

## THE FEDERATION OF THE COMMONWEALTH AND THE ROLE OF AUSTRALIAN JEWS

*Morris Forbes*

In 2001, the Commonwealth of Australia is celebrating the centenary of its formation on 1 January 1901. Since that date, Australia has witnessed momentous events on the stage of world history which have influenced its history. Only a little over a century before Federation, white settlement of this vast continent began. By the beginning of the Commonwealth the Jewish section of the whole population had experienced but 70 years of communal life as Jews. Within a further 50 years this religious group was to be transformed by the influx of migrants escaping from the tragic European Holocaust, and by the exciting advent of the creation of the State of Israel and its entry into the nations of the world. At the edge of the diaspora, as it has been described, the Jewish citizens of this land, notwithstanding their smallness in numbers, have contributed significantly to the life of the wider general community as well as to their own group. A key example of the significant involvement of Australian Jews in the general life of the community was the process of Federation. Of the 50 colonial delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1897–1898, two of them were native born Australian Jews: Isaac Isaacs and Vaiben Louis Solomon. Isaacs was to earn the distinction of being among the Federation leaders to become known as Founding Fathers of the Commonwealth.

In 1951 on the occasion of the Jubilee of the inauguration of the Commonwealth, this Society's *Journal* contained an article by Harold H. Glass, entitled, 'Some Australian Jews and the Federal Movement'.<sup>1</sup> The author was then in the early stages of a very successful legal career. Afterwards he became a senior Judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales. He was well equipped to write that essay in which he selected four Jewish figures relating to the Federation debate, and whom he permitted to speak briefly on the subject in their own words. They were Vaiben Solomon of South Australia, Isaac Isaacs of Victoria, Sir Julian Salomons of New South Wales, and Elias Solomon of Western Australia. The present writer will make further reference



to them, and also to others, all of whom demonstrated the involvement of Jewish individuals in Federation politics. It will also be instructive to consider the participation of Jewish parliamentarians in the first parliament of the Commonwealth. Further, having regard to the records readily available, it is also relevant to write of the celebration by the Jewish community of the achievement in 1901 of the nation's federal constitution.

Federation led to the unification of the Australian colonies and the birth of a nation. The article by Glass serves as a good introduction for those wishing to learn something of the views and attitudes of a few prominent Australian Jews when federalism occupied the thoughts of many. This article stated, that 'one would in any event expect, namely, that there was no such thing as a Jewish contribution to the Federal movement', adding that 'individual Jews took varying attitudes, depending upon their personalities and backgrounds, and particularly, the conditions in the different colonies'.<sup>2</sup> To the same effect, and possibly with Glass' comments in mind, Rabbi Porush later wrote, 'In itself, this move was of no consequence to Jews as Jews'.<sup>3</sup>

In a broad sense, these observations are true, and it is clear that colonial Jews shared the political reactions of their fellow citizens. However, on closer consideration, it can be argued that the federal movement may well have affected Jews, whether as supporters or opponents, in their immediate hopes and outlook. Thus, for example, Isaacs, perhaps because of his great ambition, and added at times to a feeling of isolation, pursued that subject almost as an article of faith. He displayed a zeal that was not always acceptable to others. An entirely different example of fervour was that of Sir Julian Salomons. He expressed his unreserved opposition to Federation with an exaggerated and excessive concern for the future of the senior colony to which he was so attached. Further, he even spoke of concern for the future of the British Empire and British traditions which, he argued, were being placed in jeopardy. Both of these Jewish leaders allowed themselves to be moved and carried away by sentiments and emotion displayed by few others. Moreover, other Jews hoped that the move for colonial union would help to bring together, on the new national level, their concerns and objectives as a minority religious group. This Jewish factor will be further examined.

### THE DAWNING ERA

Aron and Arndt, the authors of an historical work relating to the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation have remarked simply: 'The



advent of Federation saw the profile of the Jewish community further raised'.<sup>4</sup> The basis for this comment is not given and there is no discernible evidence to support it, unless it is to be found in the outstanding work of one such as Isaacs. Perhaps the writers were referring to the new opportunities which opened with the changed system of government, though the comments do not read that way. When the Commonwealth first became a formal reality, Rev. J.H. Landau second minister of the Great Synagogue in Sydney, delivered an eloquent sermon. He did not name any Jewish federalist specifically, contenting himself with some general remarks. 'Let our thoughts,' the preacher said, 'revert to those who first took up the cause of the Federation of these colonies, and whose patient labours and unflagging perseverance during a long series of years prepared the way for the triumph which has at last been achieved'.<sup>5</sup> In at least a decade before the federal movement had gathered momentum, it was Sir Henry Parkes, Alfred Deakin, and Edmund Barton who were the first of the few to advocate colonial union. There appears to be no record of any particular interest by Jews at that preliminary stage of federalism, or during 'the long series of years' of which Landau spoke. However, Isaacs, who entered politics in 1892 representing the electorate of Bogong, mentioned Australian federation in his address to the electors. He further spoke on the subject in meetings of the Australian Natives' Association of which he was an active member.<sup>6</sup>

In retrospect, it would be thought that the union of the separate colonies would have been seen as having an added value for the Jewish communities. In 1901 they numbered about 15,000 only. Australian Jewry had to await the marked changes resulting from the significant influx of migration before and after World War II. In 1944, for example, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry was formed as a representative national lay organisation, and, in 1946, Rabbi Dr Israel Porush convened the first national conference of Jewish Ministers in Sydney. However, the immediate impact of Federation brought no such developments for Australian Jewry which, in the respective Commonwealth States, continued to function as it had in colonial times. When only the final formalities remained to establish the Commonwealth, tentative hopes were expressed that 'the Federal spirit will likewise make itself felt amongst the Australian Jewish communities'.<sup>7</sup> The editor of *The Jewish Herald* suggested that the larger congregations should assist the small congregations and scattered members of the faith in outlying districts. The paper believed that 'A sort of circuit preaching' would answer the purpose!

However, if the spirit of federalism led to the creation of a new



nation, it had little influence at that time upon Australian Jewry amongst whom a countervailing parochialism was clearly evident. A detailed explanation, based on the events of the day, is to follow. In direct contrast was the stance consistently taken by the Catholic Archbishop in Sydney, Cardinal Moran who, while loyal to the British connection, was very keen to see the growth of an Australian nation. To him, the federal ideal was not confined to politics, and, whenever possible, he took active steps to bring together in Council the Bishops of the Australian Church.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the religious leaders of the Jewish communities, even at the very moment of the consummation of the Commonwealth, were unable to agree to meet in conference. A dispute in fact developed between them, aborting a desire in some quarters for an Australian inter-congregational meeting.

*The Jewish Herald* indicated that, apart from politics, there were many reasons for Jews to welcome the Commonwealth with satisfaction but it referred only to 'many vexatious anomalies' which henceforth would be removed. Hardly a major matter, it pointed out that hitherto a Victorian minister in Wodonga could not celebrate a marriage in Albury, a couple of miles across the border. The *Herald* wrote:

We are all Jews, and all living under the Crown of Great Britain, but under the old regime we were to treat each other as foreigners. With federation all this ceases, and, for all we know, a much closer union may be brought about between the Jewish congregations in the Commonwealth. At least let us hope so'.<sup>9</sup>

A few months later, immediately before the turn of the century, the *Jewish Herald* hailed 'The Dawning Era'. The paper noted that Australian unity was becoming an established fact, with people on both sides of the Murray River looking upon each other as fellow citizens, and recognising that the ties with the mother country were not being weakened. These remarks, however, were rather vacuous in their terms. They seemed to suggest that there was nothing remaining to be said on the matter, apart from the statement that 'all were sharers of a glorious past and co-workers in what all hope to be a no less glorious future'. The concluding thought was 'that the mother will always be proud of her daughter beyond the seas'.<sup>10</sup> It was but a pious hope to think that Federation was about to promote unity of the Jewish communities. In Melbourne, for example, the two congregations, despite serious financial difficulties, failed in an attempt to agree on a scheme for their amalgamation.<sup>11</sup>



For the Jewish communities, one of their own, Isaac Isaacs, was at the forefront when the federal movement was at its peak, earning him 'a special place in the front rank'.<sup>12</sup> Isaacs was indisputably recognised as one of the Fathers of the new Constitution. No longer mere colonials, Australians were to breathe the air of a national ethos. It portended changes which could also have been beneficial to the Jewish communities if they had begun to look beyond their state boundaries in addressing Jewish issues. In Sydney, as well as Melbourne, the Jewish press contented itself with a modicum of rhetoric, without consideration of possible advantages which might accrue for the local Jewry under the new political dispensation. For example, in 1900 a leader in the *Standard* lavished some sentiment on the federal theme:

Surely we are living in a unique period and we shall soon witness the consummation of an event which every sincere Australian has for many years longed to welcome. It matters not that opinions are divided as to the equity of the terms upon which the union of the Colonies is accomplished.<sup>13</sup>

Again, in 1901, *The Standard* emphasised the unity which all Australians would enjoy as follows:

We have been united by the cement of national life into a Commonwealth which sank the oppressive barriers and drew the bonds of kinship and brotherhood into unison.<sup>14</sup>

Before 1900 there had been few, if any, references to the subject of Federation in the *Standard*. It has to be appreciated that in the period from 1895–1900 the *Standard* was in its formative years, and, that its founder, Alfred Harris, apparently preferred that the readers should resort to the general press for all news and comment on political questions, including the controversial topic of Federation. At the relevant time the Great Synagogue was the central and dominant institution of Sydney Jewry, its leaders being generally of a strong conservative outlook, akin, it has been said, to that of nineteenth century English gentry.<sup>15</sup>

### CONSTITUTION CONVENTION AND REFERENDA

It was the detailed provisions of the Constitution Bill, some of them very contentious, which were productive of so much argument and delay in reaching final agreement on the part of the several colonies. In September 1897, the Constitutional Convention moved



to Sydney, but the proceedings were not mentioned by the *Standard*. The newly formed Jewish paper broadly reflected the values of the Jewish community establishment upon whom it was largely dependent for its support.<sup>16</sup>

Reticent on ordinary Federation affairs, the *Standard* did not hesitate to publish an item, probably paid for, of an evangelical nature by one, Donald Cormack. Cormack drew up a religious scheme in which he urged that the Bible should be the rule of faith and practice, that the relations between Church and State should be defined, and that the system of government should approximate the constitution of the Hebrew Sanhedrin. First, it said, there had to be a recognition of the Creator.<sup>17</sup> This was an unusual contribution to the federal debate, no doubt well intentioned as an exercise in religiosity, though most of it was without practicality.

The constitution makers, however, received many petitions for insertion of a clause in the preamble to the draft constitution, with appropriate words acknowledging and invoking the Supreme Being. Most of the colonial legislatures indicated their assent thereto. Yet, secularist objection was raised by some delegates at the Adelaide session of the Convention, and when a vote was taken on the question, the majority was opposed to it. It is of interest that delegate Isaacs voted with the minority delegates for the inclusion of the proposed words in the Preamble.<sup>18</sup> The attitude of the delegates changed when they met at Melbourne in 1898 when Dr Quick of Victoria supported the original proposal, saying that it 'could be subscribed to by Roman Catholics and Protestants, but also by Jews, Gentiles, and even Mahomedans'.<sup>19</sup> The words agreed to be inserted were: 'Humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God,' and they have ever since remained in the constitution's preamble. There was ample evidence of a public religious sentiment which assisted in inspiring some who looked forward to the Commonwealth. 'One Nation, One Destiny' were the words, albeit a popular catch-cry, expressive of the federal movement. There were some who believed that the words in the preamble would influence a large number of votes for the Constitution Bill.

Matters of passing interest only were noticed by the *Standard* while discussion on substantial federal questions was not raised. It was reported that the Hon Isaac A. Isaacs was the subject of a biography in the 'Catholic Press', and it was stated that it was hoped to give some prominent Catholic a like complimentary notice. The paper went on to refer to the *Catholic Times* which had written that appearances were against Isaacs, adding that Jews were not as a rule handsome.<sup>20</sup> In the following year the editor apparently felt to be on safe ground in reporting on a Passover sermon by Rabbi Dr



Abrahams of the Bourke Street Synagogue, Melbourne. The Rabbi claimed, in the course of his Address, to be viewing the federal question through a Passover spy-glass, though he conceded that it shed no new light on the Constitution Bill. He saw the basic object as freedom in providing for the civil and religious liberties of the people, and he mentioned compromise on such issues as railways, rivers, and bounties. He noted that the constitution could be altered, and he drew attention to the words to be included in the preamble. The Rabbi concluded on the Exodus theme, urging that all should walk boldly forward.<sup>21</sup>

Early in June 1898 the first referendum failed to be carried in New South Wales. The *Standard* seized the opportunity to comment that the result was a 'sad disappointment to rabid Protectionists,' while hoping that parliament would pave the way for a more reasonable outcome. 'Opinions are,' the paper said, 'at great variance among our people'.<sup>22</sup> One week later there appeared an item, 'Federation at any Price,' reporting on a long letter by S. Harris published the previous day in the *Daily Telegraph*. The letter was described as being well reasoned and a criticism was promised in an early issue. It was an example, for so it was said, that co-religionists might follow.<sup>23</sup> The letter writer maintained that the government had treated the people as aliens, ignorant of the issues, and having to listen to 'frantic billites' only. What was to be gained by the acquisition of Tasmania, South Australia or Western Australia? Would the bill lighten taxation or protect our shores against invasion? To use a phrase of the day, the bill was said to be as dead as Julius Caesar.

When the Reid government in New South Wales was about to face a general election, the *Standard* contained a Leader under the heading, 'Politics'. The editor stated that Federation had become a political party-cry, and he asked for fair play for the Rt. Hon. G.H. Reid, P.C.. He conceded that Reid had fought sincerely and bravely in the Convention to obtain the best possible advantage for the colony, even if he had to agree with the final result of the deliberations. 'The Jew', as the item read, 'knows that unity is strength and knows the desirableness of Federation, but we must not sell ourselves blindly and wildly and follow a party whose sole aim is self-interest'. Rather, it was stated, it was better to postpone Federation forever.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the paper reflected the view of many who were against the bill while professing support for Federation in theory. One senses that the *Standard* was more concerned with the return of the Reid Free-Trade government at the election, regardless of Reid's particular stand on Federation.

A professed enemy of Federation, R.H. Levien, the member for Quirindi, introduced in June 1898 an amendment in the Assembly



to the legislation to require what would be an impossible number of affirmative votes for the first Referendum. He was often regarded as Jewish but he was not so in fact. He was the nephew of Phillip Joseph Cohen and the son of Alfred Levien of Maitland.<sup>25</sup> It was later agreed that a minimum vote of 80,000 would suffice. In that form the bill was introduced into the Council by Sir Julian Salomons during an all night sitting when it was passed notwithstanding the strong opposition of Barton, O'Connor and other federalists. Towards the end of the federal struggle Salomons began to modify some of his extreme anti-federal views. A modern writer says of him, that he 'attractively combined learning and earnestness with a great sense of the ridiculous', citing the following illustration of his humour in the course of a parliamentary debate when he explained his objection to equal Senate representation for the states:

Not that I have any hostility to Tasmania. On the contrary, I'm very fond of Tasmania. I spent my last vacation there, and liked it so much that I made up my mind that, if I had a good year at the Bar, I'd buy the island.<sup>26</sup>

Salomons' speeches on the subject sometimes bordered on the fanatical and one went on for many hours in the Council. J.H. Want, the leading opponent in New South Wales of the Constitution bill, referred to Salomons' speech as being one of 'arduous labour'. When the first referendum vote was defeated, Sir Julian was interviewed by the press. Not claiming to be infallible on the matter, he gave his opinion that: 'The colony has escaped a great calamity,' and that it could be some years before the country was ready for federal union. He thought that Sydney should become the capital. He regarded the bill as one of 'dangerous silliness'.<sup>27</sup> In another interview he repeated his view that changes to the bill, which were due to become the subject of conferences and negotiation, ought to originate entirely in parliament, adding that he did not believe in the sovereignty of the people, who were not his masters.<sup>28</sup>

While Salomons was not without some eminent critics, he was highly regarded, even by those who differed from his views. Thus, Bernhard Ringrose Wise, a contemporary leading parliamentarian and a strong advocate of the federal cause, afterwards wrote:

Sir Julian was too large-minded to be a mere parochial patriot, and in fiscal matters was a Laodicean, who regarded both Free-Trade and Protection as political expedients. His unceasing opposition to Federation was due to a reasoned dislike of the inconvenience of the Federal system.<sup>29</sup>



Early in 1899 Salomons was appointed Agent-General in London, and this appointment may have softened his feelings, towards Federation. He confessed in the Council that it was possible that he may have been mistaken. He commented, that 'Australia has spoken with an undoubted voice in favour of federal union ... and the voice of the people must in the end prevail ... in some circumstances it is wise early to recognise it'.<sup>30</sup> The amendments to the bill were agreed upon at a Premiers Conference and the second referendum was successful in June 1899.

However, when Deakin, Barton and others were in England to assist with the progress of the constitution through the British parliament, Salomons came into emotional conflict with Barton who had spoken on the question at a London Club. He took extreme objection to remarks of Barton relating to the changed position of the Privy Council in the constitution.<sup>31</sup> This clash demonstrated that Salomons was still very much a conservative on such matters and was unhappy to see any change in the status quo.

In the lead-up to the legislation for the second referendum, the Legislative Council of New South Wales was below its normal numbers. The Prime Minister — as he was then designated — secured the assent of the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Frederick Darley, to the appointment of 12 new councillors. This action was criticised as an attempt to 'swamp' the Council by appointees pledged to support the Enabling bill for the Referendum. Reid denied these allegations and said that he had only sought to ascertain if the new councillors were in sympathy with the legislation. It is recorded that George Judah Cohen was one of those intended to be nominated, but he declined the honour as he had been asked if he would agree with the proposed legislation.<sup>32</sup> Referred to afterwards as 'the most dominant figure of his time within the Jewish community of New South Wales',<sup>33</sup> Cohen was a man of very high standards who would have been concerned if he was thought to be under any obligation to the government in this connection. It may also be surmised that he was not a federalist, a stand which he may well have shared with other Jewish leaders in Sydney.

The federal cause, or opposition to it, was the political issue in the New South Wales election in 1898, but it was not always a 'straight out' question. Not long a graduate in law, Daniel Levy nominated for the Fitzroy Division as a Liberal Federalist and a supporter of Reid. This was his first step in embarking on a long political career. He eventually decided to withdraw from the campaign so as not to split the vote.<sup>34</sup> In Annandale, L.R. Cohen, who spoke of being associated with a great leader such as Barton, and referring to Reid as 'a bitter opponent of Federation,' was unsuccessful in attempting to split the vote in that electorate. In Petersham, on the



other hand, John Jacob Cohen was able to split the vote which he won by 44 votes. This was Cohen's first foray into politics. His opponents tried to discredit him, but Cohen asserted that he was always a Free-Trader and a democrat. Barton spoke in his favour at the local meeting and said that Cohen was never a 'rail-sitter'. The vote turned out to be 'a magnificent Liberal triumph'.<sup>35</sup> It may be noted that John Jacob Cohen was joined by Dr Cullen and R.H. Garran on a federal committee which was responsible for a prodigious output of articles and other editorial material, liaising with many newspapers to promote Barton's efforts for the bill.<sup>36</sup> While a member of the Assembly, Cohen was included in a committee to confer with the Executive of the Federal Association for the purpose of securing the acceptance of the amended bill as negotiated by Reid.<sup>37</sup> In an early speech by him in the Assembly he criticised those who 'wore federal garments only, while they spoke in a most unfederal tone,' including the Premier, Reid who had misstated the case. He himself, he said, had advocated both in writing and in speech the acceptance of the constitution bill. He thought that it provided a much freer and democratic constitution than any of which he knew.<sup>38</sup>

From the beginning of the last decade of the nineteenth century it was realised that there had to be a strong popular movement. Without this the union of the colonies would have been difficult to achieve. The arguments for and against the constitution bill were complex, and it became clear that public sentiment and opinion required to be stimulated by education and appropriate propaganda. This task fell to voluntary organisations upon which the leaders were able to rely as powerful factors in the federal campaign. In Victoria, particularly, the Australian Natives' Association proved to be an influential body of that kind. Isaacs was a prominent member and addressed its meetings. In 1893 in Sydney Barton helped to form the Australian Federation League which, as a centre for federalists, aimed to avoid class distinction or political party influence. Within the Jewish community of the senior colony only a handful of names are disclosed as involved with such organisations. Foremost of them was J.J. Cohen who has been referred to as 'a hard working supporter of Federation'.<sup>39</sup> In a schedule of names in his work on the constitution, Garran listed Solomon Cohen of Cootamundra and Alfred Shackel of Grenfell as delegates or invited members at a Federal Convention held at Bathurst in 1896.<sup>40</sup> Cohen, it is possible, was identical with the party who had formerly been on the Lachlan goldfields and was a president of the short lived Forbes Synagogue. As to Shackel, he was afterwards a president of the Jewish Literary and Debating Society and a member of the committee of the first Zionist Society in Sydney.<sup>41</sup> He was the mayor of Grenfell in 1896



# To the Australian Born.

No people in the world have been so manifestly marked out by destiny to live under one Government as the people of this island continent ; but no people with so little reason have been so disunited in their public actions.

**The Vote on Tuesday next** will determine whether we will continue as we are, a cluster of petty provinces, each waging a wasteful competition with the other by means of hostile tariffs and railway rates ; or whether we shall have the courage to accept the responsibility cast upon us by our heritage of this great Continent.

**"A Continent for a People, a People for a Continent,"** was Mr. Barton's fine expression of a noble hope four years ago. If Australians are true to themselves this hope will be realised on June 20th.

All the difficulties in the way of Union vanish if we look at them as **Australians**, and not as the inhabitants of any single province. There should be no more difference between, say **Victoria** and **New South Wales**, than there is in **Great Britain** between **Somerset** and **Yorkshire**.

Australia is our home. Our aspiration is to **make Australia great**.

If this is **"sentiment"** it is also **"hard sense."** No Nation has ever played a worthy part in the world unless it has had confidence in its own future.

**A Nation's Greatness** does not depend upon Acreage of Territory or Material Wealth, but on the **nobleness of the thoughts** by which its people are inspired ; and of all the impulses to noble deeds which history records there is none more universal or more potent than this sentiment of Nationality.

## Let us become a Nation

and establish in the Southern Hemisphere a **POWER** which makes for Peace and Order in the sight of other nations, and which will prove to men of every race that the descendants of Britons in **AUSTRALIA** HAVE NOT LOST THEIR CAPACITY FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT.

*A Federation Referendum Placard, 1898. John Jacob Cohen was involved with the production of such placards.*

and represented the town at the Convention. The press spoke of him as an active worker for the Federation movement.<sup>42</sup>

Goldman mentions several Jews who, he writes, served Australia well by their labours for Federation in Victoria. Theodore



Fink, a member of the Upper House, 1894–1904, was the executive member of the Federal League; Max Hirsch, from the Bendigo district, is referred to as one with considerable influence in political circles, advocating Federation through Free-Trade, and debating the subject at a public meeting in Collingwood. Fink is described as a brilliant speaker and a lecturer in political economy, though he was not naturalised and unable to enter parliament. Another was M.A. Rapken, a member of the General Council of the Australian Federal League. E.L. Zox is noticed as an ardent supporter of the constitution bill — like Isaacs, notwithstanding various objections to it, rather than risk a failure of the bill to pass through parliament. Of special interest must be Louis Horwitz, a non parliamentary politician and a lawyer of Hamilton, Victoria who was interested in Federation. On 26 August, 1891, under the auspices of the Australian Natives' Association, he delivered a lecture in Hamilton which was, later published as a four page supplement to the *Jewish Herald*, entitled, 'Federation: What It Is: What It Portends'.<sup>43</sup>

The move for Federation had a long history as far back as the 'forties of the nineteenth century. In this context, historians mention an event on 14 June, 1883 which became known as the Albury Demonstration. At the border between New South Wales and Victoria on the Murray River, when the two colonies were first linked by rail, about 1,000 guests were invited to an official celebration to mark the occasion. The function is noticed by Goldman who refers to it as leading to the first Federal Convention in 1884 at Hobart<sup>44</sup> — not to be confused with the Constitutional Convention some years afterwards. Manning Clark opens his Federation chapter by recounting the rail event at Albury, and Garrahan writes of it as helping to draw closer the colonial bonds, and as suggesting the greater political union yet to come. The two respective Governors, and others, addressed the guests at a monster banquet. Goldman gives the names of the Victorian Jews invited. They were, F.J. Levien, Minister for Mines, at the official table; B.J. Fink, financier and parliamentarian (Geelong); E.L. Zox, the prominent parliamentarian (East Melbourne); H.(probably, Hirsch) Fink, of Geelong; A. Loel, president, East Melbourne Congregation; Simeon Cohen and Rev Elias Blaubaum of St Kilda Congregation. An official and attractive booklet was issued and contained the details of the proceedings, as well as the names of all the invited guests.<sup>45</sup> It included the above named Victorian Jews and referred to Blaubaum as the 'Hebrew Chief Rabbi'. It included the names of several who can be identified as Jewish representatives from New South Wales. They were, George Judah Cohen, Hon S.A. Joseph and Hon L.W. Levy, but Joseph and Levy did not attend. Also named, was B.W. Levy, proba-



bly a son of L.W. Levy. It may be presumed that G.J. Cohen was invited in his capacity, in 1883, as President of the Great Synagogue.

The Melbourne Jewish community seems to have been favourable, in principle, to the idea of a union of the colonies. The rabbinate clearly endorsed the proposal. In a sermon in 1898 Rabbi Abrahams remarked that it was 'the duty of Jews to promote and extend their liberty under the British Crown, and what was the great object of this Federal bill but to develop the civil and religious liberties of the people to the fullest extent'.<sup>46</sup> Jewish opinion in Victoria, in general, no doubt reflected the strong desire of the colonists for federal union. Frank Fletcher's comments in his thesis on Victorian Jews between 1891 and 1901 merit consideration, even if there is no indication of their factual basis. He argued that:

numbers of Jews stood to benefit personally from the economic opportunities for trade and commerce offered by the removal of colonial tariff barriers. Indeed, economic gain may well have figured prominently in the support of individual Jews for Federation as it apparently did for many Gentiles.<sup>47</sup>

There is the possibility that a similar observation could have relevance for some New South Wales Jews, especially, for example, those living in the southern border areas. As already mentioned, the expectation that the federal spirit would advantage the Jewish communities in their organisation, both socially and on a religious level, showed no signs whatever of realisation in those times. This matter receives only passing reference from Fletcher<sup>48</sup> but Jewish historians have been well aware, with respect to the question of communal unity, of the difficulties that prevented such an outcome in the wake of Federation.

The topic of this essay would clearly be deficient in its content without adequate consideration of the contribution to Federation by Isaac Isaacs. However, it is not proposed to repeat what Glass wrote lucidly and concisely, in some five pages of this *Journal* on the subject of Isaacs whose 'life and works,' as the author said, 'provide material for a biography of first importance'.<sup>49</sup> Such a biography has since been written by Sir Zelman Cowen, a work which amplified Max Gordon's earlier biography published in 1963. As regards the Australian Jewish Historical Society, Federation has not received special attention apart from Glass' article. The centenary of the Commonwealth is, therefore, an opportunity to attempt to consider the subject, particularly in the light of the participation of individual Jews and the Jewish community.



It was not until the Convention on 1897-1898 that Isaacs came into special prominence as a federalist though he had spoken on the matter before that time. When holding the position of Attorney-General of Victoria, he was elected as the fifth of ten delegates to represent the colony at the Convention. His political outlook was Protectionist, radical, and broadly democratic. Whatever his particular views on important questions debated at the Convention, Isaacs found that he needed to agree to compromises rather than prejudice the final achievement of Federation under the constitution bill. He was appointed to the Constitutional Committee of the Convention, while Vaiben Solomon of South Australia sat on the Finance Committee. It was expected that Isaacs would be included in a Drafting Committee to prepare the constitution bill. Alfred Deakin afterwards wrote of 'a plot discreditable to all engaged in it' respecting Isaacs' exclusion from that Committee.<sup>50</sup> Deakin, while admitting Isaacs' abilities, did not fail to notice what he described as his 'indomitable will and immeasurable ambition,' stating that he found Isaacs to be 'full of legal subtlety and the precise littleness of the rabbinical-mind'.<sup>51</sup> Of this last-mentioned criticism of Isaacs, Sir Zelman Cowen says that it is an allusion to Talmudic disputation and scholarship. Nevertheless, Isaacs was never a Talmudic scholar, and Deakin was no authority whatever on the rabbinic mind. The latter's remarks are evidence of Isaacs' unpopularity and, perhaps to a degree, of an anti-Jewish prejudice, albeit provoked by Isaacs himself. Throughout the Convention, and during his earlier and later career, and despite his brilliance of mind, there is no reason to question some of the defects of his character. As Cowen's work concludes:

His dogmatism, his appalling conviction of rightness..., which was supported by massive rhetoric, copious citation of authorities and interminable statement, did not commend him to those who had to endure it.<sup>52</sup>

The final assessment of Isaacs' contributions by his biographer is entirely creditable of him: 'He was big in his qualities, and it is unfortunate that some have dealt so strongly on the defects'.<sup>53</sup> Some of the critics of Isaacs were too close to him and too much his contemporaries to be the best judges of his value to the cause of Federation. Even Vaiben Solomon, a co-religionist, had a strong dislike of the tiresome learning to which Isaacs would often subject the Convention.

As Solomon told the Convention delegates, '...it would have been a very good thing if we could have arranged for an exploration



party to go through all the various libraries of the colonies and burn all the works of reference on the American, Canadian, and Swiss constitutions'.<sup>54</sup> In this regard, Isaacs was certainly unrivalled in the extent and detail of his learning and knowledge relating to Convention issues. His dedication to the federal idea was generally unquestioned and it has to be agreed that he was recognised as a forceful advocate of the cause throughout the Convention debates. Isaacs' later work as a Judge of the High Court for many years followed by his appointment as Governor-General are usually seen as the high points of a distinguished career. Thus, Glass opened his remarks by stating, 'The name of Isaac Alfred Isaacs stands at the pinnacle of the achievement of Australian Jewry'.<sup>55</sup> However, this essay is concerned with the topic of Federation and it is necessary, therefore, to direct one's concentration on a short span of his earlier career. It was, indeed, a meritorious segment of an outstanding life of service to the Australian nation. Looked at in its proper perspective, it suffices to say, as does Sir Zelman Cowen at the commencement of the Introduction to the new edition of his biography, that Isaacs 'participated actively and significantly,' with reference to the Convention, 'in its debates and decisions'.<sup>56</sup> Isaacs' efforts, as one of the Commonwealth's Founding Fathers, is worthy of full respect, even though his exceptional life and career was to extend well beyond this phase of his earlier achievements.

### THE JEWS AND THE COMMONWEALTH CELEBRATIONS

In January 1901 the inauguration of the Commonwealth was marked by elaborate ceremonial and celebrations in Sydney, where the proclamation of the Commonwealth by the Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun, took place. It was, indeed, a bright and brilliant spectacle. Sydney was transformed for the occasion and the festivities excelled anything previously witnessed in a blaze of colour and illuminations. The great Inaugural Procession proceeded to Centennial Park where special prayers were offered and a choir of 1,000 voices was heard. The general press was fully conscious of a great event in the history of Australia. The *Sydney Morning Herald* Leader observed:

It is not often in history that we meet with coincidences so striking — for it is not often that a nation or a continent takes so momentous a departure, and seldom indeed in the world's history have a people entered into full possession of their heritage under circumstances so auspicious and with an outlook so full of dazzling promise.<sup>57</sup>



The procession included the heads of Churches, in order of precedence. Among them, it was reported, were 'the Rabbis of New South Wales,' Revs A.B. Davis, J.H. Landau, and A.D. Wolinski. Isaac Isaacs, Victorian Attorney-General, attended, as well as J.F. Levien MLA, and Sir Julian Salomons. In charge of the Victorian section of the military forces was Major Monash. Rabbi Abrahams of Melbourne was an invited guest, as were Rev Blaubaum of Melbourne, and A.M. Hertzberg, president of Brisbane Congregation.<sup>58</sup>

On 21 December 1900 an address of loyalty was presented to Lord Hopetoun on behalf of the New South Wales Jewish community. It referred to his 'important and exalted position' as the first Governor-General, to a nation characterised by 'the loftiest traditions' and by ranking among 'the foremost communities of the world'.<sup>59</sup> To welcome the new Commonwealth a service of prayer and thanksgiving was held at the Great Synagogue at 11pm on 31 December 1900. Rev A.B. Davis composed a special prayer: 'For this most eventful day.' It read in part, 'in the history of these several States we have long waited; we have long laboured. Lo, it has come to pass; the purpose has been achieved, and it seems marvellous in our sight'. The prayer included the hope that the Queen should be granted 'still further length of days,' though a few short weeks later, alas, all were to mourn the passing of the Queen.<sup>60</sup>

The sermon by Rev Landau on the above occasion lacked nothing in rhetoric and sentiment, befitting those times, intermingled with pious invocations for the Almighty's blessings. He allowed himself to be swayed by emotion when he began by remarking, 'For this is a momentous occasion; one of the most momentous, surely, in the memory of man'. He went on, almost in lyrical tones:

The throb of one heart henceforth beats in us, the glory and wonder of the Commonwealth to which we belong now thrills us, the responsibility and meaning of Empire now solemnises and gladdens us. We feel that we are no longer separate provinces, jealous of each other's privileges, but that the State boundaries are lost in the larger line that surrounds the Nationality. Now are we linked together in the golden yoke and federation of hearts and sympathies, 'One flag, one land, one heart, one nation evermore'. Hail to thee, Australia Felix! youngest born of nations; hail, all hail! Spirit of a new birth, Empire of the South, the mighty voice of a great and happy people now acclaims thee 'from where the clear surge takes the Leuwin or the notched Kaikouras rise'. Blessed be thou at thy coming in; blessed be thou through all the cycles of the revolving ages.<sup>61</sup>



On an official level in connection with the public celebrations, George Judah Cohen was appointed to the Executive Committee and Ernest Marks was included in a special Sports section. The artist, Joseph Wolinski, was commissioned to paint one of four panels adorning the Commonwealth Arch in Sydney. He took as his subject an allegorical representation of 'The Awakening of the Commonwealth'.<sup>62</sup>

Commonwealth Sunday was observed by all on 6 January 1901 when a further service was held at the Great Synagogue, the press having already noted its 'gorgeous and elaborate decorations' to mark the celebrations. Special correspondents to the Jewish press were impressed with a service that was grander than the previous one. 'Our large synagogue,' wrote one of them, 'was crowded, and notwithstanding the solemnity of the occasion, the air seemed charged with suppressed excitement. The unusual presence of a full orchestra, the knowledge of a beautiful choral service, helped to fill the building as on the great fast day'.<sup>63</sup> Some extracts are worth inclusion from a report prepared for readers of the Victorian Jewish press. This correspondent described the service as a repetition of that held for the Queen's Golden Jubilee, the centenary of the colony, and, with modifications, at the time of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The music and the choral items, it seems, would have been enhanced had there been greater opportunity for rehearsals. A fine effect resulted from the interpolation of musical passages in the prayer for the Queen and Royal Family, and the sweet simplicity of an aria from Queen Elizabeth's Virginal Book was particularly charming. The choir was conducted by Alfred Hill and the music was arranged by Sidney Moss, a choirmaster who was in charge of the music at the synagogue's consecration.<sup>64</sup>

The second sermon by Rev Landau was referred to as being one of great power and eloquence. Today it reads rather as an oratorical *tour de force*, filled, as it was, with patriotic sentiment and unbridled love of England and the Empire. 'We choose neither,' the preacher said, 'Despotism nor Republicanism. We choose to blend our flag with the glorious *semper eadem* of England, the banner of the free; to link our destiny with the most constitutional of all lands, ...' He appealed to Australians not to falter in their morality, charity, and godliness. His final words were directed towards the Jews of the Commonwealth where, he remarked, 'the Wandering Jew shall be a wanderer no more,' and where, he hoped, they might hold 'honoured places in the high councils of the nation, enjoying its confidence, its golden age and ours'.<sup>65</sup> In retrospect, whatever else might be said of Landau's thoughts, these latter hopes have been fulfilled in the contributions to their country made by many distinguished



Jews, and by the freedom continued to be enjoyed by Australia's Jewish citizens in common with their fellows.

Rabbi Abrahams was present at one, or both, of the above services but took no part in them. However, Rev A.T. Boas of Adelaide and Rev D.I. Freedman of Perth participated in the service of 6 January. They afterwards wrote to the president of the Great Synagogue to express their 'sense of admiration and appreciation of the very beautiful service held on Sunday last ..., and also to thank you very much for the honour conferred on us by permitting us to take part in the service, an honour, we can assure you, which will be pleasingly recognised by our respective congregations as a mark of respect to them'.<sup>66</sup>

With regard to these services and, indeed, the celebrations generally, the *Hebrew Standard* had very little to say. 'In our columns,' the paper said, 'it is impossible to do justice to the great event now being celebrated, or to do more than add a word of praise to those universally expressed at the brilliant success of all that has been done'.<sup>67</sup> It seems obvious that the scale of the celebrations together with the extensive reportage of the general press precluded the *Standard* from giving any serious attention to the subject, though it is surprising that even the synagogue service and other Jewish involvement received only brief mention. At that stage of the paper's history, its resources would have been entirely inadequate, editorially and otherwise, to attempt to cover in its pages the fast moving celebratory events.

### THE CONFERENCE AFFAIR

Although all of the relevant Jewish histories furnish practically no detailed, or any, information relating to the Commonwealth celebrations, they all mention, understandably, and even discuss, the abortive conference of Jewish ministers originally intended to be held in Sydney in January 1901. G.J. Cohen, president of the Great Synagogue, issued an invitation to the ministers for that purpose, to be attended as well by some invited lay representatives. Cohen believed that it would be advantageous to discuss matters of general Jewish concern, with a view to furthering the interests of Judaism on an Australia wide basis. Two only of the interstate ministers attended this preliminary conference. Rabbi Abrahams declined to attend as he felt that he had been treated with great discourtesy when he attended the synagogue service held in Sydney on Commonwealth Sunday because he had not been invited to participate in the service. The synagogue Board claimed that he had not notified them of his intention to be present. Abrahams was finally



asked to read one of the Psalms, which he refused to do, feeling that he had been slighted.<sup>68</sup> The fact was that Abrahams was the senior Australian Rabbi, head of the Melbourne Beth Din, a good preacher and scholar, apart from being the son-in-law of Rev A.B. Davis, the minister of the Great Synagogue. In hindsight, it would have been a fine gesture if he had been asked to deliver one of the sermons at the Great Synagogue. There was apparently no consultation with him regarding the conference. Overall, it does seem that the leaders of the Sydney congregation were somewhat condescending towards Rabbi Abrahams, particularly as Sydney was also the focus of the Commonwealth celebrations. They were, perhaps, not unmindful of tensions then existing between the rabbinate in Melbourne and the Sydney congregation which still lacked a fully qualified rabbi.

Further attempts, at a later date, it will be seen, also failed to secure the co-operation of the Melbourne religious leaders in a ministerial conference. Of this, Rabbi Porush has written, 'a beautiful vision of unity and co-operation foundered on the rocks of immaturity'.<sup>69</sup> The affair, as Suzanne Rutland writes, 'well illustrates the proverbial rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne'.<sup>70</sup> The conference *contretemps* was first provoked by perceived discourtesy, on a personal level, felt by Abrahams. Today, however, it can surely be said that all the conference arrangements might have been made with much more tact and consideration on the part of all parties. According to Rabbi Abrahams, he was concerned that his name was not included in the printed programme to indicate the ministers participating in the above service. In his explanation given to the *Jewish Herald* Abrahams spoke of 'unparalleled discourtesy' by the lay authorities and he considered that, as he said, 'the whole Victorian Jewish community has been slighted'.<sup>71</sup> The Board of the Great Synagogue contented itself with a denial of the discourtesy alleged against it.

The Sydney conference failed to achieve anything, for, it was not adequately representative of the various Jewish communities, it did not seem to have been properly planned, and it commenced with a serious dispute resulting in the complete abstention of the Melbourne ministry. Nevertheless, even if the initiative for the conference came from Sydney, it was a first step, albeit a weak one, to secure and promote wider co-operation between all the Jewish communities of the Commonwealth. The ministers who attended it were Revs Davis, Landau, Wolinski and Phillipstein of the Great Synagogue, and Boas and Freedman from interstate. They were joined by members of the Synagogue Board, G.J. Cohen, N.D. Cohen, L. Phillips, A. Blashki, J.J. Cohen, N.S. Cohen, M. Gotthelf, and R.L. Moss. The *Jewish Herald* provided a report, in some detail,



of the proceedings.<sup>72</sup> Landau was careful to say that it was necessary that such a conference should have the imprimatur of the whole of Australian Jewry. As subjects for discussion, he instanced the ritual, the causes of intermarriage, the status of school teachers, interchange of pulpits, charity procedures, the means to be adopted for bringing children to love Judaism, the conditions of the young men, and missionary work. According to Boas, there was a need for unity of procedure by which the communities conducted 'their religious constitutions'. As one of many questions, he mentioned the making of proselytes. Freedman, for his part, thought that Judaism in Australia required 'solidification'. Its future, as he saw it, rested on the question of proselytism, yet, each congregation dealt with it quite independently. Finally, A.B. Davis voiced the hope that the conference might eventually lead to the establishment of a United Synagogue of Australia and an Australian Chief Rabbi.

The conference resolved, that: 'It is highly desirable in the interests of Judaism to hold periodical conferences between ministers and representative laymen of the synagogues of Australia'. It was suggested that the first conference be held in Melbourne in the following May, and that the convenor be the president of the Great Synagogue. The May date was suggested as the first Commonwealth Parliament was to be ceremoniously opened in that city at that time, and it was expected that representatives of the Jewish ministry and laity would be able to meet together on that occasion. The proposed agenda for such a conference, it will be seen, was to lead only to dissension in the minds of the Victorian ministers. Further, Abrahams was still smarting from his treatment in Sydney, and the suggestion that G.J. Cohen in Sydney be the convenor of the Melbourne conference would hardly have been palatable in Melbourne. It has also to be appreciated that the Orthodox ministry was then under pressure from some congregational minority groups for changes in ritual and other religious procedures tending in the direction of Reform Judaism. The prospect, therefore, of lay representation at a communal conference was regarded by some Orthodox elements with a degree of suspicion.

Under these circumstances, Abrahams' personal slight served only to exacerbate the situation. He had already given previous indications, within the Melbourne Jewish community, of his concern over matters of personal dignity and status. However, it might be wrong to be too judgmental on that account. By way of illustration, on a non-Jewish level, Cardinal Moran had encouraged a measure of unity for his Australian Church, and was also an outstanding supporter of Federation. During the Inauguration of the Commonwealth in Sydney, the government assigned him a prece-



dence immediately below that of the Anglican Archbishop. The Cardinal resented that action, claiming that he was the senior religious leader, and he declined to attend the official ceremony. That, indeed, was a precedent, even if on different level, which may shed some light on Rabbi Abrahams' personal stand relating to his actions on the question of the above conference. In general, it is abundantly clear that the Australian Jewish communities were still very provincial in outlook in 1901. Even though there was a federal spirit in the air, it was pure optimism to think that these scattered communities were ready to be subject to unifying influences.

A renewed conference was called at the southern venue in May, to be attended by ministers of the Australian and New Zealand congregations and by three lay members of each of them. Shortly before the date fixed for this meeting it became known that all the Victorian ministers, including all the members of the Beth Din, had withdrawn support for the conference and would not attend. The reason given by the Melbourne Beth Din was that they believed that the tendencies of many of the delegates to the conference were antagonistic to Orthodox Judaism.<sup>73</sup> Revs Boas and Freedman were again enthusiastic and similar support for the conference came from Brisbane and even Wellington, New Zealand. President, W.B. Isaacs of St Kilda congregation, stated that there was a lack of approval for the action of the Beth Din, and he was supported in this view by president Mendel Cohen of East Melbourne congregation. The Ballarat congregation disagreed with the opposition to the conference by Rev Goldreich.<sup>74</sup> At the Annual Meeting of St Kilda congregation in 1901 the president again expressed regret that the conference had been frustrated.<sup>75</sup> At the Annual Meeting of the Adelaide congregation, its president, L. Isaacs, thought that some of the ministers had done themselves great harm having regard to the inadequacies of the reason advanced for the refusal to participate in the conference.<sup>76</sup>

In Sydney, the *Standard* enabled both sides in the dispute to express its views. From Brisbane, Jonas M. Myers wrote, saying that 'the *non possumus* of popedom has been evinced by the Melbourne Beth Din'.<sup>77</sup> A letter came from Rabbi Isidor Bramson in defence of Rabbi Abrahams' position, pointing out that a conference on Jewish law had to be constituted by rabbis only.<sup>78</sup> To the same effect, Elias Green, an orthodox identity prominent in later years, maintained that the conference, if held, would have led to procedures not known to traditional Jewish law.<sup>79</sup> In his history of the Great Synagogue, Rabbi Porush was probably correct, in his considered opinion that the fears of the Melbourne Beth Din relating to ritual matters were 'somewhat plausible' and motivated its attitude



towards the proposed conference. However, he added that 'personal sensitivities' played a part in the dispute.<sup>80</sup> Almost a half a century was to pass before any further moves were to be made on a wide Australian basis to bring the Jewish ministry together in discussion on the current and future position of Judaism in Jewish life and well being in Australia. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Jewish communities were still rather small in numbers, disorganised, and far too parochial to begin to consider seriously and debate the broader issues that called for unified action. While some would have welcomed the initiative attempted to be taken by the lay leaders of the Great Synagogue in Sydney, there remained the question why some of the influential religious leaders in Melbourne were so strongly opposed to the holding of a conference. It is far from easy, today, to offer a confident and simple answer to that question.

Councillor Joseph Marks, in Melbourne, as president of the Melbourne congregation, together with representatives of St Kilda congregation, presented an Address to the Governor-General who had been known to them as a former Governor of Victoria. 'Among all the citizens of the Commonwealth,' the Address said, 'Your Excellency will receive no more devoted allegiance than from the members of the Hebrew faith'.<sup>81</sup> Australian Jewish leaders of that time were almost all like-minded in such expressions of loyalty though, with the passage of time, they have come to be regarded as somewhat effusive. In the nineteenth century the allegiance owed to the Crown was considered to be a fundamental principle of colonial society, and for many years afterwards the Jewish communities, in particular, were strong in their profession of those sentiments.

As the time approached for the opening of the parliament by the Duke of Cornwall and York, an Address, described as 'one of the prettiest',<sup>82</sup> was presented to him by representatives of the Melbourne, East Melbourne, and St Kilda congregations. The Address, in part, said:

When the joyous news reached Australia that our late beloved Queen Victoria had decided to prove her affection for her people in commissioning Your Royal Highness to open the first Federal Parliament in person, none were more thrilled with this indication of Royal goodwill than were our co-religionists...<sup>83</sup>

The president of the Melbourne congregation, Councillor Marks, reported at the Annual Meeting that he made the presentation to 'our future King and Queen'.<sup>84</sup> When the Royal visitors arrived in New South Wales a further Address was presented on behalf of the Jewish community. It was contained in a silver casket



which was on view in the vestry of the Great Synagogue.<sup>85</sup> As regards the Adelaide congregation, its president, L. Isaacs, stated that, through a mistake, no similar Address was made by it.<sup>86</sup>

### THE FIRST PARLIAMENT

Jewish members elected in 1901 to the first Commonwealth Parliament were, Isaac Isaacs (for the seat of Indi, North East Victoria), Vaiben Solomon for South Australia (then one State wide constituency), Pharez Phillips for Wimmera (Western Victoria), and Elias Solomon for Fremantle, Western Australia. Each of them was an experienced politician, having been a member of a colonial parliament. Both Isaacs and Vaiben Solomon had been particularly active in such politics, and they were both delegates to the Constitutional Convention. Much of the early legislation of the first parliament, which continued until 1903, was of prime importance for the new Commonwealth. The government, led by Sir Edmund Barton, was Liberal-Protectionist in its policies, while the opposition, of which Sir George Reid was the leader, followed a Free-Trade conservative policy. A third political force was the rising Labour party which held a balance of power as neither of the other parties had a majority in its own right.

Isaacs was appointed to the Library Committee of the parliament, Vaiben Solomon to the Standing Orders Committee, and Elias Solomon to the Printing Committee. Against the name of Vaiben Solomon in the first volume of *Hansard* there is an asterisk, signifying his acting at some stage as a temporary Chairman of Committees.<sup>87</sup> On the election of Elias Solomon, two successive petitions were lodged against his return. Following the reports of the Election and Qualification Committee both petitions were dismissed by the parliament as they did not comply with the relevant law of Western Australia.<sup>88</sup> In opposition to the censure motion in 1901 by Reid, Pharez Phillips emphasised that he was elected as a Barton supporter. Two candidates stood against him in the election, and he had been placarded, as he remarked in parliament, as a high tariff candidate. He claimed to be cognisant of the government's tariff policy which remained Protectionist whilst also raising revenue, the motto being, as he said, 'Revenue without destruction'. He was anxious for it to be known that he was a consistent government supporter, and that Barton was entitled to supremacy.<sup>89</sup> Phillips had been an active Free-Trader in Victorian politics, a member of the Upper House, and a Minister without Portfolio in the Turner Government.<sup>90</sup> Phillips was a lawyer and was also active in local government. He remained a member of the Commonwealth



Parliament until 1906. It is clear from the *Hansard* of the first parliament that he was an infrequent speaker in the debates and proceedings.

It may be of passing interest that the question of a prayer for the daily commencement of proceedings was the subject of some early discussion in the parliament. Reminiscent of remarks he made in the Convention, Sir Edmund Barton mentioned that he had no objection to a prayer which the Unitarians would find acceptable and which 'a member of the Hebrew faith' could readily accept. On this question, seeing that the Lord's Prayer had been mentioned, Vaiben Solomon said that he had no objection whatever to it, though at the same time other views had to be considered, and the particular form of prayer needed to be unobjectionable to all sections of the community.<sup>91</sup> However, at the front of the first volume of the *Hansard* is printed the prayer by the Governor-General when he formally opened the Parliament on 9 May 1901. It concluded with the Lord's Prayer and an invocation of the Christian Deity. It should be remembered that section 116 of the constitution prohibited the establishment by the Commonwealth of any religion or the imposition of any religious observance or test. In deference to the spirit of that constitutional provision, it is rather doubtful that the parliament could adopt prayers reasonably objectionable to members or to sections of the community.

### ISAAC ISAACS IN PARLIAMENT

In the light of his later eminent career, the role of Isaac Isaacs in the first parliament invites attention. Prior to embarking upon Federal politics, Isaacs had experienced some nine years in Victorian politics, rising to the position of Attorney-General in that colony, as well as being Acting Premier for a short time. Notwithstanding his manifest abilities, he was not always trusted by his colleagues, and he certainly was never popular in the Assembly or in Cabinet. He seems to have received some consideration for appointment to the first Commonwealth ministry. Deakin and Turner, his former Victorian colleagues, had higher claims than he, and Isaacs had to wait until 1905 when he became the Attorney-General in the second Deakin government. Of his role in the parliament and as a member of the ministry for a short period, it is true to say, as does Cowen, that he 'brought to parliament and government a high legal skill and massive knowledge and learning'.<sup>92</sup> There were, of course, a few others in parliament at that time with marked legal skills. Isaacs' learning, however, exceeded them all. While he was by no means alone in being verbose, it was the extent of his learning, which he



often introduced into his speeches and brought to bear upon his listeners, that had the effect of wearying those who were obliged to listen to these addresses. This same prolixity of his was evidenced in the lengthy judgments, filled with numerous authorities and learning, later written by him as a High Court judge.

In the parliament Isaacs gave expression at length to his protectionist views, at times, dogmatically and dramatically. Thus, he spoke against the censure motion by Reid who had questioned the Barton government's fiscal policy. 'We stand at the present moment,' he said, 'debating one of the greatest questions which can agitate this or any other community'. While all desired, he explained, to place Australia on the pinnacle of prosperity, the opposition party was asking the government to forget the pledge under which it was elected, claiming that its Free-Trade arguments would result in a 'political cataclysm'. Protection, he insisted, must be recognised as necessary for the country. His own argument must have been very close to that of the Labour party when he proceeded in florid language to condemn the laissez faire fiscal ideas of the opposition. 'Liberty!, why, that is the argument,' he remarked, 'that capital always uses to labour. It is the argument of the man who claims the right, without restriction, to employ any man he chooses, of any sex he pleases, at any price he thinks fit, for as many hours as he can get them to work, under any circumstances and conditions'.<sup>93</sup> Remarks by Isaacs, such as those quoted above, as well as other political statements of his, enable one to agree with Cowen's summation, that he 'had a good deal of sympathy for many aspects of the Labour programme without being in any way a supporter of socialism'.<sup>94</sup> For those times, Isaacs and others in his party, followed policies which were generally described as radical.

It was widely agreed in the parliament that it was necessary to make the 'White Australia' policy secure by restricting immigration, mainly from Asia, of coloured people, and by phasing out the Melanesian kanakas employed in the Queensland sugar cane industry. This was done by the Immigration Restriction bill and by the Pacific Island Labourers bill. While many saw the motivation for the legislation as the protection of Australian wages and the standard of living, there was of course also a strong racial element. By these measures effect was given to what Barton described as the 'White Australia' policy. Isaacs, in his election speeches, had expressed fears, as did many others, that Asia's 'teeming millions' could become a danger to Australia. Out of deference for Imperial concerns, the government included a European dictation test in the legislation rather than the outright exclusion of migrants by reason of their colour or race. Isaacs spoke in the House on the immigration



question in no uncertain terms, as others did likewise. With reference to this immigration policy, it has to be appreciated that the exclusion of a class of migrants, by reason of their particular race and character, came to be universally seen as being essential for the welfare of the nation. While, today, 'White Australia' has been abandoned as national policy, the policy was, however, virtually an axiom of political faith a century ago. A brief quotation from a long speech by Isaacs is appropriate:

I recognise to the fullest extent that here in Australia we have a white man's war; it is a struggle for life; it is a struggle for that higher and fuller life that all progressive nations must feel and share in ... I would resist to the utmost, if it were necessary, any murky stream from disturbing the current of Australian life ... I recognise that all this paraphernalia of the Commonwealth, all the splendour that we see around us, all the officialdom, from the Governor-General downwards, would be a mere nothing if it were not going to better the lot of the workers of Australia, the men who are at the base of the whole structure ... I believe that it is possible for us, while treasuring our heritage as a portion of this Empire, while standing loyally and faithfully to the flag, to rear here without aggression a stalwart and strong race, which will not be degraded or contaminated by any influences such as we fear.<sup>95</sup>

The 'White Australia' legislation, therefore, as Isaacs concluded in common with his parliamentary colleagues, was vital for the Commonwealth and its future.

Towards the end of the South African War, when the government was considering the dispatch of an Australian contingent, the Governor-General, in the course of a speech early in 1902, remarked that he was aware of the government's intentions and freely approved of the delay regarding the proposed contingent. This speech led to a motion by the opposition on the part of Sir George Reid criticising Lord Hopetoun for involving himself in party politics and disclosing confidential government discussions. Reid's action, however, was more of an attack on the Barton administration, and apart from Barton and Isaacs, the few who spoke in the House on the matter were not friends of that administration. This must have brought into question Isaacs' stand in joining, in effect, speakers adverse to the administration of which he was a party supporter. In his opening comments he knew well that his political loyalty might be questioned when he appeared to be defending himself by asserting that the issue raised by the motion was 'not a party



question,' and that it called for an expression of views in principle.<sup>96</sup> He must have made himself rather conspicuous as a Barton supporter in taking up an independent attitude on a matter which, though focusing on ill advised remarks of the Governor-General, reflected to an extent on the leader of the government. Isaacs, indeed, chose to say that the better case was made out by the leader of the opposition who, as did Isaacs himself, highlighted the Governor-General's apparent intervention on a policy question for which the ministry alone had the responsibility. Sir Zelman Cowen does not mention this particular stand by Isaacs. This issue does serve to illustrate Cowen's statement, that Isaacs 'must have had a very keen sense of standing alone and apart from his peers...'<sup>97</sup> It was all very well for him to have provided, on that occasion, a brief lecture to parliament on the subject of ministerial responsibility as 'a fundamental principle of the Constitution'. Within the parliament itself he was not a popular or likeable figure.

The status of the federal judges, and of the High Court, in particular, pursuant to the Constitution, was of special interest and concern to Isaacs whose views on the subject will be found in the debate in 1903 on the Judiciary bill. Though Deakin and Barton had fully expounded their ideas on the nature of the new judiciary, it is understandable that Isaacs would not have left the opportunity to pass without adding his own thoughts on such a subject. Here, again, as seems to have become his custom, and continued to be so, matters upon which he chose to speak were declared by him to be of the utmost importance. 'I apprehend,' he said of the Judiciary bill, 'that no legislative proposal has been yet offered for the consideration of the Federal Parliament which was more pregnant with the future of this Commonwealth than in the Bill now before us'.<sup>98</sup> To those who thought that the legislation was not free of defects, Isaacs suggested to them, as he put it, that 'half the commandments of the decalogue are imperfect obligations'.<sup>99</sup> If that remark of his was intended as a serious comment, then, even in the present day, there will be found few representative Christians or Jews who would speak of the Ten Commandments of Scripture in like terms. However, there was a minority of parliamentarians who, unlike Isaacs and the leaders of his party, felt that the High Court did not warrant the very special attention envisaged in the bill. Some thought that it would suffice for the chief justices of the states to act also as High Court justices. The majority of parliament was persuaded, as Isaacs insisted, that the High Court had to be the repository of the highest judicial power in the Commonwealth, 'the authoritative expositor and arbiter as to the meaning of the Constitution and of the laws made under it'.<sup>100</sup> He sought to impress



upon the parliament the necessity of reaching a correct resolution of the question being debated. 'We ought to recollect,' he declared, 'that we stand here upon the threshold of our united life. We should remember that the direction which the rivulet obtains determines the ultimate course of the stream for all time'.<sup>101</sup> In those remarks he was probably expressing his concerns as to the extent to which appeals from the High Court should be permitted to reach the Privy Council in England. Another 70 years passed before such appeals were finally abolished. Isaacs himself was essentially an Australian nationalist in sentiment, a trait of his which led him into some exaggeration in his estimation of the Privy Council, protesting in the debate if Australians were to be 'ruled by the crude and uninformed arguments of lawyers 12,000 miles away'.<sup>102</sup> As Cowen comments, Isaacs' advocacy perhaps had carried him too far in giving utterance occasionally to a sweeping statement not then expected of a lawyer of his standing.

A bill for Conciliation and Arbitration in industrial disputes extending beyond any one state came into the parliament in 1903. Isaacs had supported such a system in Victoria at the Constitutional Convention. The legislation contained some rather controversial provisions, such as elements of compulsion, and its applicability to public servants, whether federal or state. However, the bill was heralded by Isaacs as being of the greatest significance, and he spoke of it in language which listeners had come to expect. As he said in the debate:

The Bill appears to come to us recommended by the very highest public considerations that could justify any legislative proposal. I regard it as the natural outcome of many generations of development, as providing the substitute that higher civilisation of today demands for what is undoubtedly an archaic, erratic and ruinous personal struggle... it marks an era in our social and economic history... I dare hope that this Bill, which aims at closing every chasm that separates labour from capital and at keeping both on the continuous field of action, may bring to us greater blessings than even the clearest sighted of us can foresee.<sup>103</sup>

The bill had to be dropped by the government and no amount of rhetoric, whether by Isaacs or others, was able to secure its passage at that time.

In 1903 the Seat of Government bill was the subject of debate but because of disagreement between the two Houses as to the future site of the capital the bill was shelved. The constitution required



that the capital should be in New South Wales and distant not less than 100 miles from Sydney. Isaacs voiced his views on the matter, remarking that it was 'a very momentous question, in which is bound up a great deal of the future of Australia'.<sup>104</sup> He indicated his preference for the town of Albury as the capital, and he mentioned that Sir Henry Parkes had been of a similar opinion. While he noted that some desired Bombala for the site, he regarded it as 'the freezing chamber of Australia'. Albury, on the other hand, which was close to his own constituency, had the advantage, he thought, of being on the Murray River, it adjoined three States, and was served by the Great Southern Railway. He conceded that New South Wales could not be robbed of its rights, and he argued that local feeling should not be allowed to determine the matter.

In one sense, it is true to say that Isaacs did not speak too often, and he did not monopolise the course of debates in the first parliament. Yet, as has been seen, whenever he chose to speak, he usually did so with great emphasis, seeking to create the impression that he was an expert on the particular question. Lest there be any doubt as to his views, he often chose to speak at length, introducing references and authorities to add more strength to his remarks. Nevertheless, apart from some of the acknowledged leading parliamentarians, Isaacs' contributions to the debates were substantial, though his style as a speaker would have detracted from the force which he aimed to give to his views. It is no easy task for the reader of today to attempt to plough through the particular pages of *Hansard* which alone provide the evidence of Isaacs as a leading parliamentarian in the formative and historic first parliament of the Commonwealth. In this parliament, as, indeed, in his later career, the power of Isaacs' intellect was beyond question. Yet, the style of his mind, his particular personality and character, did not endear him to those with whom he was associated. As Cowen concludes, Isaacs became a major figure, and it is unfortunate that his defects weighed heavily with some,<sup>105</sup> not least an individualism which seemed to set him apart as a somewhat solitary character, even in the manner of the expression of his political views and ideas.

#### VAIBEN SOLOMON, ELIAS SOLOMON, AND PHAREZ PHILLIPS

Vaiben L. Solomon was a prominent identity in the first parliament, a popular member of the House, and a forceful and knowledgeable speaker. He remained a member for about two years until the elections for the second parliament when he was defeated at the polls,



his State then being divided into electoral divisions. In 1905 Solomon became active in politics at the state level. He was a practical, pragmatic politician, given to compromise. Though a Free-Trader he saw little difference in the House between that policy and Protection. His experience on that question, he said, was that in South Australia the prophecies of advancement from protection were absolutely belied.<sup>106</sup> With reference to the High Court, he saw it as more than a court of appeal. It would serve also to protect the rights of the different states as against the Commonwealth, and as 'the highest and most intelligent tribunal,' as Solomon chose to say of it, he thought that its judges should be elected. Speaking early in the parliament in the Address-in-Reply, he urged that the Northern Territory should be taken over by the Commonwealth instead of it being the responsibility of a small state such as South Australia. He warned against expenditure beyond the means of the Commonwealth, including old age pensions and the high cost of defence. 'We have no special patent means,' Solomon said, 'of making money. We are not likely to receive showers of gold from the heavens day by day for any extravagant proposals as the children of Israel received by *manna* in the wilderness'.<sup>107</sup> The franchise, he stated, should be the same throughout the whole country, and he added that no harm had come from the grant of the franchise to women in South Australia. On the issue of White Australia, he told the House that he had supported the restriction of Chinese immigration, that he was pledged to the White Australia policy, and that it was his duty to help maintain it. At the same time, however, he pointed out that he had lived among the coloured races in the North of the country and had employed them. On the occasion of the Immigration Restriction bill, his general attitude towards the coloured people was in clear contrast to Isaacs who remarked that he 'would not suffer any black or tinted man to come in and block progress' — comments referred to by Cowen as being crude in character.<sup>108</sup> Solomon must have been among the few who did not speak of these people in disparaging language. He feared, so he said, 'their virtues, their industry, their indomitable perseverance, their frugality, and their ability to compete against the European labour'.<sup>109</sup> He instanced the tremendous influx of Chinese into Port Darwin, resulting in undesirable competition with the rest of the population. It will be seen, then, that he had the courage and sensitivity, based on his own experiences, to refer publicly to the coloured migrants in words other than those of the more conventional denigration of that time. At another time in the House, Solomon raised the question of an extraordinary vacancy in that House, mentioning that an expense of £5,000–£6,000 might be incurred in electing a new mem-



ber, which differed, under the constitution, from the simpler procedure in the case of a Senate vacancy. He also referred, more than once, to the Inter-State Commission, provided for by the constitution, but not then set up. He felt that the Commission could deal with rival state railway rates, fair trade and commerce, and the use of river waters.

Overall, Vaiben Solomon was a true federalist, though he strongly argued for the rights of the smaller states, such as South Australia, as against the influence and power of New South Wales and Victoria. As he had said at the Convention, Federation was the objective, and not absorption. In 1898, when the Bill was finally submitted to the voters of his colony, Solomon was one of the select few who successfully urged support for the proposed constitution in an appeal to The People of South Australia. This appeal claimed that Federation would lead to 'a new era full of hope and full of promise'.<sup>110</sup> In every way a different personality and figure than Isaacs, Solomon made a worthy contribution both as a delegate to the Convention and as a member of the first parliament.

### THE COMMONWEALTH JUBILEE

Sydney's Jewish community, in common with the other denominations, commemorated Federation by special religious services at the Great Synagogue. The *Standard* regarded it as 'an appropriate happy coincidence that the dawn of Australian Nationality should be celebrated on the occurrence of the Festival of Chanukah'.<sup>111</sup> That festival, on that occasion, had no particular significance or message for the birth of the new Commonwealth. The Great Synagogue was then, and continues to be, a centre to which the state's Jews were drawn to mark important communal events. So it was that the synagogue was the venue for a further historic celebration held on Sunday, 4 February 1951, when the Jubilee of the Commonwealth was commemorated. In the course of the sermon at this choral service, Rabbi Porush began by stating that there was no specific Jewish angle in the celebrations. Upon reflection, some may question that assertion. It was, after all, a jubilee celebration, a national event that was highly significant in Biblical Judaism. Rabbi Porush went on to say that the sons and daughters of Israel had played a worthy part in the development of the Commonwealth, but he added, that 'hysterical flag-waving' was to be deprecated, as it sprang from 'a sense of insecurity or from an inferiority complex'. Of the 50 years past, in summarising his message, the preacher concluded on a note — a Jewish angle — pregnant with meaning:



Count your blessings, count them against the background of world misery; scrutinise the opportunities destiny has placed in your path; beware of the selfishness which is the step-sister of prosperity; be vigilant over the great heritage which has come to you from the word of God and the traditions of your way of life. Above all, be morally and spiritually fortified for the tasks of the future, for, maybe, Providence has entrusted us with a destiny which is great and noble.<sup>112</sup>

No conscientious Jew at that time, surveying the history of the past in Australia, and looking ahead to the future, would have not fully appreciated this message from the pulpit of an historic Australian synagogue. It was delivered by one who had served at that time but a decade in the community. He was to continue in the same office for a further 20 years as a religious leader.

The Great Synagogue's *Journal*, in 1951, contained three separate articles relating to the Commonwealth's jubilee. David J. Benjamin, a noted Jewish historian, was then editor of that publication. The first of these articles was headed, 'The Birth of a Nation, The Great Synagogue's Part'. It did not add anything to what is included in the present writer's essay. With reference to the service held on 6 January 1901, the editor wrote: 'For the first time in the history of Australian Jewry, the representative heads of all Jewish communities were present,' and he said further, that 'Most of the visiting clergy took part in the service'.<sup>113</sup> However, this statement of the historical facts is barely significant, having regard to what has already been said by the present writer. Two interstate ministers, apart from the Great Synagogue ministers, participated in the service, whilst Rabbi Abrahams, the Victorian religious leader, was in no way involved other than as a visitor in the congregation. Now that 100 years have passed since the celebrations of the Commonwealth and the failed national Jewish conference, this 'first time' event in the history of Australian Jewry should only be mentioned and discussed in the context of what might have been. It showed only how divided and parochial the Jewish communities then appeared to be. The same issue of the above *Journal* presented a brief account of the Commonwealth Jubilee Service, including an interesting extract from the rabbi's sermon, accompanied by an illustration of the representative official party in attendance.

### A JEWISH CONTRIBUTION?

A final *Journal* item was entitled, 'Jews and Federation'. It, too, was short and it can be seen that the editor drew entirely on the data fur-



nished in Harold Glass' account published by this Historical Society. It concluded, again, with the comment, 'The most striking feature of this Jewish participation in Australian public affairs is the fact that there was no such thing as a Jewish contribution to the Federal movement'.<sup>114</sup> It needs to be asked, since the lack of such a contribution by Jews, as Jews, has been mentioned by several writers, what there was about it to warrant it being seen as a 'most striking feature'. In fact, throughout the nineteenth century in Victoria, as has been stated by Hilary L. Rubinstein, 'The threat of erosion dogged the Victorian Jewish community,'<sup>115</sup> well into the next century. Because of the dominance of Anglo-Jewish leadership, the philosophy of Australian Jewry 'was to eliminate any differences between Jew and non-Jew except in the very narrow religious sense'.<sup>116</sup> During those times well known Jews were, or aspired to be, super British in outlook, they were anxious to be seen as great loyalists, and, wherever possible, to be in the forefront of national endeavour. In this more subtle sense — not so obvious to non-Jews — is this not a source of the direction which resulted in the contribution of Jews such as Isaacs, Vaiben Solomon, and others? In New South Wales, for example, the Jewish profile of Julian Salomons tended very strongly against Federation as he led himself to believe, as a staunch Britisher, that the movement would spell the end of Australian ties with the Empire. All of these well known Jews, springing from the small enclave of colonial Jewry, were driven in varying degrees — Isaacs above all — by ambition and a heightened sense of deep pride in their position, in marked contrast to the situation of their co-religionists in other countries. In the case of Isaacs, leading federalist as he was, colleagues such as Deakin and Barton, from their perspective, greatly disliked and distrusted the extent of Isaacs' ambition. As indicated, Deakin had ascribed to him the 'littleness of the Rabbinical mind'.

It is true, of course, that the Jewish reader will reject such epithets. Yet, the fact remains that eminent contemporaries persuaded themselves that therein was to be found a Jewish contribution to the federal movement. Also, in a more subtle sense, whether directly so appreciated, or not, Jewish religious and ethical teachings and principles influenced the actions and thoughts of their adherents. Even today, irrespective of the degree of attachment to traditional Judaism, Jews who have gained distinction in their careers, especially in some of the professions, or, who have earned esteem for their role in national life, are said — almost always by non-Jews — to manifest the effects of the Jewish heritage. The influence of such a heritage, it has to be said, is not easily demonstrated in every instance. However, there has persisted a strong Jewish tradition of



service to one's fellows, often extending beyond the Jewish community. It is barely necessary to refer to any authority for this statement, for, it is too well known and understood, not least by Jews who are aware of their traditions and history. Thus, it can be seen from Cowen's biography of Isaacs that at the peak of his earlier career, and then just over 50 years of age, his correspondence contained discussions on religious themes, enabling Cowen to detect therein 'a strong sense of cultural Jewishness'.<sup>117</sup> Taking Isaacs, then, as an example, he was possessed of an underlying Jewish outlook and philosophy of mind, without, it is admitted, being a conformist in all matters of his religion. Salomons, on the other hand, always an opponent of federalism, and also, religiously, a non-conformist, had a marked Jewish profile. This, no doubt, was a factor in his life of service to his profession and to the general community, as well as his passion for the freedoms and justice guaranteed, as he saw it, by the British institutions which Anglo-Jewry valued so highly. Rabbi Dr Hermann Adler, a former Chief Rabbi, speaking in London over a century ago, was able to distil, in practical terms, the religious obligations owed by the Jew to his gentile neighbour. 'We must likewise fully share,' he remarked, 'the civic and political life of our nation, and work zealously for its welfare... We must evince a thorough and vivid interest in all the institutions of our beloved land, in all movements, whether of a philanthropic, social, or educational character'.<sup>118</sup> Those sentiments were expressive, indeed, of Jewish values, and they would have been implicit in some of the motivation of colonial Jews, many of them of English origins, towards the federal movement.

It is plain enough that there was no basis, in the case of the Jewish communities, for a Jewish contribution to Federation. Had their members, and especially their leaders, been far sighted and not provincial in their general outlook, they would have realised that the spirit of unification was also beneficial to the interests of Australian Jewry. Their support for the federal movement, however, must have been influenced by considerations unrelated to their position as Jews, and certainly unrelated to the immediate need for the development of unity among Australian Jews. If, therefore, there had been a visible Jewish contribution to Federation, it would be expected to have been motivated by this need. The Jewish attitude at that time was the antithesis of that publicly shown by the leader of the Catholic Church, Cardinal Moran who, as Eris O'Brien rightly observed, 'helped to convince the Australian public that the Federal ideal was possible in politics as well as in ecclesiastical affairs'.<sup>119</sup> He was so imbued with the federal cause that he finally, unsuccessfully, stood for election as a delegate to the



Convention from New South Wales. It is recorded that a group of other churchmen set apart a day of public prayer 'to avert from the nation the calamity of electing a Cardinal to fashion the Constitution of Australia'.<sup>120</sup> The Cardinal's influence would have swayed many, particularly, Catholics, towards Federation. In contrast, the Jewish supporters of the movement did not evidence, directly, a Jewish element or motivation in their work for it. There was, then, no such element disclosed as a contribution from Jews in the public eye. Perhaps, more importantly, the reason for that situation is that the Jewish communities were too disorganised and disunited to introduce a Jewish angle into the federal debate. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, there is to be found, relevantly, a subdued, and not unimportant, Jewish factor in the contributions by the Jewish supporters — as well as the opponents — of the movement.

The notion of the Commonwealth no longer divided by separate units, and forming one nation for the first time in 1901, had, indeed, a spiritual basis in the promotion of national and communal unity. This is referred to in numerous scriptural and other Jewish classical writings as being essential for the welfare of a people and a nation. Jews regarded it as such a *desideratum* that only the advent of the Messianic era would finally achieve and ensure the unity of all humanity. It is true, that this Judaic spiritual concept was referred to, for example, in Rev Landau's above mentioned special sermons when he stressed 'the inspiring sense of national unison' represented by the new Commonwealth. The sermons, however, rather dwelt more on other matters, and it may be asked, in retrospect, why the Jewish preachers and others did not take a much more emphatic stand on this religious and ethical important aspect of federation. A possible answer may well lie in the fact that Australian Jewry itself was far from united on many issues affecting its own immediate and future welfare.

In his *Sydney's Jewish Community*, Dr Hans Kimmel, included a note, headed, 'Jewish Jubilee Idea Acclaimed' in connection with the Commonwealth's Jubilee. The author was apparently concerned to mention a Jewish aspect which otherwise would have gone completely unnoticed.<sup>121</sup> He instanced the Commonwealth celebrations in Canberra on the evening of 31 December 1950 when the Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, Dr E.H. Burgmann stated in his address that the jubilee had good precedent as a Jewish idea derived from the book of Leviticus. Under this, Israel was directed to 'proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants'. It may be mentioned that the Australian Jewish Historical Society held an Exhibition for the Jubilee at which treasures of the



Great Synagogue were displayed. Later in 1951 one of the functions of the celebrations was the special Law Convention in Sydney to which distinguished lawyers from the Empire and America were invited. It was recorded that 'Sabbath, August 11, was a notable day in the history of the Synagogue. At the request of the Law Council of Australia a special service was held...and for the first time judges, barristers and solicitors, officially attended service'. Readers should refer, in this regard, to the Great Synagogue's *Journal* which contained an interesting account of the service, together with an appropriate illustration.<sup>122</sup> The service in question is now an item of historic significance. Among those in attendance was the late Professor Julius Stone who, as the present writer recalls, suggested to him why some of the judges wore red robes trimmed with ermine. It reminded him, he said, of the Prophet's statement, that though our sins are as scarlet, they should be as white as snow.

At the commencement of Kimmel's volume there is an article, extracted by him from the Jewish press, entitled 'Australia's Jubilee — Some Potentialities,' by Rabbi H.M. Sanger, of Melbourne. The opening paragraphs, short in themselves, merit citation:

At this moment Australia prepares to enter on her Jubilee Year, commemorating 50 years of the existence of a united Australia since the establishment of Federation. Besides such delightful speculations of what might have been, there will be much sober, yet proud reflection of what has actually happened during the last half century.

From an infant nation, Australia has grown to full maturity as a member of the United Nations, her manhood tested in the crucible of two world wars, the chapters of her adolescence closed.

The book of history lies open with a fresh, clean page on which to write the events to come.<sup>123</sup>

The immediate cause of Sanger's writing was the growing Jewish concern in that period about the government's immigration policy which was allowing considerable numbers of non-Jewish migrants from Germany into Australia, so shortly after the War and the Holocaust. However, the matter, a serious one at that time, need not be further pursued here.

Recent writers on the subject of Federation are agreed that the general public of today is not well informed on the history of so important an advance by Australians towards nationhood. Little is generally known about the actual work of those actively involved,



or about the events that finally led to the creation of the Commonwealth, the culmination of the intense efforts of the founding fathers and many others. In 1901 Australia's total population was barely four million. Popular support had to be mobilised against the opposition. Of about one million people eligible to vote, less than 43% were in favour of the constitutional change. It was a minority only of the electors who accepted it, though a majority of 72.4% was recorded by those who actually voted in support of Federation.<sup>124</sup> Within the last few months, two books have appeared, both with a popular appeal, rather than as histories, as such, on this topic. They both seem to take their cue from Deakin who wrote that Federation was 'secured by a series of miracles'. Brian Matthews' book carries the title, *Federation, the Federal Miracle*, while the other, by D. Hendon and J. Williams, is entitled, *Makers of Miracles*. Matthews, in his own words, tells of 'a great coming and going of characters, the rise and fall of resounding speeches, a succession of conferences and conventions...in the end, unlikely victory won'.<sup>125</sup> In the second book, the authors refer to the ANA banquet at Bendigo as a crucial turning point when both Isaacs and Higgins urged delay in further action, and they mention that Isaacs did not then get a good hearing, but that Higgins was better received because of his frankness.<sup>126</sup> The reader may wish to turn to an authoritative history, such as Manning Clark's, *A History of Australia*, where there is hardly a mention of any contribution to Federation on the part of Australian Jews. In the volume covering this period, Isaacs alone is referred to twice. He comes under notice by this eminent historian as one distrusted as a Jew by Barton, and also for his objection to granting franchise for aborigines as lacking 'the intelligence, interest or capacity as the rest of the people' to vote in federal elections.<sup>127</sup> The Jewish reader, therefore, will look in vain, with an occasional exception, to learn anything of a Jewish role, whether individual or communal, in the Federation story. For this reason, if for no other, the present writer has endeavoured to compile the relevant data of special Jewish interest. This account of the subject is opportune on this centenary occasion and worthy of the attempt, it is hoped, to present it within this *Journal* at this point of time. The writer, it will be seen, has been concerned not to isolate the Jewish characters on the stage of the events, and not to exaggerate their place and contribution. It is most important that they should be seen in the context, including their own small Jewish community, of the events and the scenario as they unfolded in the progress of the federal movement in the few years before the Commonwealth was established and in its first parliament.



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