

HE CAME KNOCKING: DR MICHAEL TRAUB, THE *SHALIACH* FROM PALESTINE IN WARTIME AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

In September 1941, Dr Michael Traub a veteran *Shaliach* or emissary for Keren Hayesod, the financial arm of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, came to Australia on a fundraising mission. Australian troops were fighting in North Africa, and Japan was soon to join the Axis Powers to rampage in Asia/Pacific including the bombing of northern Australia. The nation feared invasion. With Australia on a war footing abroad and at home, the time did not appear promising for the Traub mission. As well, Traub's presence was bitterly resented by a cabal of prominent Australian Jews who eschewed Zionism and were led by former Governor-General, Sir Isaac Isaacs. Despite their public sniping, the emissary continued with his mission. He was a rare voice speaking about the ongoing Nazi genocide of the Jews in Europe to an uninformed Australian public, promoting Palestine as the rightful sanctuary for refugees, and explaining how the citizens of the Jewish homeland were enthusiastically participating in the war against the Nazis. Traub was in Australia for eighteen months, crisscrossing the continent and meeting with many prominent individuals and groups in the Jewish community and civil society before travelling to New Zealand. He was a consummate orator, linguist, broadcaster, writer, and Zionist lobbyist, who also involved himself in local Jewish affairs.

KEYWORDS: Zionism, Australian history, politics, antisemitism, Jewish-Gentile relations

The prequel

On 19 November 1941, Dr Michael Traub, the *Shaliach* or emissary for the Palestine Foundation Fund, known as *Keren Hayesod*, the financial arm of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, arrived in Sydney to conduct its third-ever fundraising mission in Australia. Originally two men were chosen for this task, Gershon Agronsky and Michael Traub.

Agronsky was the founding editor of the English daily, the *Palestine Post*. Born in Ukraine, he migrated as a child with his family to the United States of America, where he was educated and received citizenship. From America, he joined the British Army's Jewish Legion in World War One to fight in Palestine under the command of Australian, Lt. Colonel Eliazar Margolin.¹

Michael Traub, on the other hand, was a seasoned *Keren Hayesod* apparatchik and Zionist lobbyist. He was born in 1891 in the Latvian city of Libau, to which his parents had immigrated from Lithuania. There he was schooled in Hebrew and Talmud at a traditional Jewish gymnasium in Lodz, Poland, before attending universities in Germany concentrating on law, economics, and philosophy. Though a certified lawyer, much of his time was spent in Europe on Zionist work. He helped establish the Zionist organisation in Switzerland, and in 1931 migrated to Palestine, but soon returned to Europe. For six years he served in Germany, where he established *Keren Hayesod*, raising significant funds in the face of ever-rising Nazi antisemitism. Traub was appointed Vice President of his organisation in Germany and was elected to the Presidium of the German Zionist Federation. He attended the 1935 World Zionist Conference in Lucerne, Switzerland, and in 1938 returned to Palestine.² That year he was a participant in the Evian Conference in France. It was called to deal with the burgeoning European refugee crisis, mainly Jewish, where he would have heard the Australian delegate, Colonel White, utter his infamous statement '... as we (Australians) have no real racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one by encouraging any scheme of large-scale foreign migration.'³ Prior to his mission in Australia, Traub had successfully conducted similar ones in Great Britain, Switzerland, Belgium, Canada, and South Africa.⁴

When the Jewish Agency applied to Canberra for the required visas for the two men to enter Australia, the request was flatly rejected without explanation.⁵ Subsequently, the Executive of the Jewish Agency,

Michael Shertok, sought help from the Chief Secretary of the British Mandate Government in Palestine to intervene on its behalf, explaining why this particular mission was essential for the material progress of Palestine:

... The Fund has invested over the last twenty years more than nine million pounds in the development of Palestine. The Jewish Agency is directly dependent on the Fund to cover its current budget and meet liabilities. The spread of Nazi rule on the Continent of Europe has deprived the Fund of practically all its revenue from Jewish communities of the Continent and is now dependent exclusively on the Jewries of overseas communities. It is, therefore, a matter of most importance that the campaign to be opened in Australia should meet with success and the Palestine Fund as well as the Executive of the Jewish Agency would be deeply grateful if the Government could respond to the Commonwealth of Australia that the facilities requested be extended to the emissaries of the Fund.⁶

Agronsky had agreed to tour Australia on two conditions: that he would be absent from Palestine for no more than two to three weeks, and that *Keren Hayesod* would take care of his travel requirements. The latter was a routine matter, but the former was utterly impractical given the time required to travel to Australia, crisscross her vast continent, and return. Agronsky considered Canberra's rebuff both as a personal and public slight and demanded it be revoked whether or not he went to Australia. He felt the reason for the rejection was that he and Traub were considered foreigners. However, he also believed that had he applied for the visa himself there would not have been a problem because both Australia's Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies, and his Minister for the Army, Percy Spender, knew him and also he had done journalist work for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.⁷ To what degree his claims to be known by the two honourable gentlemen are correct cannot be verified. Perhaps, he met them when he covered their separate tours for his newspaper when, in early 1941 they visited their troops stationed in Palestine. Ultimately, Canberra relented and indicated that both men would be granted visas. This news was passed on to Max Freilich, the Zionist's point man in Sydney.⁸ However, only Michael Traub was to

travel to Australia, coming by himself and even leaving behind his wife and daughter in Jerusalem.⁹

The Zeitgeist

The timing of the mission did not appear promising for fundraising for a foreign cause, which was not even well appreciated in Australia's Jewish community. Envoys before him who represented various causes in Palestine, such as Israel Cohen for the Zionist Council in Jerusalem in 1923¹⁰ and Solomon Yankelovich Jacobi representing Ort-Oze and Emig-Direkt in 1928¹¹ were successful fundraisers. However, they did not come in wartime when the supreme financial priority was the national war effort.

When Great Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, Australia immediately followed suit. Even prior to Traub's arrival, her troops had been fighting for almost six months against Fascist Italy and then Nazi Germany in Greece, Crete, North Africa, and Syria, defending British interests. There was a distinct probability that if Rommel had not been stopped at El Alamein in Egypt on 11 November 1941, he would have crossed the Suez Canal on his way to Palestine.¹²

On 27 September 1941, Japan joined the Axis Powers to rampage in Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Sequentially, the slumbering American fleet at Pearl Harbor was shattered, the previously considered invincible British Naval Base of Singapore surrendered and northern Australia was heavily bombed. Australians feared they might be invaded.¹³ As Manning Clark described it, the attitude of the Australian populace to the war switched ever so quickly from complacency to anxiety.¹⁴ The home front was transformed by government decree industrially, economically, socially, and culturally to meet the exigencies of the national war effort. Labour and capital were nationalised, food and materials were rationed, and social life was restricted. Importantly for the Traub mission, public and private fundraising was almost monopolised by the war effort.¹⁵ The Jewish community was fully supportive of its government fundraising while still having to maintain its institutions and philanthropy as best it could.

Though wartime provided obstacles to Traub's 'Victory Appeal', as the name of his mission was called, its greatest threat came from within the Jewish community from a cabal of influential members who abhorred political or practical Zionism. They saw it, particularly in wartime, as unconscionable, disrespectful, disloyal, and socially

dangerous. Unconscionable, because they felt it espoused a challenge to their version of what it was to be an Australian Jew, which was the same as their fellow non-Jews only differing in religion. Disrespectful to Australia, because she had provided her Jewish citizens with all possible human rights and freedoms. They were horrified by the Zionist notion which implied a full Jewish life could only be experienced in a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

The charge of disloyalty comprised two components. The first concerned the Zionist objective of dismantling the 1939 British McDonald White Paper on Palestine which was preventing thousands of Nazi-maligned Jews in Europe from securing refuge in the Holy Land. Australian foreign policy had historically followed that of Great Britain. To disavow the White Paper was to be anti-British and hence anti-Australian. To open the gates of Palestine to refugees would anger the Arab/Muslim hemisphere, undermining British war strategy in the Middle East. Anti-Zionists further feared the hoary-old antisemitic libel of Jews having dual loyalties that would place the Jewish future in Australia in jeopardy.

Leading this animosity and attack on political Zionism was Sir Isaac Isaacs, a former Australian Governor-General, who peppered the press and civic officials with his views. His clashes over Zionism with Julius Stone, Professor of Jurisprudence at Sydney University have been discussed by several authors,¹⁶ and Stone's position in this debate is found in his long polemic 'Stand up and be Counted!'.¹⁷

Less known, however, is that these contretemps were preceded by an equally feisty disagreement in the *Hebrew Standard of Australasia* between Isaacs and Rabbi Lieb Aisack Falk of the Great Synagogue in Sydney. In World War One, he was the Hebrew Chaplain to the Jewish Legion in Palestine and during World War Two a Hebrew Chaplain to the Australian Military Forces in New South Wales.¹⁸ The catalyst for this affray was the presence of the Traub mission in Sydney. Falk entered it to rebuke the 'Zionist Organisation of Sydney' for its failure to appropriately respond to Isaacs's constant anti-Zionist carping and to advertise himself as the 'Honorary President of the New Zionist Organisation of Australia'.¹⁹

Isaacs labelled all who favoured a Jewish state in Palestine, as 'Herzlian Zionists'.²⁰ They were evil because they challenged the authority of Great Britain and her Mandate in Palestine. Not once in the exchanges did he mention the plight of the Jews in Europe. What

was important to him was the defence of Great Britain as the custodian of the League of Nations Mandate of Palestine granted to her in 1922, with the power to decide what was in her best interests there. Falk, on the other hand, believed the legitimacy for a Jewish homeland/state in Palestine was to be found in the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917. Curiously, Isaacs claimed that he was a victim of 'Falk's zealotness' and declared that on the forehead of all Zionists was the mark of 'Masada' that signified 'desperation, defeat, and death.' He described himself to be a 'spiritual Zionist' adding:

... My Zionism I am proud to share with the vast majority of British and Australian Jews who find that their spiritual devotion to the faith (Judaism) is not only consistent with but DEMANDS our marching in this crucial hour in step with the British Government, Parliament and People, and so towards Victory that alone can secure our Empire, regenerate the attainment of sane Jews, and beneficent consummation of the Mandate ...

No one, he said, could have two fatherlands. Justice in Palestine he insisted had to apply equally to Jews, Muslims, and Christians, and the 'extreme Zionism' currently heard in Sydney was a danger to Australia and Great Britain.²¹ These 'extreme Zionists', implying that they were evangelical culprits, were Traub and his band of supporters. Two of them from Melbourne, Dr Aaron Patkin²² and Dr Leon Jona,²³ were fearful that Isaacs's war against Zionism might derail the Traub campaign.

In Isaacs, Zionists had no mere adversary, because of the high esteem in which he was held in the general and Jewish communities. In April 1941, he was chosen to be the honorary president of the Melbourne branch of the World Jewish Congress.²⁴ His issues with Zionism of course were longstanding. Israel Cohen recounts that during his Melbourne visit in 1923, Isaacs queried him about Zionism's stress on Jewish nationality, when nationality was tethered to a country or to a territory, of which Jews had neither. Cohen replied that his interlocutor was confusing nationality with citizenship.²⁵ Isaacs also confided a wish to visit Palestine to see how Hebrew was being used as a modern language. That stopover on his way to London lasted a mere day.²⁶

When Traub arrived in Sydney, he found Zionism was organisationally weak throughout the country. Zionist societies existed in

state capitals but were internally independent of each other with quite small memberships, despite the formation of the Zionist Federation of Australia in 1927.²⁷ He relied heavily on a few dedicated local Zionists, who were socially and politically connected, to help plan the campaign itinerary and be the conduits to his meeting with prominent non-Jews in religion and politics.

At the time, the majority of Australia's dominant Anglo-Jewish community viewed the Holy Land only in spiritual or philanthropic terms. They saw their country, Australia, as a place to immigrate to and not emigrate from. Their major concern was for 'foreign' or non-Anglo Jews permitted to live among them to assimilate quickly the folkways and mores of their new abode in order to avoid arousing antisemitism.²⁸ Hilary Rubinstein writes that attitudes to Zionism were influenced by congregational rabbis, but this was far from absolute. Jewish religious leaders were at the forefront of both the pro and anti-Zionist camps, while others remained ambivalent.²⁹

The Australian Jewish press covered developments in the *Yishuv* (the Jewish Community in Palestine) and the evolving Jewish tragedy in Europe, unlike its mainstream counterpart whose accounts were few, far between, and disconnected.³⁰ However, it was steadfastly loyal to the national war effort while generally supportive of the Traub mission. The exceptions in the latter matter were the Isaacs-influenced *Hebrew Standard of Australasia* and Perth-based *The Australian Jewish Outlook*.³¹

Characterisation of Michael Traub

The *Australian Jewish News* characterised Dr Michael Traub as 'one of the best-known figures in World Zionism' who planned to stay in Australia for several weeks.³² That said, his presence in Sydney had been preceded several months earlier by David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish Agency, for a stay that barely lasted twenty-four hours³³ which serendipity paralleled one by the Australian Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies, to Palestine to survey his troops stationed there and to evaluate the military situation in the Middle East before flying to London for a meeting of the British War Cabinet.³⁴

David Ben-Gurion's trip to Sydney was not one of choice. The war in Europe had forced him to take a more circuitous route to Palestine from America where he was involved in Zionist work. On 12 January 1941, he flew from San Francisco to Honolulu by clipper, and then on

to the Philippines, Noumea, and Auckland, before setting down on Rushcutters Bay in Sydney on 3 February 1941. In Auckland, he held a chance meeting with New Zealand's prime minister, Peter Fraser, in which they discussed a Jewish army for Palestine, the lessening of tension between the *Yishuv* and the British Mandate Authority and Palestine Jewry's role in the fight against Hitler. Reaching Sydney, he held a session in his hotel room with Max Freilich of the State Zionist Council of New South Wales. They also talked about a Jewish army for Palestine. Ben-Gurion advised that Australian Zionists should follow their own path and not necessarily replicate practices from elsewhere. Soon after this meeting, he attended a hastily arranged gathering at the Maccabean Hall before leaving Sydney at 7 a.m. on 4 February 1942, by tiny seaplane to Townsville, Darwin, Singapore, Calcutta, Karachi, and Basra, eventually setting down on the Sea of Galilee on 18 January 1942.³⁵ On his return to Jerusalem, he reported to the Jewish Agency that Australia was fertile soil for the spread of Zionism, fundraising, and political lobbying for the Jewish homeland in Palestine.³⁶ These observations were to be tested by Michael Traub and his mission.

Traub's arrival was journalistically escorted by articles over successive weeks in *PIX Magazine*, arguably the country's leading popular lifestyle and cultural publication. The first titled 'Wartime in Palestine', featured a headshot of Traub and introduced him as a member of the 'Administrative Committee of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, who was in Australia on a lecture tour to tell an impressive story of the development of Palestine since it was proclaimed a Jewish national home'. The core messages were that the fraternally strong bond developed between the *Yishuv* and Australian troops in Palestine during World War One remained in the current conflict in the Middle East and that the Jews of Palestine were fully committed to the Allied war effort in the Middle East. With an eye to the magazine's major readership, it pictured Jewish women in Palestine fully involved in food production and heavy industry freeing their men to fight.³⁷ The second article, 'Diggers in Palestine-AIF: visits to Jewish Settlements', provided *in situ* evidence of the aforementioned friendship.³⁸ While no authorship was attributed to these two articles, they were either written by Traub or heavily influenced by him.³⁹ Who placed them in the magazine remains unknown, but they were a reader-friendly introduction to Traub and his mission to a national audience.

Indeed, Traub was able to market his messages to the interests of the people and groups he addressed. His narrative was usually a fabric of connecting threads – why the Jewish homeland was Palestine, the burgeoning tragedy of European Jewry inflicted by the Nazis, Palestine as the moral place for Jewish refugees, the contribution of the Jews of Palestine to the Allied war effort and Palestine as a Jewish polity post-war.

An important meeting

Having been in the country only a very short time, Traub was escorted by Alec Masel of the Melbourne-based Zionist Federation of Australia, to meet with the newly minted Australian Prime Minister, John Joseph Curtin, in Canberra.⁴⁰ Curtin had interrupted a session of his war cabinet for the interview. It was Traub's impression that Curtin listened carefully to what he had to say,⁴¹ but they were only ever likely to agree on one thing: the speedy defeat of Hitler. Their mindsets and interests were so different.

Traub informed the prime minister of the *Yishuv's* contribution to the British war effort, provided reasons for the removal of the 1939 White Paper on Palestine and addressed the reasons for a Jewish army in Palestine. He felt that Curtin's interest was aroused only by thoughts that a Jewish army might replace his own troops in the Near East. He said he would take the idea to cabinet for consideration.⁴² There is no evidence that happened.

The truth was that while Curtin might defy British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to recall his 7th Division back from North Africa to defend his country against possible Japanese invasion,⁴³ he, as had prime ministers before him, would never question Great Britain's right to make policy in the Middle East generally, and regarding Palestine in particular. Further, he may have been miffed by Churchill's failure to consult him over the selection of Australia's Richard Gavin Casey as 'Minister of State in Residence in the Middle East' in the British War Cabinet, but never would he raise any objection to the way Casey resolutely defended the 1939 White Paper, which severely restricted Jewish migration to Palestine, in the war cabinet.⁴⁴ Curtin, an ex-Catholic and former socialist,⁴⁵ cared not a jot about the Nazi persecution of the Jews in Europe, viewing it as none of Australia's business.⁴⁶ Regarding the 1939 White Paper, it should be noted that much of Casey's tenure in the British War Cabinet from March 1942 to November 1943, coincided

with much of the time Traub was in Australia lobbying for its abolition.

A Jewish Army in Palestine

The Zionist hope for a Jewish regiment in Palestine within the British army was an idea promoted by Zionists. Suzanne Rutland records that Dr Leon Jona passed on to the then-acting prime minister, Arthur Fadden, David Ben-Gurion's proposal for such a militia when he was in Sydney.⁴⁷ Indeed, he had discussed it with New Zealand's Prime Minister on his way there.⁴⁸ Fears that Rommel's forces might breach the Allies' lines at El Alamein, cross the Suez Canal into Palestine, then go beyond,⁴⁹ helped make the Zionist case for a Jewish regiment.

However, while World War One had its Jewish Legion in Palestine as part of the British Army with one of its commanders being an Australian veteran of Gallipoli and the Western Front, Lt. Colonel Eliazar Margolin,⁵⁰ the mere suggestion that a similar battalion be formed in World War Two was as controversial as it was in the Great War.⁵¹ Indeed, on the heels of the announcement on 3 September 1939 that Australia was at war with Germany again, a prominent Australian Jewish veteran of World War One, Colonel Harold Cohen, dispatched a letter to the *Australian Jewish News* headed, 'A Jew in War'. He insisted that 'a Jew must express loyalty in his own sphere and locality' and not be distracted from the 'fullness of common service'.⁵² Anglo-Australian Jewry had always eschewed any hint of separatism in public and military service, fearing antisemitism. The prevailing norm Jew *qua* Jew was invisibility.

K. Kahn, a pre-war newcomer to the country from Europe, wrote in a letter to the *Australian Jewish News* that foreign Jews like him were unlikely to enlist in a Jewish militia since their situation in Australia was so different from refugees in Palestine. They had come to Australia to settle down and to be the best citizen they could possibly be in their new home. Their hope was to be allowed to join the nation's military forces to fight Nazi Germany in defence of the British Empire.⁵³ At the time, Jews like Kahn were labelled 'aliens' or 'enemy Aliens' and barred from Australian citizenship, a prerequisite for recruitment in the Australian military forces.

Not all Anglo-Australian Jews were fearful of separatism. Julia Rapke, a stalwart of Melbourne's Jewish community, argued for a Jewish branch of the Australian Red Cross Society saying there was no objection to other faiths establishing their groups to perform public service without fear of recrimination.⁵⁴ In fact, Jewish organisations

like the Judean Red Cross and General War Auxiliary⁵⁵ were formed with especially strong membership from the 'foreign' sector of the community. On the other hand, nobody was as prominent in war work and fundraising for the national war effort as the National Council of Jewish Women led by Dr Fanny Reading which comprised mainly 'Anglos'.⁵⁶

Nonetheless, initially, the British were adamantly opposed to the idea of a Jewish army for Palestine.⁵⁷ Yet, this reality failed to stop Isaac Isaacs from becoming apoplectic with rage over an advertisement in the *New York Times* calling for the 'establishment of a Jewish Anti-Axis Army of 260,000 based in Palestine'. The force was to be operational around Suez to release some portion of the Australian and New Zealand forces in the Middle East to return to the Pacific theatre to 'strengthen the American Hemisphere'. To Isaacs, this advertisement was the work of 'ultra-Zionist critics of the British Government' wanting an army under their own flag. He felt the Australian government and Jewish community had to be made aware of the dangers of such a proposal.⁵⁸

This hyperbole came just after 2 January 1942, when Nazi generals met in Wannsee, Germany, to plan the complete destruction of European Jewry, known as 'The Final Solution'. Despite the Nazi bestial *practicum* against the Jews of Europe being well-known and condemned by the likes of Winston Churchill,⁵⁹ such ultra-inhumane behaviour was not raised in the British House of Commons until 17 December 1942, where it was at least excoriated.⁶⁰ As a consequence, the Curtin Labor Government felt obliged to follow with its own denunciation. For this paltry act, Alec Masel, representing the Victorian Advisory Board, sent the prime minister a note of appreciation with the rider that Australian Jews would remain fully committed to their country's 'struggle for freedom and decency against the forces of darkness'.⁶¹ Why he felt the need to add this when the Jewish community fully supported the national war effort is curious. Perhaps Masel felt the need to reassure the prime minister of this because of something he sensed when he and Traub met with him, or maybe it was designed to counter a wrong impression of the support the Jewish community had given him by Isaacs's comments regarding Zionism. For no sooner was the conversation between Traub and the prime minister over, Isaacs fired off a missive to Curtin seeking to dissuade him from accepting any proposal that the emissary might have put to him on behalf of the Jewish Agency because *ipso facto* it would harm Allied strategy in the Middle East. He then proceeded to send similar messages to the press and notable people in the general

community.⁶² Not everyone was willing to bend to his wishes. When the League of Nations Union of which Isaacs was a member, provided Traub with a platform to publicly speak about ‘The Jewish Home in Palestine’, Isaacs immediately renounced his membership.⁶³

On the stump: Sydney

Upon his arrival in Sydney, Freilich introduced Traub to fellow Zionists at the Maccabean Hall detailing the *shaliach’s* aforementioned biography. Despite the opposition from local Anglo-Jews to this campaign as discussed earlier, together they set up a committee led by Freilich to plan the campaign agenda for the Sydney Victory Appeal.⁶⁴ A State Zionist Council reception for Traub was held on the 4 December 1941 at the Maccabean Hall which was addressed by several speakers, both rabbinical and lay.⁶⁵ The Jewish High Holidays had descended, and on *Yom Kippur* the emissary attended religious services at three different synagogues where on each occasion his presence was acknowledged – *Kol Nidre* by Rabbi E.A. Levi of the Eastern Suburbs Central Synagogue, *Musaf* by Rabbi Schenk of the Temple Emanuel, and *Neilah* by Rabbi Dr Israel Porush at the Great Synagogue.⁶⁶ All three rabbis were Zionists.

There was further media coverage of Traub’s visit. Following the two articles in *PIX Magazine*, a third appeared in the *Sydney Jewish News* under Traub’s name called ‘The A.I.F., The Birth of a Tradition: Australian Soldiers Look at Palestine.’⁶⁷

The 24th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration was eagerly grasped by the *shaliach* as an opportunity to tell the National Council of Jewish Women of its significance in the history of Zionism. He argued its emergence was the product of the British Government’s recognition of the Jewish people’s 2,000-year religious connection to the Holy Land despite their exile, their yearning to return and their belief that Jews could resurrect their ancient homeland in *Eretz Israel* (Land of Israel) which they were currently doing.⁶⁸ At the Temple Emanuel, he traced the history of Zionism from ‘Herzl to the Present’ and emphasised how quickly refugees finding sanctuary in Palestine adapted to their new home. Blame for the pre-war hardening of Arab non-co-operation over the Peel Report that led to the 1939 MacDonal White Paper was because of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement of Nazism. However, Traub also castigated the parsimony of free Jewries towards the *Yishuv*, saying that if by the end of 1941, the Jewish population in Palestine had failed to reach a million and only 250 instead

of 500 Jewish settlements were established, the fault lay both with the restrictions of the White Paper and the financial close-fistedness of free Jewries. What was demanded 'were deeds and not pledges of sympathy', a sentiment embodied in the Victory Appeal slogan, 'The Key is in Your Pocket'.⁶⁹

Keren Hayesod's Sydney Victory Appeal was opened at the Australia Hotel in the presence of leaders of the Jewish community and eminent non-Jews such as the premier of New South Wales, William McKell, and his attorney general, C.E. Martin. Proceeds of the Appeal on the night netted the princely sum of £9,000.⁷⁰ With the Appeal now launched, Traub embarked on many speaking engagements. At one of these, he outlined to a cohort of Zionist women the methods by which the Nazis were punishing the Jews in Europe, pointing out that:

... Eight million Jews had been 'enslaved' in order to wipe them out ... thousands were tortured to death in concentration camps, hundreds of thousands were crushed by starvation and disease or fell under the yoke of slave labour.

This, he lamented, was happening when the British government, in cahoots with her Mandatory Authority in Palestine, was stopping Jews from reaching the Jewish homeland and soldiers from the *Yishuv* were fighting 'shoulder to shoulder with Australian and other British forces to defend Palestine and universal justice and freedom'.⁷¹

Traub was welcomed by a huge event at the Chatswood Town Hall organised by the North Shore Christadelphian Church. His mantra to them was that Zionism had been the faith of diaspora Jewry for 2,000 years and during that time they had prayed to return to Palestine. Now it was a sanctuary of freedom for thousands of European Jews traumatised by 'Nazi-medieval brutality'.⁷²

Returning to an overflow audience at the Temple Emanuel, Traub directly addressed the topic, 'Assimilation or Failure' in which he argued that the promise of cultural assimilation as a way of thwarting antisemitism had failed, with the proof of this currently demonstrated in Europe. He said racial antisemitism did not begin with Hitler, and it would not end with his death. The only true antidote to this scourge was a Jewish homeland in Palestine.⁷³

His lectures to the Zionist Youth Council and the Executive of the Zionist Youth Organisation, *Shomrim*, were 'The Jewish War Effort in

Palestine' and the 'History of Jewish Migration'.⁷⁴ He then took a short break but not before he had addressed 43 groups with a combined attendance of 3,500 and 14 drawing room meetings for 500.⁷⁵ The Victory Appeal cash register had rung up £15,300, far more than the whole *Keren Hayesod* fundraiser in 1938/9. This was attributed to the power of Traub's oratory which had attracted many newcomers from Europe to the cause. Many of them knew of *Keren Hayesod* in their previous communities. The Appeal's coffers were expected to rise still further because not all donors to the previous one in 1939 had yet been approached.⁷⁶

During the temporary break, Traub undertook two quick trips to Melbourne to discuss matters with the leaders of the Australian Zionist Federation residing there. On the first one, he was accompanied by Freilich and Norman Schureck, and on the second, with Freilich and Silva Steigrad, when Isaac's smear of the New South Wales Zionist Council was discussed.⁷⁷

The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 27 March 1942 published another piece by Traub called 'Jewry After the War – National Home in Palestine'. To the paper's unaware readers, he revealed the obscenity of what 'eight million Jews' in Europe were facing under Hitler, though with prescience, that could not be properly ascertained until after an Allied victory. However, when that day came, he hoped survivors would receive all human rights, though he was doubtful because antisemitism would not have been eradicated in Europe as it had become ingrained there in the people's mentality. Also, European states involved in post-war reconstruction would have little interest in accommodating displaced Jewish refugees. The only rightful place for these tormented souls was in Palestine where they would be accommodated and welcomed to help develop the Jewish homeland within the framework of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Traub thought that with the defeat of Nazism, Jews and Muslims could live amicably in Palestine, though she needed a Jewish army for security. He explained that already 20,000 Palestinian Jews had enlisted in the British forces and had been fighting in Abyssinia, Eritrea, the Libyan Desert, Greece, Crete, and Syria. Others served in the Palestine police force. The prospective Jewish regiment would be under British command and draw recruits from Palestine and from North and South America. He stressed that the Jews were the first people singled out in 1933, not 1939, by the Nazis for punishment and therefore the Jews of

Palestine regarded it a matter of right and honour to meet the enemy on the battlefield as Jews. He assured all that, come the end of the war, the genuine amity forged between the *Yishuv* and Australian soldiers would be converted into close ties between the Commonwealth of Australia and the Jewish homeland.⁷⁸

The Jewish press's positive reportage about Palestine, on the role of *Keren Hayesod* in wartime and for a Jewish regiment in the British Army,⁷⁹ were all grist to the mill for the campaign which, after six exhaustive months, ended in Sydney raising £20,000. Traub's pivotal role in this venture was celebrated at a farewell dinner given to him by the State Zionist Council of NSW where he was the recipient of praise from all present. Abram Landa, MLA, lauded his ease of communication with both Jews and non-Jews, particularly with parliamentary colleagues and trade union officials. Yehuda Feher of the *Shomrim* Zionist Youth spoke of Traub's work with his young members, always encouraging their Zionism to greater heights. Others eulogised the emissary's inspiration, dedication, and knowledge. Rabbi Dr Israel Porush of the Great Synagogue told of how in an age of great disillusionment, Traub was able to transmit the true spirit of Zionism. Silva Steigrad acclaimed him for bringing the dry bones of Zionism in Sydney to life while, with tongue firmly in cheek, Rabbi Max Schenk of the Temple Emanuel was delighted Traub was leaving them because his dynamic energy and non-stop work ethic made him feel tired. On a serious note, the Rabbi commended the *shaliach* for his courage and integrity, especially in addressing his congregation which had enlightened both friends and adversaries alike. Freilich, speaking as a friend and someone who had been with Traub throughout the campaign, endorsed all the sentiments, adding that Traub's tenacity, sincerity, and workload were truly infectious even when the road ahead appeared difficult. Especially gratifying was his work with the youth.⁸⁰

Traub's moving response lasted for nearly an hour keeping everyone riveted.⁸¹ In thanking them, he said he was reminded of his farewells from Jewish communities and Zionist organisations in Europe that had now been crushed by the Nazis and whose spokespeople had been murdered outright or died in concentration camps. The few who managed to survive were continuing as best they could with Zionist work. He saw his role not just to convey a contemporary picture of Palestine, but also to explain how the *Yishuv* was successfully prepared to absorb refugees. What sustained many of them, despite inhuman treatment, was their

hope of reaching Palestine. He revealed the three things unhelpful to the campaign were Japan's entry into the war, the lack of a Zionist movement which forced him to spend valuable time on communal matters and poor Zionist education in the Jewish community. What gave him the moral fortitude to carry on with his work was that his brothers in Palestine were actively involved in the fight against Nazism.

Traub felt the lack of interest in Zionism in Sydney when he arrived there was due to assimilation and ignorance bred of isolation from Jewish life inside and outside Palestine. The aim of his 60 presentations was to awaken Jewish consciousness, strengthen Zionist ideology, and kindle partisan support for Palestinian Jewry. He greatly appreciated Freilich's help and his publicity team of Gerald de Vahl Davis and Michael Horowitz. However, the success of his mission in Sydney was not due to him as many had suggested, but to the great cause he represented which had even awakened 'comfortable Jews out of their dreams of assimilation'. As for those who opposed his mission within the Jewish community, the rhetoric used was like that heard around the time of the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the 1939 MacDonalld White Paper. Such negativism, he felt, was currently being answered by *Yishuv* soldiers fighting alongside the Allies in the war against Nazism. Monies raised by the campaign were fully directed to secure the long-held dream of creating *Eretz Israel*. Some 460 individuals contributed to the Victory Appeal, but as important as the amount of money raised, so too was the increased Zionist awareness aroused. The challenge was to educate the rising generations about the need for the Jewish homeland because from their ranks would come the future teachers and leaders of Zionism. An Allied victory might dampen down antisemitism in Europe, but history had taught it would not disappear because it stemmed from the 'abnormal position of the Jews being a nation without a state'. Normalisation for the Jew could only be in a Jewish homeland.

Traub received a standing ovation and the proceedings ended with singing the *Hatikvah* and the Australian National Anthem.⁸² With that, the mission travelled south to Melbourne.

Melbourne

As mentioned, Traub had been to Melbourne to meet with members of the Zionist Federation of Australia which, with the Victorian Zionist State Council, formed a committee to conduct the Victory

Appeal in the city.⁸³ Rabbi Dr Harry Freedman of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation introduced Traub to the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Daniel Mannix, who was extremely interested in what was happening in the Holy Land,⁸⁴ and to the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, Rev. Joseph Booth, at St. Paul's Cathedral.⁸⁵ Alec Masel and Sam Wynn accompanied him to meet the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Frank Beaurepaire, at the Town Hall⁸⁶ and Masel was with Traub in a parley with former Australian Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies, who said he had been impressed with the *Yishuv's* economic development when he visited Palestine in early 1941.⁸⁷

Traub made two radio broadcasts on the ABC. The first, 'Palestine in War' on 17 May 1942 related how the pre-war Nazi victimisation of Jews in Germany had morphed into the mass murder of Jews in Europe. Some 250,000 refugees had reached Palestine where they were pitching in to develop the Jewish homeland. He touted Palestine as an Allied strategic asset and explained why the Jews of Palestine regarded the fight against Hitler as personal. Many of them had enlisted in the British Army to fight in Eritrea, Abyssinia, Bardia, Tobruk, Greece and Crete.⁸⁸

'Post-War Problems of Jewry' on 17 July 1942 was the subject of the second broadcast in which he repeated details about the transformative change of the *Yishuv* since the Balfour Declaration of 1917, explained that pre-war Arab anti-Jewish disturbances in Palestine were stirred by Nazi and Fascist propaganda and why Jews regarded the war against Nazism as a fight against annihilation.⁸⁹

It was inevitable that the Traub mission in Melbourne would be criticised by anti-Zionists as the city was, after all, Sir Isaac Isaacs's home turf. The negativism came in a letter to the *Australian Jewish Herald*, which was co-signed by several opponents of Zionism, all pillars of Victoria's Anglo-Jewish community. Their carapace was the call by Prime Minister Curtin to Australian citizens to fully concentrate their time, energy, and money on the national war effort. They believed the Victory Appeal detracted from this and argued as it was wartime, the timing was totally inappropriate. Disingenuously, the signatories suggested they might remove their objections to it when the national crisis passed.⁹⁰

These sentiments disturbed Masel, who said that the Victory Appeal had received the stamp of approval from the Victorian Advisory Board on whose executive sat some of the co-signatories. He was irked by the

implication that the organisers of the Victory Appeal were disloyal and cited the fact that a similar appeal in England during the Blitz had as its patrons the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, Dr Hertz, the Marchioness of Reading, and non-Jewish notables, Lords Snell and Leopold Amery.⁹¹ All of these gentlemen's patriotic credentials were beyond reproach. Also, the prime minister of South Africa, Field Marshall Jan Smut, was a supporter.

Masel contended that monies raised by the Victory Appeal helped in the defence of Palestine against Nazi expansionism while simultaneously creating a safe haven for thousands of traumatised Jewish refugees. In Palestine the war effort was being shouldered by the Jewish Agency in recruiting for the British Army, the provision of air raid shelters for civilians, and caring for war victims and their families. Having said this, the organisers would yield to no one in their determination to assist the Australian war effort. However, they were obliged to help the Jewish Agency create a new home in *Eretz Israel* for the victims of Hitler's evil, and this endeavour would be made easier if the Jewish community ensured the success of the Victory Appeal.⁹² Masel denied the claim of a signatory, Harold Boas, that he did not know that it was planned to be publicly launched on 8 June 1942, since it was agreed to by the Victorian Jewish Advisory Board of which Boas was vice president. The only limitation was that the ceremony would not be as large as the Sydney one. Further, Masel argued that any accusation that the Traub mission was creating disunity in the Jewish community was nonsense.⁹³

The Appeal's joint patronage of the Australian Zionist Federation Executive, the State Zionist Council of Victoria, and the State Executive of *Keren Hayesod* provided a strong community framework.⁹⁴ The Appeal opening dinner was at the Samuel Myers Hall in St. Kilda in honour of Traub with a plethora of speakers - Alec Masel, Colonel Harold Cohen, Lord Mayor of Melbourne Cr. Beaurepaire, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly W. Slater, Dr Leon Jona, Rabbi Dr Freedman, and of course Traub himself. Immediately following this, he addressed a women's morning tea at the Wentworth Café in Collins Street on the key role of women in the *Keren Hayesod* Appeal in London during the Blitz⁹⁵ and then to many Jewish women's organisations at the Samuel Myers Hall on the afternoon of 14 June 1942.⁹⁶

Anti-Zionist views in the Jewish community were ever on the boil.⁹⁷ A letter from Abram Landa, MLA, from Sydney to the *Australian Jewish Herald* brought this animosity again to the surface with Landa

saying that on his recent trip to Melbourne, he was perplexed by Isaacs's continual smearing of Zionism. He added that when the gentleman had adorned the high office, he never used the position once to silence anti-Zionist sentiment. Rather, Isaacs was dividing the Jewish community at the very moment it needed to be united to fight for the patriotic cause.⁹⁸ Another correspondent also censured the former Governor General for his abuse of Zionists by questioning their loyalty.⁹⁹

All this was far too much for Rabbi Jacob Danglow of the St. Kilda Synagogue and Senior Hebrew Chaplain to the Australian Armed Forces,¹⁰⁰ who viewed such disparagement of Isaacs as rude, repugnant and utterly unjustified.¹⁰¹ The Office of Commonwealth Intelligence noted that many prominent Australian Jews were opposed to the Victory Appeal for diverting money, time and energy from the war effort and that Isaacs was trying to have it stopped.¹⁰²

Despite this opposition, Traub continued his scheduled meetings with a broad spectrum of people both Jewish and non-Jewish, such as members of the Victorian Trades Hall where he expounded on the activities of the *Histadrut* (Palestine Federation of Labor) and Jewish homelessness in Europe.¹⁰³ He certainly seemed a popular figure at the Kadimah Hall of the Jewish Cultural Centre in Carlton, in the heartland of the 'foreign' or non-Anglo section of the Jewish community with whom he seemed most relaxed. There he addressed young people on what life was like in Palestine¹⁰⁴ and was welcomed by the Carlton Jewish community at a function with Sam Wynn in the chair when he spoke on the dire situation in Europe for Jews. Traub was said to have broken through the apathy towards Zionism that prevailed in Melbourne Jewry. Rabbi G.L. Gurewicz of the Carlton United Hebrew Congregation expressed full support for the Traub mission and what *Keren Hayesod* was doing for refugees.¹⁰⁵

Contributing to the Herzl-Bialik Memorial celebration with a speech in Yiddish on 'The Jewish Problem,' Traub dismissed a popular notion that antisemitism was not possible in Australia. However, it was the job of Jews to convey the message to non-Jews that antisemitism was the handmaiden of fascism and Nazism, the very evils that their troops were fighting, and if such tendencies in Australia continued unchallenged it would shatter their society.¹⁰⁶ Already, the level of antisemitism was worrying members of the immigrant Jewish community.¹⁰⁷ Reports were that Judeophobic propaganda was circulating among the Australian armed forces.¹⁰⁸ At the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation,

his talk to another all-female audience was also on ‘Zionism from Herzl to the Present’, but this time with a stress on the part women had played in the journey.¹⁰⁹

A cable from the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem kept him abreast of its thoughts on a Jewish regiment in Palestine. Traub was advised that for the moment there were not enough trained and equipped recruits to fill its rank, and though Jews were increasingly joining the Palestine Police Force, their training and equipment were inadequate for an effective home guard. What was required were 20,000 recruits for the regiment and 40,000 for different roles in the Palestine Police Force.¹¹⁰

Despite Traub’s time having been monopolised by the campaign, he felt it necessary to involve himself in local Jewish politics, particularly with the movement to have a more representative leadership of the Victorian Jewish community, one which would include Zionists and voices of newcomers to the country.¹¹¹

After six months’ toil, the end of the Traub mission in Melbourne was celebrated by the Zionist faithful. They voiced their awe at the emissary’s non-stop work ethic, depth of knowledge about the extant state of European Jewry and Palestine and the ease by which he connected with every individual and so many diverse groups. His response was to again reflect on the Jewish tragedy unfolding in Europe and related to fears held for his mission when Japan entered the war.¹¹² For the first time, he openly unleashed on his tormentor, Isaac Isaacs, without mentioning his name:

... it was a Jew who found it necessary to prove we Jews (viz. Zionists) were not right. He was not the first, nor will he be the last of those isolationist Jews who made themselves indifferent to the sufferings of the Jewish people. I have not answered him, and I shall not answer him. History will give the answer as it gave the answer to our assimilationists of 1897 and 1917. And history will show who were the better patriots, who served better the cause of democracy, of freedom, of Great Britain, of the Allied Powers, and of the Jewish People. Our task must be the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine as part of the British Commonwealth of Nations: and a Jewish army to fight for freedom and justice, and for the defence of our Homeland and the Allied cause. Our final answer will be given by those

millions of Jews who will go to Eretz Israel and turn the age-old dream of the Return to Zion into a living reality. This will be the ultimate answer of the Jewish People which is determined to live and not to die ...¹¹³

He listed the many individuals and organisations he met from Jewish and civil society such as the Trades and Labor Council, the League of Nations, the Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University, and the Legacy Club. Altogether, in Melbourne, he delivered 80 talks, and the campaign grossed £25,000 from 700 donors which was much more than the 1939 appeal that secured £10,422 from 292 subscribers. Again, he mentioned the Zionist educational aspect of the fundraising and said his purpose was always to unite all groups dedicated to '*Biyun Ha-Aretz*' (Building of the Nation). Special mentions were Dr David Tabor and his publicity team, together with the indomitable Ida Wynne and her Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) ladies. To Zionist supporters, his message was to work diligently for a post-war future that was good for mankind and the Jewish people.¹¹⁴ The mission was then off to Adelaide for two weeks.

Adelaide

Traub's schedule in the 'City of Churches' began with a meeting with the State Premier, John Playford, then the Lord Mayor of Adelaide, Colonel A.S. Hooker, and the Speaker of the House of Assembly, Sir Robert Nicholls. Lunch at the Adelaide Town Hall, arranged by the Commonwealth Club, was attended by many parliamentarians and prominent members of the Jewish community. He spoke at the Rotary Club, three drawing-room meetings in Jewish homes, and to a gathering of WIZO that drew 120 ladies.¹¹⁵ Sam Wynn came from Melbourne specifically to conduct the Victory Appeal under the auspices of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation and the local Zionist Society, notching up £1,500, a large sum for such a small community of barely 500¹¹⁶ that doubled the 1939 appeal.¹¹⁷

At the request of the Secretary of the Commonwealth Club, Traub was the guest of the Woodlands Church of England Grammar School, and later his talk at the Maughan Church was broadcast throughout the State of South Australia.¹¹⁸ He then briefly returned to Melbourne to speak with others at the Kadimah Hall in Carlton celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration,¹¹⁹ before traveling north to Brisbane.

Brisbane

In Brisbane, Traub followed his familiar beat of lectures and met prominent people. The president of the State Zionist Council in Queensland, I. Freedman, introduced him to the Brisbane Lord Mayor. There were the drawing-room gatherings in private homes, conversing with WIZO groups from north and south of the city, a lunch talkfest at the Rotary Club in the presence of the Lord Mayor, and mustering with Christadelphians and the Young Zionist League. All were said to have been well attended.¹²⁰

In a rare act of unity, Zionist societies from the north and south of the city formed a joint campaign committee. Freilich came from Sydney to launch the Victory Appeal on 10 December 1942 at the Brisbane Synagogue with 150 people present. Traub's oration was about life in Palestine and the Yishuv's support for the Allied war effort. The evening was described as a 'moral and financial success', with another £1,800 for the campaign coffers exceeding the £1,000 of the 1939 appeal.¹²¹

The campaign launch details were recorded by the Australian Intelligence Service in Queensland, whose covert operation included reading a cable from Traub to Johannesburg describing it. The curious rationale given for the surveillance was that the information gleaned might interest British authorities should friction arise between Jews and Arabs in Palestine after the war.¹²²

Though warmly farewelled at a private home, Traub's final obligation was to attend, along with Freilich, a function organised by the South Brisbane Young Zionist League. Both men urged the need for unity of Zionists across Brisbane to give their cause a single strong voice.¹²³ The final part of Traub's mission in Australia was on the other side of Australia's vast continent.

Perth

The details of Traub's exceedingly long and arduous train ride from Brisbane via Adelaide, and across the Nullarbor Plain to Perth, are not recorded, but he reached his destination twelve hours late. Despite this extremely long delay, a welcoming party stayed at the Perth railway station all that time. It was composed of representatives of all sections of the small Jewish community of a little over 2,000¹²⁴ led by Reverend Rubin Zacks of the Perth Hebrew Congregation and his president, Mayer Breckler. The exhausted *shaliach* told them he had never before visited a Jewish community so distant from any other, but he felt their warmth.¹²⁵

The West Australian reproduced a talk given by Traub to the community under the headline ‘The Jewish Home’s Remarkable Expansion and Palestine’s Part in the War’. He again spoke of the great strides, economic, social, and cultural made by the Jewish homeland since World War One that could be attested to by Australian diggers who were in Palestine in 1917 and had returned there in the current conflict. In 1917, the Jewish population was 5,500 and now, 550,000, with 140,000 in rural pursuits. There were modern factories, the Hebrew University, schools, research institutes, a National Library, and great cultural assets. Geographically, Palestine was the gateway to the Suez Canal and on the highway to oil-rich Iraq. Traub emphasised again that for Jews the war with Hitler began in 1933 not 1939 and that already two million of them had been slaughtered. Around 20,000 men from the *Yishuv* had joined the British Army and served alongside Australians in Eritrea, Abyssinia, Egypt, Libya, Greece, and Crete, while 23,000 enlisted in the Palestine Police Force. The *Yishuv*’s strong economy also served as an ‘industrial workshop’ for Allied armies further contributing to the defeat of the Axis powers¹²⁶.

Traub visited the governor and premier of the State, the lord mayor of Perth, the Legacy Club, gave a talk on commercial radio 3KZ about ‘The Jewish War Effort’, and held drawing room discussions.¹²⁷ The Victory Appeal was launched by the Perth Hebrew Congregation and netted almost £5,000. Traub’s dissertation there was the same as his radio broadcast. One of those on the podium with him was Lt. Colonel Eleazar Margolin in probably his last public appearance.¹²⁸

Traub’s long return journey back to the eastern states was not without incident though he was unaware of the circumstances. When returning by train to Adelaide, two service members observed him typing, and this information was passed on to army intelligence. All Australian Jewish communities were being watched for Zionists, principally Revisionists and Communists. Wrongly, a member of the Adelaide Jewish community with the same surname as Traub, Dr Edmund Traub, was hauled in for questioning about the matter on the train. He was an immigrant chemist from Germany who migrated to Adelaide just prior to the war.¹²⁹

Another person of interest in Adelaide who was associated with the Traub mission was Dianne Kolker, a member of the Australian Women’s Army Service. She had come to Adelaide from Melbourne

in 1941 where she was said to be on the Executive of the Eureka Youth League and a member of the Australia Soviet Friendship League.¹³⁰

What the soldiers had observed Michael Traub doing was updating his diary, something he often did to fill in time on long boring train trips. He had to cancel a speaking engagement in Adelaide because his train arrived there thirty hours behind schedule.¹³¹

Returning to Melbourne from Adelaide, Traub addressed members of the Labor movement on the work of the *Histadrut* telling them that after the war Palestine would accept all refugees who wanted to come, and that under the auspices of the Jewish Agency, the *Yishuv* would seek to become a Jewish Commonwealth within the British Commonwealth of Nations.¹³² Then it was back to Sydney to attend the 11th Australian Zionist Conference and give his last newspaper interview in the country. He told readers that if Hitler was not quickly defeated up to five million Jews in Europe could die. Palestine was the place of Jewish sanctuary for all Jews determined by ‘international sanction as of right and not of sufferance’.¹³³

A second matter of which the emissary was unaware concerned his application for a visa to New Zealand. He possessed a Polish passport and allegedly claimed to be employed by the local Polish Consulate. Also, he had secured an Argentinian passport at the end of 1942 for a twelve-month period. Thus, the Commonwealth Intelligence Services felt his true destination was the South American country. However, after internal discussion, the view of the intelligence authority was that Traub was anti-Nazi and should be allowed to leave Australia for New Zealand.¹³⁴ where he arrived in late June 1943.

Postscript: New Zealand and beyond

Traub found there that knowledge of Zionism was even poorer than when he first arrived in Sydney. He met the country’s prime minister, Peter Fraser, twice: on the first occasion with some cabinet members who queried him about plans in Palestine post-war to absorb refugees. At the second, Fraser agreed to address the inaugural New Zealand Zionist Conference telling the emissary of his hopes for the defeat of Fascism and Nazism and for New Zealand to be at the table after the war when decisions would be made concerning Jewish aspirations for Palestine.¹³⁵

The New Zealand *Keren Hayesod* Victory Appeal on 26 August 1943 was a resounding success raising £1900.¹³⁶ At the event, New Zealand’s

Minister of Rehabilitation, Major Skinner, said that if Palestine was handed over to the Arabs, the great work of the *Yishuv* would be quickly destroyed and he wanted no part in that.¹³⁷

Walter Nash, the Minister of Finance, became the prime minister temporarily when Peter Fraser took ill. He bitterly criticised the MacDonald White Paper for preventing refugees from reaching Palestine and spoke of a possible move to abolish it at a forthcoming Empire Conference in London. Traub canvassed this notion with members of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition. His instincts were that it could happen if there was a popular groundswell of support for it, and he encouraged Pro-Palestine Committees in New Zealand and Australia to lobby their respective national government on the matter.¹³⁸ Just prior to Traub leaving New Zealand for the United States of America, he received a cable from Dr J.M. Machover of the Zionist Federation of Australia, dated 10 January 1944 which stated in part:

I hasten to inform you that on Wednesday a deputation waited upon Dr. Evatt: the members of the delegation were: Mr. Saul Symons, Dr. J. M. Machover, Mr. S. Steigrad, Mr. H.B. Newman, and Mr. M. Freilich. The deputation was introduced by Mr. A. Landa. It is a purely informative affair and we promised that no publication of the talk will take place. The reception was a friendly one. All of us have the impression that our fear that the Australian Government is against our movement seems to be unfounded. On the contrary, Dr. Evatt gave us the impression that Australia would support any steps taken by other dominions and democracies on behalf of the Jewish Home. He referred to the necessity in time of war for diplomatic silence but said that when the time is appropriate, they will not be satisfied with words but will take vigorous action. He of course emphasized he would not commit the government and promised to discuss the matter with the Prime Minister. Dr. Evatt was particularly interested in our report on New Zealand's attitude and read with attention the cutting reporting Mr. Fraser's speech on the occasion of your address. We understand that Mr. Fraser is coming to Australia shortly and Dr. Evatt will talk over the matter with him.

That is why I am particularly anxious to let you know of our interview without delay, in the hope that you will be able to prepare the ground. It will interest you to know that Dr. Evatt has not been influenced by Sir Isaac Isaacs's published views on Zionism. On the contrary, he showed good understanding of the position of the real situation of affairs in Jewish life...¹³⁹

Machover felt the initiative for the removal of the White Paper had to come from New Zealand or South Africa.¹⁴⁰ The Conference Heads of Government of the British Commonwealth was held in London in May 1944 and the attendees included Winston Churchill, John Curtin, Peter Fraser, and Jan Smuts. However, there is no record of a move that concerned the cancellation of the White Paper.¹⁴¹

Traub told Freilich that if it were technically possible, he would like to return to Palestine from New Zealand before taking up his next post as special delegate for *Keren Hayesod* in America. That did not happen, and after only several months in his new post, Dr Michael Traub died at the early age of 55 years in New York's Mt. Sinai Hospital after an eight-week illness.¹⁴²

There can be no doubt his *schlihut* (mission) was crowned with financial success despite it being wartime and objections to it from within the Australian Jewish community. He was a rare public voice telling of the plight of European Jewry to often uninformed audiences. What remains problematic is whether his Zionist work in Australasia laid any foundation for Australia's and New Zealand's support of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 of 29 November 1947 that provided international legitimacy for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.¹⁴³ On 14 May 1948, David Ben-Gurion called the Jewish State of Israel into being at the Tel Aviv Town Hall. Given that Michael Traub had worked long and hard for this day, one can only wonder what role he might have played in the new polity.

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