, who visited Australia for the Palestine Foundation Fund in 1946, was highly critical of the role played by the established Australian community towards Jewish refugees. On her return to London, she commented that:

The 35,000 Australian Jews contributed £100,000 to the *Keren Hayesod*; yet the recent Jewish immigrants were not well received by Australian Jewry. Influential Jews made efforts to induce the government not to admit additional

Jews, not even children. It is this type of Jew, she added, that is fighting against the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.<sup>35</sup>

This statement was published in *Hechayal* (publication of the Jewish Brigade) in London on 18 March 1946. It was refuted by Symonds who stressed that the AJWS had worked unceasingly to 'secure government endorsement for plans for the immigration of Jews'.<sup>36</sup>

The sense of conflict between the establishment and the newcomers was heightened by a motion of Paul Cullen that Board members should be British subjects. Cullen believed that the non-Jewish population and press could expect the Board of Deputies, as the lay representative of NSW Jewry, to consist of Australian citizens, but the veteran Zionist leader, Silva Steigrad, argued that the motion was 'an attempt to be more Catholic than the Pope and more loyal than the king'. He stressed that 'Jews are brothers all over the world and we must not stop anyone from giving of his best to the Jewish community'.<sup>37</sup> Cullen's proposal was defeated by an overwhelming majority, only seven votes being in favour.

In the immediate postwar period the general press was often critical of Zionism and made antisemitic inferences, especially in regard to the European Jews who wished to migrate to Australia. In these instances, the Board of Deputies immediately sprang to the defence of Zionism and the Jewish migrants arriving in Australia. In June 1945 there was an antisemitic item in *Truth*, which outraged members of the Jewish community. In April 1946 the executive of the Board expressed concern over anti-refugee articles in the general press such as the *Sun*. They met with the *Sun*'s editor, Ashton, but he claimed the article was 'fair comment' and refused to change the paper's stance.<sup>38</sup> Following this, in October 1946 both the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Smith's Weekly* came under attack for antisemitic references. In its editorial statement, the *Hebrew Standard* referred to the latter as 'Streicher's Weekly'. Again, in January 1947 the *Bulletin* was criticised for its editorial entitled 'The Jewish Immigration Racket'. In this way, the Board was active in protecting the good name of the Jewish community.

In 1947 Dr Fanny Reading sued *Smith's Weekly* for libel because of its statement in May 1947 that Youth Aliyah was associated with terrorist activities and was raising funds to fight the British in Palestine. Dr Fanny was vice-president of Youth Aliyah at the time and was incensed by these accusations. Her actions were supported by the NSW Board of Deputies and the ECAJ. In court, however, the case was dismissed as not coming under the jurisdiction of the libel law which dealt only with individuals and not with groups.<sup>39</sup>

One of the strongest pressure groups within the general community opposing alien immigration in general, and Jewish immigration in particular, was the Returned Services League (RSL). The president of the New South Wales branch, Ken Bolton became a leading advocate for the cessation of alien and Jewish migration. He believed that these newcomers were depriving Australian ex-servicemen of accommodation and employment. In 1946 Bolton began his campaign with the statement 'let us not beat about the bush — they are German Jews of the same ilk as those who have come before'.<sup>40</sup> In January 1947 in a

ministerial press statement Calwell announced that only 700 Jewish migrants had entered Australia in 1946 out of a total of 34,312, constituting only 2 per cent of total annual immigration to Australia.<sup>41</sup> Bolton disputed this statement, claiming it was 'a pack of lies not worth the paper they were written on and preposterous'.<sup>42</sup> In response, Calwell described Bolton's remarks as 'vicious' and 'political Jew baiting'.<sup>43</sup> Despite the fact that J. C. Neagle, general secretary of the RSL, inspected departmental files with Heyes and accepted Calwell's figures as correct,<sup>44</sup> Bolton continued to wage his campaign against Jewish migration. In February 1947 he attacked the shipping arrangements of the *Hwa Lien* and in April 1947 he claimed that the *Misr* was 'packed with inferior Jewish stock'.<sup>45</sup> At the New South Wales RSL state conference in September 1947 resolutions were passed that all aliens should be required to speak and write English before naturalisation and that an RSL officer should be present when the naturalisation oath was taken.<sup>46</sup> Other ex-servicemen's organisations and publications also strongly opposed Jewish migration. In *Flak*, the journal of the Australian Legion of Ex-Servicemen and Women, it was claimed in reference to Jewish immigration that 'it is outrageous that a migrant should arrive here and immediately fleece native born Australians'.<sup>47</sup> Other RSL branches passed resolutions against an 'influx of Jewish refugees' claiming that 'a better and more desirable class of citizens could be brought to Australia'.<sup>48</sup>

The NSW Board of Deputies was very concerned about the RSL's anti-Jewish policies. On 7 May 1946 the Board's executive called a special meeting with Jewish members of the RSL to discuss the problem of anti-alien and anti-refugee tendencies within the RSL. The Jewish returned soldiers were represented by Captain John Einfeld, Lt Col David Benjamin, Richard Diamond and Brigadier Joseph Steigrad. Diamond expressed the opinion that the antisemitism in the RSL came from the 'old members, soldiers of the last war'. The returned soldiers at the meeting decided to form a sub-committee under the leadership of Lt Col Benjamin to try to ensure that Jewish delegates were elected to annual RSL conferences as well as producing publicity to counter antisemitism within the RSL<sup>49</sup> but, despite these steps, the RSL continued with its anti-refugee policies.

Arthur Calwell, Australia's Minister for Immigration from August 1945 to December 1949, was placed in a very difficult position because of this campaign against Jewish immigration from within the general community. Calwell was friendly with many members of the Jewish community and in 1945 had introduced a policy to admit, over a twelve month period, 2000 Holocaust survivors who had family members in Australia. When faced with strong opposition, Calwell sought secretly to restrict the number of European Jews permitted to migrate to Australia while publicly denying that there was any form of discrimination on the basis of race or religion. The first government policy was the introduction of a quota that no more than 25 % of any ship's passengers could be Jewish. This prevented the Jewish welfare agencies in Europe (the American Joint Distribution Committee [JDC] and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society [HIAS]) from chartering boats for their Jewish clientele who had valid Australian landing permits. Both JDC and HIAS faced enormous transportation problems because of the quota system which became known as '*numerus clausus*'.

The restrictions on Jewish immigration to Australia heightened the tensions between the Sydney and Melbourne leadership of the ECAJ. The first ECAJ president was Alec Masel of Melbourne in 1945 and he was followed by Saul Symonds who served from 1946 to 1947. In 1948 the leadership reverted to Melbourne and at the 1948 ECAJ conference, held in Melbourne, Symonds criticised the Victorian leadership for its failure to offer financial or practical co-operation during his two years as president. His points were reinforced by Einfeld who stressed that three quarters of the correspondence sent from Sydney to Melbourne was not answered. Symonds interjected, saying that it was natural because 'they owe us seventy-five per cent of their affiliation fee so they don't acknowledge seventy-five per cent of our correspondence'.<sup>50</sup> In his motion for the adoption of the president's report, Maurice Ashkanasy referred to its 'provocative wording' but expressed the hope that the two states would be able to work together constructively.<sup>51</sup>

By 1948, because of the quota system, the overseas Jewish welfare organisations found that thousands of Jewish refugees sponsored by relatives in Australia had valid Australian landing permits but no means of transport. According to departmental calculations, there were 10,700 Jewish DPs possessing valid Australian landing permits who were awaiting shipping to Australia.<sup>52</sup> The Jewish welfare organisations decided to charter planes to relieve the pressure,<sup>53</sup> but when Calwell was notified of this move he extended the quota system to plane flights.<sup>54</sup>

Maurice Ashkanasy, at that time President of the ECAJ, approached Calwell and urged a change of policy. Ashkanasy claimed that the quota system was a blatant form of discrimination and asked for it be lifted. In return, the Jewish community would make a 'gentleman's agreement' to limit the number of privately sponsored Jewish refugees to 3,000 per annum with accommodation guarantees provided. Every effort would be made to ensure that Jews did not arrive in large batches and no more than 50 per cent of any ship's complement would be Jewish. There was to be close co-operation between the ECAJ, the Welfare Societies and the Department of Immigration to provide for 'smooth and harmonious absorption of Jewish immigrants'. After a period of negotiation, Calwell endorsed these proposals in February 1949.<sup>55</sup>

During the period of these negotiations, the tensions between Sydney and Melbourne Jewry came to a head. Ashkanasy implied that Saul Symonds' handling of migration issues was responsible for the hardening of Calwell's position on Jewish migration.<sup>56</sup> Symonds deeply resented such criticism and claimed that Ashkanasy's proposals involved a more explicit form of discrimination against Jews than the percentage quotas on shipping and planes.<sup>57</sup> In the face of these conflicting positions and the associated personal acrimony Symonds resigned from the ECAJ in January 1949<sup>58</sup> and refused to have any further connection with the ECAJ.

At the January 1949 meeting of the Board, Symonds explained his reasons for resigning from the ECAJ. The Board passed a vote of confidence in Symonds and expressed the desire that he continue his work with the ECAJ. Kimmel, often a strong critic of Symonds, wrote that 'despite his faults, he is recognised as a sincere and hard communal worker and every effort should be made to persuade him to change his mind'.<sup>59</sup> These efforts, however, were not successful and Newman replaced Symonds as the New South Wales vice-president of the ECAJ, serving as president for the 1949- 1950 term.

Despite the problems and restrictions on European Jewish immigration, over 17,000 Holocaust survivors settled in Australia in the period from 1946 to 1954. The newcomers, both pre- and post-war, not only contributed to the democratisation process of the Board of Deputies but also strengthened the Board's executive. However, it was only with the passage of time that the newcomers became fully accepted into the upper echelons of the Board's management; the first 'newcomer' to be elected as president was Sidney Muller in 1975. On the other hand, the administrative side of the Board's affairs was run with great efficiency by Ilse Robey who, as discussed earlier, was general secretary for 25 years from 1942 to 1966.

Another key area of activity for the Board arose out of the assumption of the responsibilities of the United Emergency Committee through its Sub-Committee for Overseas Jewry. This Committee was initially chaired by Dr Machover, a leading Zionist who came from Britain before the war and lived in Sydney until the late 1940s. When he left, the chairmanship was taken over by another key Zionist leader, Max Freilich, who was born in Lesko, Poland, had moved to Vienna and had migrated to New Zealand and then to Sydney in the 1920s. Freilich served as chairman for only a short period because of his Zionist commitments. He was followed by Dr Wolf Matsdorf, a pre-war refugee from Germany who had many years of association with the Australian Jewish Welfare Society. Another pre-war German Jewish refugee, Dr Lotte Fink, devoted herself to the needs of immigrants and was a vice-president of the Association of New Citizens. She was active on the Board and WIZO, later becoming chairperson of the Board's Sub-Committee for Overseas Jewry until her death in 1960.<sup>60</sup>

The Committee was concerned with issues relating to Jewry outside Australia. One of its initial projects was to send a relief team under the auspices of UNRRA to Shanghai to assist the Jews there. Funds were raised through the United Jewish Overseas Relief Fund and a team of seven was selected, but in December 1945 these plans were cancelled because of difficulties of sending a team to China which was in the throes of a civil war between nationalists and communists. Eventually the Relief Team was sent to Europe where it served initially in Greece and subsequently in the displaced persons camps in Germany.

Another issue of central importance in the immediate postwar period was the situation in Palestine. In September 1945, the Board sent a cable to the British Prime Minister, Attlee, requesting that 100,000 Jewish DPs be allowed to immigrate immediately to Palestine and also for the rescission of the 1939 White Paper which restricted Jewish immigration and land purchase in Palestine. The telegram pleaded for 'the immediate opening of Palestine to free Jewish immigration and land purchase lest the small, surviving remnant of European Jews perish'. A copy of this telegram was also sent to the Australian Prime Minister, Ben Chifley. In November 1945, following an executive decision, a further statement opposing Bevin's continuation of the 1939 White Paper was sent to both the British and Australian governments through the ECAJ. A cable was also sent to President Truman, thanking him for his support and appealing to the American government to work with Britain to facilitate Jewish immigration to Palestine. Rabbi Frampton was critical of the executive for its failure to consult with the plenum about these cables, but the executive pointed out that the Board's November meeting had been cancelled due to lighting restrictions

and they felt that it was necessary for the ECAJ to act immediately.





In 1946 the committee for Overseas Jewry decided to issue Bulletins so that the community could be kept informed about the events overseas, especially in Europe and Palestine. The Committee also produced pamphlets to deal with specific issues. In June 1946 they published addresses given by Dr Zelman Grinberg, chairman of the Council of Liberal Jews in Germany, to the third session of the American Jewish Conference in Cleveland and also Judge Refleud's address to the American Jewish Conference in New York. These monthly Information Bulletins continued to be produced on a regular basis until Dr Lotte Fink's death in 1960.

In this period three youth leaders, David Wolfers, Eugene Kamenka and Joachim Schneeweiss, decided to establish a Jewish platform in the Domain to present the Jewish point of view on Palestine. While this action by the youth was supported by the Zionist movement, the Executive of the Board passed a resolution that viewed 'with grave concern' the establishment of a youth platform in the Domain because of the likelihood of violence which could harm the youth. The matter was discussed at the December meeting of the Board which ratified the Executive's resolution because of fear of organised antisemites causing disruption and harm to the speakers. The Domain platform was closed early in 1946 although it was claimed that this action had nothing to do with the Board's resolution.

In 1946 when the Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry into Palestine was taking place, the Committee was asked to draft a memorandum for the Commission. A sub-committee consisting of Jona Machover, Harold Bloom and Gerald de Vahl Davis was established and their draft was discussed in detail by the Board's executive. Once the final draft was approved it was sent to the ECAJ to be sent on the British and United States' chairmen of the Commission. In addition, copies were sent to the Federal government and public libraries.<sup>61</sup>

The Committee also supported the work of the WJC in Australia which was reinforced by the visits of Dr Maurice Perlzweig who sought to raise funds for the WJC as well as to inform and educate. In 1946 Perlzweig was head of the Political Department of the WJC and his visit in July/August 1946, was a great success. Maintaining a hectic schedule he visited Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, where he met with leading political figures including Chifley, Ward and Calwell and was able to present effectively the Jewish position in the world, especially in regard to Palestine.<sup>62</sup> His return visits in 1950 and 1953 were also fairly successful, although his visit in 1950 was cut short because of his wife's death. During his 1950 visit Perlzweig proposed the idea of a South Pacific conference of Jewish communities in the region including Australia and New Zealand,<sup>63</sup> but many years passed before this idea was implemented, partly because Australian Jewry, which later provided the leadership for the implementation of this concept, was involved in the absorption of the newcomers and in consolidating its own internal position in the 1950s.


With the creation of the State of Israel in May 1948, the Committee for Overseas Jewry began to concern itself with Jewish communities in the Diaspora which were experiencing difficulties. In April 1951 Dr Matsdorf reported to the plenum that, as chairman of the Committee, he had prepared a report on the difficult situation of Iraqi Jews and had passed this onto the ECAJ, then located in Melbourne, recommending that it be forwarded to the federal government.<sup>64</sup>




Another key activity of the Committee for Overseas Jewry was support of the annual commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In March 1946 the Executive of the Board passed a resolution stressing the importance of such commemorations. It was felt that the ceremony should be 'a memorial of the destruction of European Jewry in the widest sense, including the revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto'.<sup>65</sup> It was proposed that the memorial should be held on 28 April 1946, and it was even suggested that it should be a full day of mourning with no celebrations such as weddings or barmitzvahs. This concept was not accepted and, because the Maccabean Hall was already booked, the date for the commemoration was changed to 26 May 1946, the last day of the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt.<sup>66</sup> This function created great controversy because of the decision by the Board not to permit a second speaker in Yiddish at the ceremony. Subsequently, a meeting was called when the Board's decision was criticised and a motion was passed that a Yiddish speaker should be included in the future.

The annual memorial functions for the Warsaw Ghetto uprising became a feature of Sydney Jewry and were supported by the Board of Deputies. At the ECAJ half-yearly conference held in February 1952 it was decided that, in conformity with the decision made by the Israeli Knesset, the 22 April would be the date for the memorial day for 'the martyrs of the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt, and other victims of Nazi persecution'. All ECAJ constituents were called upon to organise appropriate functions.<sup>67</sup>

## JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS IN THE EARLY YEARS



In June 1947 the Victorian Board of Deputies passed a resolution supporting the establishment of a community day school, later called Mount Scopus College, which opened its doors in January 1949. The NSW Board also wished to become involved in the establishment of a community day school in Sydney and, at its July 1947 meeting, it passed a resolution for the establishment of a committee to advise on the desirability of establishing a Jewish day school in Sydney. Sydney Sperling was chosen as convener of the committee, other key members being David Benjamin, Philip Barg, and Dr Wolf Matsdorf. This committee did not meet with any success and in September 1948, following rejection by the Board of its initial suggestions, it resigned en masse.



In July 1949 communal identity, Isidor (John) Lewinnek, proposed that the Board of Deputies ask the NSW Board of Jewish Education to undertake the formation of a Jewish day school. Since such moves were already in progress, Zionist leader Marcel Sigalla proposed that the Board of Education simply report to the Board about the progress of its plans. In the end, because of a conflicting scheme being developed by Abraham Rabinovitch for Moriah College, the Board of Education's aim to establish a Jewish day school was not realised and in the 1950s Moriah College was the only Jewish day school in Sydney.

## THE JEWISH PRESS

There were at times conflicts between the New South Wales Board of Deputies and the Jewish press. The activities of the Boards and the ECAJ were thoroughly covered by the Jewish press since, as Joachim Schneeweiss commented in 1949, the

interests of the Board and the press are the same; they both work in the interests of the community'.<sup>68</sup> Despite the obvious advantages of co-operation, various conflicts emerged over specific issues. In New South Wales when the first Board meeting was convened there was a debate as to whether press representatives should be present but it was resolved that they should be admitted.<sup>69</sup> The VJBD, on the other hand, decided that the Board had the right to hold closed sessions of their meetings when the press would be excluded. There were a number of occasions when individual deputies criticised the Jewish press for inaccurate reporting, while there were also a few incidents when the press was accused of heightening tensions between Sydney and Melbourne. In 1947, Symonds criticised the *Australian Jewish Herald* for publishing a letter by Rabbi Berkovits of the Central Synagogue, Sydney, in which, Symonds claimed, 'certain members of the Executive Council were brought into disrepute' and were publicly accused of 'high-handedness, autocratic and undemocratic methods'.<sup>70</sup> Despite Symonds' claim that 'he does not take much notice of the Jewish press, anyway',<sup>71</sup> it did play an important role by informing the community about the activities of the roof organisations.

## THE BOARD'S FINANCES

Financial problems were constantly encountered by the NSW Board of Deputies which derived its funds through membership affiliation fees. In March 1946 the Finance Committee under the chairmanship of Hans Vidor decided to appeal for 1000 subscribers to donate five pounds each, making a total of 5000 pounds. They decided to employ Nate Zusman, who had come to Sydney from Perth after serving in the army, to organise the appeal. Over 4000 letters were sent out but the response was disappointing. When discussing the problems at the plenum, Gerald de Vahl Davis commented that 'the general apathy of the community is understandable when we realise that the Board's work, while useful, is usually unspectacular'.<sup>72</sup>

By 1948 the Board was still facing severe financial problems and a proposal, which had first been made by Dr Laserson in 1946, that the proceeds of all communal fund-raising be charged a five per cent levy to finance the roof organisation was put before the plenum. This suggestion, which was revived in 1951, sparked great controversy as the Zionist organisations, which raised the largest sums, argued that their charter required them to use all funds for Israeli purposes exclusively.<sup>73</sup> UJORF also argued against the proposal for the same reason. Many individual members of the community also strongly objected to the proposal. Rabbi Berkovits wrote a strong letter to the *Sydney Jewish News* condemning the proposal which he described as a 'monstrosity'.<sup>74</sup> Kimmel was another constant critic of the 5% levy proposal and in 1948 he wrote:

The Board of Deputies should not live on the income of our charitable institutions. It must attain such a standing in the community which would enable it to raise money on its own merits. That will be possible when the Board is transformed from an oligarchic into a democratic institution.

To frustrate the queer recommendation is the duty of all who have a sense of justice and public morality.<sup>75</sup>

As a result of this opposition, the proposal was not implemented.

Another solution to these financial difficulties was the proposal for the creation of a Community Chest Appeal which would include raising funds for the roof bodies. As early as 1945 the multiplicity of appeals for educational, charitable and cultural Jewish institutions was a concern. Some of the problems caused by the overlapping of appeals were overcome by the Board's co-ordination of all major appeals through the allocation of appeal periods each year to specific organisations. This procedure, carried out in both Melbourne and Sydney, helped to alleviate the worst problems of conflicting appeal periods. In December of each year specific appeal times were allocated to the main fundraising organisations, the first of these meetings being held on 17 December 1946. With time, the Zionist movement was allocated the first six months of the year, including the Queen Competition, while six months were allocated to local appeals, including UJORF. This appeals coordination process continues until today.

Some communal leaders still argued that there were too many appeals and what was required was a single appeal to allow a pooling of monetary resources for fund-raising, end overlapping and also facilitate national planning of Jewish charitable needs so that there would be 'one donation, one appeal, one community'.<sup>76</sup> In 1948 the American Joint Distribution Committee decided to link further donations to Australian Jewry with the demand for the establishment of one united appeal, the Community Chest. In New South Wales David Benjamin argued that there were legal problems in a united appeal, especially in relation to the Montefiore Home which was incorporated by an Act of parliament but these difficulties were overcome as a result of the advocacy of Hans Vidor, the first chairman of the NSW Community Chest.<sup>77</sup>

In both New South Wales and Victoria the first appeals of the Community Chest were held in 1949 but the results were disappointing. A number of charities refused to participate and even those organisations which joined did not work whole heartedly for the cause. In 1951 the Board debated other ways of raising finance apart from the Community Chest and 'Spotter' commented in the *Sydney Jewish News* that 'the Chest has been struck a blow from which it is unlikely to recover'.<sup>78</sup> This prediction proved to be accurate. By 1952 the NSW Community Chest was in a desperate position with only £9,333 raised to serve eleven different communal institutions.<sup>79</sup> This figure was extremely low given that the original estimations of annual funds needed from the Community Chest were around 50,000 pounds. In 1952 the Board decided to double deputies' affiliation fees to meet the Board's need for additional funds because of the Community Chest's poor results.

The appeals in New South Wales continued until 1953 when the Community Chest ceased its activities and it was officially disbanded in June 1954. The Chest's failure was blamed on a lack of unity and co-operation, poor organisation and leadership problems. In addition, many Jewish contributors had their own particular interests, their 'hobby horses' within the community and could not relate to the concept of one broad appeal.<sup>80</sup> Victoria had similar experiences with the appeal receiving little support<sup>81</sup> so that the Community Chest also ceased to function there at the same time. In Sydney, the concept was reintroduced with the formation of the Joint Communal Appeal (JCA) after the 1967 war and this time has proved to be extremely successful.

## RELIEF WORK

In Sydney, relief was handled initially by a number of different organisations including the AJWS, UJORF, the Montefiore Home, Federation of Polish Jewry and NAJEX. In 1949, Dr Max Brenner advocated that moves be made to avoid this unnecessary duplication and to ensure that all cases received sufficient help.<sup>82</sup> A co-ordinating committee was established under the auspices of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies. In 1951 this committee divided up responsibilities so that the AJWS was responsible for Federation sponsored cases, UJORF for privately sponsored cases and IRO people and the Montefiore Home was to look after all new Australians after the one year guarantee period.<sup>83</sup> By 1953, with the incorporation of Sydney UJORF into the Welfare Society, the co-ordinating committee had almost 'co-ordinated itself out of existence'.<sup>84</sup>

## PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

One of the key activities of the Board was the work of the Public Relations Committee. This was initially chaired by Gerald de Vahl Davis; he was followed by Norman Ellison, who had been editor of the *Hebrew Standard* for a period and whose appointment was controversial because of his negative comment on the Jewish refugees discussed; and then by Hyman (Bill) Wolfensohn who served effectively in this capacity for a significant period from December 1949. When he took over the chairmanship of the PRC, Wolfensohn set out his aims as follows:

1. The promotion of good will.
2. Combating anti-Semitism.
3. General protection of the rights of the Jews and the sponsorship of group libel or similar legislation.<sup>85</sup>

Wolfensohn believed that vigilance was very important and he established a legal sub-committee to investigate the need for changes to the defamation laws in regard to racial vilification. It was to take over forty years before this aim was to be finally achieved in NSW under the premiership of Nick Greiner.

The PRC sought to be pro-active, as well as responding retrospectively to specific incidents. One of its significant positive activities in the early years was to circulate Burgoyne Chapman's *The Complete Anti-Semite*, of which 3,820 copies were printed and posted to all members of the NSW and federal parliaments, members of clergy of all denominations in NSW, public schools, trade unions and Jewish organisations in Australia, the British Empire and the USA, as well as to all Board subscribers. In 1949 the concept of a Speakers' Panel was proposed so that the Board would have a team of speakers who could 'explain Jews to non-Jews'. This concept was only fully implemented in 1965.

In November 1948 a conference in Melbourne on antisemitism was organised jointly by the ECAJ and the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism (JCCF&A). At this conference the public relations sub-committees of the Boards of Deputies of New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria were

represented as well as the Jewish Council. The delegates discussed the possibility of draft legislation against antisemitism, with a specific proposal submitted by L. Wilks, a lawyer and leading member of the Jewish Council. It was also moved that the conference should be followed by an enlarged conference representing both Jewish and non-Jewish organisations but this suggestion was not implemented.<sup>86</sup> The deliberations and the personnel at this conference reflected the central role the JCCF&A was playing in public relations work, in conjunction with the VJBD and the ECAJ.

Another issue with which the PRC was concerned was the occurrence of antisemitic incidents in the immigration centres which the government had established for the reception of the displaced persons who had migrated to Australia under the International Refugee Organisation's Scheme (IRO). Since only single Jews were eligible under this scheme, and Jews had to sign a special clause that they would work in the outback, the number of Jews who came to Australia under the IRO program was very small. Of those who did, many experienced problems of antisemitism. In July 1949 the Board was informed of the problems being experienced by Jews in the immigration centre at Rooty Hill who were being terrorised by the non-Jews there. A special sub-committee consisting of Einfeld, Schneeweiss, Karpin, Lapin (of Bathurst), Brand and Dr Fanny Reading, was created to deal with the problem. The issue was again raised in August 1949 because of the activities of Hungarian Nazi elements among the IRO scheme.<sup>87</sup>

In November 1945 the Jewish Unity Committee, a parallel organisation to the Melbourne JCCF&A, was established in Sydney with the following aims:

1. To bring about greater unity in the Jewish community.
2. To create a better understanding of Jewish problems, Jewish thought and qualities among Jews themselves.
3. To bring about a greater understanding of Jewish problems among the community at large.
4. To mobilise the Jewish people and the Australian democracy in a campaign to outlaw anti-Semitism in Australia.
5. To support progressive policies and liberal movements.
6. To bring about still closer relations between the Jewish people in Australia with those of other parts of the British Empire and with the main Jewish centres in America.<sup>88</sup>

Close relations were established between Jewish Unity in Sydney and the Melbourne Council and, as in Melbourne, the Sydney Committee became involved in public relations work. Dr George Berger spent two months in Melbourne in 1946 where he worked as Director of the JCCF&A and, on his return, to Sydney was welcomed by the Unity Committee.<sup>89</sup> As a result of these activities a number of members of the Unity Committee were invited to join the Public Relations Committee of the New South Wales Board of Deputies, chaired by Gerald de Vahl Davis.<sup>90</sup> Shortly afterwards, in September 1947, the organisation changed its name to Jewish Unity Association to reflect the broadening of its base and its attempts to attract a more general membership.

In early 1948 the Jewish Unity Association sought affiliation with the NSW Board of Deputies, and at the same time began publication of a controversial monthly magazine, *Unity*, with Hyam Brezniak, a pre-war Polish Jewish immigrant and a left-winger, as the prime mover behind the venture.<sup>91</sup> The Board's executive, based on a majority, decided to oppose the admission of the Association because of the known left-wing tendencies of a number of its members. A minority on the board, including Einfeld, believed that it was preferable to have the Association as a member, than have it working against the Board from the outside. At the March meeting of the Board this Executive recommendation was defeated by 23 votes to 19 votes but the Association could not be admitted since a two-third majority was required. Saul Symonds stated that the Executive was opposed to *Unity* because it engaged in 'party politics'.<sup>92</sup> A further attempt in June 1948 to have *Unity* accepted was again defeated by 28 votes to 30. At the same time Norman Ellison became PRC chairman and he did not invite all the *Unity* members back onto the sub-committee because 'he would not work with an avowed Communist in public relations', an obvious reference to Brezniak.<sup>93</sup> Eventually, Ellison invited Maurice Allen and Nate Zusman to join with him but they declined because of Ellison's failure to re-invite the other four *Unity* members. This rift continued after the Association changed its name to the Sydney Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism in July 1948, a move bitterly criticised by Saul Symonds who was very critical of the Melbourne Council. In November 1948, after Hyman (Bill) Wolfensohn became PRC chairman, he re-established a harmonious working relationship with the Sydney Council which was finally accepted as a Board member in August 1949.





Hyam Brezniak

The story of the Sydney Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism was very different to that of the Melbourne Council. While the Sydney Council had problems being accepted initially onto the Board of Deputies, once it became a member it remained as such until it ceased to function. On the other hand, the Melbourne Jewish Council was accepted readily onto the VJBD (or Advisory Board as it was called before 1948) and it played a key role on the Public Relations Committee. However, between 1950 and 1952, there was conflict between the Council and Ashkanasy. This resulted in Ashkanasy initially resigning from the VJBD. He returned following the expulsion of the Jewish Council from the Board in 1952, a very volatile chapter in the history of Victorian Jewry for which there is no real parallel in New South Wales Jewry.



## GERMAN MIGRATION

It was the struggle over who should co-ordinate the campaign against (non-Jewish) German migration in 1950 that led to the bitter split amongst Melbourne Jewry. By 1949 Australia's ability to find suitable migrants from Europe was beginning to diminish. Although there were large numbers of potential migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, the government considered them 'less desirable'. The idea was proposed that Germans would be suitable migrants.<sup>94</sup> In 1949 Pastor Martin Niemoeller visited Australia to mobilise support for the Lutheran church and during his visit discussed the migration of Germans to Australia.<sup>95</sup> The Jewish community in Australia was disturbed by Niemoeller's visit and Ashkanasy, at the time president of the VJBD as well as the ECAJ, protested to Chifley and also wrote to the Lord Mayor of Melbourne requesting that he cancel a planned civic reception in Niemoeller's honour. Australian Jewry opposed the concept of admitting 'regenerate Germans' into Australia on a large scale and welcomed the fact that Niemoeller's proposals were not accepted by Calwell and the Labor government in 1949.<sup>96</sup>



When Harold Holt became Liberal Minister of Immigration in 1950 he proposed that Australia support German immigration with government sponsored migration of 100,000 Germans over four years. Similar mass migration schemes were being negotiated with the Dutch and Italian governments because Holt estimated that Australia needed to reach an annual target of 200,000 immigrants, and British migrants fell short of the necessary intake by more than half the total. Holt argued that an agreement should be reached with the West German government because Germans were desirable immigrants as they had proved in the past to be 'good and industrious settlers and capable of being easily absorbed into the community'.<sup>97</sup> It was further noted that both USA and Canada were accepting German migrants and that Australia needed to become involved as quickly as possible to facilitate the choice of migrants. Holt's proposals were supported by both the Immigration Advisory and Planning Councils.

The mass migration schemes involving the Dutch, Italian and later the German governments were introduced following the end of the IRO migration program and were based on written agreements between the Australian government and the respective European governments. Selection was carried out by Australian personnel of the Department of Immigration. Costs of the scheme were shared by the two governments and, as with the IRO scheme, the migrants had to give an undertaking to accept employment specified by the Australian government for a two year period.

As part of the government campaign to win support for the German mass migration scheme, the state president of the Queensland RSL, R. D. Huish, was sent to Europe to gather information on security screening procedures. Huish returned with a glowing report. He stressed that he was impressed by the German migrants available and that Canadian, American and New Zealand selection teams 'were most enthusiastic regarding the types of applicants appearing before them and stated that the standard was very high'.<sup>98</sup> Huish pointed out that in May 1951, at the time of his visit to Europe, Canada had already selected and had admitted 2,000 Germans while the United States had accepted 54,000 German immigrants to be admitted by June

1952. He argued that the Australian selection officers whom he had met were experienced, capable and efficient and very aware of their responsibility in selecting only the best types for immigration to Australia. He also noted that the detailed Nazi records housed in the Berlin Document Centre, combined with other files collated by the British and USA intelligence officers since 1945, were readily available to all Australian security officers. He concluded his report by stressing that:

it is advisable for the Commonwealth government to reach finality as quickly as possible in relation of the German Mass Migration Scheme, because, if the decision is to accept a German Scheme, it should be remembered that other countries have already selected large numbers, consequently, if the subject is deferred for any considerable time, the cream of the German people available for migration will have already been selected and transported to other countries.<sup>99</sup>

Huish's findings were consistent with those of a previous RSL delegation to Europe, consisting of Sir Eric Millhouse, J. C. Neagle and W. J. Hunt. The previous group had also endorsed the high standards of the Australian security screening techniques and medical examinations<sup>100</sup> and this added credence to Huish's arguments.

In October 1950, as part of the efforts to win support for German immigration, Sir John Storey, chairman of the Immigration Planning Council, stated that:

ex-members of the Nazi Party should not necessarily be excluded in the selection of migrants from Germany... If they were members of the Nazi Party, I would not necessarily accept the fact that they were Nazis. I believe that membership of the Nazi Party was a compulsion and that hundreds were quiescent Nazis.<sup>101</sup>

This attitude was reinforced by Holt who stated in the House of Representatives on 28 November 1951 that former membership of the Nazi Party was not an automatic bar to the admission of German migrants to Australia.<sup>102</sup>

The main group to oppose non-Jewish German migration was the Jewish community. The first protest against Germans living in Australia was made as early as 1946 by the Association of Refugees (later New Citizens) in Sydney.<sup>103</sup> Through the pages of its journal, the *New Citizen*, the Association objected to German internees, especially the Templars (a German religious group who had settled in Palestine and were transported to Australia during the war), remaining in Australia.<sup>104</sup> Australian Jewish objections to the re-settlement of the Templars in Australia proved to be of no avail and, by 1950, there were at least 800 members of the Templar Society who were permitted to remain in the country as a group settlement because they brought with them funds from the newly created state of Israel. The Australian government actively negotiated on their behalf with the Israeli government which granted compensation for the loss of Templar property in Israel as part of the restitution agreement.<sup>105</sup> This is a story which remains to be told in detail.

In 1949 the ECAJ launched a widespread campaign in all States opposing mass German migration. After private appeals to the Australian government had

failed, the ECAJ leadership decided that the issue had to be debated publicly. In a private conversation between Hasluck, Minister for External Affairs, and Rubin-Zacks in Perth, Hasluck stressed that while Australian Jewry was entitled to protest, such a decision might endanger the community's own position as it could arouse latent antisemitism. After the meeting, Rubin-Zacks wrote:

Would he suggest that Jews, for the fear of anti-Semitism, should accept the position of second rate citizens, and lose their self-respect as human beings? I, for one, would absolutely reject such a contention, and informed him that the overwhelming majority of Jews felt the same way.<sup>106</sup>

He went on to note that this was the first time in Australian history when Jews had come forward on a public question. As such, the decision to oppose publicly government policy was a significant turning point in the community's history.

Protest meetings were organised in all states with ECAJ president, Ben Green, actively involved. In Victoria in November 1950 3,000 people attended a protest meeting at the Melbourne Town Hall in spite of a train strike. In New South Wales, in September 1950, a united protest meeting passed a protest resolution against 'the admission into this country of German migrants and *Volksdeutsche*, who are still indoctrinated with Nazi ideology'.<sup>107</sup> A subsequent protest meeting attended by 6,000 people at the Sydney Town Hall in February 1951, was addressed by Dr Herbert Vere Evatt, Senator Justin O'Byrne of Tasmania (who himself had suffered at the hands of the Nazis) and Leslie Haylen, Labor MP.<sup>108</sup> Dr Evatt stated that 'we have yet to be convinced the great evils of the Nazi system no longer poison the mind and soul of German youth' and he described the government plans to bring 100,000 Germans to Australia as 'reckless'.<sup>109</sup> The motion opposing German migration to Australia was initially to be proposed by the RSL president of NSW, but not surprisingly he withdrew at the last moment and John Einfeld, president of NAJEX, had to step into the void.<sup>110</sup> This meeting was organised by the Citizens' Protest Committee on German Migration. The Jewish community was represented on this committee by Saul Symonds, Rabbi Dr Israel Porush, Abram Landa and Professor Julius Stone. A meeting was also held in Perth in January 1951, attended by 1,800 people with Kim Edward Beazley (Labor MHR for Fremantle) one of the main speakers, while a smaller meeting of 200 people was held in Brisbane addressed by Ben Green and Abe Newhouse.



Dr Herbert Vere Evatt  
Reproduced courtesy of *The Bridge*.

In January 1951 an ABC Forum radio debate was held with Professor Julius Stone, Challis Professor of International Law and Jurisprudence at the University of Sydney, as a leading and impressive critic of German migration. In an emotive address, Stone claimed that:

... for a democratic nation like ours, to turn loose tens of thousands of these regenerates in our own country, our homes and our families is a duty neither to God or to man — for Australia's future it would be an intolerable disaster... It's mass migration he's proposing. The reservoir from which he [Mr Holt] wants to draw his stream of immigration is, mentally and morally, poison.<sup>111</sup>

Professor Stone was supported in his arguments by Margaret Kent Hughes, a teacher of modern languages, who studied in Germany before the war and who stressed that the indoctrination which German youth had experienced in the Nazi years meant that Australia should wait until a new generation had grown up, free of Nazi influence, before accepting Germans as immigrants.<sup>112</sup> These points were supported by other members of the Jewish community who argued that security screening for the IRO mass migration scheme was inadequate and they feared that there was a risk that German immigrants would become a fifth column in case of war.

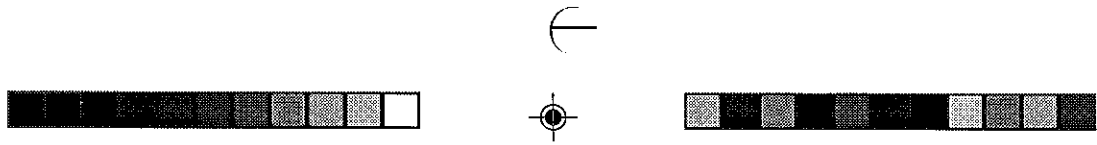
In Victoria the Jewish Council was the main organising body behind this campaign, with Sam Goldbloom and Norman Rothfield speaking at many public functions. Goldbloom even put his membership of the Labor Party on the line when he decided to stand on the anti-German migration issue against the endorsed ALP candidate for the seat of Isaacs in the 1953 federal election. In New South Wales the Jewish Board of Deputies led the campaign against German migration. At its January 1951 plenary meeting, vice-president Silva Steigrad launched an appeal for the emergency fund to fight German migration. Steigrad stressed that the government's plan was 'a threat to the physical existence of the Australian Jewish community', and he stated:

If we do not rise to meet this challenge, we shall go down in history as a community which betrayed its trust.

Nazi indoctrination of the easy going, gullible public is a real threat to the life of every Jewish man, woman and child in this country.

The freedom and liberty which Australians have enjoyed for so long will be wiped out if vicious foreign political influences secure a foothold in our midst.<sup>113</sup>

At this meeting 500 pounds was pledged and the Board continued its successful drive for funds. The Jewish ex-service organisation, under the leadership of John Einfeld, also contributed to the campaign, publishing an effective pamphlet opposing German migration. Communal personality Sydney Einfeld was also very active and was described as a tower of strength. At a meeting organised by the Jewish Council at *Tarbut* in September 1951, attended by 200 people, Einfeld stressed that every Jew who did not join the campaign against German migration did not deserve his heritage.<sup>114</sup>



The Jewish community's campaign was supported by a few members of the general community but the ECAJ failed to split the bipartisan approach to immigration. Public opinion polls indicated that there was general support for the German mass migration program. A gallop poll taken in 1950 showed 61 per cent in favour of the migration of carefully picked Germans, with only 35 per cent against such migration.<sup>115</sup> German migration was also endorsed in the general press. For example, in response to the Sydney Town Hall protest meeting, the *West Australian* commented:





Far too much factional heat is being engendered, for what are suspiciously like ulterior motives, in organised opposition to the Commonwealth Government's plan to bring 25,000 Germans to Australia this year within the broad scope of the long-term European immigration programme. At the least — apart from the understandable Jewish attitude — there is being displayed an unreasoning intolerance which would apparently condemn and outlaw an entire people for the misdoings of that section of the German nation which willingly and actively associated itself with the crimes of Nazism under Hitler.<sup>116</sup>

The RSL (which had been highly critical of Jewish refugee migration) continued to express its support for German migration. In August 1951, Federal RSL president, G. Holland, was reported as having requested the government to speed up its intake of Germans as he claimed that screening was completely satisfactory and Germans were good migrants.<sup>117</sup> German migrants provided significant numbers of workers for projects requiring skilled labour such as the Snowy Mountains Electrical Power Project where of the 1,800 employees 600 were German. The general acceptance of the West German government by other nations with the end of Allied occupation of Germany and the beginning of West German rearmament also made the campaign against German migration more difficult.<sup>118</sup> As a result, the government rejected the arguments presented by the Jewish community.

Holt believed that security screening would ensure that only the right types migrated to Australia, and urged that as a persecuted minority, the Jewish community should not condemn another entire nation. Privately, Holt noted that it was chiefly 'Jewish interests' which had sought to arouse the public against German migration and that:

I feel that a small vocal minority should not seriously be regarded as expressing the will of the Australian people or be allowed to retard the Government's immigration plans to the extent of preventing the settlement of suitable German migrants in Australia. Reports available show that in West Germany a wide range of skilled, semi-skilled, rural and female workers of the kind required to meet out labour shortages can be readily obtained.<sup>119</sup>

Tasman Heyes, head of the Department of Immigration, supported Holt's view of the desirability of German migration and remarked in a letter to Sir John Storey,




chairman of the Immigration Planning Council: 'We are giving consideration to ways and means of countering the Jewish arguments, but I do not want you to become the centre of any controversy. My own view is that we should come out into the open and take the gloves off, but the government may not wish to do this'.<sup>120</sup>


These reactions showed that the Jewish community's challenge to the Australian government's policy was no easy task. In August 1950, S.D. Einfeld was acutely aware of the difficulties facing the Jewish community and he wrote to Walter Lippmann:

I am equally convinced that whatever action we take, nothing will alter the Government's determination to proceed with the scheme. I have had private advice that the Government is firmly resolved to proceed with large scale German migration and despite any previous interviews with both Holt and Heyes, I believe that Cabinet has endorsed this decision some time ago.<sup>121</sup>

The signing of the agreement with the West German government was delayed, but this was due to the rising unemployment and the general downturn of the economy in Australia in 1951, rather than because of the campaign waged by the Jewish community, although it may have contributed to an improvement in Australian security screening procedures which, until 1951, were inadequate.



In May 1952 a special German migration mission came to Australia to investigate the mass migration proposal and in August of the same year Holt finally signed an agreement in Bonn with the West German government. The agreement was to last for five years (1952-1957) but the exact yearly quota was not specified as Holt stressed that the numerical intake had to be regulated by the economic factors in Australia at the time including the level of unemployment. However, it was projected that 4,000 German immigrants, assisted by the Australian government, would arrive during the first year that the scheme was in operation.<sup>122</sup> In all, a total of 50,000 Germans arrived under government sponsorship in the 1950s.<sup>123</sup>



Another issue which aroused strong emotions within the community and the Board was whether Jews should be banned from trading with Germany or from buying German goods. In October 1951 the New South Wales SZC passed a resolution which condemned 'any Jew engaging actively in commercial relationship with the present Germany'. At the subsequent plenary meeting of the Board in October Dr Matsdorf, then chairman of the Committee for Overseas Jewry, criticised the SZC resolution because the Jewish community was powerless to enforce it. Matsdorf also raised the issue of reparations from Germany to Jews and to Israel. At the November plenary meeting, the resolution that 'this Board of Deputies continues to view with disfavour any Jews trading with Germany or dealing with German goods' was passed unanimously. The resolution was proposed by Mark Cohen who said he regretted having to introduce such a motion only six years after a war in which six million Jews were killed, but it seemed that some members of the community needed a reminder. He ended by stating that 'Although we cannot enforce this motion by mandatory injunctions, we have the weapon of public disfavour at our disposal and apply it to those Jews who persist in trading with our arch enemy. We can and must appeal to the consciences of our fellow Jews'.<sup>124</sup>

The visit of Walter Giesecking, a German pianist who was brought to Australia in February 1952 as an ABC soloist caused significant debate within the organised leadership of Australian Jewry, including the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies. The ECAJ also argued that Giesecking was a 'proven admirer of the Nazi regime'<sup>125</sup> but both R. J. F. Boyer and Charles Moses of the ABC denied this accusation. Moses, in particular, was very critical of the Jewish opposition, implying that there had been no protests against two earlier German ABC soloists, Erna Berger and Rudolph Schock, because they were singers, 'a field in which comparatively few Jewish artists are of outstanding ability', unlike with Giesecking who, according to Charles Moses, was 'one of the few world-famous pianists who is not a Jew'.<sup>126</sup>

Faced with a determined stance on the part of the ABC, the ECAJ leadership decided against organising public protests against Giesecking during his concert tour. The NSW Jewish Board of Deputies supported this position, but at the same time unanimously passed a resolution that all members of the Jewish community should not attend any concert given by Giesecking. The Jewish Council believed that the community should follow a policy of more open opposition, but the Board felt that its policy was vindicated by events in Sydney during Giesecking's visit.

There was also conflict over Liberal Prime Minister, Menzies' 1950 proposal to outlaw the Communist Party. Menzies introduced the Communist Party Dissolution Bill in April 1950 and at its May meeting the VJBD discussed the Bill which it decided would permit 'a citizen to suffer disabilities without proof thereof first being given in open court'.<sup>127</sup> Following the annual ECAJ conference, Ashkanasy wrote to Menzies as a 'private though official communication to your government', requesting certain amendments to the bill which would ensure that minority racial and religious rights would be protected. Menzies stressed that the bill was directed against the Communist Party and that a full measure of British justice would be observed.<sup>128</sup> The bill was eventually passed but in March 1951 was found to be 'wholly invalid' by the High Court of Australia. Menzies decided to put the whole question to the Australian public and introduced a referendum. In the debate leading up to the referendum, the Jewish press strongly advocated a 'No' vote, as did the Jewish Council, but the organised Jewish community through its Boards of Deputies and the ECAJ took an apolitical stance, thereby strengthening the battle lines between the Council and the VJBD.<sup>129</sup> The referendum itself was defeated.

## JEWISH VISITORS

The New South Wales Board has always played a key role in hosting important Jewish visitors during their time in Sydney. In February 1952 the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, Rabbi Israel Brodie, and his wife visited Sydney as part of their Australian tour. The Board organised a communal reception for the Chief Rabbi at the Maccabean Hall which was attended by over 1000 people including representatives of the State of Israel, state parliament, all synagogues, and heads of every communal organisation. During his address Rabbi Brodie, who was closely associated with the British Board of Deputies, stated that 'I have been told that the Board of Deputies consists of 100 odd members. I hope that every one of them is odd — odd and individual who will give his views in constructing more for the good of the Jewish community'.<sup>130</sup>

## END OF AN ERA

On 7 April 1952 Saul Symonds experienced a massive stroke and died within 48 hours. This sudden loss of a leader who had devoted so much of his time to community work was keenly felt. His funeral was described as 'one of the greatest Jewish funeral processions in the history of Sydney Jewry'. No oration was given at the graveside because his death occurred on the eve of Pesach but a special Memorial service was held at the Great Synagogue on Sunday 20 April and the Board convened a special meeting on 24 April to pay tribute to Symonds, founder and first president of the Board. Newman spoke about the late president, stressing that he would always think of him against the background of the Board: 'This was his final love — a parliament of the Jewish people'. Einfeld spoke of his perseverance on behalf of the European refugees who wished to settle in Australia and of the innumerable trips which he made to Canberra to gain the support of the government and the civil servants.<sup>131</sup>

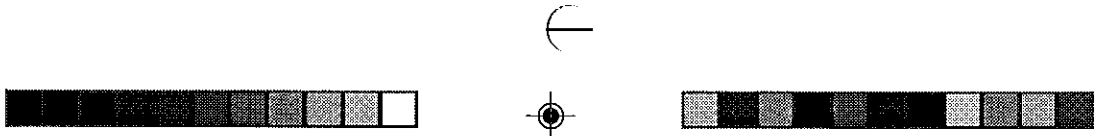
Following the death of Saul Symonds, the *Hebrew Standard* editorialised:

The late Saul Symonds, eminent in his leadership in so many and various aspects of Jewish activity, worthily earned in his irreproachable public life a niche in the hall of fame to which many aspire but few succeed. It is pleasing to record that his recognition did not come only with his death, but whilst he was so actively alive and alert in all the undertakings, large and small, into which he enthusiastically threw his unbounded and unstinting energies. No Jew in Australia has rendered such sterling service to Australian Jewry. The large attendance of mourners present at his funeral was the greatest tribute that any community could pay to a public figure of the stature of the late Saul Symonds . . .

Saul Symonds as a leader, president and a chairman of public organisations, with a directness of speech, and an uncanny ability to see into the crux of any situation, frequently disconcerted the would-be debater. Whilst the person might be offended at the time, after the meeting Mr Symonds' humorous personality would come to the fore, no animosity remaining with either party. His repartee at debating was famous, and the sting behind the wit brilliantly executed.<sup>132</sup>

This eulogy effectively summed up Symonds' strength as the leader of Sydney Jewry for the key decade of the 1940s both during and after World War II. Its sentiments were strongly endorsed by other key commentators and communal observers. In his history of the Great Synagogue, Rabbi Porush who arrived in Sydney in 1940 praised Symonds for his leadership skills. A plaque, supported by the AJWS, the Great Synagogue and the Board of Deputies was unveiled in his honour at the NSW Jewish War Memorial in September 1954.

Despite his obvious strengths as a leader, Saul Symonds' conservative approach and lack of vision did limit both the evolution of the Board of Deputies, as well as the growth of Sydney Jewry as a whole during this period. Symonds'



opposition to the concept of universal general franchise meant that bringing into reality a fully democratically elected Board of Deputies, the vision of the 18 signatories, proved to be an extended struggle. In 1949, under the direction of Einfeld, the first step was made with 25% of the deputies being elected by general franchise, but this still fell short of the original concept for the Board. This partial democratisation of the Board was achieved in the face of strong opposition from the majority of the Board's executive including Symonds. Other projects which the Board could have become involved in such as the foundation of a Jewish communal day school, as occurred with the establishment of Mount Scopus in Melbourne, remained a pipe dream for Sydney Jewry.

Immigration was another area which was limited by Symonds' conservative approach. He believed that it was important not to oppose government policy and to ensure that government policy was carried out. In this regard, he came into constant conflict with his Melbourne colleagues, including Alec Masel, first president of the ECAJ, Leo Fink, president of the Australian Jewish Welfare and Relief Society in Melbourne, and Maurice Ashkanasy. They believed that a more aggressive policy needed to be followed by the Jewish community. His clash with Ashkanasy led to Symonds' resignation from the ECAJ leadership in January 1949. As a result of the differences in immigration policy between Sydney and Melbourne, approximately 60% of Jewish refugees settled in Melbourne after the war; only 40 % came to Sydney so that while Sydney had been the larger of the two communities before 1939 Melbourne emerged as the largest Jewish community in Australia after 1945. In addition, Symonds' tendency to make abrasive statements which were seen as casting aspersions on European Jews caused tension between himself and many of the newcomers. There is no doubt that Symonds devoted his energies in every possible way to assist the European refugees both before and after the war, but his conservative approach did limit the success of his endeavours.

Symonds' death in April 1952 brought to an end an important era in the history of the Board of Deputies. Under his leadership, the Board was established as a central and important part of the organisational structure of Sydney Jewry. At the same time, its potential was not fully realised and there were a number of areas where further change and development were required. Apart from the need for further democratic reform, the problem of the Board's finances was a perennial problem and the failure of the Community Chest was a real setback for the community's development. These were challenges which were to face subsequent presidents of the Board of Deputies.

Unified Day School

Council Set Up

JANUARY 2, 1953

## Board of Deputies 'Bankrupt'



Israel to Join M.E.  
Command?

New Board's First  
Meeting was Noisy,  
Long and Abortive



Kashruth Problem May  
Go To The Chief Rabbi