

AUSTRALIAN JEWISH REACTIONS  
TO RUSSIAN JEWISH DISTRESS, 1891-1913

by  
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The Russian pogroms of 1881 had two principal effects upon the five million Jews of the Russian empire. The first was to begin the great wave of Russian Jewish migration to America, Britain and other lands. The second was the effect upon the remaining Jews of Russia. The May Laws of 1882 severely restricted the economic activities of Russian Jewry, curtailing their role as merchants, middlemen and traders, and condemning them to renewed and increasing poverty of a type virtually unknown even in the slums of the industrial world.<sup>1</sup> Not unnaturally, the prosperous and assimilated Jewish communities of the West, including Australia, reacted to this wave of persecution with outrage and sympathy for its victims.

However, this sympathy was surprisingly but frequently mixed with an ambivalent attitude towards the Jews of Russia. While willing to assist in relief efforts for them, western Jews feared — indeed dreaded — the prospect of hundreds of thousands of impoverished, uncultured, Yiddish-speaking refugees descending upon countries whose small and assimilated Jewish populations knew little prejudice. This paper examines the dimensions of this ambivalent attitude in Australia, specifically from 1891, when a false but generally believed and widely publicised report that the Franco-German Jewish philanthropist Baron de Hirsch was planning to send 500,000 Russian Jews to form an agricultural settlement in Australia appeared in the Australian press and caused general panic.<sup>2</sup>

One of the first manifestations of this Australian Jewish attitude had come in 1887 when Walter D. Benjamin, a well-known Sydney Jew, contributed an article to the *London Jewish Chronicle* in which he examined the suitability of Australia for Jewish immigration. The sum of his advice was that "for the resolute tiller of the soil, or for the skilled artisan . . . there were openings in profusion, but that the individual with proclivities towards traffic in brass jewellery, second-hand sponges, rehabilitated clothing and apocryphal cigars, or the recruit to the already large standing army of our co-religionists which subsists on interest, percentage and commission, would not meet with an enthusiastically cordial welcome, and would find competition in his line exceedingly keen."<sup>3</sup> Benjamin doubtless meant well, although in this insensitive presentation of stereotyped Jewish occupations he managed to sound almost as offensive as Marcus Clarke and some anti-semitic writers of the *Bulletin* school. In February 1891 he championed Russian Jewry against the aspersions of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* St. Petersburg correspondent, who felt that with their usury and "sly grog-selling" they brought their troubles on themselves, and who was castigated by Rev. Davis of the Great Synagogue as an apologist for Czarist oppression and a disgrace to British journalism.<sup>4</sup>

But Benjamin was an archetypal privileged western Jew who sympathised with his oppressed brethren's plight but could not translate that sympathy into practical benevolence if that entailed not merely fund-raising but welcoming the disadvantaged into the land where he himself found acceptance. In May 1891, alarmed by reports of the de Hirsch scheme, he wrote again to the *Jewish Chronicle* reiterating the views he had expressed five years earlier, and warning that the penniless Russian Jew was not wanted in Australia: "he would be regarded every whit as unfavourably as the

Chinese cook, the Hindoo hawker, the Kanaka plantation-hand, the Tamil servant, or the Lascar sailor". It was not that Australians were hard-hearted:

We give, in moderation, of our substance to the beggar who seeks our alms, but we refrain from asking him to take up his quarters permanently in our spare bedroom. So it is with the Russian Jew. We indignantly protest against the harsh treatment meted out to him by the authorities, and we append our names to subscription lists to aid him in his distress, but we would rather not have him in our midst . . . Australia sympathises with the Russian Jews, and with all who are down-trodden, but she would strenuously object to receive a class of immigrants likely to provoke a burden to the State.<sup>5</sup>

Almost immediately, Benjamin followed this up with a longer letter to the *Jewish Chronicle*, amplifying his views. He warned: "many worthy folks in England appear still to regard Australia as a veritable El Dorado, and emigration as the panacea for every form of poverty, and every phase of misfortune". He even went so far as to compare the hypothetical mass Russian Jewish migration to Australia with America's "negro problem" which "furnishes Australia with an eloquent warning". In America, "two separate and distinct races are growing up side by side, with different habits and diverse hopes, so that a community of interest — the power of cohesion which . . . holds . . . a nation together — is neutralised". Similarly, "indiscriminate immigration to Australia of the proscribed Russian Jews would lead to a like result, and their assimilation with the dominant nationality would assuredly never be effected". He concluded: "the Russo-Jewish incursion with which Australia is threatened is . . . calculated to bless neither the man that comes nor the land that receives".<sup>6</sup> However, many prominent Australian Jews besides Benjamin were troubled by the vexed question *ma yomru ha-goyim?*\* Rev. Dr. Abrahams of Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, for example, assured the *Argus* that "anxious as we are to ameliorate the condition of our oppressed brothers and sisters in faith, we are fully alive to the interests and claims of our fellow-citizens".<sup>7</sup> In other words, Australian Jewry would neither encourage nor facilitate the mass migration of Russian Jews.

On 4 May 1891, six leading members of the Melbourne Anglo-Jewish Association met to consider what their response should be to de Hirsch's alleged plan. E.L. Zox, the popular M.L.A. for East Melbourne (in whose office the six met) spoke forcibly in favour of a motion proposed by the secretary, architect Nahum Barnet, and seconded by Dr. Abrahams, which recommended that the London headquarters of the A.J.A. be told that "only sturdy agriculturalists with adequate means, willing to pioneer and open up new country, were suitable for emigration to Australia", and that despite its sympathy with Russian Jewry the Melbourne A.J.A. must "nevertheless strongly protest against any measures that might be adopted to bring about an emigration of a purely pauper class of people to cities which were already over-populated, and in which the struggle for existence was so great". Zox seems to have swayed the meeting's acceptance of this motion (which was regarded as premature by one of those present, Rev. Blaubaum of St. Kilda) by confiding that he had been approached by many constituents and others worried about an influx of Russian Jewish petty traders into Australia. Sympathetic as Australian Jewry was to

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\* "What will the non-Jew say?"

the plight of their co-religionists in Russia they had a clear duty as citizens to prevent an invasion of people likely to burden the country — or regarded as undesirable by Australians. Rev. Abrahams and Barnet spoke along similar lines, though the latter stressed that the usual image of Russian Jews as “a lot of thrifless small traders” was erroneous, since a substantial proportion of them were agriculturalists, for whom, under suitable auspices, there was “ample room in Australia”.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, Barnet informed the London A.J.A. that in view of widespread Australian hostility to the proposed de Hirsch scheme “Australian Jews had to yield to the pressure which was stubbornly forced upon them, and were obliged . . . with some degree of pain, to protest along with their fellow colonists against the fulfilment of a project which would bring disaster and trouble to all concerned”. He quickly added that Australian Jewry would welcome “the sturdy agriculturalist or pastoralist, who would become an important and necessary factor in the process of colonisation in this country, but they would decry any attempt that may be made to facilitate the immigration of the petty trader, the sweater-artisan and the like, who would crowd our already over-populated cities, increase the responsibilities of the local Jewish charitable institutions, and create an evil which older countries are so anxious to mitigate, and which Australia strives hard to avoid”.<sup>9</sup>

The *Jewish Herald*, edited by Blaubaum, felt uneasy about the Melbourne A.J.A.’s stance, and explained that the Jews of Melbourne were not consulted about it. The paper expressed confidence that “when the time comes . . . no Australian Jew will show that, in point of sympathy with their unfortunate Russian co-religionists they are behind the Jews of any other country”.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, during 1891 Australian Jewry seems to have contributed less than munificently to a fund for Russian Jewish relief. This prompted Bendigo businessman Abraham Samuel Gordon, himself from Russian Poland, to charge that Australia’s wealthiest Jews (then on the threshold of the financial crisis) held aloof: “our wealthy bankers, merchants, leaders of society, either fear the publicity that prominence in this movement would give to their semitic descent, or they indolently enshroud themselves in a cloak of apathy, neither caring nor wishing to know of the havoc and ruin with which the furious tide of fanaticism is decimating his [sic] fellow-Jew in another land”.<sup>11</sup> The London A.J.A. had, however, already made clear to the Melbourne branch its firm belief that fund-raising for relief of Russian Jewry within the confines of the Pale was a wasted effort. “No monetary help, however large, can effect an improvement [there]” it maintained, since money collected would not be permitted to reach the intended victims. As proof of this, it reminded the Melbourne branch that a scheme by Baron de Hirsch to finance technical and agricultural instruction to the Jews of the Pale was defeated owing to Czarist opposition. “It is only for purposes of emigration that pecuniary help can be efficacious”, it stated starkly.<sup>12</sup>

Small wonder, then, that advice such as that of Walter D. Benjamin and the Melbourne A.J.A. hardly raised the image of Australian Jewry in the eyes of the London A.J.A. and of other English Jewish organisations striving to find alternative homes for Russian Jewish refugees. A letter in the London *Jewish Chronicle* from B. Rosenfeld, a prominent English communal worker, lambasted Jews who joined in protests against the settlement of their own people. He asked how the A.J.A.’s objects could be achieved if its overseas members were to behave as those in Melbourne had done. “What an example of feeling to the world . . . how Jews are acting towards their own co-religionists”. Rosenfeld found Benjamin’s arguments equally shameful, and reminded him that “a goodly proportion of our most successful and wealthiest

Jewish brethren who started life in Australia were neither agricultural labourers nor artisans". Moreover, he suggested that "a great number of those who emigrated to Australia landed there poor boys, the very commission agents, dealers in old clothes, jewellery, et cetera, whom Mr. Benjamin thinks so very undesirable". They had become useful citizens of "the great and prolific country which God created for all his creatures and which some labouring [men] and would-be monopolists and such gentlemen as Mr. Benjamin and the Anglo-Jewish Association of Melbourne would claim as their inheritance". As for moneylenders, whom Benjamin had mentioned euphemistically, Rosenfeld observed that "before a man can lend money on interest he must have it to lend". He advised the Australian and other Jewish communities to ostracise those who practised "this despicable calling" and thus discourage new migrants from turning to it.<sup>13</sup>

A non-Jewish Englishman sarcastically asked whether it was the duty of Jews living in freedom, and surrounded by millions of acres of unoccupied land, to pass resolutions such as that of the Melbourne A.J.A. He ventured to ask "the majority of the leading Jewish citizens the amount of capital they had when they first landed" in Australia.<sup>14</sup> Equally scathing was an outburst in the London *Jewish World*. "Anything more degrading to the colonial character than this inhuman and dog in the mangerish temper we cannot conceive", it declared. "The Australian continent could take and provide for the whole Russo-Jewish population and not feel it." Although Australia needed agriculturalists badly, and despite de Hirsch's "unparalleled munificence", Australian Jews "propose to lay down such limitations as will save them from pecuniary sacrifice and even personal discomfort". With an obvious reference to Australia's beginnings as a penal settlement, the paper added:

Paupers are, perhaps, not very desirable people, but the paupers we shall send out will, at any rate, bear a good character, and their expatriation will be due to no fault of their own. Whatever prosperity Australia enjoys today has been largely derived from infinitely less promising material.<sup>15</sup>

Such indignation, however, perhaps failed to appreciate the extent of opposition to Russian-Jewish settlement which had surfaced in Australia in response to the reported de Hirsch plan, and which persisted after August 1892, when the British Colonial Office officially informed Sir Saul Samuel, Agent General for New South Wales, that there was no truth in the rumour that "thousands of pauper Russian Jews" were about to emigrate to Britain, Australia, and other British colonies.<sup>16</sup>

The press furore over the erroneous reports that 500,000 Russian Jews were to come to Australia was not, opined the *Jewish Herald*, "at all creditable to liberal-minded citizens in a free and prosperous country".<sup>17</sup> The paper regretted that for liberality of attitude the Melbourne press lagged far behind that of the "mother country": the London *Times* was singled out for its sympathetic stance. The *Jewish Herald* condemned (though it did not name) the *Age*, "always boasting of its liberalism" yet "has placed the Jews of Russia on a par with the [American] negroes, designating them both as alien races, but forgetting or ignoring the fact that the Russian Jews are not aliens". In a similar oblique way it condemned the *Argus* for a totally prejudiced feature on Russian Jews — an article which Blaubaum roundly condemned.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the *Jewish Herald* lamented that "to us Jews the incident has revealed the disappointing fact that even in Australia there is yet a good deal of prejudice against the Jews".<sup>19</sup> This prejudice manifested itself in a number of ways throughout the depressed 1890s.

In 1891 James Brown Patterson, M.L.A. for Castlemaine, a close associate of David

Syme of the *Age* (a newspaper whose method of reporting stories with a Jewish link gave frequent offence to Melbourne Jewry), and soon to be Premier of Victoria, maintained his reputation as a radically inclined ambitious demagogue by disparaging Russian Jews in a speech in his constituency and strongly opposing their entry into Victoria.<sup>20</sup> Taken to task on the matter, he attempted to justify himself before the Legislative Assembly: he did not intend to stigmatise the Jews already in Australia, who "were of our own nation and desirable citizens, and entirely different from the Russian Jews, who would only come to Australia for [the sake of] their own misery". This flattery got him nowhere with the *Jewish Herald*, which remarked that Patterson might yet discover that "there are loyal, law-abiding and patriotic Jews even in Russia."<sup>21</sup> That same year the President of the Australian Natives' Association commented that the millions of Jews in Russia "talk of sending half a million away, as though it were a mere bagatelle", which indicated that "the Russian Jew must be a contemptible creature".<sup>22</sup> Since many Australian-born Jews were active members of the A.N.A., there is no concrete reason to suppose that the organisation's President was an anti-semitic. Rather, he seems to have been voicing a fear of the supposed hordes whose predicted arrival was regarded as a threat to the jobs and living standards of Australian workers. Even so, his remarks were interpreted as anti-semitic by the *Jewish Herald*.<sup>23</sup>

A letter in *The South Australian Register* declared that Russian Jews bound for Australia should be "warned off" by the various State governments, since "they are of all men the people we don't want". It asked: "is there a Jew in this colony who is a farmer, gardener or vinegrower?"<sup>24</sup> When the *Sydney Bulletin*, in a feature about London's East End, wrote that the arrival of "each mouldy Hebrew or moth-eaten Pole makes the prospects of work more precarious" and that "the dead-broke Russo-Israelite who makes slops in a London sweater's den in eighteen hours a day for ten shillings a week is dragging the Englishman down to his own level . . ." it had the potential Australian situation in mind and fanned fears already prevalent.<sup>25</sup> During the tailors' strike in Sydney in 1891 there were frequent accusations emanating from the Trades and Labour Council that "foreign Jews" were the worst sweaters of labour. Jews were identified not only as exploiters but as strike-breakers, lacking solidarity with others in the tailoring trade. It was claimed that the strike failed owing to the refusal of Jewish tailors to join it.<sup>26</sup>

In October 1891 James Munro, Premier of Victoria, told the Legislative Assembly "that any attempt to land any of these pauper Jews in Victoria would be futile".<sup>27</sup> In January 1892 a representative of the Miners' Association told the Ballarat Trades and Labour Council that a number of Russian Jews had arrived secretly in Victoria. He said that there had been much talk about the settlement of "the submerged tenth" (Russian Jews) in Australia, but it seemed as if "a submerged twentieth" were coming here. He urged his fellow unionists to protest against their immigration.<sup>28</sup> ("Strange", commented Abraham Samuel Gordon, "this compatibility of the working classes here with the cold refusal to recognise the right of these 'pauper Jews' to work for their living in another country'.")<sup>29</sup> In fact, no more than twenty-five Russian Jews seem to have come to Victoria, and they were scattered throughout the colony. About half a dozen were employed as farm hands in the Horsham district.<sup>30</sup>

When Rev. Davis, of Sydney, denied that the Russian Jews being resettled by de Hirsch were "of the objectionable, money-lending type", the Melbourne literary periodical *Bohemia* declared that he, "like all the other apologists of his race", had missed the point. "We have no objection . . . to the Jews being money-lenders", it

said. "What we object to is that, when they lend their money, they want it back again". It added: "this is the feature in their conduct that causes them to be so frequently disliked".<sup>31</sup> The *Age* of 19 April 1894 claimed that persecution of the Jews in Russia and other places was attributable to their usury: "therefore it is that the Hebrew is a mark for the obloquy of the world, not on account of his fidelity to the Mosaic dispensation, but because he is and must remain the Shylock of the nations".<sup>32</sup> And later that same year a series of letters portraying the Jews as usurers appeared in the Brisbane press.<sup>33</sup>

These and similar declarations tended to obscure expressions of sympathy with Russian Jewry made by individual churchmen and others, and seem to have unnerved even the *Jewish Herald*, which in June 1891 had confidently asserted that Australians would remain unaffected by anti-Jewish propaganda.<sup>34</sup> Like the rest of the established Australian community, the *Jewish Herald* feared that the admission of Russian Jews (even if opposed in most cases, not so much owing to dislike of Jews, as to anxiety over the economic consequences of a flood of cheap foreign labour) could easily lead to anti-semitism. From its position in January 1892, when it had thundered that no matter how many Russian Jews may be pouring into Victoria, "as long as Australia remains a free country no objection could possibly be taken to people coming here and earning their living by the sweat of their face",<sup>35</sup> it gradually came to caution against the mass admission of Russian Jewish migrants, so long as the economic depression lasted. The London *Jewish World* deplored this new attitude. "There may, indeed, be a scarcity of work for skilled artisans in the establishments of manufacturers, whose capital has been diminished through participation in the general over-speculation that has operated so injuriously in Australia; there may also be no room for men who want to make a commercial success out of farming; but while there is an abundance of valuable land not yet brought under cultivation and which can be had for the asking, Australia would seem of all countries, one of the best adapted for the Russian Jewish agriculturalist, with his indomitable industry, frugality and sobriety, to succeed in", it declared. It added that Russian Jews would go to Australia not "to invest money", nor to "beg aid from the government", for all they asked was "to live by their labour unoppressed, and with the free right to observe their religion and customs". They could do this "in a fertile country like Australia if merely placed on the land" and would redeem not only themselves but Australia, "for its waste land would be brought under cultivation and its resources developed".<sup>36</sup> The *Jewish Herald* disagreed, maintaining that Russian Jews would be at a tremendous disadvantage compared with established farmers. Thus to induce them to come here would be "the height of folly". Moreover:

In addition to all this there is another, and perhaps equally potent reason, why at present Jewish immigration to Australia should not be encouraged. There is amongst the working classes a strong feeling against all immigration. They consider that until sufficient work has been found for the colonists already here, anything in the shape of wholesale immigration is undesirable, and we may be sure that, in the case of Russian Jews coming in large numbers to this country, a very strong feeling, something like anti-semitism, would at once spring up.

It added: "we know that all this is mere prejudice, but it is not desirable that such a latent feeling should be fanned into bright flame, and while there are other countries where Russian Jews are more likely to succeed in earning their bread by the sweat of their brow, Australia might very well be left out of the question".<sup>37</sup> There were those in both Britain and Australia, however, who were not prepared to take this

advice. In 1905-6, Australian Jewry subscribed £3,000 to the London headquarters of the Russian Jewish relief fund, but at the same time — in the wake of the Aliens Act (which effectively closed Britain to European immigration) and the Gomel, Moghilev and Kishinev pogroms — Australian Jewish voices began to ask whether there might not, after all, be a surer way of helping distressed Russian Jewry — perhaps settling some of them on the land in Australia. Those who felt like that were largely inspired by Israel Zangwill's Jewish Territorial Organisation (J.T.O.) which aimed at establishing Jewish agricultural settlements in various parts of the globe.

Early in 1906 Isaac Abrahams, a Russian-born Jewish farmer at Toowoomba, Queensland, wrote to the *London Jewish Chronicle* enthusing about opportunities for Jewish farmers in his adopted State. He was by trade a tailor's cutter, and had operated his own tailoring business for twenty years. His brother David (also a tailor) and he had been farming for three years, and had 160 and 242 acres respectively. The brothers were "the talk of Darling Downs" and the objects of much curiosity on the part of their non-Jewish neighbours, who had still to come to terms with the notion of Jewish farmers. The main theme of Abrahams was that if he could succeed on the land, so could other Russian Jews. The "only serious difficulty" he encountered was that of obtaining reliable labour, for he found the Australian-born "more adapted to cricket, football and horse-racing". He wrote: "My little experience teaches me that there will always be trouble for the Jews until they take to manual work, no matter how they try otherwise". He believed that about 500 Jewish families could be settled in each State for a trial period, and he provided estimates of the financial outlay they would need to set up their own agricultural homesteads. "A more suitable country for farming and dairying than Australia is hard to find", he declared enticingly. "Here you can grow two crops a year: anything and everything will grow here". He concluded: "I can safely say that this is a land of milk and honey, and if you send good men for a start no doubt in time to come we may have reason to say that our people are as good producers as the rest of the world's nations".<sup>38</sup> His opinion that "it would be of more benefit to the Russian Jews and to ourselves if the money subscribed were utilised for emigration" was shared by other Australians, not all of them Jewish.

On 1 July 1906 a special meeting of the N.S.W. Zionist League was convened to hear Dr. Richard Arthur, M.L.A. President of the Immigration League of Australia, outline his scheme for Jewish agricultural settlements in Australia. Condemning Russian barbarity, Arthur expressed his pleasure at offering a concrete remedy. Citing the examples of Jewish colonising success in Palestine and Argentina, he asserted that the stream of Russian Jewish immigration should be directed towards Australia, a land of nearly three million square miles and only four million people. He put forward two schemes. The main one was that large numbers of Russian Jews be gradually settled in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland. The Roper River Concessions syndicate had been formed to enable land to be taken up in the N.T., and had been granted four million acres by the South Australian government (which administered the Territory). On this land it was intended to settle Scottish crofters, Italian fruit-growers and others, each on farms of 500 acres, to be sold for half a crown an acre with a paying off period of twenty or thirty years. This meant an annual rent of one penny an acre, and in this way, Arthur believed, a Jewish colony could be established.

Because of controversy regarding the feasibility of permanent white settlement in the Northern Territory, Arthur advised his audience to send a commission there to

investigate for themselves. They should confer with the Immigration League and with other bodies in Sydney who might be able to subsidise such a scheme. His subsidiary plan, which he suggested could be operated either simultaneously or only if his primary one failed, was that a group of wealthy Sydney Jews might be persuaded to finance a small Jewish settlement in N.S.W. Surely, he said, those who had subscribed £3,000 for Russian Jewish relief would be willing to contribute to this cause. Even if they refused, were but a dozen Jewish families — or even a dozen Jewish young men — to be brought out, the nucleus of a small settlement would be established, just as a small Italian settlement had been established on the Clarence River.<sup>39</sup> The N.S.W. Zionist League was fired with enthusiasm for Arthur's broad plan, but like the later Kimberley scheme, it was doomed to come to nothing. European Zionists, to whom it was sent for consideration, were committed to fostering interest in Palestine, and it appears to have met with little support from the Sydney community, doubtless mindful of the controversy over the de Hirsch proposals in the 1890s.

Yet, Sydney Jewry was not entirely idle. With Rabbi Cohen's approval, Arthur W. Hyman, a young lawyer and communal activist (later a well known military figure) corresponded with Zangwill about the N.T. scheme, but, as he informed the Sydney Jewish Literary Society in October 1908, he believed that the scheme was unworkable. He gave as his reasons — very debatable ones — the climatic unsuitability of the N.T. for physically unfit Russian Jewish settlers, the fact that these poverty stricken people would each require £200 to start up in the N.T., and (perhaps his major concern) the risk of incurring the wrath of the Labour movement and stirring anti-semitism. He felt it was unwise to introduce large numbers of unskilled Jewish labourers (evidently his scheme did not confine itself to experienced agriculturalists) because they would probably after a time flock to the large cities of south-east Australia, where they would accept lower wages and exacerbate unemployment. As an Australian citizen, Hyman insisted he was bound to concede this.<sup>40</sup>

Efforts on behalf of territorialism were made in other States. In Western Australia a Jew named Marks apparently put out feelers to the State government on the possibility of setting aside a tract of prime land in the great timber producing region about Albany for Russian Jewish settlement. It was claimed that he had the *chutzpah* (effrontery) to lobby for a railway link with the proposed area — surely a prudent consideration.<sup>41</sup> From South Australia was heard Leopold Judell, J.P., a son-in-law of leading Adelaide communal figure Maurice Salom. Judell, born in Altona, near Hamburg, in 1848, arrived in S.A. in 1870. For many years he was in partnership in Truro with Alexander Kauffman, a former Adelaide merchant. In 1870 he moved to Orroroo where he managed a branch of Levine and Judell, of Jamestown, and he took an active part in the local affairs of the district, where his was the only Jewish family. Many buildings in Orroroo were constructed of stone mined from his quarries, and he owned at least four farming properties.<sup>42</sup> As far as he was concerned, agricultural settlement was the most practical scheme for Russian Jewish relief. His advocacy of the plan was hampered by the fact that there was no I.T.O. branch in the colony.

Two of the staunchest supporters of Russian Jewish farming settlements in Australia were Isaac Jacobs and Adolph Hertzberg. Jacobs was born near Graudenz, Prussia, about 1834 and came to Victoria in the 1850s from Manchester, where he had emigrated during boyhood with his merchant father and family. He became associated with Philip Falk and Co., wholesale importers, later with the tobacco firm of Feldheim, Jacobs and Co., and then with Jacobs, Hart and Co. He became one of the best known businessmen in Melbourne, and among other activities was a leading

member of the Chamber of Commerce and a principal founder of the Victorian Provident Loan Society. Deeply involved in Jewish communal affairs, he was an original member of the St. Kilda Hebrew Congregation and served on its Board of Management. He was the father-in-law of Sir Isaac Isaacs. Jacobs was much involved in several Jewish causes. As a convinced believer in Reform Judaism, he attempted to implant its principles in Australia by means of letters to the press, pamphlets and lectures. He was founder and president of the Melbourne branches of the A.J.A. and I.T.O. It was characteristic of his entire approach to Jewish problems that he tried to translate territorialist schemes into tangible results.

Adolph Hertzberg was also a practical visionary. Born in Hammerstein, Prussia, in 1852, he arrived in Queensland in 1867, joining his maternal uncle, Raphael Lewin, in business in Roma. There, at the age of twenty-one, Hertzberg became an alderman and in subsequent years was twice elected mayor. His brother Abraham joined him in 1878, and ten years later the two moved to Brisbane where they founded the firm of A.M. Hertzberg and Co., wholesale importers of hardware and other goods. Adolph Hertzberg served as president of the Chamber of Commerce, and was a member of several other commercial and benevolent institutions, of the Royal Geographical Society and the University Senate. He served for three years as president of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation.<sup>43</sup> Both Jacobs and Hertzberg were influential businessmen and respected citizens. They were committed and professing Jews, concerned for the welfare of Judaism and Jewry, and they combined activity in the wider community with attachment to Jewish life and philanthropic effort. Hertzberg, who was in contact with Jacobs, had for some years championed a Jewish agricultural settlement scheme in Australia, and he had corresponded about it with the Jewish Colonisation Association Council in Paris, and with two communal leaders in London. He had raised the matter again with Zionist emissary Samuel Goldreich during the latter's visit to Queensland in 1905. On 9 October 1906 Hertzberg had an interview with the Queensland Minister for Agriculture (who was a personal friend), and learned that the Queensland Government had as yet available no land on the Darling Downs adjacent to the railway line. (Naturally enough, the Jewish settlers would want easy transportation of their produce). The value of land bordering the railway — that is, the price at which the government would be likely to sell it — was 70 shillings per acre. Payments would extend over several years, and the Minister estimated that 160 acres of such land would be sufficient for each family. Hertzberg advised Jacobs and friends to concentrate on farming a twenty-family settlement and work out how to fund it later. "I have in my mind's eye one man in Melbourne who could well afford to give the lot, and more, if only he felt so disposed", he wrote, meaning almost certainly the very wealthy and philanthropic Joseph Kronheimer, an eighty year old tobacco and general importer. And he warned: "I take it that good care will be taken not to introduce pedlars or petty traders and endeavour to form an agricultural settlement with such inexperienced people". If the experiment with twenty families proved successful, Hertzberg had no doubt that the Queensland government would countenance a similar large-scale project. He pointed out that while an autonomous settlement in Australia was impossible, Queensland in particular offered the possibility of settlement in large groups, which would be "almost tantamount" to autonomy or "would at any rate give the settlers local self-control".<sup>44</sup> After a second interview with the Minister for Agriculture, Hertzberg reiterated that "none but agriculturalists should be sent here". It was necessary to impress this fact upon their contacts in the Jewish Colonisation Association. "Upon that point we shall have to be very careful

so that our friends at the other side, in their anxiety to find a haven of refuge for these poor persecuted people, may not be tempted to relax their vigilance in seeing that agricultural labourers only are sent".<sup>45</sup>

"No pedlars" was a point to which Hertzberg returned frequently. He obviously did not want the settlement to founder through inept workers, which might preclude the extension of the scheme. And he undoubtedly did not want Queensland crowded with hawkers drifting away from the land, which could endanger the good relations he and other Brisbane Jews had established with the general community. Meanwhile, Jacobs had been corresponding with Rev. Freedman of Perth, who in November 1906 wrote to Jacobs regarding his "interesting proposal to settle on the land a few Russian Jewish families of the farming class". In Perth an informal meeting of prominent Jewish men and women considered the twenty-family scheme advocated by Hertzberg, and thought it could be effected, but they preferred not to commit themselves to contribute towards its finance until a definite proposal was laid before them. Newton Moore, the West Australian Premier and Minister of Lands, whose avowed policy was cheap land for settlers, verbally assured Freedman that he would welcome a settlement of Jewish farmers, and that there were many thousands of acres of good land suitable for such a colony, about which he waxed optimistic.<sup>46</sup>

In December 1906 Jacobs left for Europe, intent on discussing the prospects for Jewish settlement in Australia with officials of organisations concerned with the assisted migration of Russian Jews. At the end of May 1907 he had talks with B.A. Levinson, honorary secretary of the Association to Promote the Settlement of Russian Jewish Farmers in Australia. A month later he discussed his ideas with Leonard Cohen, a Vice-President of the Jewish Colonisation Association, who was shortly leaving for headquarters in Paris. He showed Cohen useful literature on Queensland which Hertzberg had acquired for him. Jacobs found that it was harder than he had previously imagined to ensure that the intended settlers would all be agriculturalists, the *sine qua non* on which Hertzberg and other Australian supporters of the project insisted.<sup>47</sup>

At one time, the Jewish Colonisation Association had been considering sending a number of Jews to Queensland as labourers on the sugar plantations, but abandoned the idea when advised that the near-tropical climate was unsuitable for Europeans.<sup>48</sup> This latest proposal came to nothing because the Association was by now committed to colonisation work in Argentina, the United States and Canada, and wanted for the time to concentrate on these regions to the exclusion of others. Accordingly, Cohen felt it pointless to bring the question before the J.C.A. Council in Paris. He told Jacobs that if the Queensland scheme was not confined strictly to agriculturalists, the emigration department of the London Jewish Board of Guardians might be interested, though "the material which presents itself in London for emigration makes it hardly likely that the Board would find among their applications persons who would be willing, or would be qualified to settle on the land".<sup>49</sup> Jacobs' mission failed, but attempts to bring Jewish settlers to Australia were not entirely abandoned.

In 1911 E.L. Batchelor, Federal Minister for External Affairs, told the London *Jewish Chronicle* that in Australia immigration selection policies were determined by the individual States and that there was no objection to Eastern European Jews. He cited the great parts played in Australia by Jewish public figures. There was "no feeling against the introduction of any particular white community" though there was "a very strong prejudice against the admission of paupers". The *Jewish Chronicle* representative observed that if "a large Jewish settlement gradually grew up, let us

say, in the Northern Territory, the Jews, being presumably in a majority, would automatically and thereby secure self-government". Batchelor replied that there would be no objection to that, since there was "no power in our constitution to impose disabilities on members of special races . . ." But then he raised the crux of the matter: "as a general rule, Jews do not go in much for agriculture, do they?" he mused. "Without a considerable proportion of agricultural immigrants no development takes place, especially in a new country".<sup>50</sup>

The establishment of the Jewish agricultural settlement at Shepparton, Victoria, in 1913, was of course a challenge to such stereotypes. Joseph Kronheimer donated £1,000, about half the cost of settling nine families (most from Russia, two or three from Palestine) on the land there. Isaac Jacobs, A. Kozminsky, Dr. M.A. Schalit and Barnet H. Altson jointly provided a similar sum. The families arrived in Shepparton in April 1913, and soon proved themselves worthy of their sponsors' trust. As Jacobs remarked, they were determined to avoid "struggling to support their families by all kinds of menial, disheartening work in Melbourne, such as hawking [and] bottle-washing . . ." <sup>51</sup> He, indeed, was the prime instigator behind the settlement, and on his death in 1914 the Shepparton agriculturalists dedicated their settlement to his memory.<sup>52</sup> Owing to his efforts, and those of the other trustees of the Shepparton project, Australian Jewry had taken a small, yet practical, step towards alleviation of Russian Jewish distress. Outright rejection of mass settlement had been replaced with a carefully monitored token of redemption. This helped to restore the shine to the tarnished image which Australian Jewry had acquired during the 1890s in the eyes of British Jewish activists campaigning for a better life for Russian Jewish refugees.

### Notes

1. For the May Laws see H.M. Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History*, rev. ed., New York, 1977, pp. 243-46.
2. It seems that this report originated in the English *Pall Mall Gazette* but it was swiftly and widely reprinted. See *Jewish Herald*, 8 May 1891, p. 113.
3. Walter D. Benjamin, 'Australia as a Field of Labour', *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 March 1887, p. 13, synopsis quoted in *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 June 1891, p. 8. Benjamin was at that time living in Melbourne.
4. Letter in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1891, quoted in *Jewish Herald*, 13 March 1891, pp. 91-92; for Davis see *ibid.*, 10 April 1891, p. 94. In contrast, the *Sydney Morning Herald* had on 1 August 1890 carried an editorial very sympathetic towards the Jews of Russia and elsewhere, ascribing their persecution to "their thrift and industry and relative prosperity". Quoted *ibid.*, 15 August 1890, p. 283.
5. *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 June 1891, p. 8.
6. *Ibid.*, 31 July 1891, p. 16.
7. *Jewish Herald*, 8 May 1891, p. 115.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
9. *Ibid.*, 28 August 1891, p. 189.
10. *Ibid.*, 15 January 1892, p. 35. It is worth noting that Blaubaum, far from having any personal connection with the Pale, was a native of western Germany. In 1882 he had attempted to interest the South Australian government in Russian Jewish agricultural settlement. *Ibid.*, 24 February 1882, p. 90.

11. *Ibid.*, 29 January 1892, p. 45. Gordon became the author of a curious little book, *Mordecai MacCobber: the story of a Scotch Jew in Australia*, which went through several editions.
12. *Jewish Herald*, 21 November 1890, p. 375; c.f. Lewis Emanuel, secretary, Russo-Jewish Relief Committee, London, to H. Levinson, Secretary, St. Kilda Hebrew Congregation, quoted *ibid.*, 12 August 1892, p. 159: "the channels of relief at home are dried up, all our hopes, therefore, are centred in the efforts of our colonial brethren . . ."
13. *Jewish Chronicle*, 3 July 1891, p. 7.
14. *Jewish Herald*, 10 April 1891, p. 97.
15. Quoted *Ibid.*, 28 August 1891, p. 189.
16. *Ibid.*, 9 September 1892, p. 170.
17. *Ibid.*, 22 May 1891, pp. 122-23.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 5, pp. 415-16; *Jewish Herald*, 14 August 1891, p. 181.
21. *Ibid.*, c.f. *ibid.*, 4 September 1896, p. 262.
22. *Ibid.* 8 May 1891, p. 115. Albert Harris, Russian-born owner of a large fancy goods emporium in Melbourne, attempted to counter such prejudice in an interview he gave with the Melbourne *Evening Herald*. See *ibid.*, 22 May 1891, p. 123.
23. *Ibid.*, 8 May 1891, p. 115.
24. Quoted *ibid.*, 19 June 1891, p. 43.
25. *Bulletin*, 17 January 1891, p. 5.
26. *Jewish Herald*, 12 February 1892, p. 49. The N.S.W. Government Statistician's Department investigated, and exonerated Jews from allegations of sweating; *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, 6 November 1891, p. 237.
28. *Ibid.*, 15 January 1892, p. 35.
29. *Ibid.*, 29 January 1892, p. 42.
30. *Ibid.*, 15 January 1892, p. 35.
31. *Bohemia*, 18 February 1892, p. 6.
32. Quoted in *Jewish Herald*, 1 June 1894, p. 155; Blaubaum and Isaac Jacobs separately defended Russian Jewry from the Age charges. *Ibid.*
33. See *ibid.*, 28 December 1894, p. 23.
34. *Ibid.*, 5 June 1891, pp. 131-32. Outspokenly sympathetic to Russian Jewry were Patrick Moran, Catholic Archbishop of Sydney and William Cowper, Anglican Dean of Sydney. See also the conference of N.S.W and Queensland Wesleyan ministers, *ibid.*, 8 April 1892, p. 80.
35. *Ibid.*, 15 January 1892, p. 35.
36. Quoted *ibid.*, 2 November 1894, p. 317.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 May 1906, p. 20.
39. *Jewish Herald*, 13 July 1906, pp. 269-70.
40. *Ibid.*, 16 October 1908, pp. 360-61.
41. *Table Talk*, 2 May 1907, p. 5. A letter to the *Western Australian*, 18 May 1907, signed 'Anti-Hebrew', claimed that the scheme would result in "a huge Petticoat Lane". See *Jewish Herald*, 26 July 1907, pp. 274-75.

42. *Cyclopedia of South Australia*, Adelaide, 1909, vol. 2, pp. 583-84.
43. *Australian Hardware and Machinery*, 1 September 1906, p. 258.
44. *Jewish Herald*, 14 December 1906, p. 11.
45. Hertzberg to Jacobs, 17 October 1906, quoted *ibid.*
46. Freedman to Jacobs, 8 November 1906, quoted *ibid.*
47. Jacobs to Levinson, 28 June 1907, quoted *ibid.*, see also *ibid.*, 9 August 1907, p. 281.
48. Cohen to J.C.A. Council, Paris, 30 May 1907, quoted *ibid.*
49. Cohen to Jacobs, 14 June 1907, quoted *ibid.*, pp. 281-82. The London Board of Guardians did in fact send a number of boys to Australia to work on the land. In 1913, through the instrumentality of Rabbi Cohen, thirty Jewish teenage boys were brought out to N.S.W. and trained on the Dreadnought farm near Windsor. Nine boys arrived in Victoria. *Ibid.*, 28 March 1913, p. 131 and 4 July 1913, p. 254.
50. Interview with *Jewish Chronicle*, reproduced *ibid.*, 18 August 1911, p. 29.
51. Interview with *Shepparton News*, 18 September 1913, quoted *ibid.*, 26 September 1913, p. 349.
52. *Ibid.*, 6 November 1914, p. 387. Jacobs' son Elliot replaced him as one of the Shepparton trustees. See also *ibid.*, 23 October 1914, pp. 373-74.