

What our young leaders believe

WE WELCOME the comments (AJN 22/5) of Benseon Apple and Judith Kadar on our Young Adult Leadership survey, even if they are somewhat misguided.

We find it hard to be as benign about the headline 'Youth Survey Flawed' which you chose to use, without even a question-mark. Even if all the points made by Apple and Kadar were correct — and we will argue that they were not — it would not have justified such a sweeping headline as this. Newspapers do have a responsibility of care, and in our view you have not, in this case, properly exercised that responsibility.

To answer the specific points made by your correspondents:

— 'Nowhere does the survey define exactly who is a young adult'.

We point out that the survey was conducted among people 'holding executive positions in Jewish youth organisations.' These are people who have chosen to offer themselves for leadership positions in Jewish organisations. The survey asks them to tell us about themselves: how old they are, where they come from, whether they are partnered or not and so on. We did not want to make a priori judgements about them on the contrary, we wanted them to define themselves.

— '... it appears that a significant number of young adults in public leadership positions were not surveyed.'

Because the survey population was defined precisely, 'young adult deputies of the NSW Board of Deputies' could have been included if they were leaders in a Jewish youth organisation. One would imagine that at least some would be.

In surveys of this type, the practical problems of securing lists of names are always considerable. We think we did pretty well. But no doubt a few names slipped through our net.

On the question of marital status, we made provision for 'other' for people who did not see themselves fitting in to the conventional categories — they may have been people living together. Survey courtesy demands that people be given the chance to define themselves.

On the question of religious affiliation, what we sought to do we achieved to gain some indication of the level of observance among this cohort.

On the question of democracy in the roof bodies, the thrust of our question, and indeed of the answers is clear. It is an old trick, but not a very useful one, to attack the question when you don't like the answer. This latter point may also be made about the survey response to the question on antisemitism. Rather than question the result your correspondents might be better employed in thinking about why they are as they are.

Irving Saulwick
Bernard Rechter
Melbourne



Ultra Orthodox Jews at the Western Wall: but what of the majority of Jews?

How to be a Jew

THERE are many discussions and controversies about being a member of the Jewish people. The major discussions are in relation to practising Judaism in Israel.

Orthodox Jewry requires a total devotion to the traditional religious practices. They believe that Judaism faces neglect and will not prevail if strict compliance is not observed.

The more liberal members of the community regard the Orthodox attitude as a fundamentalism similar to that practised by Muslims and some Christians. This fundamentalism leaves a vacuum which does not meet the needs of immigrants to Israel or of those wishing to join Jewish communities elsewhere.

My own view is that the only criterion which is necessary if you wish to be a Jew, other than conversion, is to be born to a Jewish mother, which of course is also the *Halachic* definition. But the claim that religious observance is the *only* way to keep the Jewish people alive as an entity is not acceptable to many Jews, including myself.

From the many Jews I meet in the Melbourne and Sydney commu-

nities it is clear that, like me, they do not adhere strongly to the traditional religious values. Yet when I consider my own life I believe that my bonds with Judaism, although not religious, have been and remain very strong.

My parents' house was certainly Jewish, although they observed very few rituals. In addition to my barmitzvah and marriage in a syna-

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gogue I'd like to summarise some aspects of my Jewish involvement over the years.

1) I was a very young and enthusiastic member of Betar in pre-war Vienna. The fact that Betar's founder Ze'ev Jabotinsky and Menachem Begin were in Vienna on the day of my barmitzvah was a source of great pride.

2) Although many of my friends became legal or illegal immigrants to Palestine, I was heartbroken that my parents didn't allow me to go there.

3) In Sydney I was one of the very early members and leaders of the

Shomrim movement, a youth group providing a balance between the Orthodox and older Zionists at the time.

4) Later on I joined B'nai Brith, Unit Wallenberg and was responsible for the creation of the Wallenberg State Library Holocaust Collection. Now I hope that this activity will extend to the Genocide Centre at Macquarie University.

5) I spent my study leave (sabbatical) while a professor at La Trobe University in Jerusalem at the Hebrew University in the Department of Zoology and worked with students there for eight months.

I believe that these few episodes are examples of being Jewish and supporting Jewish values in the community, without having recourse to the *Halachah*.

My examples may appear to be trivial to some. But I believe that, in addition to being the son of a Jewish mother, they legitimise my claim to be a Jew.

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Revisiting the Arthur Calwell story

IN LAST week's edition you featured an article (AJN29/5) on a forest dedicated in Israel to the memory of Arthur Calwell. The article described Calwell as 'the father of multiculturalism'. The Australian ambassador praised him for paving the way for Asian immigration. Colette Avital considered that he 'had opened the gates to the beginnings of the Jewish community of Australia'. Those expecting to read next of his discovery of penicillin were disappointed.

Is this the same Arthur Calwell who is quoted with approval in the maiden speech that launched the career of Pauline Hanson? Somewhere there is an element of confusion. It is doubtless true that there was no Jewish community in Australia before 1945 and the likes of Sir John Monash and Sir Isaac Isaacs are a figment of the imagination. But what about the other assertions?

As the country's first Minister of Immigration Calwell did indeed provide a limited allocation of entry permits for Jewish immigrants in 1945. He was approachable and maintained good relations with members of the Jewish community. He made various concessions which were not made public. Those who worked with him at the time, men like Paul Morawetz, Alec Masel, and Frances Barkman, knew best the minister's hidden face, the close co-operation with the Executive Council of Australian Jewry.

But what did he do in public? When the voices of hatred and antisemitism were raised in the second half of 1946 he acted to stem the flow of Jewish immigration. Jewish immigrants came on ships chartered by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and the American Joint Distribution Committee: it was almost impossible at the time to book passages on the very limited commercial shipping available.

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Calwell decreed that henceforth no more than 25 per cent of the passengers on a ship were to be Jewish. A numerous *clausus*, but admittedly a generous one. Only the Jewish agencies did not see how they could continue their work.

In parliament Calwell disclaimed credit for the 1945 scheme, claiming that he was merely filling the quota for Jewish refugees established by his conservative predecessors in 1938. Still, his strategy might have been correct at the time; it made possible, if very difficult, the continuation of Jewish immigration away from the public eye.

When the displaced persons program was launched under Calwell's initiative in the middle of 1947, he issued unambiguous

instructions to the selection teams. Contrary to the agreement the government had entered with the United Nations, contrary to the terms of United Nations charter, selection was to be on a 'racial' basis. First preference would go to Aryan types from northern Europe. And no Jews were to be included in the program — a decision not reversed for two years. Let the Jewish agencies handle the immigration of Jews.

Still, this was possibly the correct step at the time: it made it easier to sell the immigration program to the Australian public.

Racial credentials were more thoroughly scrutinised than political or war-records. This, let it not be forgotten, was the program under which a number of war-criminals found a path to Australia. But no revolutionaries from Spain: the recruitment teams were instructed not to visit the refugee camps of those who fled the Franco regime.

Calwell also maintained, so it is said, good relations with the Chinese community of Melbourne. But when Asian people brought pressure on the government to be allowed permanent residence Calwell came down hard. Asian refugees who had been given temporary entry during the war years were required to leave. When a deportation order was successfully challenged in the High Court, Calwell secured the passage of retrospective legislation. Police launched

raids in the Chinese quarter of Sydney. Refugees who had married Australian women during the war and established homes were dragged off to jail, pending deportation.

Appeals were sent to the United Nations. The Asian press gave extensive coverage to Calwell's heavy handed administration of the White Australia policy. And in parliament Calwell boldly confronted his critics: not the critics of the policy providing aid and shelter to the survivors of the Nazi terror, but those few souls who questioned his treatment of Asians.

While he was minister, he boasted, there would be no easing of the racially discriminatory immigration policy. If you allowed even a handful of Asians to breach the Great White Walls then one day there would be no walls left to protect. As for marriages contracted overseas by members of the army of occupation in Japan, no Japanese brides of Australian servicemen would be allowed under his administration.

Whatever his achievements, and in the context of the time they were indeed considerable, it is unlikely that memorials will be erected to honour his name in the countries of Asia.

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