

THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE AND ZIONISM

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An eminent authority in the field of American Jewish history, Jacob R. Marcus, described Zionism as a "curious mixture of, on the one hand, religious universalism and messianism and, on the other, political nationalism and secular idealism" (*Studies in American Jewish History*, 1969). No one, the same writer went on to say, had presented the story of American Zionism historically and critically, whilst another historian, Salo W. Baron, pointed out that there was no single documentary history of the Zionist movement in the Western hemisphere (*Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, No. 39, p. 265). Equally, it can be said without question that a full history of Australian Zionism is non-existent. Indeed, it seems strange that while broad histories of Australian Jewry are being attempted, the Zionist annals in this country, whether on a Commonwealth or State level, remain unrecorded, bearing in mind that Zionism is amongst the strongest, most persistent and oldest of local Jewish interests. In the meantime, however, any contribution which may assist in reducing this overall deficiency must be welcome, appreciating that there is still an inadequacy of research and writings relating to the subject.

The impression has often been given that the Great Synagogue, when its leaders dominated the local Jewish scene, was for a long time in opposition to Zionism. That attitude was attributed to the Synagogue because of the persistent discouragement of active Zionism by Rabbi Cohen, notwithstanding that the Rabbi was sometimes helpful to the movement and that the board of the Synagogue did not generally share his views. With the benefit of hindsight, and writing under greatly changed conditions, historians have sometimes disparaged and questioned the work and influence of the former Synagogue leaders who, it is said, constituted an "oligarchy" which did not identify itself with the Zionists. Such criticisms have been made, often without any attempt to examine, objectively, all the facts. Without any sustained history, whether of Australian Zionism, or of the N.S.W. Jewish community, researchers and students were often left to their own devices, drawing only on isolated recorded items, including even mere rumour. The present writer had access to the Great Synagogue minutes and reports and to the Sydney Jewish newspapers, and to papers in the Journals of the Australian Jewish Historical Society. It would be advantageous to consult official Zionist records.

It is clear that the religious and lay leaders of Australian Jewish congregations, with significant exceptions, have always co-operated in promoting the aims of Zionism and in contributing towards the welfare of the *Yishuv*, formerly in Palestine, and over the last forty years in the State of Israel. The Great Synagogue, established in Sydney for over 110 years, as well as its predecessors, the York Street and Macquarie Street congregations, has a most interesting and worthy record of involvement with the Holy Land. By Zionism, strictly speaking, one of course understands a world movement founded by Theodor Herzl in 1897 — a mere twenty years after the consecration of the Great Synagogue — the aim being to create for the Jewish people a publicly recognised and legally secured home in Palestine. The realisation of this ideal had long been the dream and fervent hope of the Jewish people. Within a few brief years Herzl's brief leadership bore fruit when the Balfour Declaration was issued and the League of Nations placed Palestine under a British Mandate. Less than thirty years later, after the 1947 decision for the partition of Palestine, the State of Israel was established and subsequently admitted to the United Nations.

Throughout all this period, marked by two World Wars, the tragedy of the Holocaust, and much turmoil in and around the land of Israel, Zionism continued to be a vitally significant factor in the Jewish world, extending its influence and receiving support from Jewry everywhere, including Australian Jewry, once so remote from the centres of Jewish life. By the middle of the last century there were already some tens of thousands of Jews in Palestine, consisting mainly of pious immigrants who profoundly prayed for and believed in the future restoration of Zion, though they could not then be regarded as "Zionists" and they would not have visualised that a Jewish State would be a reality by the next century. It is of interest to note that amongst those who settled in Palestine, more than five generations ago, were the ancestors of Israel Porush who was himself born in Jerusalem in 1907.

The minutes of the York Street Synagogue show that, in 1845, there was first established a Jerusalem Fund by means of which moneys were transmitted every year for the relief of Palestine Jews. In 1854 Sydney Jewry answered a pastoral appeal by the Chief Rabbi, Dr Nathan Adler, on behalf of the starving Jews of Palestine. As a first step, a meeting of the members of the Hebrew faith was held at the Synagogue Chambers, called by the president, Isaac Levey. A sum of about £3,385 was eventually collected for this purpose. Before long, however, the board of the Synagogue was to express annoyance at the constant visits to the community of Jewish emissaries from Jerusalem, questioning "this itinerant and adventitious mode of collecting funds."

A notable visitor from the Holy City, in 1861, was Jacob Levi Saphir who explained his objectives to the Synagogue board. He may have been far more successful, perhaps, in Melbourne, for, he later wrote, "here they are more opulent than in Sydney," but the board decided to place a charity box in the Synagogue for donations for the poor in the Holy Land. Again, in 1863, Chaim Zvi Schneersohn led an appeal for the accommodation of pilgrims and needy Jews in newly constructed houses on Mount Zion. The Sydney committee included such well known identities as George J. Cohen, Rev. A.B. Davis, Sigmond Hoffnung, Moses Moss, Rev. S. Phillips, and Saul Samuel, M.L.A. Rabbi Schneersohn delivered a lecture at a public meeting on "The Dispersion and Restoration of Israel and the Present Condition of Palestine." The Governor of the colony, Sir John Young, presided when Schneersohn's address, in Hebrew, was translated by Rev. Davis.

The New South Wales Zionist League was formed in 1901 after a meeting called at the Great Synagogue chambers. During that year a debate was held at the same venue when George J. Cohen, the Synagogue president, took the chair, the subject being, "The Zionist movement should be encouraged." Prominent Synagogue personalities who participated were Percy J. Marks, Alroy Cohen, Rev. P. Phillipstein, Alfred Harris, Aaron Blashki, Coleman P. Hyman and Elias Green. Rev. A. B. Davis was not a supporter of the new movement; Rev. J.H. Landau was a staunch opponent, and his anti-Zionist ideas came to be regarded as *Landauism*. Of the Synagogue's clergy, only Rev. A.D. Wolinski was prepared to take office on the committee of the League.

On the passing of Herzl in 1904, mention was made at the Synagogue general meeting of Herzl's "zealous and self-sacrificing devotion to the House of Israel." The following year, Rabbi F.L. Cohen commenced his ministry, and he soon made it known that he was completely opposed to political Zionism, though on the first *Yahrzeit* of Herzl a memorial tribute was publicly paid by the Rabbi. This apparent ambivalence frequently surfaced in his utterances on Zionism, though his views seem to have become more consistently negative as the years went on.

The Young Men's Zionist Society, established in 1916, was supported by Rabbi Cohen who gave lectures and conducted services for it. The Society asked the Synagogue board to assist in convening an Australian Jewish conference to secure equal rights for all Jews. The time, the board thought, was not then opportune for such a move. When it was moved at the

1917 Synagogue meeting that the congregation support the Zionist aspirations for a Jewish home in Palestine, Samuel Cohen, the Synagogue treasurer, spoke in support of the proposition. A spirited discussion followed. Some thought that it was dubious to debate the matter as there were great differences of opinion on the subject of Zionism, which could create a schism. It was decided to defer the motion, on the grounds that it was inappropriate to submit it to such a small meeting. In November of that year the Balfour Declaration was issued. Although Zionists were overjoyed, Rabbi Cohen's pulpit remarks contained reservations: "We have heard much", he said, "in connection with the British advance in Palestine, about a restoration of that Land to an autonomous Jewish nationality. But we have heard too little about the revival or restoration of the Jews themselves, about those spiritual recognitions which gave the Jews their illustrious position in human history." In yet a further sermon the Rabbi did not seem to be too enthusiastic over the effect of the British victories in Palestine. He acknowledged the need to pray "for the peace of Jerusalem", but added that all were exhorted to "seek the peace of the city whither the Lord had carried them", arguing that the Jews of Sydney had a more immediate task than the future of Jerusalem and that it was their duty to support the local referendum in favour of conscription. The Rabbi was one of the speakers at the Zionist Society's meeting to celebrate the capture of the Holy City. The aim of the Zionists, he remarked, could not be fulfilled without Jerusalem as a spiritual home, and Judea, the land of promise, would become the land of fulfilment. On a more practical note, Rev. M. Einfeld hoped that all the rejoicing would not cause people to overlook the needs of the war-stricken Jews in Palestine.

Another reflection, though indirectly, of the Great Synagogue's attitude towards these events, may be found in the views of Ernest L. Davis, who, in 1918, was vice-president of the Synagogue. Speaking as president of the Anglo-Jewish Association at its annual meeting at the Synagogue chambers, he said that the British Government's promise deeply stirred the hearts of Jews and would prove the means of opening up opportunities which for centuries had been denied them. On the occasion of the annual meeting of the Zionist Society during that same year, H.I. Wolff, then the Synagogue's assistant secretary, pointed out that Zionism was entering a new phase when the financial support of Jews generally would be required. Also, the Synagogue report for 1918 quoted the text of the Balfour Declaration, but the writer was content merely to comment that "an event of historic importance to Jewry has taken place." One year later a public meeting was held to commemorate the first anniversary of Declaration Day. M.E. Mosely, elected president of the Synagogue in 1919, moved a resolution expressing heartfelt gratification at the British Government's plans for Palestine, and it was further moved by Leonard Abrahams that the resolution be transmitted to that government. Another speaker was Daniel Levy, M.L.A., who was responsible for a motion of thanks for the support of the French, Italian and United States governments.

In the report for 1920 the board indicated satisfaction that the Allies' conference at San Remo had placed the protection of Palestine under British control, noting the appointment of Sir Herbert Samuel as High Commissioner in Jerusalem.

There has often been a tendency to identify the Great Synagogue with the opposition to Zionism manifested by Rabbi Cohen. It is evident, however, that many of the Synagogue members and its leaders and clergy were sympathetic and helpful towards Zionist aims. Thus, at the very successful public meeting in Sydney in 1920 when the Governor, Sir Walter Davidson, presided and an address was given by Israel Cohen, the first Zionist emissary to Australia, most of those on the platform were prominent Great Synagogue leaders and members. Even Rabbi Cohen assisted the cause by, for example, his representations to the Minister of Defence to enable moneys to be remitted to the Jewish

National Fund. Israel Cohen spoke of Rabbi Cohen as "sitting on the top of the fence", though the Rabbi, he added, by his generous donation of £100 to the Palestine Restoration Fund, had shown that he had "stepped down on the right side of the fence." It has to be appreciated, however, that only a small section of Sydney Jewry were motivated by Zionism at that time and there was little enthusiasm for the movement. This apathy was deplored by S.S. Cohen, then the Great Synagogue president, when, in 1922, he chaired the annual meeting of the Union of Sydney Zionists at the Great Synagogue chambers. Although objections were raised to holding this meeting on Erev Yom Kippur, S.S. Cohen, supported by Rev. L.A. Falk, defended a meeting of such a character taking place on the penitential days. Every Jew, S.S. Cohen said, should support Zionism; he himself would remain a heartfelt Zionist. It was moved, and seconded by John Goulston, that the name of S.S. Cohen be inscribed in the Golden Book.

Rev. Falk, who joined the Great Synagogue as a minister in 1922, having served as a Jewish chaplain with the British Forces in Palestine, was an ardent Zionist who availed himself of every opportunity to promote the objectives of the movement. Preaching during Passover, 1923, he dwelt on the duty owed to the new national home: "Mere lip service," he said, "pious hopes and sentiments" were not good enough. He quoted the poet, Byron, "Know ye not, who would be free themselves must strike the blow!" In contrast Rabbi Cohen warned against "revolutionary politics" which would place all in a false position before the world. To those who argued that all Jews were foreigners here, Cohen replied that it was only in matters of religion that Jews were different from their fellow citizens (sermon on 27th October, 1923).

From 1925 to 1932 Morris Symonds occupied the various positions of treasurer, vice president and president of the Great Synagogue. He was active and progressive both as a Synagogue leader and in the general Jewish community. Symonds was devoted to the Zionist cause and he was able to counter some of the opposition to it. He was present at the opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and made a munificent donation to University funds. In its report for 1925 the Synagogue referred to the establishment of the University which, it was stated, had proved a source of gratification to Jews throughout the world. A cable of congratulations on behalf of N.S.W. Jewry was sent by the Synagogue president to Dr Weizmann in Palestine. About two years later, the Synagogue president, Orwell Phillips, presided at a meeting when Dr Alexander Goldstein, an emissary for the Keren Hayesod, spoke on the need to rebuild Palestine and thereby to electrify Jewish life. On that occasion Rabbi Cohen remarked that men with different views could meet amicably on common ground.

In 1928 the Synagogue was made available for a special service by the Union of Sydney Zionists on the anniversary of the passing of Theodor Herzl, when addresses were given by Rev. Falk and Rabbi Kirsner.

In Palestine conditions were growing more turbulent. Widespread Jewish resentment was felt when the mandatory government interfered with arrangements for Jewish prayer at the Wailing Wall on the Day of Atonement. In Sydney, however, Rabbi Cohen criticised those who impetuously, in his view, questioned the actions of the British authorities. The Union of Sydney Zionists voiced their concern and forwarded a copy of their protest to the British Government; but the Rabbi claimed that the Zionists did not necessarily represent the majority of N.S.W. Jewry and he wrote accordingly to the Prime Minister.

In September, 1929, it was necessary to call a public meeting at the Town Hall in protest against massacres of Jews in Palestine. The board of the Synagogue asked the Rabbi, subject to his approval, to open the proceedings with a prayer and remain throughout the meeting. A resolution was proposed by S.S. Cohen, the president of the Synagogue. It mentioned that it was vital to British prestige that peace be maintained in Palestine. It called

for Jewish representation in the police force, a settlement of the Wailing Wall question, and increased Jewish immigration into Palestine. Rev. Falk, as one of the speakers, said that Jewish manhood would respond to the call if required, adding that officialdom seemed to regard the Balfour Declaration as a mere scrap of paper. Others to speak were Morris Symonds, president-elect of the Great Synagogue, and S.B. Glass, who referred to an emergency fund to be opened and to be at the disposal of Lord Melchett of the Jewish Agency in London.

The Synagogue report of 1929 mentioned that the second annual conference of the Australian Zionist Federation was attended in Sydney by many interstate representatives, and that Rabbi Cohen participated in the proceedings. The report of the following year contained a reference to the third conference, held in Melbourne. The greetings of the Great Synagogue were conveyed to the conference by Morris Symonds.

It should be noted, however, that the board seemed to be anxious to maintain a middle-of-the-road stance on Zionist matters. Thus, when in 1929, it received a requisition for a general meeting to recommend that no anti-Zionist references be permitted from the pulpit, whether openly or by innuendo, Symonds replied that a meeting was not necessary, and that the board would deal with the matter. Further, Rev. Falk was to be asked to preach more often. Yet, following on the British White Paper on Palestine in 1930, exception was taken to certain pulpit remarks by Falk, who was then directed to avoid discussing political questions so as to avoid schism and controversy.

The year 1933 marked the passing of Morris Symonds who, in addition to his services to the Synagogue, was life president of the Union of Sydney Zionists. In the Synagogue special tribute was paid to the driving power of his ideals and his personal support for the Hebrew University. During this same year Sydney Zionists welcomed Dr. B.H. Stein as a Zionist emissary; in an address Rabbi Cohen invited all to join in seeking the peace of Jerusalem, and referred to the emissary as a gentleman of high culture, a travelled observer and a diplomat of tact and discretion.

The death of Rabbi Cohen in 1934 marked the end of an era for the Sydney Jewish community. Now followed a short period covered by the brief ministry of Rabbi E.M. Levy (1935-1938). The winds of change had not as yet transformed Sydney Jewry into a more vigorous and democratically led and organised community. Not long after his arrival, Rabbi Levy was elected to the position of president of the Zionist Federation of Australia. He actively became involved in a controversy with Sir Isaac Isaacs who charged the Zionists with dual loyalty which, he argued, compromised the citizenship of Australian Jews. Although Levy's stand incurred the displeasure of the Synagogue's president, Sir Samuel Cohen, it was not this alone which led to the termination of the Rabbi's appointment, and Zionism, as such, had not been discouraged by the board of the Synagogue. The report for 1938 noted only that the situation in Palestine was increasingly disquieting and it was earnestly hoped that a solution would speedily be found.

Rabbi Porush was appointed chief minister in 1940, holding office for 32 years during momentous and historic times. The Rabbi has indicated to the present writer that from his earliest days he was a follower of the Mizrachi movement with its religious Zionist ideology advocating "The people of Israel, in the Land of Israel, according to the Torah of Israel." This ideology, the Rabbi states, "has been consistently my philosophy of life . . . I felt that I could not be anything else." He was descended from a family that lived in Eretz Israel since 1833. Prior to his appointment to Sydney he was interviewed in London by the Great Synagogue's vice-president, John Goulston, who was then fully aware of Rabbi Porush's Zionist affiliations and views, but did not regard them as any obstacle to the proposed appointment.

In the earlier years of Rabbi Porush's ministry the community was beginning to undergo

many changes due to the influx of migrants, the appearance of numbers of new Synagogues and centres, the creation of the N.S.W. Jewish Board of Deputies, and of course the emergence of the State of Israel. It is therefore not surprising that the Great Synagogue ceased to be the automatic hub of all Jewish communal activities. The Synagogue membership, and, indeed, its leaders individually, were now more free to identify themselves, to the extent they desired, with many developing causes, including Zionism, and further, the direction of the Zionist movement was itself changing in so many ways. Yet, during this new vital and creative phase in the history of the local Jewish community, the Great Synagogue still continued to play a leading Zionist role.

From 1941 onwards, Sir Isaac Isaacs launched into a series of attacks upon the Zionists in *The Hebrew Standard* which led to Professor Julius Stone's writings in defence and in support of the Zionist position. In addition, Rabbi Falk, undeterred by Rabbi Levy's experience, was quick to expose the weakness of Isaacs' arguments. He wrote as president of the Revisionist New Zionist Organisation, taking also the opportunity to criticise the Sydney Zionists for their silence.

At the 11th annual conference of the Zionist Federation in Sydney in May, 1943, Rabbi Porush, even at the height of the war, was one of those who spoke clearly and unequivocally on Jewish rights in Palestine. Not only, he said, was it necessary to reconstitute the civil rights throughout the world, of Jewry. The Jewish people had to be restored to their rightful place, and Palestine could and should play the major role in the work of Jewish post-war reconstruction.

After the end of World War II, Rabbi Porush led a combined service in 1945 with the object of supplication for the surviving remnants of European Jewry and prayer for the future of Eretz Israel. The Rabbi emphasised that Jewry was entitled to expect much more than words of sympathy and comfort. A most impressive service, when 1000 worshippers attended, was held at the Great Synagogue in December, 1947, to commemorate the United Nations decision on the partition of Palestine.

Rabbi J.L. Zlotnick of South Africa was invited to preach. At about this same time the Zionist Federation gave an ovation to Dr H.V. Evatt at a special dinner. Speaking on that occasion, Rabbi Porush stated that the partition decision of the United Nations was not merely political; it signified not only the creation of a Jewish State but rather the fulfilment of a prophecy, and Dr Evatt was "an instrument of God."

Only a few weeks before the emergence of the new State in 1948, Rabbi Porush and other communal leaders urged support for the Jewish State Appeal Emergency Campaign. On the eve of Passover they referred to the struggle for freedom in Eretz Israel: "We are witnesses of a fateful and tragic conflict . . . We should mobilise all our moral and material forces, the emergency is unprecedented." A rally in June, 1948, at Paddington Town Hall under the auspices of the Zionist Federation, was reported by the Jewish press with the heading, "Sydney Jews Hail New State." The Rabbi echoed the hopes of many of the community when he said that he would now see the rebirth of the Holy Land, and added: "I am certain that Mr Bevin does not represent the real British people in the same sense as did Lloyd George, Gladstone or Balfour." The Great Synagogue Congregational Journal commented on the celebration of Israel Day, following on the establishment of the new State, throughout the Synagogues of the Commonwealth on Shabbat Nachamu. Drawing attention to the Haftarah with its message that the time of fulfilment was at hand, the writer observed that all must seek and find means to devote to "the greatest Jewish undertaking in our history. We must not fail Israel at the present hour." Rabbi Porush spoke much to the same effect at the service at the Great Synagogue in 1949, in commemoration of the State's independence. "The Yishuv," he said, "has done its part gloriously. We can do no less." On Independence Day, 1951, the Great Synagogue pulpit was occupied by Rabbi Dr Louis

Rabinowitz who was in Australia to conduct the United Israel Appeal. He remarked upon the reality of the State and of prophecy being fulfilled. The Minister for Israel, J.I. Linton, and the First Secretary of the Legation, G. Doron, were present.

Under the auspices of the Legation of Israel a memorial service was held at the Great Synagogue in November, 1952, on the death of the State's first president, Chaim Weizmann. Rabbi Porush said Weizmann was the builder of Jewish nationhood and had stood resolute like a prophet of old. The board of the Synagogue conveyed its tribute through Mr Lapid, Israeli Chargé d'Affaires. About a year later the Synagogue held a memorial service on the first anniversary of Weizmann's passing. The Minister for Israel, Mr M. Nurock, spoke in Hebrew of the radiant memory of the late president through whom "the very crown of nationhood was reborn to independence and sovereignty in the ancient homeland of his people." Six years of Israel's independence was observed at a special Shabbat service at the Synagogue on Yom Ha'atzmaut, 1954. Mr Nurock, as well as Legation members, Mr Lapid and Mr Trigor, attended. A few months later the Synagogue Journal included a forceful article by Rabbi Porush on the new challenge, since the creation of the State, in a changed pattern of Jewish life. It was necessary to seek "a living basis for close association between the Diaspora and Israel in a constructive influence of the latter on Jewish life everywhere and in a unification of the Jewish people with Israel eventually as its core."

The Synagogue's report for 1956 referred to the Israel Emergency Appeal in November of the previous year. Telegrams over the president's signature were sent to all the Synagogue's members and a total sum of £5000 was subscribed within three weeks. The appeal, the Synagogue Journal remarked, came not as a burden but as an opportunity. Moshe Sharett, formerly prime minister of Israel, visited the Synagogue in 1957 when an emergency appeal was being launched. The Synagogue board sent telegrams to its membership urging their support of the appeal. In 1958 Israel's tenth anniversary was celebrated at the Synagogue when all orthodox congregations were represented and leading members of the community attended. "Our ideal," Rabbi Porush said in an A.B.C. broadcast, "is the creation of a living religious civilisation in the land which has given birth to the religion of the spirit. With this prayer we enter upon the second decade." In the same year the Rabbi visited Jerusalem for the opening of the Supreme Religious Centre. He read a message in Hebrew at the dedication ceremony. In October of 1958 the newly appointed Israeli Minister, Moshe Yuval, addressed a Synagogue luncheon and spoke of the value of small communities to the Jewish world in developing Jewish solidarity. He emphasised the effect of this in leading to the establishment of the State of Israel.

In the Synagogue Journal, in 1959, Max Wassner, president of the J.N.F. of N.S.W. wrote of the Jewish National Fund as an integral part of every day Jewish life. He was deeply encouraged by the gesture of the Great Synagogue in declaring Shabbat Shekalim as the opening of J.N.F. Month. Later, in the course of the year, the 25th anniversary of Youth Aliyah was celebrated at the Synagogue. The federal chairman of that organisation was I. Lewinnek, a respected member of the board of the Synagogue. Also, in 1959, a memorial service was held at the Mizrahi Synagogue under the auspices of the Beth Din, for the late Chief Rabbi of Israel, Dr I.H. Herzog. Rabbi Porush referred to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel as virtually the supreme rabbinic authority of the Jewish people everywhere. Dr Herzog, he said, was dedicated to the study of the Torah, the reverence for scholarship, and the creation within the Jewish State of a generation that would be guided by the Torah and follow the traditional paths. In 1960 an event of special interest was the lecture at the Synagogue by Dr Evatt, on Australia's part in the creation of the State of Israel. (The full text of the lecture was later published in the Journal of the Australian Jewish Historical Society). Herzl Year, as the centenary of the birth of the Zionist founder, was marked by a

symposium organised by the Great Synagogue. There was also an exhibition of books, pamphlets and documents illustrating Herzl's work, based largely on materials in the Falk Library.

The fourth nationwide ministers' conference was held in Sydney in 1962. In an address Rabbi Porush discussed the impact of Israel and observed that the creation of the State was a decisive element in the struggle for survival and revival. Whilst helping Israel was the highest imperative of the moment, Zionism was not a momentary aspiration dictated by acute needs, but of the very essence of the Jewish faith. In the following year about 800 people attended a memorial service at the Great Synagogue, sponsored by the Israel Embassy, in memory of the late President, Yitzhak ben-Zvi. In his address Rabbi Porush referred to the deceased as a statesman and scholar, "an upright, simple and modest man." A further such service was held at Canberra and was conducted by the Rabbi in the auditorium of the Academy of Science. In 1964, the Rabbi Falk Memorial Lecture was given by the Acting Consul-General of Israel, Mr S.Z. Laor. He spoke of Israel's War of Independence in metaphysical terms: "Only the stark facts of the splendid phenomenon of the beginnings of redemption bar us from realising the wonderful change of tides which have come to pass in front of our very eyes." He referred to the deep-rooted Jewish belief in providential guidance, and the faith that the indomitable ideals of justice, liberty, and universal peace would ultimately reign.

The outbreak of the Six-Day War in 1967 was indeed a fearful time when the State faced destruction by hostile neighbours. Jews everywhere responded to the emergency. The Jewish community attended a mass rally at the Central Synagogue when some 5000 persons, reported as being the largest gathering in communal history, were present. In its nineteen years, said Rabbi Porush in his sermon, Israel had fulfilled its task and had aided millions of refugees. Financial aid was the least form of solidarity the Sydney community could give, unless some were also prepared to go to fight in Israel. On Sunday, 4th June that year, a Day of Prayer and Fasting for N.S.W. Jewry was observed with a united communal service at the Great Synagogue. In the Synagogue Journal, not long afterwards, the Rabbi was able to write of the miracle that "the beleaguered small State of Israel was able to break the crippling shackles of the surrounding enemies, driving them out of the immediate vicinities and occupying vast stretches of land which can given Israel greater security in the future", adding that the old city of Jerusalem and the Western Wall were again in Jewish hands. Later in the year, the Rabbi wrote on the jubilee of the Balfour Declaration, "in the wake of the great and shattering miracle of the Six-Day War." In retrospect, he remarked, one was now in a better position to evaluate the famous Declaration.

In September, 1967, a forum luncheon took place at the Great Synagogue when Professor Julius Stone was in the chair and the Ambassador for Israel, Mr Simcha Pratt, gave an address, "The Middle East — What Now?" Israel, the ambassador indicated, had made her position permanent as a people that had the deepest roots of all the nations, occupied the same land after 2800 years, spoke the same language and had the same faith. The only solution to the problems of the region was peace by negotiation based on the principle of the territorial integrity of Israel.

A pulpit tribute was paid by Rabbi Porush on 1st March, 1969, to the late Prime Minister of Israel, Levi Eshkol, great builder of the State and leader of the Yishuv at a most critical time. The rest of the sermon was dedicated to the United Israel Appeal as it was indeed a time of grave emergency. On the next Shabbat, the Rabbi had occasion to welcome the new Consul-General, Mr David Marmor.

On 1st January, 1973, Rabbi Raymond Apple succeeded Rabbi Porush as senior minister of the Great Synagogue. By that time, almost a quarter-century had passed in the short and

spectacular history of the Israeli nation and the State had been confronted by and survived many emergencies, though it was very soon to be subjected to further hostilities over which it prevailed, so largely due to Providence and the faith and sacrifices of the Yishuv. Despite all these trials, Israel had become a pivotal factor in the life of Jewry everywhere, and in Australia, when Rabbi Apple took up his new appointment, Jewish communities identified closely with Israel and its welfare. Within the Sydney Jewish community, including the Great Synagogue in particular, the turn of events during a period of about thirty years commencing with the appointment of Rabbi Porush, had resulted in marked and visible changes in Jewish feeling, education, and concern for the State of Israel. Rabbi Apple gave early indication that he was an avowed Zionist, with, as he said, "a lifetime love affair with Israel". Almost immediately on his appointment he arranged for the Israeli pronunciation of Hebrew to be used in all services of the Synagogue, viewing this step as a logical mark of identification with Israel.

Rabbi Apple was one of the speakers at the communal rally on 15th October, 1973, when he made a call for unconditional solidarity with Israel then embroiled in the Yom Kippur War. He appealed for support from the Australian government and from the United Nations. It was a time, he urged, for Jewry to forget frivolities and luxuries in order to give Israel maximum support. The Rabbi spoke again the same day at a special service at the Mizrahi Synagogue. The Great Synagogue board resolved to levy each member and an appropriate letter, under the president's and Rabbi's signatures, was sent to the membership. It was estimated that congregants contributed altogether over \$300,000 to the emergency appeal.

In 1973 the State had celebrated the 25th anniversary of its establishment. An address delivered on that occasion by Chief Rabbi Dr Immanuel Jakobovits, was afterwards published in the Great Synagogue Journal. He likened the first twenty-five years of reborn statehood to the generation of Davids, a generation of heroic pioneers. He prayed for the rise of a new generation of Solomons, blessed with peace in rebuilding their sanctuaries, uniting the ingathered tribes of Israel in the pursuit of spiritual excellence.

As a gesture of appreciation for its long and continued co-operation, the Great Synagogue, in 1975, was inscribed by the J.N.F. in the Golden Book at Jerusalem. Then in 1978, as part of the Synagogue's centenary functions, a Great Synagogue Centenary Forest was established in Israel. As a highlight of the celebrations, a delegation of congregants, headed by the president, Mr Sidney Sinclair and by Rabbi Apple, were present when the Centenary Forest was dedicated in December 1978 at Kerem Maharal. This was a memorable and unique event providing a living and tangible link between the State of Israel and the Great Synagogue. An extract from the dedication prayer by Rabbi Apple may be quoted: "We recall with what a humble sense of privilege Australia, and Australian Jewry, was able to make crucial contributions in the cause of the upbuilding of Israel. We acknowledge with what joy we derived and derive rich inspiration and spiritual vigour from Israel, with what anguish we shared in Israel's agonies and with what ecstasy we rejoiced in her triumphs."

An evaluation of Israel's significance, from the pen of Rabbi Apple, appeared in the Synagogue Journal at the time of the 29th Independence Day celebrations. "As far as I am concerned", he wrote, "the vision has begun to be fulfilled. Israel has done wonders, and every Jew ought to be proud . . . Israel is not yet the Kingdom of God on earth, though none can deny that of all countries, this is the land where God dwells most visibly, and I pray we may all have the *zechut* to play our part in bringing Israel to the complete redemption."

The State reached its 30th anniversary of independence in May 1978, and Rabbi Apple, as chairman of the Association of Jewish Ministers, issued a press statement referring to this miracle of 2000 years of Jewish history and to Israel as centre of resurgent Jewish learning

and piety. A commemorative service to mark the anniversary took place at the Great Synagogue on Shabbat, 13th May, 1978. In his sermon the Rabbi spoke of what Israel meant to the world as a whole, and prayed that it would be a model society and a joy for all the earth. A message of greetings was read by the ambassador, Mr Michael Elizur.

The world president of the J.N.F., Mr Moshe Rivlin, visited Australia and attended Shabbat service at the Great Synagogue on 11th November, 1978, when he was guest of honour at a luncheon given by the Board.

On 26th March, 1979, President Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Begin of Israel signed the historic peace treaty between the two countries at the White House. A special service was held at the Great Synagogue the following Shabbat. Israel's insistence, the Rabbi remarked, on direct negotiations had proved to be the right policy. Consul-General David Ben-Dov attended with other Israeli representatives. Dr Albert Silver, president of the State Zionist Council, headed an array of Zionist leaders.

When the State reached its 33rd anniversary in 1981, the Synagogue Journal published a stimulating article by Rabbi Apple calling for personal commitment to Israel not merely by words. Israel had to be seen and experienced. The vernacular of Jewish life should be Hebrew, and the Israeli accent ought to be heard in many more of the Synagogues. It was important, in these miraculous times, to recognise a religious dimension in the events which had been experienced so traumatically.

A Great Synagogue forum luncheon in 1983 was addressed by the Ambassador of Egypt who spoke on Egyptian-Israeli Relations. There were aspects of the Ambassador's analysis with which the audience would have disagreed, but it was already significant for the speaker to talk to Jews about Israel. In the Grace After Meals, the Rabbi included the prayer, "May the All-Merciful Bless the State of Israel, the beginning of the flowering of our redemption." One year later, again under the presidency of Mr Orwell Phillips, a forum luncheon was addressed by the then leader of the Federal Liberal Party, Mr Andrew Peacock, who spoke on his party's attitude towards Israel. Amongst those who attended were Mr Alex Ganor, the Consul-General, Dr Silver, president of the State Zionist Council, and Mr Arnold Newhouse, past president of that Council. Mr Peacock expressed pride that Australia had been one of Israel's firmest supporters and friends. Australia needed to take a global perspective in which the problems of the Middle East must be taken into account, appreciating that the security of the Western World was at stake.

It would be beyond the scope of this paper to mention every Zionist organisation that has been associated with the Great Synagogue from time to time. Thus, in June, 1984, W.I.Z.O. Shabbat was observed at the Synagogue. The Rabbi then pointed out that, apart from the Synagogues, W.I.Z.O. was the largest mass membership movement in the community, playing a major role in mobilising and motivating Jewish women towards love of Israel, Judaism and humanity.

It has been, however, a practical impossibility to list and specify every effort by or on behalf of the Great Synagogue in support of Israel and the many organisations with Zionist objectives. Only a few months ago the Synagogue agreed to sponsor part of the J.N.F.'s new Galil Australia project, which will establish twenty-seven new settlements in the Segev region.

With the approaching bicentenary of Australia in mind, Rabbi Apple delivered a special series of sermons during the *Yamim Noraim* of 1987. On the second day of Rosh Hashanah he addressed the congregation on the significance of the 40th anniversary of Israel, celebrated during our bicentennial year. The Consul-General asked for a transcript of the address and thanked the Rabbi for "a most eloquent presentation on Israel".

The late Max Freilich, a life-long and leading Zionist, was a long-time member of the Great Synagogue. His own personal view was that some former Synagogue leaders had not

been sympathetic towards Zionism. He went on to say: "But Rabbi Porush until his retirement, and subsequently Rabbi Raymond Apple, have regularly exhorted the congregation towards greater material support and greater awareness for Israel. It is now quite apparent and significant, that the sons and daughters of the old establishment are identifying more and more with Israel and present-day Zionism, unaffected by the controversies of the past."

In considering the deficiencies of the past, it is really necessary to apply historical perspectives. Today, of course, most Jews, with few exceptions, support the State of Israel. On the other hand, committed Zionists, especially those who advocated political measures for the achievement of their aims, were once a small minority in most Jewish communities. When, towards the end of the Great War, the Balfour Declaration was issued, nobody then could foresee Nazi Germany, World War II, the Holocaust, and the many thousands of homeless survivors in search of refuge. In those times Australian Jewry was small in numbers and virtually isolated at the periphery of the Jewish world, and it was a struggle to maintain Jewish identity. The Sydney community had clung tenaciously to its roots in England. As the religious head of the Great Synagogue, and of the whole community, Rabbi Cohen, by personality and character, manifested a British stance to an extraordinary degree. It would be far from correct to say that his personal attitude was representative of the Synagogue's leadership or of the congregation. Further, Rev. Falk, always a devoted Zionist, was also an ardent champion of the British flag. Just as Falk's brand of Zionism was personal to him, so too, Cohen's antipathy to the Zionists was essentially a reflection of his own outlook and background. Another illustration is afforded by the case of Sir Isaac Isaacs, the first native Australian to be appointed as Governor-General at a time when loyalists and conservatives regarded the appointment as an affront to the Imperial Crown. Sir Isaac, however, often asserted his great affection for and attachment to the throne. With equal vigour he condemned Zionism, though there were very few, whether within the Great Synagogue or elsewhere, who approved the extreme stand taken by him. His attitude, also, was a highly personal one which was not representative of any class of Australian Jewry. By way of contrast, and perhaps far more representative of all the Jewish communities of Australia, was the example shown by Sir John Monash who, great patriot as he was, accepted the presidency of the Zionist Federation of Australia, in 1927, remarking: "The British Empire has accepted the mandate for Palestine, and we who are living in Australia have a double responsibility, both as Jews and citizens, to do our share in rebuilding the cultural and spiritual centre of Judaism." That statement admirably epitomised the real sentiments of the Jewish communities, including the congregants of the Great Synagogue, though it is agreed that support for the Zionist aims did not always reach high levels.

Reference has already been made to the complex of factors which brought about great changes in the composition and outlook of Australian Jewry. Further, since multiculturalism has become government policy, a new social and political climate has prevailed so that there can be no inhibitions whatever in demonstrating positive support for our people in Israel. These sentiments are fully shared by the membership of the Great Synagogue which, as the Mother Congregation of Australian Jewry, has given valuable service to Eretz Israel. It has forged strong ties both spiritually and materially with the Jewish homeland. Today, perhaps, more so than at any other time, the Synagogue emphasises the reality and relevance of the prophetic message of old, "For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."