

THE JEWS IN AUSTRALIA

by *Suzanne D. Rutland, Cambridge; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp.203, \$39.95.*

Suzanne Rutland's new book is, to a large extent, a condensed version of her earlier history, *Edge of the Diaspora* (1st edition 1988, revised edition 1997). The book was commissioned by the publishers as part of a series on ethnic groups.

The major theme of her previous books was the transformation of a small, conservative, isolated community as the result of European immigration since 1933. Jewish immigration was also a significant influence on the development of multiculturalism. One reviewer complimented her on bringing out this fact in all its ambiguity. The process of transformation remains the central theme of the present book.

Some of the new material in the book concerns the three major immigrant groups of the last 25 years—South Africans, Russians, and Israelis. There will be general agreement that South African Jews have made a significant impact on the local community, especially in Sydney, which accounts for 58 per cent of the immigrants. Although the level of migration has decreased since the peak years of the 1990s, new arrivals have continued to come because of the high level of crime and insecurity in South Africa. She also notes the different patterns of residence in Sydney and Melbourne, where 26 per cent of the immigrants have settled. In Sydney, most settled in the northern part of the city, especially in the affluent suburb of St Ives, and formed a distinct enclave with two new religious congregations. As the immigrants have become more integrated into the Sydney community, there has been a gradual shift to the eastern suburbs, where more than 60 per cent of the Jewish population lives. A similar shift has occurred in Melbourne, where there was a rapid growth of South African households in the Doncaster/Templestowe area on the north-eastern fringe of the Melbourne metropolis. In the past decade, more than half of these families have moved to the major area of Jewish communal activity in the south-eastern suburb of South Caulfield. The Central Synagogue, which opened in 2003, is familiarly called the 'Zulu Shul'.

Although the numbers are smaller, the impact of South African immigration has been most spectacular in Perth, where the small Jewish community of 3000 doubled in size as the result of the South African influx. Two new religious congregations were established as a result. The Carmel day school also acquired a large number of

South African students. More recently, the inflow has been greatly reduced as the result of restrictive Commonwealth Government policies. The Carmel school sends a team annually to South Africa to recruit new families.

Rutland presents South African immigration as a success story, making only a few references to its problematic aspects. She notes, briefly, that there has been some disaffection among the locals. This is a shorthand description of an outburst of correspondence in the *Australian Jewish News* in 2004, when feelings of disaffection were clearly on show. Regrettably, she does not refer to the adjustment difficulties of the South Africans themselves, which have been the subject of several studies.

Russian Jews (more precisely, Jews from the former Soviet Union) make up a smaller percentage of the local community. According to the Census of 2001, there were approximately 6000 Russian-Jewish immigrants, although the actual number is undoubtedly much larger. Their problems of adjustment have, of course, been considerably greater than those of the South Africans. As one of them has written, 'We arrived not from another country or another planet, but from a different constellation'. Unlike the South Africans, two-thirds of the Russian immigrants settled in Melbourne, and the Melbourne community has been particularly active in assisting the Russians to integrate. Rutland says much less about the Russians in Sydney, perhaps because there is less organised activity to report. She might, however, have mentioned the obvious Russian presence in the Bondi Beach area, dubbed 'Little Odessa' by the locals.

The present book devotes much more attention to the third immigrant group, the Israelis, than its predecessors. Although the majority of Israeli immigrants have only tenuous links with the organised Jewish community, more energetic efforts have been made in recent years to reconnect them. On the whole, the Israelis have little or no religious affiliation, and when they send their children to Jewish day schools they choose the non-Orthodox schools, King David in Melbourne and Emanuel in Sydney.

A completely new and disturbing topic in this book is that of the rise of antisemitic incidents, especially since the Palestinian intifada of 1987. Rutland refers particularly to the recurrent outbursts by the Islamic Mufti, Taj-el-din-el-Hilaly, who has accused Jews, among other things, of endeavouring to control the world through sexual perversion. She concludes that these activities represent no significant threat to the Jewish community, but she does not mention that the community now devotes substantial resources to the provision of security services.

If there is a general criticism to be made of the book, its relative brevity (162 pages of text, plus tables and bibliography) means that the author has little space for analysis. Although the publishers clearly felt the need for a compact version, the present book is no substitute for Rutland's earlier volumes. However, for those who wish to read a more concise and up-to-date version of Australian Jewish history, then this is the book for them.

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