



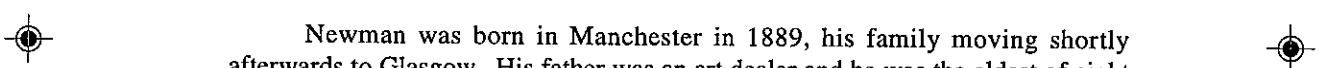
## CHAPTER THREE

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### CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP 1952 - 1957

Following the death of Saul Symonds, Horace B. Newman was elected president. His first term of office, which lasted for three years, was a period of volatile debate especially in relation to constitutional and procedural issues. Other matters dealt with in this period included the day school issue; the use of Yiddish at Board meetings; a suitable Holocaust memorial; and the role of the lay leadership in Kashrut. This was also the time when the Conference of Jewish Material Claims against Germany started and Australian Jewry's role at the conferences was subject to debate. Possibly worn out by stress and tension, Newman did not nominate as president for the elections of 1955 and in April of that year Gerald de Vahl Davis was elected as the Board's third president, a position he effectively filled for only eighteen months due to health problems. By April 1957, when Davis resigned due to ill health and Newman resumed the presidency having already been acting president from September 1956, many of the controversial constitutional issues and other matters had been resolved. Thus, the five years between Symonds' death in April 1952 and Newman's return in 1957 was a very significant time in the Board's history.

#### HORACE BOHMER NEWMAN



Newman was born in Manchester in 1889, his family moving shortly afterwards to Glasgow. His father was an art dealer and he was the eldest of eight children. At an early age he and his twin sisters suffered from diphtheria. While the twins died, Horace survived this illness. He left school at the age of eleven and started work as a 'boy' in a drapery business in Glasgow. At the age of fourteen he went to London where he worked for Raphael Tuck, world-wide stationers who, in 1911, sent him to Sydney. He returned to London before World War I and sought to enlist, but was refused because of a heart murmur. He met his wife to be, Ella Kate Lyons, the daughter of a Jewish hotelier from Wales, Morris Lyons, during his stay in Sydney and after the war he returned and married Ella at the Great Synagogue in 1918.

In 1929 he went into partnership with his cousin, Alfred Newman, as an importer and manufacturing agent. In 1931 Felix Benson in London and Harold Ponsford in Melbourne joined the partnership which became known as Newman, Benson and Ponsford. During World War II Newman enlisted in the Eighth Head Battery in the Volunteer Defence Corps. He rose to the rank of warrant officer, was in charge of the searchlights off South Head with 60 men under his command, and was awarded a medal. After the war he returned to business which initially did quite well but then gradually deteriorated until it was taken over in the late 1950s.

He became involved in communal leadership in the late 1930s due to his close friendship with Max Freilich. Freilich described how this friendship developed:

A chance meeting in April 1936 profoundly influenced the course of my life and in the long run influenced greatly the leadership of the Australian Jewish community and the development of the Zionist Federation of Australia and New Zealand. I met Horace B. Newman in the course of business and we soon struck up an enduring friendship which in time blossomed into much more than a personal relationship. It was a bond forged by sharing a common faith in the destiny of our people based on an appreciation of the heritage and spiritual values of Judaism and the historic unity of our nation.<sup>1</sup>



Horace Bohmer Newman and Max Freilich

Newman strongly supported Freilich in his political endeavours to win the support of the government for the concept of a Jewish State. In 1947, Newman was president of the Zionist Federation. Travelling in Europe, he met Moshe Sharett in Zurich and Sharett stressed the importance of this political work. Freilich and Newman's efforts were crowned with success as they led to Dr Herbert V. Evatt playing a central role at the United Nations in the creation of the Jewish state and later its admission to the UN in 1949. But, many of the key leaders of the Jewish community in New South Wales, including Saul Symonds, saw this political activity as 'dangerous'<sup>2</sup> and opposed Freilich and Newman in their attempts to win political support from Labor.<sup>3</sup>

The friendship between Newman and Freilich led to a thirty-year association in communal leadership when the two men worked as a team in the Zionist movement and the Board of Deputies. Newman became involved with the NSW State Zionist Council, formed in April 1939, serving as its president from 1945-1948 and 1952 - 1960 and of the Zionist Federation of Australia from 1947 - 1949 and 1962 - 1968. In 1949, after Symonds resigned as senior vice-president of the ECAJ, Newman was elected to that position and went on in 1949-1950 to be president. Thus, he was to head the two key federal organisations of Australian Jewry, as well as devoting many years of dedicated service to the Board of Deputies. He was also president of the Jewish National Fund for seven years and was associated with the Great Synagogue for more than 50 years, serving as honorary treasurer for two years and vice-president for four years.

Newman was noted for his gentlemanly and dignified approach and his clear command of the English language. While his main interest was community work, he also enjoyed gardening, playing tennis and was a member Mason. He was an avid reader, with an extensive library. A private person who set very high standards both for himself and others, in his younger days he did not suffer fools gladly.

By nature Newman was fairly conservative but under the influence of Freilich, he worked for Zionism, which in the 1930s and 1940s was not fully supported by the Sydney Jewish establishment, and he also assisted in the process of constitutional reform for the Board. The contrast between Newman and Freilich is of interest. Newman was imposing, tall of stature, very British, the conservative, dignified statesman, whilst Freilich, so much smaller in height and slimmer in build, was the Polish Jew, imbued with the European Jewish fervour for Zionism and the need to democratise the community. Freilich commented on these differences as follows:

Our backgrounds and upbringing, however, were completely different. Horace was born in Scotland of a Polish father and German mother and at the age of sixteen went to London but a few years later migrated to Australia; whilst I was born in Galicia, reared in a strictly orthodox home and educated myself as an autodidact in Vienna, Austria... [Newman] was not an assimilationist but, because of circumstances incidental to the environment in which he lived, he remained aloof from the Jewish way of life. He was a regular worshipper at the Great Synagogue but socially and in business his friends were either non-Jews or totally assimilated local Jews. Consequently, he had no contact with Zionists nor was he aware of Zionist trends and local communal activity. With the ripening of our friendship we met regularly and often discussed, amongst other topics, the aims and objects of Zionism and my personal involvement in the movement. It was not because of persuasion on my part but rather through becoming aware of the problem and thinking it over that he joined the Zionist ranks of his own accord.<sup>4</sup>

This partnership worked most effectively for the Board in the 1950s when Newman was president of the Board and Freilich was honorary treasurer and later vice-president. During Newman's presidency there was strong support for Israel and JNF projects such as the Queen Elizabeth Coronation Forest. The Board also supported the establishment of an Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce and fundraising for the Australian sporting team which was sent every four years for the Maccabiah Games in Israel (in this period in 1952, 1956, 1960 and 1964).

## **CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND DR HANS KIMMEL**

Constitutional and procedural issues continued to occupy much time during Newman's first term as president. The second Board elections in which 25% of deputies were elected by general franchise was held in October 1952; 40 candidates nominated for 27 positions. 8000 ballot papers were distributed and about 1500 people participated in the voting process. The results of the elections were announced at the November Board meeting. At this meeting Dr Kimmel asked for an

investigation into the election of Chaim Frankel who was chosen to represent the Folk Centre. Frankel wrote to the Sydney Jewish News justifying his election and stressing his involvement in all aspects of Yiddish culture for 25 years.<sup>5</sup> At the January 1953 meeting a resolution was proposed by Kimmel and seconded by Dr Hanns H. Wachtell 'to set up a standard for candidates'. This motion resulted in such heated debate that the *Jewish News* described it was 'one of the stormiest Board meetings ever'.<sup>6</sup> In September 1953, Frankel was recalled as the Folk Centre representative and replaced by Maurice Phillips and Haskel Davis, but he was then restored to the position in February 1954. All these events led to great debate about the procedure for a constituent organisation to terminate the office of a deputy.

During 1953 the issue of increasing the number of general franchise deputies was raised again, especially because of the Board's continued financial difficulties. In July 1953 Paul Ungar stressed the need to make the Board more representative and stated that he believed a popularly elected Board would attract greater financial support. In November 1953 Edgar Newman proposed a motion for full general franchise, decreasing the number of deputies to 40, as well as having each constituent member organisation sending an observer to meetings. This motion was defeated, but it highlighted the need for further constitutional reform.

In 1954 much energy was expended on what was known as the 'Constitutional Reform Debate'. Motions were deferred from one meeting to the next because of the length of debate, and extra meetings were called. The goal was to devise a system which would be more representative, simplify the electoral procedure, cost less and entail less work for the polling officers. There was great debate on whether to increase the percentage of general franchise deputies and decrease the number of deputies. The issues were raised in the correspondence columns of the Jewish press where much acrimony was expressed by different participants.

At the May 1954 plenum meeting the executive proposed that 50% of the deputies should represent the constituent organisations and 50% should be elected by general franchise. There would be a total of 120 deputies. Any person over the age of 18 who enrolled as a member of the Board could vote. After much debate, and the calling of a special meeting on 23 June when a quorum failed to materialise, these proposals were presented by Syd Einfeld at the August meeting and were adopted. Dr Kimmel tried to amend the proposals by decreasing the number of deputies to 80, 45 of whom would be elected by general franchise and only 35 would represent constituent organisations, but this amendment was defeated. Kimmel also proposed a three year rather than a two year term; this was accepted at the September meeting and the term of the Board extended from 31 December 1954 to 31 March 1955. It was decided that in the case of a dispute regarding the election of a deputy from a constituent organisation, the executive of the Board should adjudicate and its decision would be final.

Another area of debate was the issue of a constituent organisation terminating the office of its deputy and also the Board's right to suspend or expel a deputy. Two motions were drafted to deal with these issues. The motion relating to a constituent organisation terminating the office of its deputy was finally passed at the October 1954 plenum, but the issue relating to the expulsion of a deputy from the Board was deferred to the November meeting. An amendment was proposed introducing the

alternative of suspension rather than expulsion of a deputy and this was passed by the Board. Any member could be suspended through a motion, provided it was placed on the agenda and passed by a two-thirds majority. A proposal to introduce an independent chairman, separate from the president of the Board, was also introduced at the March 1955 meeting by Gerald de Vahl Davis but the concept was rejected even though the VJBD had accepted it at the suggestion of Ashkanasy in September 1950.<sup>7</sup>

During all these debates, one of the main agitators was Dr Hans Kimmel. When Newman became president of the Board, Kimmel praised him for his leadership and, in November 1952, wrote that 'unlike his predecessors does not muzzle the Deputies, nor does he try to give to the discussion a pre-conceived course'.<sup>8</sup> Kimmel's honeymoon with Newman did not last. During the January 1953 plenum, when Kimmel introduced the motion to control the standard of deputies, Newman stated:

Dr Kimmel has appointed himself communal witch-doctor, a sort of Jewish Senator McCarthy. I have given a fair ruling and Dr Kimmel is splitting hairs.<sup>9</sup>

Kimmel then made accusations about the Board's executive and only withdrew these after Einfeld moved for his expulsion. By 1954 there were constant clashes between Kimmel and the president, especially in relation to the constitutional debates. Events came to a head at the October meeting when the debate came close to uproar and only Einfeld's intervention again stopped suspension of proceedings.

As a result of these events, a special executive meeting was called for 2 November 1954 and it was decided that the president should make a statement that the executive would support the confirmation of the constitutional amendment with regard to removal from office of any deputy. In this statement, prepared by a sub-committee of Davis, Benjamin and John Einfeld, Newman said:

Before I go on to matters arising from the minutes, I must now refer to our October meeting, when this Board witnessed scenes, unparalleled in its history, which were the culmination of similar disorders at previous meetings for months past.

Your executive is gravely concerned with this trend, which is destroying the usefulness of this Board and its debates and bringing the Board of Deputies, consisting of the representatives of the Jewish community, into contempt and disrepute. Nobody can possibly have any respect for a forum or organisation which allows scenes, such as we witnessed in recent months, to continue, without taking measures which will ensure that those responsible for this disorder are not permitted to continue.

I regret that, in this connection, I have to name Dr Hans Kimmel, who consistently, and, I consider, deliberately defies the rulings of the Chair, and creates disorder and confusion whenever the Chairman's ruling or opinion of certain other members do not please him.

Newman said the executive would not tolerate further behaviour of this nature and was not prepared to be 'continuously the target of abuse and whole meetings are unruly and disorderly to the point when it is impossible to do any constructive work or thinking'.<sup>10</sup>

At the January meeting problems arose over the Minutes which Dr Kimmel opposed as incorrect but which were accepted by a vote of 32 to 2. When Kimmel interjected and would not behave in an orderly fashion, Syd Einfeld moved, 'That this meeting endorses the Chairman's ruling to suspend Dr Kimmel' and the motion was carried unanimously.<sup>11</sup> This appeared to have the desired effect, since when Dr Kimmel returned to Board meetings, he was no longer so disruptive.

The new Board elected in 1955 selected Kimmel as chairman of the Constitutional Committee in what was seen by commentators as a surprise result. He served in that capacity on the executive and in June 1956 commented to the Board that the constitution was working well and that the Board had 6500 names on the register of voters. Shortly after this, he had to take leave of absence due to illness and, in June 1957, he submitted his resignation because of ill health. He left Sydney in 1958 to join his married daughter in London, thereby removing from the Sydney Jewish scene one of its most colourful critics and provocateurs. In London he continued his journalistic work and in 1968 he published his *Structure and Regime of the Board of Deputies of British Jews* arguing for greater democracy in the British Board. He died in October 1970, aged 81. He was a great fighter and, even though he caused great uproar at Board meetings, his efforts were a key factor in the decision to introduce general franchise for fifty per cent of deputies.

## USE OF YIDDISH AT BOARD MEETINGS

Another area of debate during Newman's presidency was whether Yiddish could be used at meetings. This issue arose when the Folk Centre representative, Chaim Frankel, wished to speak in Yiddish concerning a memorial for the martyrs of World War II. Newman refused this request resulting in a heated debate about the issue in the Jewish press. Newman accused the *Sydney Jewish News* of misrepresenting his decision; he said he was not opposed to Yiddish being spoken and that he had encouraged the inclusion of speeches in Yiddish at public meetings which he had organised. He felt that he had good reasons for not permitting Frankel to address the meeting in Yiddish since he had a 'a very good command of English' and 'with a considerable number of deputies being entirely unacquainted with Yiddish' an address in Yiddish would be confusing.<sup>12</sup> Ben Caplan was very critical of Newman's decision and wrote that 'to deny a deputy the privilege of speaking in a Jewish tongue at a Jewish meeting is, to say the least, a sad reflection on our outlook and our Jewishness'.<sup>13</sup>

At the September meeting, A. Cymerman put on notice his intention to present a motion in support of the use of Yiddish and Hebrew at Board meetings for the October plenum. During the discussion of the motion, Gerald de Vahl Davis added the following amendment:

That this NSW Jewish Board of Deputies officially recognises the use of Hebrew and Yiddish at meetings of the Board by any deputy who cannot adequately express himself or herself in English.

This motion was carried by the plenum but Cymerman was disappointed by the qualification expressed in the amendment and wrote to the Sydney Jewish News expressing his discontent. He stated that Hebrew and Yiddish were the 'soul of the Jewish people and important instruments in our struggle for survival' and it was wrong to limit their use at a Jewish forum.<sup>14</sup> He felt that the amendment represented the 'complex of British Jews' and that in a pluralistic community, national languages should be encouraged, especially the languages of the Jewish people. The Board's executive, however, were critical of this public airing of issues relating to the Board which they felt should have been discussed internally.

The debate over Yiddish had started when Frankel introduced a motion to establish a memorial to the martyrs of World War II. During his speech he stated that:

To erect a monument in lasting memory of our heroes and of our dead is our sacred duty, not only towards the dead, but towards the living and towards the future generations. It will be a token of self-respect and honour for the Jewish people.<sup>15</sup>

There was great debate about this suggestion as some deputies felt that the community 'should not waste its energy on stonemasonry but commemorate the Jewish dead by planting trees and cultivating the soil of Israel'.<sup>16</sup> The Board decided to establish a sub-committee of twelve, chaired by Edgar Newman, to consider proposals. In November the following two proposals were carried:

1. That a tangible Memorial be established at the Sydney Chevra Kadisha Memorial Hall and a Commemoration Day be set aside each year to be known as 'Martyrs' Observance Day'.
2. That a prize to be known as 'The Jewish Martyrs' Memorial Prize' be endowed to be awarded annually to scholars in Jewish schools.

A third proposal for support for the Martyrs' Memorial Forest in Israel already had the support of the JNF and it was felt that it was not necessary to formally adopt it since it was seen to be self evident.<sup>17</sup>

## **SYDNEY COUNCIL AND SOVIET ANTISEMITISM**

While the Sydney Jewish Council remained as a member of the Board, there were at times tensions between the Council and the Board. The failure of leading members of the Jewish Council to recognise the revival of antisemitism by Stalin was discussed at the Board. The first news of government-sponsored antisemitism and anti-Zionism in Eastern Europe had begun to filter through to Australian Jewry

in July 1949. In 1951 reports surfaced of the persecution of Hungarian Jews, and in 1952 there were stories of further persecution of Jews in the Soviet Union. The Council, whilst condemning the US government during the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the 'atom spies', denied the antisemitic tendencies in the Soviet regime, especially in regard to the Prague Trials, show trials held in 1952 of a number of Czechoslovakian leaders many of whom were Jewish, such as Rudolf Slansky, Walter Clements and Eugene Lobl, and the Doctors' Plot, with Stalin's bizarre accusations that a group of doctors, a large percentage of whom were Jewish, were trying to kill him.

In both Sydney and Melbourne, the Council's uncritical appreciation of Soviet Russia and its refusal to recognise the wave of antisemitism which spread through the Soviet Union in the last years of Stalin's regime led to conflict between the Council and the Boards of Deputies. In July 1952 Julian Rose defended the Sydney Council and told deputies that they should not be influenced by the 'red baiting of the Jewish Council' as its members were sincere people and included ex-servicemen.<sup>18</sup> At the January 1953 meeting, Sam Travers raised the issue of the Prague trials and said that the Sydney Council should make its position clear. Mark Cohen, president of the Council, stated that he needed time to prepare a statement, but that he would fight antisemitism anywhere.<sup>19</sup>

In September 1954 the executive decided that the Council had ignored the correct channels of communication when it invited Dr Evatt to address a meeting on civil liberty and did not first refer the matter to the Board of Deputies. The president of the Council, Nate Zusman, was asked to put in writing the Council's willingness to adhere in future to the existing channels of communication.<sup>20</sup> There were further problems with Nate Zusman when he signed a petition expressing concern about Israel which the Melbourne Jewish Council submitted to a 'Big Four' meeting at Geneva. Gerald de Vahl Davis felt that since the petition implied that it was speaking in the name of Australian Jewry, it undermined the position of the ECAJ and was a 'flagrant breach of the rules governing public statements'. Zusman claimed that being a deputy should not prevent him from signing a petition as an individual and not on behalf of his organisation.<sup>21</sup>

## CONTROVERSIES OVER KASHRUT

The supply and price of kosher food was one area where the Board of Deputies under Newman's presidency tried to improve the situation for Sydney Jewry. Until 1945 the Great Synagogue was responsible for communal shechitah. As the community expanded, the Great Synagogue lay leadership believed that other congregations should share in the administration and expenses of shechitah. By 1947, moves were made for the formation of a United Shechitah committee under the chairmanship of Abraham Rabinovitch.<sup>22</sup>

This did not eventuate because of the attack by Rabbi Berkovits of the Central Synagogue on what he believed to be totally inadequate standards of kashrut in Sydney. When he became aware of the inadequacies in the supply of kosher meat, due to the fact that the shochet was not shomer shabbat,<sup>23</sup> as well as other problems with shechitah, he referred to the 'inconceivable disorder and chaos in all matters concerning shechitah and kashrut'<sup>24</sup> and claimed that:

In fact, judging by the conditions I found I have no reason to assume that these matters have ever been in order for the last twenty years or so. I have had to reach the conclusion that the Beth Din was lacking the necessary authority to solve the problem of kashrut and at the same time I also found that a sound foundation for the administration of shechitah and kashrut has never been in existence.<sup>25</sup>

Berkovits believed the chaos in kashrut was due to years of neglect, inefficiency, incompetence, and to some extent indifference, and that for too long the affairs of shechitah had been in the hands of people (not the Beth Din) who were not interested in kashrut as such, but only in the power of controlling the community.<sup>26</sup> The veracity of this belief was evidenced by the fact that when the head of the Beth Din, Rabbi Porush, visited a member of the Great Synagogue's kashrut sub-committee one Sunday morning, he found him eating prawns which are forbidden by the kosher dietary laws.<sup>27</sup>

After the Central Synagogue established a separate shechitah committee, the Mizrahi followed suit, so that for a period three synagogues — the Great, Central and Mizrahi — each had its own shochet and was running its own butcher shop. Central employed the Rev. E. Belfer who had previously been the shochet for South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation,<sup>28</sup> servicing at one stage three shops and the needs of Newtown, while the Great Synagogue brought out Rev. Joseph Kleerekoper from London and he serviced a kosher butcher's shop at Kings Cross.<sup>29</sup> In October 1951 the Central and Mizrahi joined forces and established the Conjoint Committee but further efforts in the 1950s to unite with the Great failed. In addition to the Conjoint and Great shechitah committees, the Adath Yisroel continued its own separate shechitah committee, with its own kashrut system under Rabbi Bernath.

Lay leaders were dissatisfied with the supply of kosher meat and complaints were expressed in the Jewish press and at the Board of Deputies. These complaints included the high cost of kosher meat, the fact that there were no kosher facilities in the Western Suburbs and the North Shore, and the inefficiency of three separate bodies dealing with shechitah.<sup>30</sup> In September 1952 the problems, especially in relation to extra costs, were forcefully presented by Sam Travers, a Polish Jew who had arrived in Australia in the 1920s. The Board of Deputies decided to establish a kashrut investigating committee in October 1952 under the chairmanship of David Benjamin.<sup>31</sup> In January 1953 Travers withdrew from the committee because he was only concerned with issues of cost and believed that with the appointment of a new price commissioner, kosher prices would be fixed. The committee's report stressed that the commercial and technical administration of kashrut should not be in rabbinical hands and proposed the formation of a Kashrut Commission which would consist of orthodox Jewish laymen of unimpeachable religious faith who would issue licences, employ shomrim and enter into arrangements for the production of kosher food products.<sup>32</sup>

Efforts were made by the Board of Deputies to establish a Kashrut Commission along the same lines as in Melbourne. Numerous meetings were held throughout 1953 and 1954, with the focus being on the formation of a United Shechitah Committee which would combine the Conjoint Committee and the Great Synagogue

(since the Adath refused to participate) but there were constant delays because of problems with organisation, personnel and finance.<sup>33</sup> One of the problems which the Board faced was in relation to the Beth Din. Some of the rabbis believed the Board had no right to interfere with kashrut, especially since in its registration scheme it did not check if all members were Jewish according to Halachah. In November 1954, Rabbi Osher Abramson published an article in the Yiddish section of the *Sydney Jewish News* which was highly critical of the Board's involvement in issues of kashrut. He wrote:

A misfortune happened to our Board when, a few years ago, a certain irresponsible member dropped a sensational speech on Kashrut finance, based on a complete lack of understanding of the question and without any foundation. In fact, even though this member was later compelled to withdraw his 'well chosen remarks', the Board and its Chairman was left with a chronic headache.

It is superfluous to underline the sincerity and righteousness of the Chairman in his attempt to establish a United Board of Shechitah and Board of kashrut. It is, however, clear as day that the entire matter is absolutely not the business of the Board, or of its membership as such. Sooner or later they will have to admit that the Board is not the institution to organise Kashrut or even discuss it.

It is high time that members of the Board should understand that one cannot make any undertaking successful that is built only upon a paradox and upon idealism... on the one side, to agitate for a universal membership, including in its ranks even those who, according to our Torah, are not even Jews, on the grounds that the Board is a secular institution that has nothing to do with religious questions, and on the other hand to discuss questions such as Kashrut as if it were a religious community.

Such two contrasting activities are useless ideology and could not be crowned with success.<sup>34</sup>

At the October 1954 plenum the lack of progress on the Kashrut Commission was raised and the debate became so heated that 'a number of deputies insisted on speaking at the same time, unparliamentary language was used, the Chairman's [Newman's] ruling not obeyed'.<sup>35</sup> Order was only restored by Syd Einfeld taking over the chairmanship of the meeting and urging all deputies to conduct themselves in an orderly manner. Finally in March 1955 the problems were overcome and a United Shechitah Committee was formed under the chairmanship of Emanuel Braham, founder and president of South Head Synagogue and a strictly devout man, but this did resolve the fact that there were still three separate Shechita Committees: the Conjoint, the Great and the Adath, each of which continued to function as a separate entity.

In March 1955, following the constitutional amendments passed in 1954, new elections were held with 50 percent of deputies being elected by general franchise and 50 per cent representing constituent organisations. Worn out by all the controversies about constitutional changes, the use of Yiddish, the activities of the Jewish Council and the issue of kashrut, Newman announced that he was standing

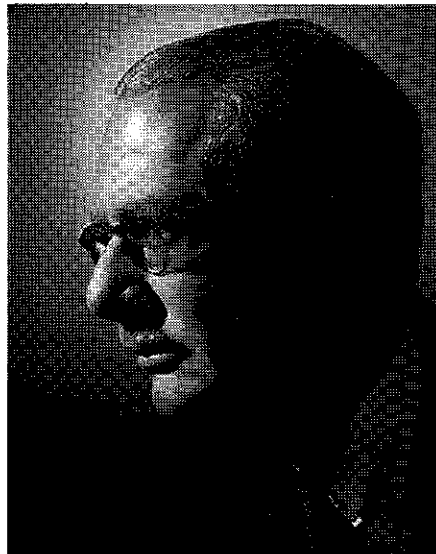
down as president. He felt that after 20 years of communal service and, in particular, three years as president, he needed a rest, but he agreed to continue to serve on the Board's executive and as president of the NSW State Zionist Council. The editor of the *Jewish News* commented that this decision:

... will deprive the community of an outstanding leader whose gentlemanly qualities will be remembered for a long time. He has had to face an unwarranted amount of personal attacks at Board meetings made by some irresponsible deputies.<sup>36</sup>

At Newman's last meeting as president in March 1955 Syd Einfeld moved a resolution recognising his 'devoted and untiring work for the Board, paying special tribute to the inspiring leadership he had given to the Executive in particular' and this resolution was passed by acclamation.<sup>37</sup>

### **GERALD DE VAHL DAVIS**

In April 1955 a new executive was elected with Gerald de Vahl Davis as president. Davis had a long tradition of family involvement in communal leadership as did his wife Rose (nee Luber). His grandfather, Woolf Davis, migrated from Poland to Melbourne in the 1840s and after starting life in Australia as a peddler he rented a shop in Carlton and with the money he made built a row of shops from 1 - 15 Drummond Street, Carlton. Woolf Davis became involved in the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation which he served for many years on its board and as president. He later gave money to a charity in Palestine to build a row of houses for the poor in Jerusalem as well as a synagogue in honour of his children. The houses and synagogue still stand and are in use today.



Gerald de Vahl Davis



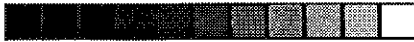
When Woolf Davis left Poland his name was Ze'ev Vahl Katzenellenbogen. He initially settled in Swansea, Wales, where his surname caused difficulty and he changed it to Davis, the name he continued to use in Australia. However, the name Vahl had special significance since it meant he could trace his family back to Saul Katzenellenbogen, a court Jew in seventeenth century Poland. During a dispute over the election of a new king, Saul was made king of Poland for one day. In recognition for his contribution, he was given the name 'Wahl' which means election.

Woolf married Rachel Moses and they had eight children of whom Abraham, Gerald's father was the fifth. Abraham married Cecily Altson in 1894 and they had three children, Gerald being the youngest, born on 8 April 1897. While living in Melbourne, Abraham was involved in the community and also served as president of the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation. So, too, did Cecily's father, Isaac Altson. In 1907 Gerald's parents separated. His father moved to Western Australia and his mother returned to London. He and his sister Rachel (Dorothy) were sent to Sydney to live with their aunt and uncle, Rev and Mrs Phillip Phillipstein of the Great Synagogue.

In 1912 Abraham Davis drowned when the ship, *Koombana*, on which he was travelling from the pearling town of Broome in Western Australia, disappeared during a cyclone near Port Hedland and was lost with all hands. Gerald was fifteen when his father died. While Woolf Davis dropped the special title 'Vahl' in Wales, his children sought to restore it. His son Abraham continued to call himself Davis but he had a property in Western Australia which he called de Vahl and his grandson Gerald took on de Vahl as part of his name. Gerald studied at Sydney Grammar, concentrating on the classical side, and went to the University of Sydney where he studied Agricultural Science, graduating in 1921. Davis had commenced his university studies in 1915 but he enlisted in early 1917 after being rejected at least three times for defective sight. As he later commented 'perhaps the standard had been lowered by then'.<sup>38</sup> He served in the 6th Light Horse Brigade in the AIF in Egypt and Palestine. In 1918 he was invalided and sent down to Cairo and returned by hospital ship to Australia, resuming his university studies while still in the military hospital at Randwick.<sup>39</sup>



In 1919 Gerald Davis met Rose Luber at a picnic. She was one of the first women to qualify as a pharmacist in New South Wales and she had her own pharmacy before she married. Later, she worked in her brother Myer Luber's pharmacy in Oxford Street. After their marriage, Rose and Gerald Davis bought a farm with Rose's sister Eve and her husband Lou Field at Junees Reefs, where Gerald had spent a short period as a Field Officer with the NSW Department of Agriculture after his graduation in 1922.<sup>40</sup> They lived in the country for a couple of years until Gerald experienced a recurrence of dysentery contracted in Palestine which forced them to sell the farm and return to Sydney. Their only child, Graham, who later also served as president of the Board of Deputies, was born in May 1931.

On their return to Sydney in 1925, Gerald joined Davis Gelatine Co. Ltd (no relation) as chief chemist. He was appointed Sales Manager because of his business acumen. In 1929, while overseas on six months paid leave from his company, Davis was appointed Australian representative for French and German potash interests. This was as a result of contacts he had established through his stepfather who was an



agricultural scientist connected with the potash industry in England. He was appointed managing director together with D. L. Napier of the newly established Pacific Potash Company (Australasia) which traded with France and Germany. During World War II the business ceased trading because it was not possible to import goods from France or Germany. Gerald joined the Volunteer Defence Corps as signal sergeant in 1941 and from 1942 - 1943 served as captain in the First Australian Mobile Signal Company (AMF). After his unit was posted overseas in late 1943 and de Vahl Davis was retired from the army on the grounds of his age, he applied for various government positions but did not find suitable employment. At the end of the war, he rejoined the business when it reopened but it took quite a while before it recovered to its former trading position.

Throughout this period Davis worked for the development of agricultural science in Australia. He worked actively with the University Agricultural Graduate Association of which he was president in 1934. Through this Association, he was active in the formation, especially in preparing the draft constitution between 1933 and 1935, and organisation of the Institute of Agricultural Science of which he was both state (1937) and federal president (1947) and acknowledged as its founder. He also represented Australia at a number of international agricultural science congresses.



From the time of their return to Sydney, Gerald and Rose Davis became very active in communal affairs. Davis started his association with the War Memorial in 1925 and from 1928 was on the Board of Central Synagogue for a decade. He worked with his brother-in-law, Cecil Luber, in the establishment of the Temple Emanuel in 1938 and remained actively involved for the rest of his life, serving as president and holding other executive positions. He also became involved with the work of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society from its foundation in 1936 as the German Jewish Relief Fund. In 1939 he went to Europe via the United States and spent time organising funds from the American Joint Distribution Committee for the establishment of Mutual Farms, a committee of the AJWS which lent money to Jewish refugees to help them settle on the land and which also ran the Chelsea Park Training Farm at Baulkham Hills. During the early days of the Second World War he was active on the NSW State Zionist Council and the Zionist Federation. He was involved with the United Jewish Overseas Relief Fund, worked with Dr Laserson in the World Jewish Congress, being president of the Australian Section of the WJC, and was on the executive of the Board of Deputies from its foundation. He was a NSW representative on the ECAJ, being the only member of the original Committee of Management to serve without a break from 1945 to 1956. Through his involvement as an ex-serviceman he was on the Board of Governors of NAJEX and was also president of the NSW Jewish War Memorial from 1946-49.

For many years de Vahl Davis was a staunch supporter of the Liberal Party. In 1948 he was elected to the Woollahra Council and he continued to serve on the Council until 1956. He served as Deputy Mayor in 1951 and again in 1955. He was particularly interested in park development and street beautification for the Council. He stood for the federal elections in November 1949 for the electorate of Cook, a Labor stronghold, as the Liberal candidate but it was an inner city electorate which was strongly pro-Labour and was not elected. In June 1950 he ran as the Liberal candidate for the state seat of Randwick. Although he had a greater chance of success

and did make significant inroads into the Labor majority, he was again not successful. He was a Freemason and belonged to the Double Bay Royal Chapter from 1931 and for three to four years in the late 1930s was associated with the Boy Scout movement as group president and patron. After World War II he was active in the United Nations Association of Australia and served on the executive of the NSW Division, being chairman of standing committee on FAO.

Gerald de Vahl Davis was an avid reader who had a very broad based knowledge and was a great source of information. He wrote poetry and short stories including children's stories such as 'The Fable of the Lost Fable' and the 'Fable of the Fortunate Youth' which he read to his son, Graham, but never sought to have his writings published. He was also very interested in aviation and wrote 'The Trial of the Green Comet' which was the story of the London-Melbourne flight by K. Waller and Lt. Cathcart-Jones in October - November 1934. He was an excellent committee man who was able to work within a team and bring matters effectively to fruition. In his obituary published in the Journal of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science E. T. Edwards wrote:

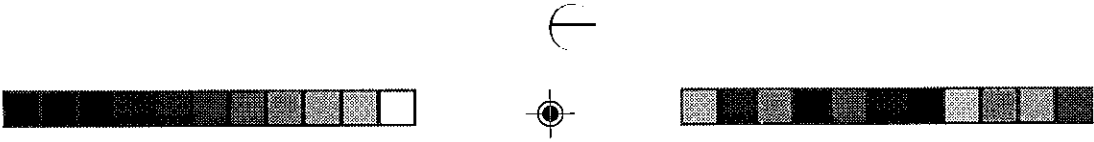
He was easily the best committee man I have known. His knowledge of procedure was flawless. His thinking was direct and clear and I have never known anyone who could frame a resolution with such clarity and speed or who could simplify a mass of confused ideas with such unerring skill and dexterity.<sup>41</sup>

He used this broad knowledge and his leadership skills for the benefit of Sydney Jewry, including the work of the Board.

## **ISSUES & CONFLICTS OVER RESTITUTION FROM GERMANY**

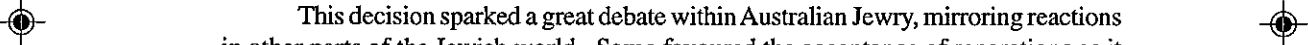
One area where the Board played a central role in the 1950s was the restitution, compensation and indemnification for the loss of property, both real and personal, formerly belonging to Jewish victims of Nazism by the West German government. Since the BCAJ acted as a federal body, the stand taken by each State Board on this issue was very important. As early as 1945 the issue of indemnification was raised and in 1946 Dr George Berger, Honorary Secretary of the Jewish Unity Committee, corresponded with Chifley, then Federal Treasurer, in relation to Australian government support for claims by Australian citizens against Germany. Chifley promised to look into the matter but nothing definite eventuated.<sup>42</sup> The lack of interest of the Australian government in this matter led Dr S. W. Krieger to claim in the New Citizen that while the Commonwealth government was actively sponsoring the claims of the Templars for £3,500,000 from the Israeli government, it was not giving any assistance to the Jewish refugees with claims in Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Hungary.<sup>43</sup>

In 1951 the West German government proposed that both moral and material reparations should be made for the destruction of European Jewry by allocating funds to the various Jewish communities throughout the world. This money was to be for 'heirless' property which had become part of the assets of the West German



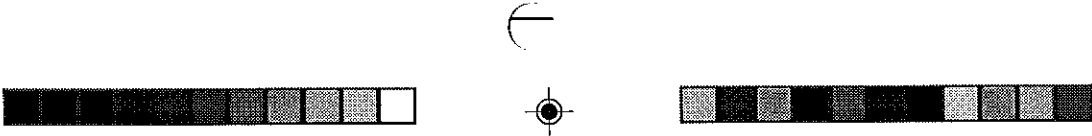
government. In October 1951 a meeting was called in New York with representatives from the USA, France, England, Canada, Australia, South Africa and South America to discuss the issue of restitution. The ECAJ was unable to send a representative to this meeting and Maurice Perlzweig of the WJC represented Australian Jewry.<sup>44</sup> As a result of this meeting, an organisation called the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (COJMCAG) was incorporated in the USA to lodge a claim on Jewish heirless property in West Germany in the name of the Jewish people as a whole. After much debate, the Israeli government decided that it would claim 'reparations in lieu of restitution of heirless Jewish property to assist in the tremendous task of rehabilitating Jewish victims of Hitler's persecution in the State of Israel'.<sup>45</sup> Initially it was hoped that Israel, and the Jewish Conference for Material Claims against Germany, would be able to negotiate with Germany through an intermediary such as the UN or one of the great powers but none agreed to act as mediator and Israel and the Jewish Claims Conference decided to deal directly with Germany.<sup>46</sup>

After lengthy negotiations between the government of Israel, the Conference and West Germany, an agreement for the disposition of the property and the proceeds was signed at Luxembourg in September 1952. This agreement provided that the property should become vested in the West German Government and that cash or goods to its value should be made available, over a term of twelve years, to Israel. A proportion of the value would then be paid by Israel to the Conference for distribution in accordance with a carefully drawn up set of rules to Jewish organisations throughout the world which were engaged in the relief, rehabilitation and resettlement of the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution.<sup>47</sup>



This decision sparked a great debate within Australian Jewry, mirroring reactions in other parts of the Jewish world. Some favoured the acceptance of reparations as it was only right that the victims of Nazism should be assisted by their former persecutors; others considered reparations as 'blood money' and believed that there should not be any relationship with Germany.<sup>48</sup> In an emotive sermon at the Great Synagogue in August 1950, Rabbi L.A. Falk strongly criticised those claiming compensation which he referred to as 'blood money' and he argued that Jews should maintain their dignity.<sup>49</sup> These differences of opinion were reflected in the opposing positions taken by New South Wales and Victoria. The New South Wales Board voted in support of Israel's position, whereas in Victoria, under Ashkanasy's presidency, the ECAJ voted against the negotiations with West Germany. Further debate and discussion, with Einfeld strongly supporting reparations, led to a reversal of the Victorian position and in July 1952 the Australian Jewish community decided to participate in German reparations through the ECAJ, with Einfeld as a director of the COJMCAG.<sup>50</sup>

Another area of debate was the question of which was the appropriate body to represent the claims of the Jewish victims of Nazism. In Sydney, the Association of New Citizens (ANC) led by Dr Max Joseph believed that the Association should be the representative body in regard to reparations. Dr Joseph argued that the Association represented the victims of Nazism and as such it was entitled to the funds. He claimed that the ANC had been concerned with reparations since 1945 and that at the signing of the 1952 agreement with West Germany the ANC had been represented through the Council for German Jews, UK.<sup>51</sup> Thus, it was the body most qualified to deal with the issue.<sup>52</sup>



This view was strongly opposed by Einfeld who believed that only the ECAJ as the roof body of Australian Jewry could represent the claimants. In September 1953 Einfeld wrote to Saul Kagan, secretary of COJMCAG, that the ANC was not a Jewish organisation, as its membership comprised both Jews and non-Jews.<sup>53</sup> The ANC sought to negotiate with Einfeld over the issue of representation. At a fiery meeting of the ANC held on 10 November 1953 a motion was proposed that three members of the ANC, who were also members of the Board of Deputies, should approach the Board in a private capacity to try to bring about co-operation between the ECAJ and the ANC. No vote, however, was taken as Dr Joseph, while agreeing with the spirit of the motion felt that it would interfere with the freedom of his Executive.<sup>54</sup> On 13 November 1953 Dr Joseph met with Einfeld and argued that the ANC should have a consultative voice in decisions relating to the distribution of funds. At the ANC's tenth AGM a motion was passed that the ANC 'would welcome continued co-operation between our Association and the ECAJ in matters referring to German and Austrian restitution, compensation and indemnification'.<sup>55</sup> Further correspondence ensued but in February 1954 Joseph announced that the ECAJ did not wish to co-operate, and that the ANC could not continue because its secretary, Dr S.W. Krieger was resigning in April 1954.<sup>56</sup> At a general meeting held in March 1954 Dr Joseph stressed that there was no way of keeping the ANC alive either as a voluntary scheme or functioning with part-time staff as there was a lack of time and expert experience among the voluntary workers as well as a general waning of interest in the ANC.<sup>57</sup> He spoke bitterly about the local Jewish community and claimed in regard to indemnification that:

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that the community of refugees is the only community entitled, legally and morally, to the indemnification money which is to be distributed by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims. The refusal of the Conference to entrust us with the administration of monies destined for us is based on the reasoning that our organisation is not Jewish . . .

[W]e have made our hardest efforts to co-operate with the local Jewish Organisations. We have never met with any friendly attitude and, particularly in the most recent past, it became obvious that there is not the slightest inclination on the other side to work out a workable compromise between the naturally different attitudes.<sup>58</sup>

The ANC met for the last time on 8 April 1954 when the vote was taken to wind up the Association.

Conflicts also arose over the allocations of funds through the ECAJ. In 1955, for example, Ashkanasy obtained the allocation of £36,000 over a three year period for Mount Scopus College, in Melbourne. Ashkanasy considered the allocation of this grant a great achievement because it broke a conference rule and paved the way for educational and cultural grants for other Australian Jewish institutions in the future, an opinion endorsed by Dr M. Perlzweig who wrote:

Some of the people quite obviously do not realise how great an achievement it was to obtain as much as you did for help in a country which was never occupied, and in which the Jewish community is free and prosperous.<sup>59</sup>

The Sydney community was very bitter at the size of the Scopus grant, especially as Moriah College did not receive any financial help from the Claims Conference for some years although it was argued that 90 per cent of the school's enrolment were children of Holocaust survivors.<sup>60</sup> In April 1955 Ashkanasy addressed the New South Wales Board and stated that the money had been allocated to Scopus because 'no other Jewish school in Australia was so truly representative of a Jewish community' and he felt that it set a precedent from which Moriah could benefit in the future.<sup>61</sup> This explanation did not satisfy a number of people in Sydney and criticism of the allocation was expressed by John Shaiak, editor of the *Australian Jewish Times*, in an editorial of 13 May 1955 and in a further article of 27 May 1955 he again expressed the hope that the 1956 allocation would be made 'on a more fair and just basis'.<sup>62</sup>



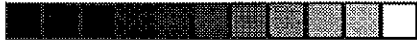

## THE ORTHODOX/LIBERAL DIVIDES

Other internal conflicts arose over the relationship between Orthodox and Liberal Judaism. The ECAJ leadership believed that every effort should be made to avoid conflict between the Orthodox and Liberal sections of the community. In 1952 in Sydney, the rabbis of the Temple Emanuel and the Great Synagogue spoke from the pulpit during the High Holy days in terms which aggravated tensions. Einfeld, at the time ECAJ president, called a meeting between the Rabbis Porush and Swift, both orthodox, and Rabbi Brasch of the Temple Emanuel to try to resolve the differences. It was decided to organise a forum on 'Is Sydney Jewry facing extinction?' with the three rabbis and three lay leaders on the panel as a display of unity.<sup>63</sup>


These difficulties were highlighted in the question of official religious representation of the community. During his visit to Australia in 1953, Rabbi Israel Brodie, Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, confirmed the decision of his predecessor that Rabbi Porush should act as the Chief Rabbi's deputy and he was also recognised as the religious representative of the community.<sup>64</sup> The president of the Central Synagogue, Felix Freeman, believed that the Central was not being given its fair share of representation and wrote to Einfeld who replied that this was a matter for the Chief Rabbi. In June 1954 Brodie reconfirmed that 'Rabbi Dr Porush, in view of his ecclesiastical position and standing, must be regarded as the religious spokesman of NSW Jewry'<sup>65</sup> but he requested Porush to ensure that his colleagues were offered a turn to represent the community.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES


During this period the Board continued with its public relations activities. After a period of great stability under the leadership of Wolfensohn, he tendered its resignation in April 1954 and resigned in August. He proposed Julian Rose as a



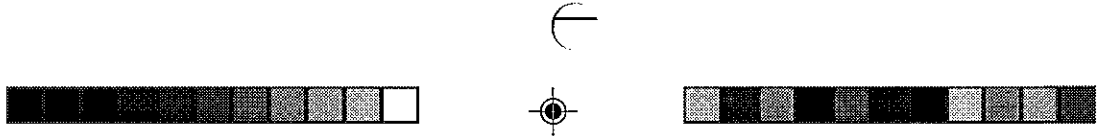
suitable successor and Rose served as Acting Chairman until October 1954. After the elections of March 1955 Max Mansell became the new chairman. He made his first policy statement in May 1955 when he stressed the need for a strong positive Jewish defence program and to establish a central lecture committee to fight antisemitism, but within a few months Mansell also tendered his resignation because of business considerations. During his 'farewell' speech, Mansell criticised deputies for being unwilling to share in the public relations work and stressed that effective public relations work was often due to individual action taken outside of the Board. Commenting on Mansell's resignation, an article in the *Jewish News* stated that the Board was hampered by a lack of funds and that too much work devolved on the chairmen of committees and the paper stated that the 'deputies must pull their weight or the Board will be a useless instrument'.<sup>66</sup> Following Mansell's resignation, two deputies, Harry Goldstein and Nate Zusman nominated as chairman, the former being elected. Goldstein, who was president of the Jewish War Memorial, was seen as someone who had been an active worker for public relations for a long time.



One of the key issues which concerned the PRC during this period was the continued growth of new Australian political associations which were seen as anti-democratic and very right wing in their policies. A member of the Jewish Council, Mrs I.S. Vahl, of Lindfield, was very active investigating the activities of these right wing organisations. In December 1955 Goldstein co-opted Mrs Vahl onto the PRC. This co-option was then raised at the Board meeting and, at the January 1956 meeting, her co-option was rescinded after a very heated debate. This issue flowed over into the correspondence columns of the Jewish press and B. Hildesbrand wrote that he had been a visitor at the January plenum and that it seemed to him 'to be more important to executive members of the Board to maintain the committees as an exclusive club for those they consider to be "nice" people rather than to utilise all the ability available to the committee'.<sup>67</sup> Mrs Vahl wrote outlining the position and stating that she would continue to fight antisemitic groups and the issue of German migration as she had been in conjunction with the Jewish Council even though 'I cannot see eye to eye with some of the members on other political matters'.<sup>68</sup>



The Board also concerned itself with other matters of defence of the community. In September 1954 an incident with a musician playing the Horst Wessel Lied at a restaurant at the Cross was reported at the PRC and the matter looked into. There was also a problem with a number of headlines of papers, including the *Brisbane Courier Mail* and the *Broken Hill Barrier Daily Truth*, which mentioned that one of the witnesses before the Royal Commission on Espionage was a Jew.<sup>69</sup> The Board wrote to these two papers objecting to the inclusion of a person's religion in a headline. Copies of the 'Scourge of the Swastika' by Lord Russell were circulated to parliamentarians, Church leaders, and other key people, as part of the continued campaign against German migration. In September 1955 Professor Julius Stone was asked to reply to the anti-Jewish broadcast of Sir Raphael Cilento which greatly offended the Jewish community. In 1957 Prime Minister Menzies informed the PRC that in regard to antisemitic material being sent through the post, the Commonwealth government had no power to control this mail. Special dinners



were also organised for key people. In November 1954 a dinner was held for John Goulston to celebrate his eighty fifth birthday and in December 1956 a reception was held for Emanuel Shinwell, a socialist member of the House of Commons who was visiting Sydney.

## OVERSEAS JEWRY

The Committee for Overseas Jewry continued its activities, initially under the chairmanship of Max Mansell who followed Dr Matsdorf and then under Dr Lotte Fink, with its main functions being the production of the monthly Information Bulletin which was circulated with the meeting notices and the organisation of the annual Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemoration in April of each year. In 1954 a special Assereth Yemey Kehillah (ten days of the Congregation) was organised to co-incide with the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto commemoration. In 1955 a particularly successful commemoration was held with Recca Stone as the English speaker, a Yiddish speaker from Melbourne and Jacob Waislitz doing recitations in Yiddish.

A number of key issues arose during this period, in relation to Soviet Jewry and to Jews in Egypt and Israel. In August 1955 the Board of Deputies passed a resolution proposed by Ben Caplan and seconded by M. Lee in relation to the world wide campaign to release Soviet Jews who wished to emigrate to Israel or other countries. An amendment was proposed that the matter should be referred to a special sub-committee since the motion might be interpreted as an insult to the USSR, but this was rejected. In June 1956 a resolution was passed protesting at the execution of Jewish writers in the USSR, although this resolution again did not have unanimous support since some felt that a protest resolution was futile while others felt that it came too late. The passing of these motions were the first stage in the campaign for Soviet Jewry which was to become a central part of the Board's activities over the next three decades.

There was also great concern expressed for Jews in Arab countries, and in particular in relation to the position of Egyptian Jews at a time of increasing nationalism and violent attacks on Jews under President Nasser. In February 1955 Melbourne Jewry staged a public protest meeting at the 'judicial murder' of two Egyptian Jews and the arrest of others on charges of 'Zionism' which was seen as part of a policy which denied human rights in Egypt and led to the exploitation of a minority group. However, although a motion condemning these events was passed by the Board, moves to organise a similar protest in Sydney were defeated at the plenum. The vote was tied and the matter was decided by Newman using his casting vote against the resolution. The other members of the executive abstained from the vote. Following this vote, the Folk Centre decided to organise its own protest meeting. President Maurice Phillips claimed that the Board's decision showed the 'assimilationist' trend in Sydney and that the position taken by the executive was 'fence sitting'. He felt that when Newman used his casting vote and voted against the proposal he mirrored 'local feeling on Jewish issues' which were apathy and disinterest. He felt that 'it takes more than the murder of two Jews by the Egyptian government to stir the stony heart of Sydney Jewry'.<sup>70</sup> At the protest meeting organised by the Folk Centre the venue was packed with over 200 people present. Syd Einfeld was the keynote speaker at the meeting and

Mansell, still chairman of the Committee for Overseas Jewry, also attended. In December 1955 the Board urged more support for the Moroccan Clothing Appeal.

The situation in Israel was a matter of continual concern for the Board. In October 1954 the Board asked the ECAJ to transmit to the British Board of Deputies and the World Jewish Congress the fact that it noted 'with profound regret British and American refusal to supply Israel with arms while supplying the Arab League nations with armaments'.<sup>71</sup> 'Watchman' of the *Jewish News* was again critical of this action of the Board. The paper commented:

The Board's resolution is a token gesture of empty words and meaningless phraseology... [What is needed is] active monetary support of Israel since the present period is as full of challenges as any since the establishment of the State. These cannot be met by pious resolutions.<sup>72</sup>

In 1956, as the crisis which led to the Suez conflict and Sinai Campaign began to emerge, the Zionist Federation of Australian and New Zealand requested the establishment of an Israel Emergency Committee and the Board supported this development. Action during the actual crisis was more the responsibility of the ECAJ but the Board expressed its concern at the events and its support for Israel.

## HOSPITAL VISITATION

In January 1955 vice-president Einfeld referred to the excellent work done by a small group of stalwarts of the Hospital Visiting Committee of the National Council of Jewish Women but suggested that this work needed to be taken on by a larger committee, especially because of the problem of outlying hospitals and the need for visits to mental institutions. By the mid 1950s the major medical problem facing the Welfare Society was that of mental illness. In 1955 it was estimated that in New South Wales there were 93 Jewish inmates in the various mental institutions. Einfeld expressed concern in regard to the mentally ill patients<sup>73</sup> and Proposed the establishment of a Hospital Visiting Committee under the auspices of the Board. This motion was passed by the plenum.<sup>74</sup>

Such a committee was established and by April 1956 it had inaugurated a hospital visiting scheme with the aim of covering all hospitals and mental institutions, providing daily lists which were up to date and having these details ready for members of the committee, raising funds to supply small gifts for patients, and having a panel of religious men to visit the sick and dying. Syd Einfeld chaired the inaugural meeting of this committee and Dr Mick Isaacs was elected its first chair. Unfortunately the activities of this committee were shortlived because of a shortage of personnel and the fact that hospital visitation had always been part of the NCJW work and the Council was concerned that its activity should not be duplicated.<sup>75</sup> When Dr Isaacs stood down as chair, Mrs Wolf S. Matsdorf agreed to take over organising the Bicur Cholim Association in August 1959 and for a period she was active organising training courses for visitors to patients with mental health problems, but in December 1960 she had to withdraw because of ill health and the activities of the Association went into abeyance.

## THE JEWISH DAY SCHOOL CONFLICT

Education continued as part of the Board's agenda. As noted, in 1947 the Board of Deputies had established a day school sub-committee but no positive results eventuated. After the war the North Bondi Jewish Day School and Kindergarten, founded in 1943 by Abraham Rabinovitch, continued to expand slowly but dissatisfaction with its administration continued to simmer as some members of the community felt that Rabinovitch, was too authoritarian and a more community-based school was needed.



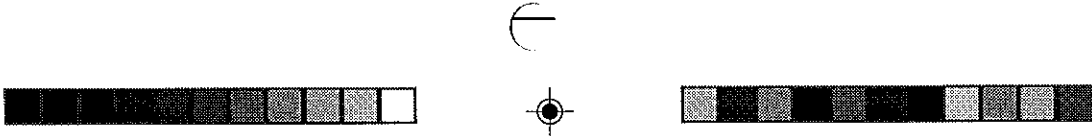
Abraham Rabinovitch, founder of Moriah College

In 1949, the New South Wales Board of Jewish Education bought a property at 134 Old South Head Road, Bondi Junction, with the aim of establishing a day school, Hillel College. At the same time Rabinovitch had plans drawn up to expand the North Bondi Jewish Day School so that Sydney Jewry was faced with two separate day school schemes.<sup>76</sup> Many leaders advocated the need for amalgamation but various negotiations failed to bring about an agreement. Supporters of the North Bondi Jewish Day School claimed priority because they were established earlier and had the financial resources to bring their scheme to fruition. Proponents for the Board of Jewish Education claimed that Rabinovitch with his supporter and right-hand man, Rabbi Bernard Frampton, represented only a sectional interest of ultra-orthodoxy. For example, in an article entitled 'The School conflict in a Nutshell', Dr Kimmel argued that:

The policy and spiritual foundation of a school is of greater importance than the material foundation . . .

We want to bring the greatest possible number of Jewish children into the orbit of Jewish education. Therefore, we ought to establish such a form of school which would overcome the reluctance of numerous parents to send their children into a Jewish day school.<sup>77</sup>

In the face of these conflicting viewpoints, each project went ahead with its building plans.



Through the personal intervention of Rabbi Swift, a further conference aiming at amalgamation was held on 18 October 1952, but again there was an impasse. However, events in 1952 changed the situation. In March 1952 Rabinovitch acquired an old house, previously owned by the Mark Foy family, situated on one and a half acres of land between Victoria Road and Vivian Street, Bellevue Hill. At the same time, the response to the Hillel College appeal was disappointing. In March 1952, a Hillel Appeal Dinner was attended by only 60 people even though the Chief Rabbi, Dr Israel Brodie, was guest of honour. In his address, Brodie warned against two competing projects and pleaded for co-operation between the two day school movements.<sup>78</sup> During his visit two further meetings seeking compromise were held, but without positive results.

It was not until December 1952 that some measure of agreement was reached, largely because of the financial difficulties of Hillel combined with the negotiating skills of a three man committee established by the Board of Deputies and chaired by veteran Zionist leader Max Freilich. In 1953 it was decided that the expansion of Moriah College was to proceed as the communal day school with Hillel College to be developed by the Board of Jewish Education as a kindergarten.<sup>79</sup> In addition, a New South Wales Jewish Day School Council was established under the auspices of the Board to act in a supervisory role on educational policies, both religious and secular, as well as co-ordinate any appeal periods. The annual report of the Board of Jewish Education stated that the role which the Board had played in ending the rivalry between the two day school schemes 'justified its establishment as the roof organisation of the community'.<sup>80</sup>

Hillel College was formally opened as a kindergarten in 1954 and soon reached its full capacity of 60 children. In 1956 the Board of Jewish Education opened the Cohn Kindergarten at the Kingsford/Maroubra Synagogue. In January 1953 Moriah College opened as a full primary school (until 1953 it had only reached Year 3). For the subsequent eleven years, until his death in 1964, Rabinovitch presided over the College's development, with the aid of a group of men of strong orthodox outlook. As Sophie Caplan has outlined in her MEd (Hons) thesis, the school faced the problems of his dominance, together with Moriah's rigid educational policies and continual crises in educational leadership.<sup>81</sup> These difficulties retarded its development.

Dissatisfaction with the school and Rabinovitch's leadership continued to increase throughout the 1950s as a result of the constant problems of educational leadership.<sup>82</sup> The Board of Deputies became frustrated by its inability to achieve an input into Moriah and so broaden its basis. In October 1954 questions were asked about the Day School Council, which had met a number of times but key representatives from the Board had not been invited.<sup>83</sup> Questions were raised in relation to the problems with Moriah's headmaster in 1954, and the matter was raised again in 1955. The Board proposed the appointment of Harry Kresner, who worked with the Department of Education and was highly regarded as an educator but was not strictly observant, as headmaster of Moriah. However, when Kresner arrived at Moriah to begin work in 1956, he was opposed by Rabinovitch who refused to permit him access to the school building. These events led to acrimonious debates at the Board. Hannah Kessler blamed the rabbinical vote for these events

and stated that 'not all is well in this community when we find that four rabbis favour our retention of the non-Jewish headmaster at Moriah and reject the justifiable claims of a qualified Jewish applicant'.<sup>84</sup> In a letter to the *Jewish News* the arguments raised at the Board were criticised by A.D. Robb who justified the decision made in regard to Kresner and stressed that the rabbis had been unanimous in their decision.<sup>85</sup>

The Board dealt with the government in matters relating to education. In June 1954 when two local schools held half yearly examinations on the first day of Shavuot, Benjamin undertook to speak in person to the relevant officer at the Department of Education. A letter was also written to the Department requesting that no examinations be scheduled on Jewish festivals.<sup>86</sup> In 1954 the Board also decided to establish a sub-committee which would institute weekly lectures and debates and organise discussions. Dr M.S. Richmond was co-opted onto this committee and elected as its chairman, but the first evening was postponed and the committee did not operate for long.

## THE CONTINUING FINANCIAL STRUGGLE

With the failure of the Community Chest to provide sufficient financial support for the roof bodies other funding methods were required. It was estimated that at least £3,000 per annum was required for the work of the Board, yet only half this amount was being raised. By November 1952 the Board was facing a financial crisis and the salaries were paid only due to the generosity of an individual member of the Board. To overcome this problem, Felix Freeman suggested the idea of a registration scheme which was introduced in September 1953, with the fees being £1/1/- per adult, 5/- per child, and £2/2/- per family unit. By December 1953 1,375 Jews in New South Wales had enrolled, including 381 children, with a total contribution of 1,118 pounds.<sup>87</sup> Although this amount was less than anticipated it did help to relieve the financial pressures. In May 1954, in a letter to the *Jewish News*, Paul Ungar appealed to the community for further support of the registration scheme since the Board undertook important work for immigration, public relations, defence against antisemitism, co-ordination of charities and contact with overseas Jewry. He pointed out that without the Board the community would be 'like a rudderless ship'.<sup>88</sup> The organisation of an annual ball was another means of fundraising for the Board. The first of these balls was held in 1952, organised by Sam Vandersluis who continued to undertake this important task in subsequent years. Vandersluis later became chairman of the Finance Committee.

In February 1953 the Board established a sub-committee to investigate the introduction of a superannuation scheme for all community professionals. A conference was held to discuss this issue in July 1953 and the scheme was finalised in February 1954, especially due to the efforts of Max Mansell, who was in the insurance industry and provided contacts, and John Einfeld, a lawyer, who prepared the Trust Deed. By March 1956 there were ten organisations involved in the scheme with 21 policies totalling 40,000 pounds. Following the success of this superannuation scheme, Melbourne Jewry decided to institute a similar scheme.

## DE VAHL DAVIS' FAILING HEALTH AND RESIGNATION

In the latter part of 1956 Gerald de Vahl Davis suffered from heart problems and, on his doctor's advice, requested leave of absence. In January 1957 he hoped that he would be well enough to return to office but this did not eventuate. In April 1957 he submitted his resignation and at the meeting of 30 April 1957 the Board paid tribute to his significant contributions, not just to the Board of Deputies but to his manifold areas of communal involvement. At the May meeting the Board recorded:

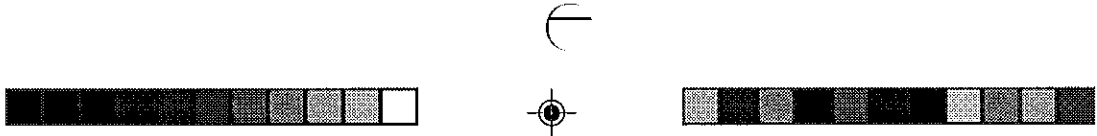
. . . its deep appreciation of his leadership and his untiring efforts in community work for many, many years and, in particular, for his devoted membership of the Board's executive since its inception. The Board expresses the hope that Mr Davis will be speedily returned to complete health.<sup>89</sup>

Sadly, this hope was not realised and de Vahl Davis died on 22 November 1958 from a massive heart attack which occurred while he was playing bowls on a Saturday afternoon. On the second anniversary of his passing a special memorial service was held at the Temple Emanuel in his memory and Rabbi Brasch described him as: 'an unforgettable figure of the Australian Jewish community — one of its finest, most tolerant and most able leaders'.<sup>90</sup> As with Saul Symonds, the Board and the community lost another of its key leaders at the time when they held (or in de Vahl Davis' case, just resigned from) the presidency of the Board.

By 1957 the Board of Deputies was firmly established as the community's roof organisation and was seen to be widely representative with fifty per cent of its deputies being elected by general franchise. It was succeeding in preserving the unity of the Jewish community and in making it into one kehillah, rather than being 'a number of small kehillahs, grouped around this or that synagogue or other organisation'.<sup>91</sup> In 1956 the importance of this vital change was summed up by Walter Lippmann, ECAJ honorary secretary in Melbourne, when he wrote to Herbert Katzki of the Claims Conference:

Unlike the communities with which you are normally familiar, the Australian Jewish community is not yet a homogeneous community. As the statistics in your possession clearly indicate, our community during the past ten years has gone through a process of rapid growth which has brought all sorts of problems. As a British community, it was not prepared for the centralised kehillah - the type of communal activity in existence elsewhere. If you had been here as, for instance Mr Jordan was, seven years ago, you would have noticed an amazing movement towards centralisation, and what may appear to you now as a relatively unintegrated variety of activities would then have appeared to you as amazing progress towards co-ordination and centralisation.<sup>92</sup>

In the decade after 1945 Australian Jewry not only managed to absorb the 18,000 survivors of the Holocaust who almost doubled the community in size but they were

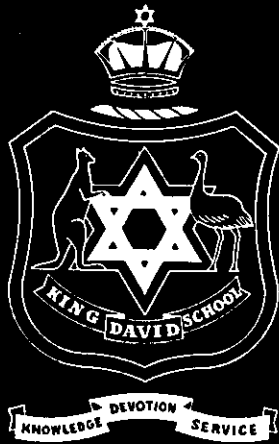


able to develop an organisational framework which, through the Board and the ECAJ, provided unity so that the community was no longer a 'rudderless ship'.<sup>93</sup> As a result of these developments, Australian Jewry was represented in world Jewish forums and, whether it was through the World Jewish Congress or Claims Conferences, was accepted as a significant and meaningful Jewish community. The work which the roof bodies did in the fields of immigration policy, negotiation with the government, public relations, defence of the community against antisemitic manifestations, co-ordination of charities, and contact with overseas Jewry enabled them to significantly strengthen the communal fabric and so safeguard the future of Australian Jewry.

Certainly, there were still many problems to overcome. The Board was often perceived as a debating forum which lacked dignity and achieved few practical results. This perception was fostered by the activities of individuals such as Dr Hans Kimmel whose interruptions led Newman to complain in 1954 that 'it was time for the Board to concern itself with the affairs and problems of the community instead of being held up by the legal quibbles of Dr Kimmel'.<sup>94</sup> Another problem was the financial crises which the Board continued to experience. Despite these difficulties, Sydney Jewry in the period from 1945 to 1952 had made radical changes in its whole communal structure and these changes were consolidated in the period between 1952 and 1957.

WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW:

# JEWISH EDUCATION IN MODERN AGE



OUR HOPE FOR  
THE FUTURE

## Federal Labor in two sectarian disputes



Jews terrorised  
in Soviet cities,  
body says

25 JAN 1963