Debates and Conflicts: Australian Jewry, the Claims Conference and Restitution, 1945–1965

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Debates and Conflicts: Australian Jewry, the Claims Conference and Restitution, 1945–1965

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Between 1933 and 1960 the population of Australian Jewry more than doubled in size, increasing from 23,000 to 61,000. Given that official government policy prohibited the expenditure of funds for Jewish refugees and survivors, this demographic growth created severe financial challenges for the local community. This article will argue that the involvement of Australian Jewry in German restitution and with the Claims Conference was a significant aspect of post-war Australian Jewish history, one that has not been investigated. The community’s involvement was a burning issue with different emerging conflicts. First, there was the question of whether the Australian Jewish community should be involved with what some claimed was ‘blood money.’ Then, there was a battle over representation between pre-war refugees, represented by the Sydney-based Association of New Citizens and the newly created and officially recognized roof body of Australian Jewry, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ). Finally, while the two main Jewish communities in Sydney and Melbourne largely cooperated in the efforts of the ECAJ, there were some significant tensions. In contrast, the Australian Jewish community was united in regard to individual restitution, but faced difficulties with both the Australian and German governments. How these various debates and issues played out and were resolved was significant for the development of the post-war Australian Jewish community because Claims Conference funds assisted in the resettlement of 25,000 Holocaust survivors in Australia with the resultant growth of the community.

Keywords: claims conferences; restitution; Australian Jewry; holocaust survivors

Introduction

In 1955, Sydney David Einfeld, a leading figure in the Australian Jewish community, delivered a major address on post-war Jewish immigration to Australia. The following report of his speech was published in the Jewish press:

Mr Einfeld said: ‘The absorption of Jews from overseas had a tremendous social and cultural impact on the relatively isolated Australian Jewish community which was predominantly of a conservative British outlook … Without the coming of these migrants, the Australian Jewish community would have stagnated and perhaps have faded completely. Migration means new life, new vigour and new enthusiasm.

‘When the history of the Australian Jewish community was written,’ Mr Einfeld said, he felt that ‘the period of 1934 to 1954 would be aptly and properly described as the time when Jewish life was preserved, enriched and even revitalised by the enormous influence extended by the Jewish migrant from Europe.’


© 2014 The Institute for Holocaust Research, at the University of Haifa
The period from 1934 to 1954 was, indeed, a watershed in Australian Jewish history. Pre- and post-war Jewish immigrants brought with them a new and stronger identification with Judaism and Jewish consciousness, transforming every aspect of Jewish life in Australia. The pre-war Jewish refugees laid the basis for key changes in Australian Jewish life. Subsequently, these were built upon and extended by the much more numerous post-war immigrants. As a result of their experiences during the Holocaust, the post-war immigrants added a new dimension to Australian Jewry, influencing and changing the attitudes of the established community. Australian Jews, in turn, assisted with the rapid integration of Jewish refugees into the Australian lifestyle so that the transformation was a two-way process.

Before the war, around 10,000 refugees, mainly from Germany and Austria, found sanctuary in Australia between 1933 and 1940, of whom around 7–8000 identified as Jews. After the Holocaust, between 1946 and 1954, 17,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors arrived in Australia, with another 10,000 arriving by 1961. This later migration mainly occurred as a result of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and with communist Poland opening to some emigration in the late 1950s. As a result, Australia had the highest percentage of Holocaust survivors on a pro rata population basis of any country outside of Israel. Finding funds to assist in the integration and resettlement of these refugees and survivors was a challenging task, which was exacerbated by the attitude of the Australian government. Both sides of the political spectrum – the Labor and Liberal parties – held that the reception and integration of the refugees was the responsibility of the Jewish community. In response to the anti-refugee hysteria and antisemitism expressed by powerful segments of Australian society, no government funds were to be expended on Jews because of fear of political repercussions. Of officially, family members sponsored refugees and Holocaust survivors for family unification based on Form 40. The Australian Jewish Welfare Societies, however, also directly sponsored some of the refugees. The Welfare Societies also acted as a backup service for those who were sponsored privately but required assistance. Boats were met, immigrants were helped with finding employment or setting up a business with interest-free loans, and there were two different schemes to assist orphan survivors of the Holocaust who wished to immigrate to Australia. This was too immense an undertaking for Australian Jewry to finance alone and they appealed to overseas Jewish communities, particularly to those in the USA. The absorption of Jewish immigrants into Australia in the post-war era became a joint enterprise between local and overseas Jewish organizations. Initially, the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC, or the Joint), the Refugee Economic Corporation and the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society provided the funding for what they called ‘The Australian Immigration Project.’ After 1954, funds were allocated by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (COJMCAG, or Claims Conference). These allocations proved vital for the development of post-war Australian Jewry.

There were two main pillars of support for Jewish survivor resettlement. One was the Claims Conference, which provided funding for infrastructure on a collective basis to both Israel and

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2Klaus Neumann, ‘Fifth Columnists? German and Austrian refugees in Australian internment camps’, Public Lecture for the National Archives of Australia, the Goethe Institute (Sydney), and the Centre for European Studies at the University of New South Wales, presented in Sydney, 17 April 2002, 2.


Diaspora Jewish communities that received refugees and survivors. In addition to providing for physical support, this funding included provisions for the educational and cultural needs of the affected community. Diaspora funding was administered through the offices of the Claims Conference in New York, which was headed by Saul Kagan and which held an annual meeting of representatives of the countries involved. The second pillar was individual restitution, which was based on German federal restitution laws passed in 1952 and 1956. This funding aimed to provide individual compensation to victims of Nazism for their loss of freedom and property, as well as for resultant physical and emotional medical problems.

While there has been research into the overall role of the Claims Conference, including most notably Ronald Zweig’s study, to date there has been no serious study of the role and impact of the two pillars – claims and restitution – in Australia. Two books have been written about Jewish welfare organizations involved in immigrant reception. In 1987, Anne Andgel published her study of the history of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society in New South Wales, and in 1998 Rodney Benjamin published a history of Jewish Welfare in Victoria. However, the authors mention neither Claims Conference allocations to Australian Jewry nor the story of individual restitution. This article aims to fill this gap in the literature and is largely based on primary sources from the Archive of Australian Jewry, located at the University of Sydney. This collection contains 40 boxes of correspondence files relating to the Claims Conference dated from 1954 to 1965, as well as the personal files of Dr Max Joseph, a German Jewish refugee and leading figure.

With the end of the war approaching, the Jewish communities in the various Australian states realized that they needed to cooperate more closely in order to deal with the challenges of post-war migration. In August 1944, the community leaders met to form the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) as the roof body and official organization to represent Jewish community interests both to the Australian government and to overseas Jewish bodies. Their immediate pressing concerns were survivor immigration to Australia and the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.

By the 1950s, Maurice Ashkanasy from Melbourne and Sydney David Einfeld from Sydney emerged as the two leading figures in Australian Jewry, alternating as presidents of the ECAJ for a fifteen-year period. The men shared much in common in terms of their backgrounds. Both sets of their parents had come from Eastern Europe, and before migrating to Australia had all spent some time in England. Maurice’s father, Solomon Ashkanasy, was active in community leadership, while Sydney’s father, the Rev Marcus Einfeld, served as the cantor at the Great Synagogue in Sydney from the time of his arrival in 1909 until his death in 1937. Both men were active in the Australian Labor Party; Ashkanasy ran unsuccessfully for federal parliament, but Einfeld was elected for one term (1961–1963). After serving in the federal parliament, Einfeld successfully ran for the New South Wales Legislative Assembly (the state parliament) and served both as opposition deputy leader and later as Minister of Consumer Affairs, to have a state parliamentary career spanning for 20 years from 1965 to 1984.

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10Einfeld was named ‘Sydney’ because he was born a few months after his parents arrived there in 1909.
11There were also differences. Ashkanasy qualified in law and became a leading barrister, while Einfeld left school early to enter the workforce during the depression years to assist his family and thus had little formal educational qualifications.
There were also substantial differences in the approaches of both men, partly over tactics and partly due to contrasting political styles. These distinctions reflected the larger differences between the Melbourne and Sydney Jewish communities. Melbourne preferred an activist lobbying campaign directed toward Australian opinion-makers, whereas Sydney emphasized ‘quiet diplomacy’. These differences were partly due to the historical and local conditions of the two cities, but different Jewish ethnic migration patterns had a more significant impact. More Polish Jews migrated to Melbourne, while Sydney attracted more assimilated Central European Jews. The Polish Jews brought with them a stronger commitment to Yiddish culture, Jewish education, and Zionism, and were prepared to be much more proactive in lobbying on Jewish issues. These differences contributed to tensions between the two communities.

Both Ashkanasy and Einfeld believed that the ECAJ was the appropriate body to represent Australian Jewry at the Claims Conference. The story of the community’s participation in the Claims Conferences unfolded against the background of the post-war development of Jewish welfare organizations in Victoria and New South Wales, the tensions in Sydney between the Association of New Citizens (ANC) and the ECAJ, and the interstate rivalry between Melbourne and Sydney. The community’s participation in the Claims Conference contributed significantly to its post-war transformation in this watershed period.

**The blood money debate**

As early as 1945 the issue of German indemnification for Jewish and other Nazi victims was raised in Australia. In 1946, Dr George Berger, a pre-war refugee and honorary secretary of the left-wing Jewish Unity Committee, corresponded with then-Federal Treasurer Ben Chifley about Australian government support for claims by Australian citizens against Germany. Chifley promised to look into the matter but nothing definite resulted. The lack of interest of the Australian government in this matter led Dr S.W. Krieger to claim in *The New Citizen* that, while the Commonwealth government was actively sponsoring the claims of the Templers for £3,500,000 from the Israeli government, it was not giving any assistance to the Jewish refugees with claims in Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Hungary.

In 1951, the West German government proposed that both moral and material reparations should be made for the destruction of European Jewry by allocating funds to the various Jewish communities throughout the world. This money was to come from the proceeds from ‘heirless’ property, which had become part of the assets of the West German government. In October 1951, representatives from the USA, France, England, Canada, Australia, South Africa and South America attended a meeting in New York to discuss the issue of restitution. The ECAJ was unable to send a representative to this meeting and Maurice Perlzweig of the

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15*Sydney Jewish News (SJN)*, September 20, 1946.
18For a detailed discussion of German reparations, see Ronald Zweig, *German Reparations and the Jewish World* (London: Routledge, 2001).
WJC represented Australian Jewry. As a result of this gathering, an organization called the COJMCAG (or Claims Conference) was incorporated in the USA to lodge a claim on Jewish heirless property in West Germany in the name of the Jewish people as a whole.

After much debate, the Israeli government decided that it would claim ‘reparations in lieu of restitution of heirless Jewish property to assist in the tremendous task of rehabilitating Jewish victims of Hitler’s persecution in the State of Israel’. Initially, the Jewish leadership hoped that Israel and the Jewish Conference for Material Claims against Germany would be able to negotiate with Germany through an intermediary such as the UN or one of the great powers. None agreed to act as mediator, so Israel and the Jewish Claims Conference decided to deal directly with Germany.

After lengthy negotiations between the government of Israel, the Claims Conference and West Germany, an agreement for the distribution of the property and the proceeds was signed at Luxembourg in September 1952. This provided that the property should become vested in the West German government and that cash or goods equal to its value should be made available to Israel over a term of 12 years. A proportion of the value would then be paid by Israel to the Claims Conference for distribution to Jewish organizations throughout the world in accordance with a carefully drawn up set of rules. Such organizations were to be engaged in the relief, rehabilitation and resettlement of Jewish victims of Nazi persecution. The signing of the Luxembourg agreement was of crucial importance for all concerned. It enabled Israel to absorb the hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors who arrived with nothing, to build up its economic infrastructure, and to play a central role in the rebuilding of world Jewry following the devastation of the Holocaust.

The signing of this agreement was the result of efforts of three leading personalities – Chancellor Konrad Adenauer of West Germany, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion and Nahum Goldmann, who represented the Claim Conference. In the face of strong opposition and violent demonstrations, Ben Gurion managed to gain majority support in the Knesset for negotiations with Germany. Similarly, Goldmann also received personal threats and strong opposition.

Australian Jewry experienced an emotional debate as to whether to participate in German reparations and restitution. This debate mirrored reactions in other parts of the Jewish world. Some favored the acceptance of reparations, arguing that it was only right that the former German persecutors should assist the victims of the Nazis. Others considered reparations to be ‘blood money’ and believed that there should not be any relationship with Germany. In an emotional sermon at the Great Synagogue in August 1950, Rabbi Leib Aisack Falk strongly criticized those claiming compensation, which he referred to as ‘blood money.’ He argued that Jews should maintain their dignity.

These differences of opinion were reflected in the opposing positions taken by the New South Wales and Victorian Jewish communities. The New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies voted in support of Israel’s position, whereas in Victoria, under the presidency of Melbourne leader and barrister Maurice Ashkanasy, the ECAJ voted against negotiations with West Germany. At the half-yearly conference of the ECAJ held in Adelaide in February 1952, a resolution in support

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20 SJN, January 11, 1952.
21 SJN, June 27, and July 25, 1952.
22 SJN, September 16, 1955.
23 SJN, December 14, 1951.
24 SJN, August 18, 1950 and NC, Vol. 5, No 9, September 15, 1950. The editor of the NC, Dr S.W. Krieger, argued that there was a difference between monetary compensation for the loss of murdered relatives, which he deemed ‘blood money’, and restitution for property looted by the Nazis in Germany and Austria.
of the claims of the Israeli government against Germany was defeated.  

Further debate and discussion followed, with Einfeld strongly supporting reparations. His arguments were persuasive and led to a reversal of the Victorian position, so that in July 1952 the Australian Jewish community decided to participate in German reparations and to be represented on COJMCAG.

**Battles over representation**

Another area of debate was the question of which was the appropriate body to represent the claims of the Jewish victims of Nazism. Until 1936, Australian Jewry did not have a welfare organization dedicated to the reception and resettlement of Jewish refugees. Nazi persecution, however, forced the development of an organizational structure to cope with the increasing numbers of Jewish refugees. In 1937, the Australian Jewish Welfare Society was formed, with separate bodies in the different Australian states that subsequently united to form a federation.

Anti-refugee feelings were prevalent in Australia before World War II. With the outbreak of war in 1939, this hysteria intensified as a result of increasing security concerns. German and Austrian immigrants were classified as ‘enemy aliens,’ with no differentiation made between Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany and Nazi supporters. Enemy aliens faced administrative restrictions. For example, refugees had to apply for permission to travel from one suburb to another, lived under surveillance, and were prohibited from owning radios.

In 1940, an additional 2500 Germans – largely refugees from Germany and Austria, including 1750 Jews, who had been interned by the British – arrived on the *SS Dunera*. Klaus Neumann estimates that, in addition to the *Dunera* internees and other evacuees, several hundred Jewish refugees who had arrived before the outbreak of war were interned, most for less than a year. During the war years, Jewish internees were disillusioned with the efforts of Jewish Welfare and, once released from internment, they established their own organizations. The German-born rabbi of the Liberal Congregation of Temple Beth Israel, Dr Hermann Sanger, formed the Association of Jewish Refugees in Melbourne in 1942.

In addition, Polish Jews established an organization to raise funds for relief for Jews in Europe. These three different organizational bodies – representing welfare, assistance for refugees and relief for Jews still in Europe – amalgamated in Melbourne in 1947 with Leo Fink, a Polish Jew, assuming the leadership of Jewish Welfare. Fink was also Vice President of the ECAJ. The Welfare Society in Sydney did not experience a similar revolution and continued to be dominated by the Anglo-Jewish establishment.

These institutional changes meant that the main conflict over representation took place in Sydney with the ANC. ANC was a non-denominational organization, although 90% of its members were Jewish. Formed in 1943, the ANC was initially called the ‘Association of Refugees’ because it sought to represent all refugees from Nazism, both Jews and so-called non-Aryan Christians. Dr Max Joseph served as the organization’s president. Joseph was a German Jewish refugee and had been incarcerated in Sachsenhausen for three weeks after the Nazi pogrom of November 1938. His wife and daughter had managed to escape to England and were able to

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25 Minutes of Half-Yearly Conference, ECAJ, Adelaide, February 9, 1952, AAJ.
26 SJN, July 25, 1952.
30 See the Dr Max Joseph collection, AAJ.
gain landing permits for Australia. The whole family emigrated and arrived in Australia before the outbreak of war. Dr Joseph was later classified as an ‘enemy alien’ and interned at Tatura in October 1940. Like his counterpart in Melbourne, Rabbi Dr Sanger, Dr Joseph was active in the Reform movement and was central in the establishment of the Temple Emanuel on the North Shore in 1960. The ANC did not develop close ties with Jewish Welfare because its General Secretary, Walter Brand, strongly opposed the movement. He even wrote to the Commonwealth Department of Security in 1945 to warn against the ANC’s activities. An English Jew, Brand reflected an Anglicized approach in his dealing with newcomers and his inability to speak either German or Yiddish created a gulf between him and his clientele.

In Sydney, Joseph claimed that the ANC should be the representative body at the Claims Conference, as the ANC represented the victims of Nazism and as such was entitled to the funds. He claimed that the ANC had been concerned with reparations since 1945 and that, at the signing of the 1952 agreement with West Germany, the ANC had been represented through the Council for German Jews, UK. Thus, it was the body most qualified to deal with the issue.

This view was strongly opposed by Einfeld, who believed that only the ECAJ as the roof body of Australian Jewry could represent the claimants. In September 1953, Einfeld wrote to Saul Kagan, the secretary of COJMCAG, to tell him that the ANC was not a Jewish organization, as its membership comprised both Jews and non-Jews. The ANC sought to negotiate with Einfeld over the issue of representation. At a fiery meeting on 10 November 1953, a motion was proposed that three ANC members, who were also on the Board of Deputies, approach the Board in a private capacity to try and bring about cooperation between the ECAJ and the ANC. No vote, however, was taken, as Dr Joseph agreed with the spirit of the motion but felt that it would interfere with the freedom of his executive.

On 13 November 1953, Dr Joseph met with Einfeld and argued that the ANC should have a consultative voice in decisions relating to the distribution of funds. At the ANC’s 10th Annual General Meeting, a motion was passed that the ANC ‘would welcome continued co-operation between our Association and the ECAJ in matters referring to German and Austrian restitution, compensation and indemnification’.
Further correspondence ensued, but in February 1954 Joseph announced that the ECAJ did not wish to cooperate and that the ANC could not continue because its secretary, Dr S.W. Krieger, was resigning in April 1954. At a general meeting held in March 1954, Dr Joseph stressed that there was no way of keeping the ANC alive, neither as a voluntary body nor functioning with part-time staff. He pointed out that there was a lack of time and expert experience among the voluntary workers as well as a general waning of interest in the ANC. He spoke bitterly about the local Jewish community and, in regard to indemnification, claimed that:

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that the community of refugees is the only community entitled, legally and morally, to the indemnification money, which is to be distributed by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims. The refusal of the Conference to entrust us with the administration of monies destined for us is based on the reasoning that our organisation is not Jewish…

[W]e have made our hardest efforts to co-operate with the local Jewish Organisations. We have never met with any friendly attitude and, particularly in the most recent past, it became obvious that there is not the slightest inclination on the other side to work out a workable compromise between the naturally different attitudes.

The ANC met for the last time on 8 April 1954, when the vote was taken to end the Association. Consequently, the ECAJ became the official body on the COJMCAG.

Einfeld’s victory and the close of the ANC reflected the fact that by 1954 the ‘New Citizens’ had successfully integrated into both the larger Australian and the Jewish communities. The end of internment and the defeat of Nazi Germany, combined with the effective rebuilding of lives in Australia, meant that they no longer needed a separate organization to represent their interests and needs. Those pre-war Jewish refugees who wished to remain active in community leadership did so within mainstream Jewish organizations, so that the ECAJ could effectively represent them. While, on the whole, the Australian Jewish community cooperated in their applications for Claims Conference funding, at times tensions developed between the Sydney and Melbourne leadership, which rotated on a two- or three-year basis.

Interstate cooperation and conflicts

As discussed above, there were significant differences between the ethnic backgrounds and approaches of Melbourne and Sydney Jewry, as seen in the leadership styles of Ashkanasy and Einfeld. The nature of post-war survivor migration reinforced these differences. Of the survivors who emigrated to Australia, around 60% settled in Melbourne and fewer than 40% in Sydney. Most survivors in Melbourne came from Eastern Europe, while mainly Central Europeans moved to Sydney. These ethnic migration patterns reflected earlier migration trends. Other capital cities received few survivors, as most were attracted to the two major urban centers because of family connections and better prospects for rebuilding lives.

A traditional rivalry between these two cities had emerged in the late nineteenth century, when Australian leaders could not agree on which city would become the capital of the newly federated country in 1901. In the end, Canberra was selected as a location situated approximately midway between the two cities. This inter-city rivalry also impacted Jewish community leadership and affected the Claims negotiations.

41 Speech by Dr Max Joseph, ANC Council Meeting, March 25, 1954, AAJ, Joseph collection.
The first Claims Conference meeting to distribute funds from the West German government was held in 1954, and from then on Australian Jewry applied for funding for the resettlement of survivors in Australia. The assistance provided by COJMCAG proved invaluable for Australian Jewry’s efforts, as the local community could raise only 25% of the money required for immigrant welfare. Claims Conference allocations replaced earlier provisions from American Jewish welfare organizations.

All claims on behalf of the Federation of the Australian Jewish Welfare Societies for victims of Nazi persecution were to be made through the ECAJ. In 1953, Saul Kagan, Executive Director of the Claims Conference from the time of its founding, defined a ‘Jewish victim’ as:

Every Jew who was displaced by Nazi persecution, which would include all Jews resident in the European countries under Hitler’s rule, starting with 1933, is a victim of National Socialist persecution in the meaning of the above resolution. Persecution may have taken the form of deprivation of means of livelihood, as well as deprivation of liberty. The controlling factor in my opinion is whether the individual suffered damage in one form or another as a result of Nazi action.42

Each year a specific amount was allotted to various organizations according to their role in migrant absorption (see appendix). An office was set up under the auspices of the ECAJ to process the applications from various Jewish organizations and to forward the applications with comments to the Claims Conference (Figure 1), which made the final decisions.43

![Graph showing Claims conference allocations over years](Figure 1. Claims conference allocations)

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42 Kagan to Einfeld, September 3, 1953, AAJ, Box G1, COJMCAG.
43 These applications were divided into two categories: (1) relief, rehabilitation and resettlement, and (2) cultural and educational reconstruction.
The ECAJ executive rotated between the two major Jewish centers in Melbourne and Sydney in a two- or three-year cycle, as led by Ashkanasy and Einfeld.\(^4^4\) They traveled overseas to represent Australia’s interests at the Claims Conference meetings. On the whole, they cooperated in their struggle to ensure that the needs of Australian Jewry were recognized. Einfeld attended the first Claims Conference meeting held in New York in March 1954, when Australian Jewry was allocated A£40,000 for the relief, rehabilitation and resettlement of Jewish refugees. These funds were to be supervised by the AJDC, as ‘the conference is fully aware of the close and continual relationship between the Joint and the Australian Jewish Community.’\(^4^5\) In addition, the Department of Cultural and Educational Reconstruction granted A£2000 in the form of stipends for two students studying at the Lubavitch Yeshivah in Melbourne.\(^4^6\)

At each subsequent conference, the president of the ECAJ faced a battle to have the needs of Australian Jewry recognized. At the second Claims Conference gathering held in December 1954, Ashkanasy made the case for Australian Jewry with a forceful emphasis on the fact that the local community was ‘swamped by the flood of post-war refugees’, stating that the community ‘would be in severe straits without overseas assistance’. He pointed out that since 1933 immigration had caused an increase in the population of the Australian Jewish community of more than 100%, ‘a figure which was substantially greater than that of any other Jewish community outside of Israel’.\(^4^7\) Despite these arguments, when Ashkanasy met with Moses (Mo) Leavitt, the executive vice chairman of the AJDC since 1947 and honorary secretary of COJMCAG, in New York he found that Leavitt was skeptical of Australian Jewry’s requests and ‘scolded at what we regard so proudly as our achievements’.\(^4^8\) Ashkanasy was not defeated by Leavitt’s attitude and he sought allies among other COJMCAG directors, which resulted in Australia’s receipt of a substantial proportion of the monies requested in January 1955.\(^4^9\) Einfeld also faced many difficulties, particularly in 1958 when he experienced problems in achieving recognition for Australian claims for cultural and educational reconstruction.

COJMCAG sent ‘rapporteurs’ to Australia to establish procedures in the analysis of applications and to help assess them, as requests for assistance from the various Jewish communities were much greater than available funds.\(^5^0\) Herbert Katzki, Assistant Director General of the Joint in Paris and an associate of the Joint working in many European countries since 1936, was sent to Australia in August 1956 to act in such a capacity. Katzki spent three weeks in Australia and visited Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane.\(^5^1\) In 1957, Leavitt served as rapporteur and in 1959 Dr Judah Shapiro, the former Director of the Department of Cultural and Educational Reconstruction (part of COJMCAG) until 1956, assumed the same role.


\(^{4^5}\)April 1, 1954, AAJ, Box G1, COJMCAG.

\(^{4^6}\)May 12, 1954, Dr Judah J. Shapiro, Director of Cultural and Educational Reconstruction to ECAJ, AAJ, Box G1, COJMCAG.


\(^{4^8}\)Ashkanasy to Fink, December 21, 1954, AAJ, Box E28, ECAJ Corres Files.


\(^{5^0}\)In 1957 for example COJMCAG had over 300 applications from 26 countries for a sum of $35,000,000, which was much greater than the amount available for distribution, January 25, 1957, AAJ, Box G2, COJMCAG.

\(^{5^1}\)Lippmann to Einfeld, August 8, 1956, AAJ, Box G5. He was accompanied by Walter Brand, AAJ, Box G2, COJMCAG.
The processing of applications and monies received was complicated. Each organization that received a grant was expected to supply a quarterly accounting of expenditures, and the ECAJ was responsible for administering these reports.\(^{52}\) The cost of overseeing the applications totaled more than A£1000 each year and the ECAJ did not have such funds. At first, COJMCAG executives expected the ECAJ to cover its administrative costs.\(^{53}\) It was only after his 1956 visit to Australia that Katzki realized the difficulties and wrote that, ‘I imagine that the cash position of the ECAJ is not too brilliant and that there are subvention payments on Conference allocations which are due.’\(^{54}\) The issue of the ECAJ using Claims Conference funds for administration expenses remained a matter of contention and was still not resolved in 1958.\(^{55}\) A further complicating factor was that when the ECAJ moved between Sydney and Melbourne, the Claims Conference office followed. The ECAJ moved to Melbourne in August 1958 after a two-year period in Sydney, at which time Katzki suggested that the Claims office remain in Sydney. Einfeld informed him that this was impossible. It was a matter of prestige for Melbourne Jewry, who ‘would not like it to be thought by anybody that their efficiency was less than that achieved by their Sydney confreres’.\(^{56}\)

Conflicts also arose over the allocation of funds through the ECAJ. In 1955, for example, Ashkanasy obtained an allocation of A£36,000 over a three-year period for Mount Scopus College in Melbourne. Ashkanasy considered the allocation of this grant a great achievement because it broke a Claims Conference rule and paved the way for further educational and cultural grants for other Australian Jewish institutions in the future, an opinion endorsed by Maurice Perlzweig, who wrote:

> Some of the people quite obviously do not realise how great an achievement it was to obtain as much as you did for help in a country which was never occupied, and in which the Jewish community is free and prosperous.\(^{57}\)

The Sydney Jewish community was very bitter about the size of the Scopus grant, especially as its Jewish day school, Moriah College, did not receive any financial help from the Claims Conference for a number of years although the children of Holocaust survivors comprised 90% of the school’s enrollment.\(^{58}\) John Shaiak, editor of the *Australian Jewish Times*, expressed criticism of the allocation in an editorial dated 13 May 1955. On 27 May 1955, he again published an article expressing his hope that the 1956 allocation would be made ‘on a more fair and just basis’.\(^{59}\)

When Einfeld represented Australian Jewry at the Claims Conference meeting held in New York in January 1957, he was determined to press Moriah’s claims. COJMCAG Secretary Saul Kagan, informed him that his predecessor, Ashkanasy, had agreed that no further claims for Australian educational institutions would be made during the three-year term of the grant. Upon Einfeld’s return, Ashkanasy denied that such an agreement had been made.\(^{60}\) In mid-1957, when considering Moriah’s claims, Einfeld decided that, unlike Mount Scopus, Moriah was not a

\(^{52}\)Katzki to Einfeld, referring to the fact that a number of receiving organizations were not up to date with their accounts, June 7, 1957, AAJ, Box G2, COJMCAG.

\(^{53}\)Kagan to Lippmann, July 26, 1955, AAJ, Box G5, COJMCAG.

\(^{54}\)Katzki to Einfeld, September 14, 1956, AAJ, Box G2, COJMCAG.

\(^{55}\)Katzki to Newman, January 20, 1958, AAJ, Box G3, COJMCAG.

\(^{56}\)Einfeld to Katzki, August 26, 1958, ‘ECAJ Post-Conf & Functions, August 1958–August 1959’, AAJ, Box E6, ECAJ Corres. Files.


\(^{58}\)See Claims Conference Files, AAJ, Boxes C1–C9.

\(^{59}\)Australian Jewish Times (AJT), May 27, 1955. Einfeld was critical of the AJT’s editorial, which he called irresponsible because he was concerned that it threatened Australian Jewish unity.

\(^{60}\)Ashkanasy to Kagan, July 29, 1957, AAJ, Box G5, COJMCAG.
community-owned school. The institution’s trustees were the authority responsible for the control of its affairs and he suggested that the school’s constitution be changed. At first, the trustees refused. After further negotiation, the school’s president Abraham Rabinovitch decided that the trust deed would be altered

so that, when a vacancy occurs in the number of the Trustees, the same shall be filled by a person being a member of the North Bondi Jewish Day School and Kindergarten Association, appointed by a General Meeting of the members of such Association.61

In 1958, A£5000 was allocated to Moriah and further sums of a similar nature were granted later (see appendix).

At the 1958 meeting, Einfeld again raised the issue of funding for Moriah College in Sydney. He succeeded after delivering strong representation, and a precedent was set with A£5000 granted to the College, A£1000 to the St. Kilda and Elwood Talmud Torahs, and A£4500 for the Yeshivah, Melbourne.62 In response to this achievement, David Feiglin, president of Yeshivah College, Melbourne, congratulated Einfeld on his efforts and wrote that, ‘[I]t is abundantly clear from reports leaking through that it was your personal zeal and drive which brought your advocacy to a successful conclusion.’63 In 1959, Ashkanasy was again a director, and once more argued for Mount Scopus because it was ‘sponsored by the community and outweighs in size, responsibility and burdens all others’.64 This time, however, the Directors gave the school no priority.

In 1963, there was general satisfaction with the overall allocation made to Australian Jewry. However, Walter Lippmann wrote to Ashkanasy to complain that a few organizations that served outlying communities (such as the Coogee-Randwick-Clovelly Congregation in Sydney, the North Shore Temple Emanuel, Sydney and Temple Beth Israel, Ormond, Melbourne) had expressed disappointment with regard to their allocations. Lippmann stressed that many survivors had settled in these outlying suburbs and it was important that they too receive assistance. He also noted that although the Claims Conference had placed its emphasis on educational facilities in 1964, Australia continued to need assistance with relief and resettlement.65

Overall, allocations from the Claims Conference meetings between 1954 and 1965 played a significant role in the development of Australian Jewish communities. Individual institutions also benefitted from funding, in addition to the general allotment for Jewish welfare to assist in the resettlement of survivors, mainly in Melbourne and Sydney but also with smaller amounts allocated to Perth and Adelaide. These supported both specific educational institutions and synagogues’ educational programs. These funds also were mainly for Melbourne and Sydney, but the Jewish communities in Perth, Brisbane and Canberra were granted smaller amounts. Mount Scopus College in Melbourne was the major educational beneficiary, as it received A£63,000 over the entire period. Altogether, Australian Jewry received more than one million Pounds (Australian) for relief, rehabilitation and education, a very significant amount of support for that time.66

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61 Ashkanasy to Kagan, May 30, 1958, AAJ, Box G5, COJMCAG.
63 Feiglin to Einfeld, March 4, 1958, AAJ, Box G6, COJMCAG.
64 Confidential Report dated June 1, 1959 of Com Meeting of Board of Directors, January 17–18, 1959, AAJ, Box G6, COJMCAG.
66 A£895,800 was allocated for Relief and Rehabilitation and A£170,156 for synagogues and schools. Rutland, Edge, 412. Australia only moved over to the decimal system on 14 February 1966, after the allocation of funds from the Claims Conference ended.
Individual restitution: government issues

In addition to collective reparations based on communal property lost during the Shoah, the need for individual restitution was recognized. In response to early piecemeal legislation, the United Restitution Office (URO) was established in 1948 to provide legal aid to claimants who lived outside of Germany and needed assistance. In May 1952, the agreement with the Western Powers on the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany included provisions for the restitution and indemnification of individual victims of the Third Reich. The Federal Indemnification Law of 1956 introduced further changes to meet some of the shortcomings of the 1952 legislation. When the Claims Conference was established in 1952, it took over financial responsibility for the URO and established a central office in Frankfurt. The URO eventually had 29 branches in 15 countries. Through the efforts of Dr Nehemiah Robinson of the World Jewish Congress, who was also directly involved with COJMCAG, then-ECAJ president Einfeld was appointed to the URO governing board in 1953. This selection provided official recognition of the ECAJ in its work on behalf of Jewish refugees from Europe.67 A URO office was set up in Australia with branches in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth to assist individual Jews with reparation claims. By 1955, the Sydney branch had four employees,68 while the Melbourne branch had two.69 Only those who earned less than A£1000 per annum received assistance, and those with larger incomes had to seek the support of private solicitors or agencies. It was estimated that the URO branch in Melbourne dealt with about one-fifth of the claimants.70 Thus, the Australian Jewish community was united in terms of individual restitution, with Melbourne and Sydney working closely in a collaborative fashion. However, they faced problems with both the German and Australian governments.

Despite the efforts of the Australian URO officers, the processing of claims moved very slowly. Ten thousand individual claims from Australia remained outstanding in 1957, and totaled A£7,500,000. Walter Lippmann, a Melbourne Jewish community leader and former pre-war German Jewish refugee, compiled a report that analyzed the reasons for the slow pace of the settlement of individual claims. Using evidence compiled by Kurt Grossman in West Germany, Lippmann argued that the German personnel were inadequate in both quantity and quality, and that there were often delays due to inefficiencies in the public service. Many claimants from Europe, the USA and Israel visited Germany to speed up the process, but those in Australia were at a geographic, time and financial disadvantage. In order to overcome these problems, the ECAJ suggested that the Australian government appoint an officer to be added to the Australian legation at Bonn to act specifically on behalf of the claims of Australian citizens. This suggestion was not implemented.71

In March 1957, Dr Heinrich von Bertano, Foreign Minister of the West German government, visited Australia. Einfeld and David J. Benjamin, then-honorary secretary of the ECAJ, met with Bertano and Dr Walter Hess, the German Ambassador to Australia, to discuss these problems. Although this meeting did not lead to any specific changes in the system, Dr von Bertano

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68 They were Dr and Mrs Kurt Honigbaum, Dr S.W. Krieger, and Mrs S. Fein.
69 They were Dr H. Ebner and Mrs I. Kohn. In 1964, Dr Ebner passed away at the age of 80. His contribution to helping many survivors secure the settlement of their claims was acknowledged at the 1964 annual meeting. Dr L. Duldig succeeded him in the position.
promised to attend to any special ECAJ requests to ensure prompt action and Einfeld was confident that the meeting would assist in speeding up the process.  

This confidence proved unrealistic and the ECAJ continued to complain about inefficiencies and delays that were seen as causing unnecessary suffering to the applicants. In some cases, prospective beneficiaries died before they received their compensation. In 1960, there was again correspondence between the German Ambassador in Canberra and the ECAJ, located in Melbourne under Ashkanasy’s presidency. Damaged health as a result of Nazi persecution was the major area of concern of the 950 applications lodged with the URO Office by 31 December 1959. Only 50 of these had been processed by the second half of 1960, with rejections more numerous than approvals. Dr Honigbaum argued that the delay was caused by the fact that medical experts in Germany had to approve the medical reports from the two local doctors nominated by the German consulates in Melbourne and Sydney. These experts based their decisions on written reports without personally examining the applicants. Dr Honigbaum claimed that their ‘main objective was to cut down the number of favorable decisions’. These delays were also due to the problem of Australia’s distance and the fact that the West German government sent all letters by regular mail, which took up to three months to arrive.

The ECAJ stressed that the manner in which cases were handled was ‘frustrating to all concerned giving a sense of lack of goodwill’. This sense of frustration was described as follows:

In general, all persecutees complain that the cases are dealt with by officials who tend to disregard the extremely difficult conditions during the persecution; that the agencies and courts do not consider properly the impact of maltreatment, hunger, hard labor, and other inhuman acts (including the loss of most of one’s relatives) or the physical and mental conditions of the persecutees; that the German physicians and agencies, even where they cannot avoid recognising that the illness is due to the persecutory measures, recognise loss of working capacity below the statutory 25% and/or restrict the impact of these measures to a short time, thus avoiding payment to persecutees.

The Ambassador sought to defend the delays on the basis of the large number of claims that had to be handled. However, Ashkanasy argued in his reply that, “justice delayed” was “justice denied.” He continued to express his distress at the procrastination, but to no avail. As Ashkanasy stated in his 1960 annual report, ‘perhaps it is as was shown in the commission of these crimes’.

In 1965, the community again had cause for complaint when the West German parliament voted to delay restitution payments because of budgetary considerations. Einfeld wrote to Dr Ritter, the West German Ambassador in Canberra, stressing ‘moral obligations should transcend any budgetary requirements’. The act to delay payments was passed, resulting in Einfeld writing again in 1966 to ask that this harsh measure be reconsidered.

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72 Report by Einfeld on interview with Dr Heinrich von Bertano, March 25, 1957, AAJ, Box E41, ECAJ Corres. Files.
73 Dr. Honigbaum to Isi Leibler, ECAJ Hon Secretary, May 4, 1960, ‘Restitution Claims’, AJHSA, Sydney, Box 10, File 104.
74 Davis, acting president, to the German Ambassador, August 4, 1960, AJHSA, Sydney, Box 10, File 104.
75 Ibid.
76 Ashkanasy to German Ambassador, September 15, 1960, Box 10, File 104, AJHSA, Sydney.
As restitution money began to flow into Australia, the government discovered it and began to levy income taxes.\textsuperscript{79} The claimants were distressed at this decision, as the West German government did not tax the restitution payments and, since they were issued as compensation for lost property, they felt that the Australian government should not tax them either. Dr Joseph corresponded with overseas groups and was advised by his solicitor in Germany that, because Israel, the USA and the UK did not tax restitution payments, Jews receiving compensation should leave Australia. This suggestion had no appeal, as ‘Australia could lose quite a number of members,’ Joseph wrote to Einfeld and suggested that the ECAJ contact Federal Treasurer, Sir Arthur Fadden, on the matter.\textsuperscript{80} In October 1957, Einfeld submitted a memorandum with assistance from Joseph, but the government refused to remove the tax for fear that it would set a precedent in the case of widows’ pensions. Einfeld wrote repeatedly to Canberra requesting a personal interview with Fadden, but was informed that Fadden could not spare the time.\textsuperscript{81} In mid-1958, the ECAJ headquarters moved to Melbourne and Ashkanasy continued to pursue the matter through legal action by threatening legal action.\textsuperscript{82} When Liberal politician, Harold Holt assumed the position of Federal Treasurer in 1959, Ashkanasy took up the matter with him. In Holt’s budget speech of August 1959, he announced that restitution payments from Germany would be exempt from taxation from 1 July 1959 onward, but that the exemption would not be retroactive. At the same time, the government also agreed that the Council for Jewish Education would be exempt from taxation. The Jewish community welcomed Holt’s decision and Ashkanasy wrote to thank him for ‘his warm and sympathetic understanding’.\textsuperscript{83}

The ECAJ faced other problems due to the fact that a large number of Jews in Australia were not entitled to restitution. For example, in 1957 the \textit{Daily Telegraph} featured the case of Betty Lissing, a Dutch Holocaust survivor of Auschwitz who believed that she had been unfairly denied restitution payments.\textsuperscript{84} Einfeld commented on this article to Kagan, stating that ‘those people who, I believe, have a just and proper grievance, feel that we are not doing nearly enough for them in this matter’.\textsuperscript{85} In Melbourne many of these victims joined together to form the Association of Ex-Concentration Camp Inmates in order to assist them with their claims for restitution.

The filing of all claims for restitution under the German Federal Indemnification Law ended in 1965, and survivors who had not submitted claims by that date could not be considered. At the same time, allocations for relief and resettlement and for educational and cultural activities also ceased. The final meeting for allocations of funds took place in March 1964 in Brussels, where a resolution was adopted for the establishment of a Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture to be set up to manage trust funds remaining from the Claims Conference. The ECAJ was invited to become a charter member of this new foundation and was expected to pay an annual membership fee of USD1000. The Foundation held its first meeting in April 1965, and at that gathering it specified that there would be some flexibility in the allocation of funds for

\textsuperscript{79}This policy was confirmed in a letter to Charles J. Berg & Assoc. from the Federal Taxation Office, Canberra, January 8, 1957, AAJ, Box 3, Joseph Collection.
\textsuperscript{80}Joseph to Einfeld, May 8, 1957, AAJ, Box 3, Joseph Collection.
\textsuperscript{81}See Fadden to Einfeld, November 29, 1957 and May 9, 1958, AAJ, Box G4, COJMCAG.
\textsuperscript{82}Ashkanasy to Reichman, URO, London, April 14, 1959, AAJ, Box G4, COJMCAG. Such a case would cost £750 British sterling and Reichman sent a cable of May 7, 1959 agreeing that the URO, London, would pay half the cost of the case.
\textsuperscript{83}Ashkanasy to Holt, August 20, 1959, AAJ, Box G4, COJMCAG.
\textsuperscript{84}Betty Lissing wrote her memoirs later in life. See Betty Lissing, God Cried at Auschwitz (Adelaide: LMN Systems, 2003).
\textsuperscript{85}Einfeld to Kagan, August 22, 1957, AAJ, Box G2, COJMCAG.
cultural activities, but that primary and secondary schooling would no longer be included. A provision for Jewish teacher training, however, would be considered. Over the years, Australian Jewry has received small cultural grants from the Foundation, and ECAJ presidents continue to attend its meetings.

Since 1965, there have been other compensation and restitution schemes, including the Hardship Funds, compensation for forced labor in ghettos, the Swiss Bank Fund and Article 2 Fund that followed the reunification of Germany, after which East Germany accepted responsibility for restitution and fair reparations to victims. However, these various schemes fall outside the purview of this article, which focuses on the period up to 1965.

In some cases, pre-war refugees and post-war survivors received lump sum payments, while others got indexed pensions or a combination of the two. These monies were a welcomed ‘asset’ that helped them to rebuild their shattered lives. The importance of these individual German restitution payments for the development of Australian Jewry helps to explain the close collaboration of individual Australian Jewish communities through the ECAJ.

Conclusion
The story of Australian Jewry’s involvement with both the Claims Conference and the URO has been a neglected one. It is important, however, in terms of the development of the community after the Holocaust, particularly in the immediate post-war period. It also sheds further light on the whole allocation process of both community grants and individual restitution provided by the COGMCAG executive on a global level. This process for Australian Jewry was a complex one, which involved a general debate as to whether the Jewish community should participate in Claims Conference allocations, the question of who should represent the community at the COJMCAG meetings, and interstate tensions and rivalry. In the end, however, Australian Jewry’s participation in the Claims Conference contributed to the major and multi-layered transformation of the community in this watershed period of Australian Jewish history.

First, there was material help for the resettlement and integration of survivors. Monies allocated to the Jewish community in Australia by the Claims Conference, as well as those received by individuals through restitution, were clearly important for the growth of Australian Jewry. These payments provided enormous impetus, assisting those in need and facilitating the implementation of important educational and cultural programs. An undated document claimed that, ‘a whole Jewish world was rebuilt physically and spiritually, with the help of the funds received from the Germans’. This statement was undoubtedly true for the small and distant Australian Jewish community. Holocaust survivors more than doubled the pre-1933 Jewish population of Australia, which never could have so successfully integrated them without support from the Claims Conference.

Second, community leadership developed at a federal level and contributed to the strengthening of the representative structure of Australian Jewry. The fact that the ECAJ became the spokesorganization for the community on this issue, rather than the ANC, was significant in this regard. The need for financial assistance forced the community to cooperate at a federal level, although at times internal rivalry and tensions emerged between the Melbourne and Sydney communities. The ECAJ leadership played a vital role in the allocations, especially through the effective overseas representations of the two major Jewish figures of this period: Maurice Ashkanasy and Sydney Einfeld. While the survivors themselves were not directly involved – they were busy

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87 ‘Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany’, undated document, AAJ, ECAJ Corres Files.
recreating their lives in Australia – they were the beneficiaries of these efforts. Even in those organizations with majority survivor involvement (for example, Jewish schools), the leadership usually came from the local community or had been pre-war refugees, such as Walter Lippmann in Melbourne. As such, these developments were important in the growing maturity of approach of the local community in Australia, as its leadership learned to be effective players on the world scene. Claims Conference allocations also covered the cost of the local administration required for both communal compensation and individual restitution. In this way, Claims Conference funding to the ECAJ contributed to the initial development of a professional infrastructure for Australian Jewry.

Thus, despite the debates and conflicts in regard to both the overall participation and local representation, Australian Jewry’s involvement in Claims Conference allocations proved to be a very positive factor in its development after 1945. The process, both in terms of material assistance and also structural change, contributed to the community’s development. Australian Jewry today ranks as the ninth largest in the Jewish Diaspora and is seen as an effective community. Compare this to the fact that it was an isolated and highly assimilated fragment of world Jewry in the early 1930s, one clearly sees that Claims Conference funding between 1954 and 1965 contributed to the transformation created by the influx of pre-war Jewish refugees and post-war survivor émigrés. However, the Claims Conferences provided funding to the Jewish welfare societies, which improved the local community’s infrastructure and assisted in the successful integration of Jewish survivors into Australian society, and contributed to the Jewish educational and cultural institutions created in the period from 1954 to 1965.

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### Appendix: Appendix to Annual Report 1964

#### Table A1. Claims Conference Allocations

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**TOTAL — EDUCATION**

12,300  
12,000  
15,358  
13,848  
16,000  
20,000  
17,050  
27,000  
19,600  
17,200  

**TOTAL**

£40,000  
64,300  
64,800  
58,758  
99,498  
107,700  
129,650  
115,200  
137,500  
133,250  
115,500  

**TOTAL OVER PERIOD OF COMCAG OPERATIONS:**

£895,800 for RELIEF & REHABILITATION

£170,356 for EDUCATION

£1,066,156 TOTAL