

Are Jews Happy In Australia?

A Survey Of The Jewish Community In A Remote Corner Of The Southern Hemisphere

By RABBI MARTIN M. PERLEY

There is a healthy Jewish community far away that leads an existence in which Anti-Semitism is a little-used word. The author of this article spent quite some time as a religious leader in that land. An informative, authoritative study of an unknown chapter of contemporary Jewish history.—The Editor.



GENERAL MONASH

THESE are troubled times. Daily the outlook becomes gloomier as the war clouds hang over Europe darken and descend lower. Everywhere on the Continent we find unrest and apprehension. For Jews the situation is even worse. Even in the best of times Jews in many countries have not had a happy lot, but today the prospects are even less cheering. At a time when Jews are suffering so intensely in Germany, in Poland and in other European countries; when in Palestine they are faced with serious problems; when even in England, Canada and the United States there are strong, articulate anti-Semitic groups, it is comforting to find at least one bright spot in this depressing picture, one country in which Jews are able to live in absolute freedom without being menaced by hostile groups. True, this country is far away from the centre of the world, that it harbours comparatively few Jews, nevertheless it exists as one small ray of light in a world cloaked in darkness.

Australia is, generally speaking, a happy land, far removed from the cares and worries of a troubled world, and the 23,000 Jews who live there are able to share in the peace and contentment on a basis of absolute freedom and equality. Perhaps the reason for their happy condition is that they constitute only one third of one per cent of the total population of over six million, possibly it is because the great majority of them have lived in Australia for several generations and have become quite assimilated; but whatever the reason, there it is—the Jew is able to live happily in this forsaken corner of the universe without being troubled by the evils of the universe without being troubled by the evils of racial and religious prejudices.

As is the case in practically every other part of the world, most Australian Jews live in the large urban centres. Two-thirds of the entire population of Australia is crowded into two large cities—Melbourne and Sydney—each of which has a population of over one million, while three-quarters of the entire Jewish group is divided equally between these two cities. In other words, there are about 9,000 Jews in Sydney, and the same number in Melbourne. Perth has the next largest Jewish community, numbering some 2,000, while the remaining three or four thousand are located in Adelaide, Brisbane, and in the rural districts.

Several years ago two agricultural colonies were established at Shepparton and Berwick, in the hope that they would absorb most of the post-war Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe. A large number of these settlers ultimately drifted into the cities, but there are still a few dozen families in Shepparton successfully engaged in fruit-growing and canning. There are also a number of Jewish graziers scattered throughout the country.

Jewish migration to Australia commenced during the middle of the last century with the gold rush. Thriving Jewish communities grew up in the mining centres—Ballarat, Bendigo, Kalgoorlie, etc.—but in the past few decades their numbers dwindled to practically nothing, and the

Synagogues which were built there are unused most of the time, some being opened only for the High Holidays.

About 90 per cent of the Jewish population is either native-born or of English descent. Recent immigrants from Eastern Europe—the so-called "foreign element"—constitute only a minute part of the Australian Jewish community. As a result, most Australian Jews are quite Anglicized and assimilated, and, as can well be imagined, their Judaism is very attenuated.

Institutions and Organizations

Despite the absence of an intensive Jewish life, there do exist, in a lukewarm version, most of the institutions and organizations that one finds in the average American Jewish community. In Melbourne, for example, there are five Synagogues, various philanthropic societies, a Zionist Organization, a Y.M.H.A., a Council of Jewish Women, the "Kadimah," and several other clubs and social societies.

Of the five Synagogues, two are Orthodox, two others call themselves Orthodox but are really conservative in the American sense, and there is one Liberal or Reform Synagogue. Most of these congregations are housed in very comfortable and attractive buildings. The Liberal Synagogue is the newest addition to this group. It was organized in 1930, and in the seven years of its existence has succeeded in becoming an integral part of the community. Thus far, it is the only Reform Temple in Australia, but there is no doubt that within the next few years similar congregations will be established in Sydney and in some of the other Jewish communities.

There is a Jewish Advisory Board, composed of two representatives of each Syna-

gogue, which is intended to serve as the representative body of the Jewish community; but actually it does very little, and has small influence.

The philanthropic societies care for the less fortunate members of the community, but the calls made upon them are not very pressing. Years ago a large group of houses was built to serve as an old peoples' home—but today one of the chief concerns of the Philanthropic Board is to find sufficient indigent old folks to put into the home. This is a rather good indication of the general economic condition of the community. One must not, however, jump to the conclusion that there is no poverty among the Jews of Australia; but the standard of living among the less fortunate groups is far above that of similar groups elsewhere.

When there was a small wave of Jewish Immigration from Eastern Europe soon after the world war special welcoming committees of the Philanthropic Society were organized. These committees looked after the immigrants—found them suitable lodgings, jobs, and even gave them loans to enable them to make a start. Today many of these immigrants are successful manufacturers and shopkeepers.

This so-called "foreign group" is the nucleus of the Zionist societies and of Kadimah, a very live organization devoted to Yiddish and Yiddish culture.

Zionism is still comparatively weak in Australia. Very few of the really influential native Jews have been drawn into the movement, which is also weakened by petty internal squabbles. Worse still, there is real cohesion and harmony between the Zionist groups in the several States. Although there is an Australian Zionist Federation it is very feeble, and the Zionist group in each State tends to act as a distinct unit. Thus, instead of pooling their resources, each city sends its own contributions to the Keren Hayesod or Jewish National Fund. One of the units of the Zionist Federation of Victoria is the Ivriah, a small Hebrew-speaking group which meets fortnightly and endeavors to encourage the speaking of Hebrew.

A much more successful organization is the Kadimah, which was founded about 25 years ago and enjoys a membership of over 300. This society has a flourishing center of its own and sponsors a variety of Yiddish projects. It conducts weekly lectures, regular programs of Jewish music and occasional plays in Yiddish. Melech Ravitch, the Yiddish poet, has been living in Melbourne for several years, and has been directing most of the cultural activities of this group.

Since the advent of Hitler there has been a German Relief Committee, which has conducted annual fund-raising campaigns to help German refugees. Efforts have been made to get the government to relax its severe immigration restrictions to permit the entry of a limited number of German refugees, but these attempts have met with very little success.

Each year the Australian Jewish communities are invaded by at least one emis-

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Jewish Immigration

By Louis Rosenberg, F.R. Econ. S.



LOUIS ROSENBERG

IMMIGRATION is one of many economic and social problems facing the population of many lands from time to time, which comes to the forefront when economic conditions or conquest creates a pressure which forces a current of immigration from the country where the pressure is lower, and which recedes into the background as economic conditions in the homeland improve, or when political conditions become such that the population has no need nor desire to seek freedom elsewhere.

For Jews, the need for emigration and the right of immigration has made migration a permanent and vital Jewish problem, which will remain so until Palestine has absorbed the maximum Jewish population which that country can maintain when its capacity and economic possibilities have been developed to their utmost extent, and until economic and political conditions in the European countries in which the majority of Jews live at the present time have become such as to ensure to their Jewish populations full economic, social and political equality with all other citizens.

Theoretically much may be said for the argument that the economic and social problems of the Jews in any country can only be solved when the economic and social problems of the entire population of that country are solved, and that Jews therefore should not emigrate in search of freedom but should remain whenever they happen to be born and wait for the "inevitable" march of progress.

Such a theory, however, is of little practical value in many countries to the Jewish population which finds itself crushed not only by the economic forces which effect all people but also finds itself the scapegoat and the victim of all parties in the struggle for power. If the Jews living in the countries of oppression are to renounce emigration and await the coming of an economic messiah as a solution to their problems, then there is every likelihood that when at long last the day of freedom dawns there will be no Jews left alive to benefit from it.

In the 12th and 13th centuries, the centre of gravity of the European Jewish population was not in Eastern and Central Europe but in Southern and Western Europe in the countries of Spain and Portugal, France, Germany and England. Persecution and expulsion from those countries sent a wave of Jewish emigration eastward into Eastern and Central Europe and southward into Northern Africa.

The hopes of political emancipation aroused towards the close of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century proved abortive. The redrawing of political boundaries in Europe and the intensification of nationalist feeling made the position of the Jews in Eastern and Central Europe more and more intolerable, so that towards the end of the 19th century, the tide of Jewish emigration definitely turned towards the West across the Atlantic, and repeated Russian pogroms in the first dec-

ade of the 20th century, increased the tempo of overseas emigration until it reached its highest peak before the World War.

During the period of the World War, Jewish overseas emigration fell to a low point as a result of transportation and passport restriction, but was again resumed as soon as the war was over and would have reached a new high level if it had not been for the immigration restrictions introduced by the United States and Canada.

No other country was immediately found to take the place of the United States as a home for Jewish immigrants, more particularly since the political situation in Palestine was still unsettled, but with the approval of the Palestine Mandate in 1923, Jewish emigration to that country increased and although the immigration policy of the Mandatory Power in that country has remained restrictive and capricious, Palestine has now taken the place formerly occupied by the United States as the goal of Jewish emigration.

Before proceeding to an analysis of Jewish immigration to Canada, it would be well to examine and compare the stream of Jewish immigration to all overseas countries. It is very difficult to compile an accurate statement of Jewish migration, for definitions and interpretations of immigration differ in various countries, very few record the ethnic origin or religious belief of all immigrants, and even those countries that do so have not kept detailed and uniform statistics except during recent years.

The period of immigration from 1901 to 1936 covers a period of 36 years, which divides itself into two periods of 18 years, the first being the pre-war period from 1901 to 1918, and the second being the post-war period from 1918 to 1936.

The United States of America headed the list of countries of Jewish immigration in all the years from 1901 to 1924 inclusive, accounting for as much as 91.9% of all Jewish migration in 1901-1902. In the years 1924-1925 and 1925-1926, Palestine took the lead, but relinquished the lead to the United States in the five years from 1926 to 1931 inclusive. In 1931 and 1932, Palestine again assumed the lead in percentage of total Jewish migration and in spite of disturbances in Palestine has retained this lead. In 1934-1935, Palestine absorbed as much as 87.8% of the total migration in that year.

Canada, which held second place in percentage of total Jewish immigration in 13 out of the first 18 years of the 20th century, has fallen to fourth place in 10 out of the 18 post-war years and since 1933, the Jewish immigration to Canada has been lower to any other overseas country.

Excluding migration to European countries the total Jewish overseas emigration from European countries during the first 36 years of the 20th century amounted to 2,550,636, of which 64.5% migrated during the first 18 years and the balance during the post-war period.

The number and percentage of Jewish immigrants has increased in the post-war period in Palestine, Brazil, Uruguay, the Argentine and the Union of South Africa, and has decreased owing to restrictive legislation in the United States, Canada and Australia.

During the period from 1901 to 1918, Jewish immigration to Palestine formed 1.9% of total World Jewish migration in comparison with 83.6% to the United States, 8.4% to Canada and 5.4% to the Argentine. During the post-war period from 1918 to 1936, Jewish immigration to Palestine formed 31.8% of the total World Jewish migration, in comparison with 42.4% to the United States, 10.1% to the Argentine and only 6.8% to Canada. The peak of Jewish immigration to the United States, Canada and Australia was reached in the pre-war period whilst the peak of Jewish immigration to Palestine, South Africa, the Argentine and other countries will no doubt be reached in the post-war period.

Although the first historically recorded settlement of Jews in Canada goes back to 1759, the major increase in Jewish population has taken place since 1900, and Canadian immigration statistics since that date regarding Jews must be of particular interest to us. Moreover, it is only since 1900 that statistics regarding the ethnic origin of immigrants to Canada are available. However, it was not until the fiscal year 1926-1927 that statistics regarding the total number of Jewish immigrants to Canada in each year became available, for until that year the ethnic origin of only such immigrants as entered Canada through ocean ports was recorded, but in that year this information was extended to include immigrants through United States border points also.

It is therefore necessary to adjust the immigration statistics concerning Jews hitherto accepted for Canada prior to 1926-1927, by estimating the number of Jewish immigrants arriving in Canada in each year from 1900 to 1927 through United States border points.

During the decade from 1901 to 1911, 68,176 Jewish immigrants entered Canada, while 12,121 Jews left Canada, leaving a net increase in Jewish population to immigration of 56,055. As against 22,266 Jews who entered Canada within that decade from the United States, 12,121 Jews left

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