

SANCTUARY FOR WHOM? JEWISH VICTIMS AND NAZI PERPETRATORS IN POST-WAR AUSTRALIAN MIGRANT CAMPS*

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In an address entitled 'Where can the Refugees Go?' given to the national conference for Palestine in November 1944, James G. McDonald analysed the inadequate response of the allies to the Jewish refugee crisis during the war years and then predicted that the situation would not change. Surveying the main countries able to receive refugees at the end of the war, he stated: 'Australia? The latest land settlement scheme for Jews in that comparatively empty continent can be expected to result in the admission of hundreds, perhaps a few thousand, not more, Jewish refugees.'¹

This prediction proved to be somewhat pessimistic, as Australia took in 10,000 Jewish survivors from Europe and Shanghai in the period from 1946 to 1951. However, in the same period, almost 170,000 non-Jewish 'Displaced Persons' (DPs) were accepted into Australia, so that the percentage of Jews was comparatively small. In 1988 a book entitled *Sanctuary? Remembering postwar immigration* rendered an account of the post-war emigration program.² It contained only one reference to Jewish immigration.³ One year later, Mark Aarons published his account of the post-war migration program, with the word 'sanctuary' also in its title.⁴ It dealt with the perpetrators of the destruction of European Jewry during World War II and revealed that a considerable number of them managed to find refuge in Australia through the government mass sponsorship schemes, which started with the International Refugee Organisation (IRO). This article will examine the IRO

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program in Australia, the situation in the major migrant reception centre, Bonegilla, in Victoria and the reasons why so many war criminals and Nazi collaborators were admitted through this program. It will also investigate the antisemitic sentiments displayed by the immigrants in these camps against the Jewish DPs, who were so few in number that their experiences have so far been largely omitted from the main narrative of Australia's postwar history.

Australia and the IRO Program

After World War II, the Australian government introduced a new migration policy. Whilst British migrants were still the preferred source, efforts were made to increase substantially Australia's population by tapping previously restricted migration sources, especially non-British Europeans displaced by the war.⁵ This change developed towards the end of the war as a result of the impact of the threat of a Japanese invasion. This survival anxiety led Calwell to develop the concept of 'populate or perish' in a little book he entitled *How many Australians Tomorrow?* published in 1945.⁶ In this way, the Australian Labor Party and the newly created Department of Immigration under Arthur A. Calwell, introduced a radically new approach to post-war migration policies.

In May 1945, there were about seven and half million DPs in Europe, of whom one and a quarter million were Jews. Most were housed in DP camps set up in the British, American and French zones in Germany and Austria, as well as in Italy. By early 1946, the majority of the DPs had been repatriated, but there were still over a million residing in camps. In April 1946, a special international committee was established to consider the problem of the DPs. It recommended the formation of the International Refugee Organisation (IRO). In December 1946 the United Nations General Assembly decided to replace the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) with the IRO. For its constitution to be endorsed, it required 15 countries to contribute 75 per cent of its total budget. By June 1947 16 countries joined the scheme, with eight countries agreeing to make advanced contributions.⁷ The Eastern bloc countries refused to co-operate with the IRO as many of the refugees had fled from the Communist controlled areas.

In April 1947 proposals were made for Australia to join the IRO. Noel Lamidey, chief migration officer at Australia House, London, strongly recommended co-operation with the IRO. He argued that the IRO was 'the logical body to do the spade work for us'.⁸ In July 1947 Calwell visited London and the continent where he negotiated

an agreement with the IRO under which the Australian government agreed to accept 4,000 European DPs in 1947 and 12,000 in 1948. The Commonwealth was granted full selection rights. These migrants travelled on assisted passages paid by the IRO, but the Australian government made an *ex-gratia* payment of £10 per adult because of the long distance to Australia. The government was also responsible for the reception and employment of the DPs who were selected and assigned jobs according to Australia's economic needs. They were obliged to remain in their assigned jobs, initially for at least one year and later for two years.⁹ This program, known as 'Operation Kangaroo',¹⁰ proved so successful that the numbers were rapidly increased. Between 1947 and 1951 168,200 migrants arrived under the IRO scheme with an additional 29,800 assisted as individuals. In addition some 95,800 non-British migrants who were not assisted by the IRO arrived in this period.¹¹ On the basis of these figures, Australia's contribution to the IRO program in relation to her own population was a significant one and Australia ranked third, after the United States and Canada, in helping to solve the problem of displaced persons after the war.

When Australia joined the IRO scheme, Major-General Frederick G. Galleghan was appointed to head the Australian Military Mission in Berlin, a position he filled until 1949. A career soldier, Galleghan was a hero of the Changi prisoner-of-war camp (between 1942 and 1945). Known as 'Black Jack' because of his dark hair and complexion, he was a hard, rough man,¹² and has been described thus:

He was a stern figure with a natural air of authority that brooked no dissent. Some officers claimed to have feared Galleghan more than they did the Japanese. Nevertheless he is said to have been a respected leader who understood that his men's survival depended on their morale, which he maintained through the imposition of military discipline.¹³

After liberation Galleghan was appointed Deputy Director of the Commonwealth Investigation Service in Sydney from 1945 to 1947, before accepting the position to head the Australian selection team in Berlin.¹⁴ The military mission in Berlin was in charge of all Australian selection policies for the IRO scheme. These policies were implemented through selection teams, which usually consisted of two selection officers, one medical officer and a driver. They were sent to various parts of the occupied territories in Germany, Austria and Italy.

The early selections were made from Baltic, Ukrainian,

Yugoslavian and Czechoslovakian DPs.¹⁵ Initially, only Baltic migrants were selected because their racial appearance — tall, blond, blue eyed — fitted into the image required by the White Australia Policy. As such they were considered to be 'Aryan' in appearance. The Australian government also believed that 'they are people who are easily assimilated'.¹⁶ In April 1948 Galleghan suggested that Poles be included as other groups were diminishing.¹⁷ The Secretary of the Department of Immigration, Tasman Heyes, approved this suggestion with the proviso 'for your confidential guidance (that) Polish Jews should not be recruited unless they are exceptionally good cases and then in limited numbers'.¹⁸ In July 1948, when Hungarians were admitted into the scheme, the same stipulation was made. In December 1949, selection processes commenced among German nationals who had been dispossessed by religious or political persecution during the Hitler regime or who had emigrated from Germany and subsequently been displaced.¹⁹

The Australian selection teams at first did not accept family units but by late 1948 this provision was modified. They were instructed that family units could be accepted with the exception of Poles, Hungarians, Jews and White Russians.²⁰ In March 1949 Polish family groups were accepted 'on the same terms as displaced persons of other nationalities subject to their being non-Jews'.²¹ In the cable with this instruction Heyes stressed 'desire no publicity be given to the exclusion of Jewish persons'.²² Even in May 1949, when all nationalities 'who are of pure European race' became eligible, 'Jewish family units of European nationality' were still excluded.²³ This policy of exclusion remained in force until the last years of the IRO program in 1951 and 1952.

Migrant Camps in Australia and the entry of Nazi War Criminals

When the DPs arrived in Australia under 'Operation Kangaroo' they were sent to migrant reception and training centres, which were usually military camps that had serviced army needs during the war and were scattered across the country.²⁴ Calwell's idea was that these camps would assist in the acclimatisation of the newcomers to Australia, although it was thought that most migrants would only remain in the camps for a month or so, in order to undertake an intensive program of preparation and orientation for life in Australia.²⁵ After that, they would be allocated work and would move to where their employment was located.

Until 1948 there were three reception and training centres — Bonegilla in Victoria, Bathurst in New South Wales and Northam in Western Australia. In 1949, a further 20 army camps were

converted into holding centres across Australia and by late 1949 there were reception and training centres which catered for 15,500 people at a time, holding centres for 22,500 and workers hostels for 31,014, providing a total accommodation for close to 70,000 DPs at any one time. Once the new arrivals had found approved employment, they were permitted to leave the reception and training camps, whilst the holding centres provided accommodation for the wives and children of men sent to different locations to work.²⁶

The largest camp that emerged was Bonegilla, which was located on the border between New South Wales and Victoria and close to the border towns of Albury/Wodonga. It had served as an army camp during the war. Between 1947 and 1971 320,000 migrants passed through its gates, with the first contingent of Baltic DPs arriving in December 1947. It became known as 'Little Europe', providing the initial accommodation for migrants from over a dozen European countries. Conditions were very basic. Migrants were housed in fibro huts with corrugated iron roofs that were unbearably hot in summer and freezing cold in winter. Altogether there were 20 blocks, each of which housed between 300 and 600 people, so that the camp could accommodate up to 7000 migrants at any one time.²⁷ The food was basic but plentiful. Many newcomers found it difficult to eat the typical Australian diet because it was different from what they were accustomed to in Europe. Conditions were so difficult that migrants complained and there were a number of riots.²⁸ The second largest migrant camp was Greta, located near Newcastle in New South Wales, which also served as an army camp during the war. Conditions at Greta replicated those at Bonegilla and for a period it served as both a reception camp and a holding camp.²⁹

Interestingly, German was the *lingua franca* at both Bonegilla and Greta, because it was the German speaking DPs who had gained the positions of power in running the camps. They determined where each group of newcomers would be accommodated and the quality of the food that they would be given.³⁰ By the 1950s, 80% of the jobs at Bonegilla were filled by migrants, as working there had a number of advantages. As historian, Glenda Sluga argued, it was 'preferable to taking one's chances labouring in another remote spot in the Australian "bush"; it could offer some stability and security, as well as the certainty of a reasonable standard of accommodation at a relatively inexpensive rate'.³¹

The majority of DPs were genuine refugees fleeing from the dislocation of war and the conquering Soviet army in 1944 to 1945. However, amongst the DP camps in Europe there were also Nazi war

criminals and collaborators, so that the camps that were intended as centres for the persecuted also became centres for the prosecutors. Indeed, the nature of the DP camps, which were hastily organised in over 900 centres throughout Germany, Austria and Italy, led to an absurd mixing of the oppressed with their oppressors, resulting in the characterization of the DP camps by a *New York Times* reporter as 'camps for collaborators'.³² These experiences were repeated in the Australian migrant reception centres where Jews represented a tiny minority. This was particularly the case at Bonegilla, which very quickly earned the reputation as a centre of antisemitism. The Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Antisemitism, which was formed in Melbourne during the war years, was alerted to the problem and collected a series of statements from Jews in the different migrant camps. The contemporary notes about the situation at Bonegilla stated:

The superintendent in charge of the camp is Major Kershaw, but in actual fact the camp is run by his aide who is a Balt by the name of Lipsius. Mr Lipsius is well known in the camp as a former Stormtrooper. He is very much disliked, not only by the Australian staff, but by all non-Baltic migrants, who say he appoints only Balts to the best jobs in the camp. As far as can be verified, there appears to be some truth in this statement.³³

The statement also noted that a number of the English teachers at Bonegilla, themselves recent immigrants from the Baltic countries, were openly antisemitic, whilst the Australian English teachers complained that in the summer, 'when the men wear sleeveless singlets, [it was common] to see the marks showing that they had been storm troopers, under their arms'.³⁴ Recent research validates these accusations. In her study of Bonegilla, Sluga referred to information provided by Mrs Steiner, the wife of the chief education officer at the camp, of the 'Latvian takeover',³⁵ but did not make any further comments about this statement, other than noting that later they were replaced by a Polish monopoly. Mark Aarons' study of war criminals in Australia provided more information. One member of the Waffen-SS in Latvia, Konrads Kalejs, worked as a documentation and processing clerk in Bonegilla after his arrival in 1950. Aarons claims that in this position 'he was well placed to help other Nazis, handing many sensitive documents, especially the issuing of identity cards to other migrants with no papers'.³⁶ Kalejs received his Australian citizenship in 1957, and later settled in the United States in 1959. In 1979, the Office of Special Investigation (OSI) was created by President Jimmy Carter to investigate the

presence of war criminals in the United States. It uncovered evidence that Kalejs had served in the Arajs Kommando, the Latvian Security Auxiliary Police, during the Nazi occupation of Latvia. He had played a key role in the execution squads, which travelled throughout the country, carrying out mass murders of Jews and other civilians.³⁷ Kalejs claimed on his immigration application forms for Australia and later the United States that he had been a farmer during the war, and that his papers had been lost in a fire in 1947. However, he had admitted to the IRO that he was a lieutenant in the Latvian army in 1941.³⁸ He was eventually deported from the United States for lying about his activities during the war, and was later forced to leave Canada as well. He died peacefully in Melbourne while an appeal against his extradition to Latvia was being heard.

Another war criminal, Branislav Ivanovic, arrived with the IRO in June 1949 and was sent to Bonegilla. He had collaborated with the Nazis from the start of the war until the end of 1944, serving as the Understate Secretary for Transport and Communications in the Nazi-controlled Serbian administration of Milan Nedic.³⁹ As such, he was classified as a war criminal and in March 1950 the Yugoslav government requested his extradition. This request was refused by the Australian government, which used the fact that he had arrived under the name of Branimir Ivanovic to claim that this was a case of incorrect identity. According to the government's note of August 1950, Branislav Ivanovic had not migrated to Australia.

The government's refusal to take action against Ivanovic was part of an ongoing cover-up on the part of the Department of Immigration to the real situation in the Australian migrant camps. In December 1949, a migrant English teacher, J. Gray, wrote a letter complaining about 'an apparent tendency to Fascism among certain groups of his students'.⁴⁰ This information was passed onto Immigration by the Director of the Office of Education, R.C. Mills. Gray referred to a man by the name of Popoff or Popovic, a Yugoslav. Mills claimed that 'this man allegedly was using his position of influence to disseminate fascist propaganda among other recently arrived migrants [in Bonegilla]'.⁴¹ Heyes initiated inquiries and was able to clarify that Popoff or Popovic was actually Ivanovic; that he had served in the Serbian Nazi puppet government; and that he was a staunch anti-Communist. A copy of this report was sent to Major Kershaw, but Immigration simply informed Mills that following their inquiries, the information gathered did not warrant any action. This was despite the fact that, as a senior Nazi official, Ivonovic should never have been accepted into the Australian sponsored IRO program.⁴² Again, in May 1950,

Heyes wrote to the Department of External Affairs that 'Ivanovic appeared "to be identical" with a DP employed as a block supervisor in the Bonegilla migrant camp'.⁴³ Clearly, Immigration had a very clear picture of Ivanovic's identity, but no action was taken on the Yugoslav request.

In May 1951, the Yugoslav consul general again asked for the extradition of two other alleged Nazi war criminals, Mihailo Rajkovic and Milorad Lukic.⁴⁴ A memo from the Legal and Consular section of Department of External Affairs referred to weakness of evidence against the two: 'Even if investigation discloses that there is some truth in the Consul-General's allegations, it does not appear desirable to accede to its request for the men's extradition. Similar requests have been made to the United Kingdom Government but almost all have been refused on the grounds that it is time to bring to an end the punishment of minor war criminals.'⁴⁵ The memo concluded that the evidence against one was weak, but that a rather better *prima facie* case had been made against the other. In a letter from Sir Charles Spry of 11 July 1951 to the secretary of External Affairs, Colonel Spry wrote: 'While this matter appears to be an extension of Yugoslav internal politics, it must be stated these two men represent a body of Yugoslavs who cause infinitively less trouble to this organization than the great body of their fellow immigrants. They are unceasing in their campaign against Communism and can and do assist ASIO to the limit of their ability'.⁴⁶ As a result, extradition was refused. Again, both men had arrived under the auspices of the IRO program and Lukic, who arrived in November 1948, was also initially housed in Bonegilla.

In 1986, the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles put together a list of 40 alleged war criminals from Latvia and Lithuania who had come to Australia with the IRO program. The list contained the name of Karlis Ozols, who was born 9 August 1912 in Riga and was a member of the Arajs Commando murder unit, which was accused of committing mass murder perpetrated in Latvia and Byelorussia. It was noted that he was a 'platoon commander, Latvian Security Police, Riga - left for Australia, 23 February 1949 aboard the *Mozaffari*'.⁴⁷ Ozols had been a leading chess player in Latvia before the war and was a member of its Olympic Team in 1936. He did not try to change his name or his identity after the war. He continued to play chess and played a pivotal role in building up chess in Victoria in the 1950s. Not surprisingly, an IRO official who arrived on the *Mozaffari* in Australia in March 1949 asserted that 'among the Baltic migrants on the *Mozaffari* were some who had fought with the German army during the war'.⁴⁸

These stories are just some examples of the type of war criminal who was able to enter Australia under the IRO, a subject investigated in detail by Aarons. Indeed, he illustrates that members of the Ustashe continued to migrate to Australia, even after the end of the IRO program, with Geza Pasti, a member of the Ustashe, arriving in Bonegilla in February 1954, but 'promptly absconding' from the camp and making his way to Melbourne.⁴⁹

Reasons for the Entry of Nazi Criminals into Australia

A number of factors explain why Nazi war criminals and collaborators entered Australia, and other countries. In 1948, the United Kingdom contacted seven Commonwealth governments, recommending the termination of prosecution of Nazi war criminals. Its letter stated that 'punishment of war criminals is more a matter of discouraging future generations than of meting out retribution to every guilty individual. Moreover, in view of future political developments in Germany envisaged by recent tripartite talks, we are convinced that it is now necessary to dispose of the past as soon as possible'.⁵⁰ The Commonwealth countries were requested to reply to this recommendation by 26 July 1948. In a letter from the Commonwealth Relations Office to Lord Shinwell, it was noted that all the Dominion governments, with the exception of Australia, answered the above telegram 'agreeing or at any rate not disagreeing with our proposals'.⁵¹ Since Australia did not reply by the requested date, it was assumed that the Australian government had no objections to the recommendation.

The procedures followed by the Australian selection team show a pattern of ignorance and inexperience, which led to laxity in the selection process. 'Enemy aliens', that is Germans and Italians, were excluded from migration to Australia in the early post-war years and they were not part of the IRO scheme. There was, however, no formal Australian policy for the exclusion of Nazi collaborators from East Europe. It was presumed that all DPs were genuine refugees. Selection criteria tended to mediate in favour of those who hid their Nazi past because, unlike their victims, their physical health had not been undermined by years of mistreatment in concentration and forced labour camps.

East Europeans who had actively assisted in the Nazi terror sought to cover up their wartime activities. There were many forgeries, false names and denial of an unpleasant past history and such activities were difficult to police. Those who had been members of the SS often had the tattoos of their blood group in their left armpit removed. Such tattoos were removed usually by a skin graft operation and it was alleged that an American army doctor was

among those who performed such operations.⁵² The IRO did search for the tattoo but it was possible for people to go in place of their friends for the medical examination, as occurred with X-rays.⁵³ With the Australian medical team, each DP was examined naked, but the medical officers did not examine diligently for tattoos or evidence of a scar. If a scar was found and the DP questioned, there was always a benign reason — such as a boil, pimple or wound from knife or bullet. The Australian medical officers were not even given any specific instruction on such matters.⁵⁴

Before the war, Australia had no consular offices in Europe. British consular officers dealt with all Australian migration matters. Even Australia House in London had no authority to accept applications for landing permits from non-British Europeans. With the newly established Department of Immigration in Australia in 1945, a large number of immigration officials were employed. Most had no experience or knowledge of European history, current conditions or languages, yet the selection teams were chosen from these officials. The IRO undertook the initial selection for Australia. The Australian selection teams interviewed those DPs, who fitted into their selection criteria, but they assumed that those DPs who were presented by the IRO were acceptable on security grounds. They were much more particular in regard to medical examinations.⁵⁵ In addition, the calibre of the men in the Australian selection teams was very variable. Some were public servants who were co-opted from other departments while others were opportunists, anxious for the experience of working overseas. Many were inexperienced and most were not fluent in a foreign language so that they were totally dependent on interpreters. Their lack of knowledge of Nazi and Fascist organizations and their crimes perpetrated in Eastern Europe meant that they were ill equipped to cope with the migration demands of post-war Europe. Many did not understand the nature of organizations such as the Ustashi and the Arrow Cross. The documentation they were given listed the nationalities acceptable under the Australian immigration program and the restrictions on Jewish migrants, but there was no documentation about the various East European institutions of collaboration.⁵⁶

The combination of insufficient, and at times, inefficient, resources on the one hand, and misrepresentation by prospective immigrants of their status and past on the other, allowed Nazi and war criminals to enter Australia. Australian Jewish historian, Dr G.F.J. Bergman, worked as an interpreter on the intelligence staff of the British troops in Austria from 1945-1947. In 1950 and again

in 1951, he stressed that 'effective screening' is practically impossible' because of the problem of faked identity cards and the fact that at least two hours per person was needed to investigate their past. Bergman believed that 'a team of 30 efficient and thoroughly experienced Australian security officers speaking German fluently and also acquainted with the ruses and tricks of post-war Germans' was required to ensure the exclusion of Nazi war criminals and collaborators.⁵⁷ An editorial in the *Sydney Jewish News* in 1950 entitled 'How Nazis Come Here' referred to a former Nazi in Vienna who was caught engaged in producing false passports for Australia.⁵⁸ On the other hand, in correspondence published in the *Mercury*, Hobart, regarding the question of the lack of screening of German migrants, Gerhard Koerber wrote a letter to the press stating that he had not been 'screened' in Germany before his departure. In a statement from an official of the department, it was claimed that migrants may be screened and not know it, as screening did not always need a personal interview.⁵⁹

Given the fact that Australia admitted almost 170,000 DPs under the IRO scheme between 1947 and 1952, officials were faced with the pressure of time. An English journalist, Robert Symes, claimed a friend of his, a commandant of a DP camp in Germany, received a cable from London that he must have 20,000 DPs ready for Australia within three weeks. The commandant called back to London saying that it was impossible to screen such large numbers in so short a time. The cable was repeated and the numbers requested were sent. Symes claimed in 1952 that 'Australia has been over anxious to place numbers before selection.'⁶⁰ A member of the Australian selection team stated that 'I can recall socially talking to my friends and the air of disgust or concern that we had to process these people so quickly... We used to call them 'bodies'.'⁶¹ DPs would be brought from their resettlement camp to a staging centre for selection and the numbers presented were often excessive for the time available, yet they had to get the work done. One reason was the problem of logistics — it was often difficult to move large numbers to a staging centre and since they had to return that night to their resettlement camp, the work could not be left until the next day. Another reason for the pressure of time was the problem with shipping. When IRO boats became available, 'bodies' had to be found.⁶²

The pressure of selection, particularly in the early years, meant that Australia was reliant on the IRO for security screening. Alan Ryan Jnr, former head of the United States OSI, claimed that the IRO's own investigations were 'superficial and in the eyes of some, corrupt' with many of its clients former collaborators.⁶³ Mileko

Trebich claimed that Charles Wagner, employed by the Austrian IRO, had participated in the round up and murder of 3000 Yugoslavs. It was claimed that Wagner had some influence on the selection of DPs for Australia.⁶⁴ A medical officer with the IRO recalled that IRO screening was 'fairly superficial' although it was better in the British zone than in the American zone.⁶⁵

Foreign sources were also unreliable. The US Counter-Intelligence Corps (CIC) relied on the Gehlen organisation, an American funded, secret, German agency for security screening. Its staff included high-ranking Nazis and war criminals, among them top Nazi military counter-intelligence officer, Dr Franz Six, Professor of Political Science at Königsberg University and former SS-Oberführer, a commander of a mobile SS killing squad.⁶⁶ In 1951, Australia was still reliant on foreign officials for screening, especially American and British officials.⁶⁷ There were also problems with the US controlled Berlin Document Centre as it only contained personal files and records of German SS and Nazi party members, but not dossiers of indigenous collaborators serving in the Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian Auxiliary Police, the Croatian Ustashi or the Hungarian Arrow Cross. Despite contemporary acknowledgement of screening deficiencies, Australia continued to rely on these sources. In 1952, after a trip to Eastern Europe, Harold Holt praised the Berlin Document Centre and stressed that British and American intelligence officers were co-operating with Australian migration officers in weeding out undesirable immigrants.⁶⁸

The preoccupation with communists has been described as 'Cold War myopia'. Already in the 1930s Australian government policy was more concerned with preventing the arrival of anti-Fascist campaigners than with Nazis operating in Australia. This has been amply illustrated with the decision of preventing Egon Kisch from giving a lecture tour in Australia, while in the same period, Nazi propagandist, General von Luckner, was permitted to tour Australia.⁶⁹ After the war, fear of a Communist takeover dominated policy of the Western powers. Later, the Klaus Barbie affair revealed that America utilised and then assisted in the escape of war criminals, indicating the lengths to which Western powers were prepared to go with their Cold War strategies. Exact Australian involvement in such activities is not clear, but there can be no doubt that Australia placed much emphasis on detecting Communist sympathizers over others. At the height of the Cold War tensions in 1948-1950 the Australian selection team adopted this 'mental pre-occupation' with Communism and its alleged supporters.⁷⁰ In 1950, Sam Goldbloom stated that the 'basis of accepting migrants seems

to be anti-Communist. Those who fought the Nazi undergrounds seem to be barred. Apart from being anti-Communist, physical prowess is also important.⁷¹ A letter from J.B. Polya in the *Mercury*, Hobart, claimed that 'fascist journals are freely circulated in Australia. Reputable New Australians are being threatened and systematically denounced by organised neo-fascist groups. Australian citizens who protest against the mass migration of war criminals are accused of communist sympathies'.⁷²

It would be wrong to suggest that Australian immigration officers deliberately admitted Nazis to Australia. What is closer to the truth is that they only wanted DPs who would not undermine the government's migration policy. For this reason Jews were excluded and the emphasis of the selection policy was on strong, healthy looking migrants who would be able to bolster the manual labour supply in Australia. As evidence emerged of Nazi war criminals and collaborators having entered Australia, especially during the years 1948 to 1952, the Labor and later the Liberal governments were, as in Canada, primarily concerned with blunting the issue and turning it aside. This was the case during the period when Holt was the Minister for Immigration since he was sponsoring the mass German migration program and did not wish to admit to any weaknesses in the Australian screening process.

Exclusion of Jews from the IRO and the ending of IRO Funding

As in Canada, Jews were largely excluded from the IRO program to Australia. In 1949, it was estimated that of the 50,000 DPs who had arrived in Australia, less than 150 were Jewish, despite Calwell's assurances that 15% of people arriving under IRO sponsorship would be Jewish.⁷³ Of the 170,000 refugees who entered Australia between 1947 and 1951 on the work contract scheme, a maximum of 500 were Jewish. Even though many Jews did not qualify, since they tended to have professional and commercial skills whilst the IRO scheme targeted skilled and unskilled workers,⁷⁴ there would have still been a considerable number of Jews who could have been admitted under the Australian scheme. These small numbers also reflected the fact that Jewish DPs did not volunteer for the program because of the vehement antisemitism displayed by the non-Jewish refugees.

The fact remained that the Australian government did not want to increase its Jewish intake, keeping it as in the past and in the future in line with the 0.5% of the Jewish population in Australia. One Australian immigration official stated in respect of German and Austrian refugees in Shanghai: 'We have never wanted these people and we still don't want them. We will issue a few visas to

those who have relations there as a gesture'.⁷⁵ The virtual exclusion of Jews from the IRO scheme in 1947 and 1948, and the subsequent limitation of selection of Jews to single males and females who were prepared to sign a special undertaking that they would work in remote areas of Australia only, is evidence of this attitude.⁷⁶

In addition, the Australian government policy under Calwell was that no government funds were to be expended on Jewish DPs. Jewish refugees who arrived from 1946 to 1953 were either sponsored by family members already in Australia or by economic sponsorship. Both forms contained a question of the ethnic Jewish identity relating to the person to be sponsored. The costs for migration had to be covered either by families or by the Jewish community. However, the local Jewish community was very small in number, consisting of only 23,000 souls in 1933. They absorbed around 9,000 pre-war refugees, and 17,000 post-war survivors in the period from 1947 to 1954. Thus, community leaders appealed for financial assistance from the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HIAS). These American Jewish welfare organisations assisted in organising transportation to Australia and in funding the Jewish hostel system that was created, based on the government's insistence for accommodation guarantees for all Jewish migrants.

Initially the IRO provided the JDC and HIAS with a subsidy for the fares paid for individual Jewish refugees. Each passage cost about US\$500 with an IRO payment of US\$300, a significant contribution. However, in September 1948, Calwell insisted that the IRO cease reimbursing the JDC and HIAS, resulting in great hardship for the Jewish refugee organisations. The JDC argued that all the individual Jewish DP cases fell under IRO jurisdiction and were eligible for funding assistance. They described the Australian government policy as 'arbitrary and discriminatory' and were determined to fight it.⁷⁷ Despite this, the JDC decided to continue to advance the funding for fares to ensure that the Jewish DPs did not lose their chance to migrate to Australia where they could start to rebuild their lives after the war. By the end of 1949, the JDC calculated that they had spent over a million dollars for fares to Australia that should have been reimbursed by the IRO. Despite continual representations to Calwell and later to Harold Holt, who became Minister of Immigration in December 1949, this matter was not resolved until 1951 when Holt agreed that the subsidy could be reintroduced, but without retrospectivity.⁷⁸

Some Jews did manage to come with IRO. Nick Gardos was a Hungarian Holocaust survivor who on 1 July 1944 had been

deported with his mother, father and sister and many other relatives to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Of all his family, only he, his mother Maria and sister Clara survived. He was reunited with his mother and sister in Budapest in June 1946. Following the Communist takeover of the family business and properties on 15 May 1949 he decided to escape from Hungary. Gardos wished to migrate to Australia because it 'was the furthest point away from Europe apart from New Zealand'. He was aware of the quota for Jews but as he put it 'living in Europe all my life it never occurred to me that it would be any different. It was the same at universities with the *numerus clausus* so it was no surprise. After the war, there was antisemitism and Australia was no different'. Gardos explained how he managed to be selected even though he was Jewish:

He [the selection officer] asked me what I am doing for a living. I said I am a farmer. You know at that time I looked like a *sheigist* [Yiddish for non-Jew] but at the same time I did not look like a farmer either and my hands were really... from milking cows, 15 cows, and you know when you milk a cow you get big bunions here from the fork and your hands get very, very rough and you could practically grate cheese on it, so the fellow who interviewed me said: "Are you a farmer?" I said "Yes." He said: "Show me your hands." I showed him my hands and he said "OK. You are a farmer." It took about five minutes, the whole thing. Five minutes at the most. I went on the next transport.

Interviewer: You mentioned you looked like a *sheigist*. Can you explain what a *sheigist* is?

A *sheigist* is a non-Jewish boy.

Interviewer: Right and did the selection officer ask you if you were Jewish?

No, he had my... he knew I was Jewish. Oh Yeh! He had all the papers there and in Europe there was no such thing as filling out a questionnaire and no religion. I never knew it existing [sic] and I don't think it was any different after the war either. It was only here in Australia that I had the surprise that people ask you all sorts of questions except "What's your religion".⁷⁹

Gardos travelled to Australia on the *General Taylor* with 1260 refugees, of whom only 12 were Jews. He was one of the few Jews to pass through Bonegilla.

Antisemitism on the Migrant ships and in the Australian Camps

Most of the Jewish DPs sponsored by the IRO experienced antisemitism during their voyage to Australia and in the migrant reception centres. Reports of the trip to Australia illustrated the attacks Jews encountered:

On the 16/3/49 on the *S.S. Dundalk Bay*, at Trieste, 1060 passengers boarded the ship and amongst them were 17 Jews. The first antisemitic incident occurred on the first day, where Jews were continuously insulted, and the antisemites tried to provoke incidents. 12 nationalities were on the ship. The Ukrainians, of which there were approximately 400, tried every day to provoke incidents, and were the biggest offenders. e.g., the D.P.s had to eat on different shifts. If two or three Jews come in the mess room, the Ukrainians immediately shouted, "The Jews are coming."... Often, the members of the crew, who were English and Danish, has [sic] to interfere so that Jews could sit in peace at the table and were not manhandled.⁸⁰

The experiences on the *Dundalk Bay* were mirrored on the other IRO transports coming to Australia where Jews were a tiny percentage of the overall number of passengers.

When the Jews arrived in Australia, their situation was often not much better. Complaints were made by a number at the Wallgrove migrant camp at Rooty Hill, near Sydney, the migrant centre near Canberra, Woodside Camp near Adelaide, South Australia and, of course, Bonegilla. One example of such complaints was this letter:

I come from Europe. I went through the terrible war, and I find myself again in a camp with fascists. They still seek our extermination. Their animal instincts follow me like black clouds. I live in barracks, one Jew between twenty Jew haters with a black past. Last week I overheard a conversation from my neighbour's bed. One informed his two mates — There were happy times when he and his friends, who were capable of deathblows, used to loot and beat up Jews... How am I better [off] than my father and brother and the whole family who were murdered by Hitler, and who knows through which of my present camp inmates they were killed? (Signed. Michael Einlager, Hostel Wallgrove, Rooty Hill).⁸¹

An account of the situation in Canberra by a member of the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism reported that the seventeen Jewish DPs living there wished to fulfil their two-year work contract, but had no desire 'to be forced to work together with the same antisemites who had murdered their parents and relations, and committed unspeakable crimes against the Jewish people'.⁸² As Aarons commented, the 'Jews were clearly intimidated and genuinely feared for their safety'.⁸³

It is interesting to note that evidence of such ethnic tensions has not been reported in the broader historical literature relating to the Australian migrant camps, perhaps because Jews were such a tiny proportion of the overall number of DPs who arrived in the migrant camps with the IRO program. Thus, in relation to Bonegilla, Sluga claimed that 'the migrants themselves rarely mention ethnic, or national, rivalries' and she argued that 'class affiliations often broke down barriers and took priority'.⁸⁴ Similarly, Keating commented in regard to Greta Migrant Camp that 'nearly all reminiscences of life in the camp relate that there was very little inter-national tension at Greta'.⁸⁵ However, the Jewish DP experiences in the Australian migrant camps revealed a different picture.

Failure of Contemporary Efforts to prevent the arrival of Nazi Criminals

The Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism spearheaded many of the protests against alleged fascist activities amongst the new arrivals. However, the known left wing or communist sympathies of a number of leading members of the Council invalidated the evidence it produced to prove Nazis were entering Australia, resulting in the persecution of Jewish refugees. An Australian lawyer, E.W. Renouf, submitted to the government material provided by Dr and Mrs Stephen Vahl, members of the Sydney Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism. Heyes wrote a department note for the Minister, Harold Holt, stating: 'While not unmindful of the charges, if correct, I feel I must warn you that enquiries so far appear to indicate that these documents and charges are emanating from the Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism. The Council is said to be Communist dominated and is managed by Judah Waten, a known Communist'.⁸⁶

Such attitudes, combined with the feeling in the department that Jews in Australia were 'very anti-displaced persons',⁸⁷ prevented any serious investigation into the Council's allegations or the evidence they presented.⁸⁸

In 1953, Ernest Platz, secretary of the Melbourne Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, submitted to

parliament and to the Head of Immigration, Tasman Heyes, a collection of Nazi memorabilia as evidence of the existence of Nazis in Australia. The collection included a small statuette of Hitler found in Bonegilla, a bronze plaque with effigies of King Frederick, Bismarck and Hitler, found at a migrant camp at Wilhouse Street, Northcote, Victoria, and dozens of press cuttings from Nazi newspapers published in Australia. A high government official stated that this evidence was inconclusive. 'There may be a few Nazis in Australia ... they could do no harm...their activities were a nuisance but negligible'.⁸⁹ Sam Goldbloom, a young ex-serviceman, and other members of the Council managed to enter Bonegilla masquerading as plumbers and gain access to the showers where they saw evidence of the removal of the SS tattoo marks under the arms of a number of the men there. Goldbloom managed to take some photos, which were also presented to the government as evidence.⁹⁰ As Aarons clearly shows, Holt consistently denied any truth to the allegations raised by Jewish Council members such as Platz and no action was taken, even though Holt claimed that all such allegations were investigated.⁹¹

Conclusion

What is disturbing is that Nazis and perpetrators entered Australia with relative ease when compared with the admission of Holocaust survivors. The fact that the Australian authorities turned a blind eye to the arrival of Nazis, even after clear evidence was produced, also made it more difficult for Jewish refugees to arrive. It can be stressed that this is not simply a coincidental or historical footnote. Rather, the processes were inextricably bound, one with the other. For those charged with keeping the Jews out were the same people making the decisions about who were allowed in. In addition, whilst the non-Jewish DPs arrived in Australia, with their fares and initial housing covered by the IRO and the Australian government, this was not the case with Jewish DPs. On the contrary, Calwell prohibited the IRO from providing any funding to the Jewish organisations in Europe responsible for coordinating Jewish refugee migration to Australia, whilst their reception by their sponsoring family members or in Jewish community hostels had to be paid for by the Jewish community.

It is estimated that around 4-5,000 war criminals probably migrated to Australia in the immediate post-war era, but no action was taken at the time. It was only in 1986, as a result of Mark Aarons' research and representations from the Jewish community, that the debate was re-ignited and the government agreed to investigate the accusations of false sanctuary being provided for

perpetrators in Australia. However, this delay explains Australia's failure to bring those accused of war crimes to justice in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Forty years on it was too late to provide sufficient evidence according to criminal law as required by the Australian justice system, so that criminals such as Konrads Kalejs were able to escape sentence and die peacefully in their new country of sanctuary.

ENDNOTES

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4. Mark Aarons, *Sanctuary: Nazi fugitives in Australia*, Port Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia, 1989.
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6. Arthur A. Calwell, *How Many Australians Tomorrow?* Melbourne: 1945.
7. *New Citizen (NC)*, 15 June 1947
8. Noel Lamidey to Tasman Heyes, 11 April 1947, 'DPs Policy — Part I', CRS AA 1980/101, Item 250104, National Archives of Australia (NAA), Canberra, ACT.
9. *Ibid.*, Report of Conference re DPs, Berlin, 17&18 July 1947.
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11. *Current Affairs Bulletin*, vol. 11, no 3, November 1952, as reported in the NC, 15 January 1953. In addition, 278,500 British migrants arrived in this period, making a total of 572,300 immigrants to Australia for the period 1947-1951.
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13. Major General Frederick Gallagher 'Black Jack' Galleghan, DSO, OBE, ISO, 'Who's who in Australian Military History' <http://www.awm.gov.au/people/180.asp>, accessed 25 December 2005.

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19. Memo, Dept. of Immigration, 7 December 1949, 'DPs Policy', AA1980/101, Item 250107, NAA.
20. Conference: Resettlement of Refugees and DPs in Australia, 1-2 November 1948, 'DPs Policy — Part 4', AA1980/101. Item 250106, NAA.
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22. Ibid.
23. Berlin Instruction no 39, 26 May 1949 to members of the Australian Selection Team, provided by a member of the team (name withheld on request), as quoted in Suzanne D. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia*, Sydney: Brandl & Schlesinger, 2001, p.406.
24. See Nonja Peters, *Milk and honey but no gold: postwar migration to Western Australia, 1945-196*, Nedlands W.A., University of Western Australia Press, 2001, for description of the situation in Western Australia.
25. Charles Jordan to Moses A. Leavitt, 29 August 1947, and Confidential report, 23 September 1947, written in Singapore, AR JDC 45/54 #97, American Joint Distribution Committee Archives, New York (AJDCA-NY).
26. 'Survey of Jewish Migration and Settlement in Australia', Confidential, Emery H. Komlos, 26 October 1949, p. 3, Australia, Immigration, 1948-1949, JDC AR 45/54 #96, formerly AR 46/64 #145, JDCA-NY.
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