

A Jewish Settlement in the Kimberleys

Author(s): J. Steinberg

Source: *The Australian Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Mar., 1940), pp. 24-30

Published by: [Australian Institute of Policy and Science](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20630815>

Accessed: 15/01/2014 18:51

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Australian Institute of Policy and Science is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Australian Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# A Jewish Settlement in the Kimberleys

J. STEINBERG\*

The problem of a settlement in the Kimberleys can be considered from two points of view. From the European point of view the realization of this enterprise would be a contribution to the solving of the refugee question *by* populating and developing the North of Australia. From the Australian point of view the upbuilding of the settlement would be an active contribution to the problem of populating and developing the North of Australia *by* a planned colonization of Jewish refugees from Europe. The scheme would be only justified if it would prove to be for the benefit of both sides who have to participate in the proposed settlement.

The refugee has already become in Europe not only an object of pity and charitable help but a social phenomenon of great and grave importance. The refugees from Germany and Austria were not only victims of indescribable barbarity, but also indications of the imminent aggressive tendencies and plans of the Hitler state.

In the Europe of to-day, refugees are not only those hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children who are already actually persecuted, expelled and exterminated by the Nazis. No less dangerous is the position of millions of potential refugees who are living under the threat of being persecuted and expelled from their homes. The destruction of Poland during September 1939 showed how quickly works the process of transforming potential refugees into actual refugees.

The especially tragic position of the Jewish refugees must be emphasized. They have been and they are persecuted not because they are political opponents of the Fascist regime in their countries, not because they are guilty of any crime in general, but only because they happened to belong to a peculiar race or faith. It could even be said that they are persecuted because they are guilty of no crime at all. Thus the extermination campaign led by the Nazis against the Jewish people is characterized not by their political persecution and economic ruin, but first and foremost by the moral degradation of the

\* Graduated in Law, at Heidelberg and Moscow Universities and a former member of the Russian Social Revolutionary Party, author of several Russian books and an English book *Spiridonosa*. Secretary of Jewish Freeland League.

Jewish personality. The humiliation of man's dignity in the Jew is the aim of Hitlerism; this is the reason why all progressive minds in the world feel the obligation to repulse this attack on their common human rights.

From innumerable proofs, it would be sufficient to quote only one report from the London *Times* of 16th December 1939, where the Nazi plan of the establishment of a Jewish state in Lublin, Poland, was described under the heading: "A Stony Road to Extermination." The writer told how:

Early in October the Jewish community of Mährisch-Ostrau was ordered to compile a register of all male Jews between the ages of seventeen and seventy. They had to parade on 17th October at 8 a.m. at the Ostrau riding-school. Each man was ordered to take a knap-sack, a suitcase, food for three days, and a maximum of 300 marks. They were told to take leave of their families at home as no one would be allowed to accompany them, and strict silence would be enforced at the school. There was to have been a medical examination, but it was a farce, and even serious diseases were not considered sufficient ground for exemption. About one thousand men were taken in buses to the railway station. As that ghoulish cortège proceeded through the streets, non-Jewish Czechs and even some German women were seen crying bitterly.

There is little hope that the refugee problem will disappear from Europe at once after the conclusion of peace. More than that, during the meeting of the Inter-Governmental Committee on Refugees in Washington last October, President Roosevelt stated:—"When this ghastly war ends not one million but twenty million might enter into the problem. It is not enough to indulge in horrified humanitarianism, empty resolution, golden rhetoric or pious words. We must face the problem actively if the democratic principle based on security of the individual is to be restored," and Mr Roosevelt asked the Committee to start "a serious and expansive effort to survey and study the geographic problem of resettling several million people."

Whatever the end of the war may be, Europe will have to think hard, not only of a temporary displacement of unsettled refugee masses, but of a permanent redistribution of its population on a large scale.

The Jewish Freeland League in London was created in 1935 with branches in Poland, France, Holland and U.S.A. The League aimed at finding some considerable area under the British flag in order to establish a large scale settlement of Jewish refugees. After considerable study, it came to the conclusion that an area in the East Kimberleys in Western Australia would be best suitable to its ideas.

The League does not consider the infiltration of refugees into many countries of the world as sufficient and satisfactory. The infiltration of the individual refugee means mostly his drifting into the industrial over-crowded cities of the old-established population. He has no choice but to continue the trade or occupation of his former life. Thus he is bound to be driven into competition with the city population, and unfortunately, economic competition might lead to unpleasant consequences of a political or racial nature which are equally dangerous to both sides. In order to avoid such possible results, the Freeland League formulated an alternative programme of large-scale colonization.

Colonization means the taking-over of an unpopulated and economically undeveloped area by groups of trained and inspired young refugees in order to give them a chance to start new life on new soil. The main idea behind such a colonization scheme is to give this unfortunate youth a constructive aim for the building of their future, and so to return to them their dignity, self-respect and self-confidence. These moral values, cruelly destroyed by the Hitler persecutions, would be then restored in a big enterprise of the economic and cultural creation of a new human settlement. Regeneration of men and regeneration of land would coincide.

The second point of the Freeland programme concerns the *political* aspect of its plan. The League has no political aspirations with regard to the Jewish settlement; it should not become a political entity separated in any way from the Australian Commonwealth. The settlers should become in due course Australian citizens and their area part and parcel of the State and Commonwealth. English language and Australian law and administration should be introduced from the beginning. There is no danger of a "minority problem" arising because the Jewish refugees have no state behind them to look to. They will make the new settlement their permanent home, for themselves and for their children, so that their loyalty will be guaranteed by the very nature of their entrance into the country.

The third point of the colonization programme intends to lay down the principles of the *economic* development of the settlement. A planned economy should prevent the waste of human and material resources within the new area, and the competition with the Australian economic life as a whole from without. The economy of the new area would be built up systematically, by stages, beginning with small numbers of trained young men and women, and backed by a special Jewish financial institution. While the economy of the Kimberley country is at present based on pastoral pursuits alone, it appears that the developmental policy of the settlement could be directed to a

balanced combination of the pastoral, agricultural and secondary industries. The closest co-operation should exist from the beginning between the two spheres of primary industry. Simultaneously, with their upbuilding, the foundations of manufactures could be laid, and made to conform with the growing community. The marketing of the surplus of the new place would arise some years later, and it might be best considered later in the light of the new international trade relations which have been created by the war and other events.

It is clear that before the three spheres of economic activity could be fully developed, the settlers would have—in the first pioneering stage—to embark on a programme of public works, devoted to the laying of the foundations of the settlement. In order to open the new area, they would be occupied with the work of housing, road-building, fencing, preparation of irrigation plants and a central power-station. The establishment of a scientific Research Bureau, associated with the primary and secondary industries, would become one of the most important items of the public works programme. No economic progress would be possible in such a settlement without a scientific basis. It is needless to say that most of the economic activities of the pioneers in the initial stage must be put on the basis of co-operative work. The Kimberley country cannot be opened by individual efforts only. There must be a community of men and women, bound together by common historical and spiritual memories, by common sufferings and hopes, and inspired by the vision of a new and peaceful home. The Jewish refugees would respond to these requirements of a modern colonization, and they would be perhaps more than others prepared to do the hard pioneering work on co-operative lines. Hundreds of successful co-operative colonies and enterprises in Palestine, established in the last twenty years, are living witnesses to the interest shown by Jewish youth in co-operative work. This is the main reason why the Freeland League believes that the pioneers would stay in the new settlement and not drift to the industrial cities of Australia. After investing their labour and capital, and even sacrifices in the soil, after seeing that their work is going to become successful, and a new home is growing before their eyes, they would prefer the settlement to all temptations of the civilization in the cities.

It seems advisable to recall some historic facts in regard to the possibilities of a Jewish agricultural colonization. Despite the lack of any immediate contact with the soil for many centuries, the Jewish masses enthusiastically turned to agriculture at the first historic opportunity given to them. Every time large numbers answered the call for large-scale settlement, and later they defended their colonies tenaciously against the odds of nature and society.

The first attempts at large-scale Jewish colonization in Russia commenced during the reign of Alexander I. His Act of 9th December 1804, was a combination of paragraphs of persecution and points which were meant to ameliorate the conditions of the Jews. On the one hand, about 600,000 families were to be driven from the villages, but simultaneously the Act offered Jews the possibilities of agricultural life in South Russia. The first pioneers were two Jews from Mogilev, who in 1806 approached the Governor in the name of thirty-six families to grant them land, "since they were trained in agriculture." At the close of 1807, the first four colonies, with a population of almost 500 families, were founded in the Cherson province of South Russia. According to an investigation in 1892, 4603 families (32,280 persons) lived in the colonies of Cherson and Jekaterinoslow. Those exclusively occupied in agriculture amounted to 66 per cent. Even the future political and economic catastrophes (pogroms, world war, civil war) could not destroy the family-rooted Jewish colonies in South Russia. In 1927, there existed forty-eight colonies with 7892 farms and a population of 35,503 people, cultivating about 800,000 hectares of land (one hectare—2.47 English acres).

The history of the first colonization in Russia was a significant chapter of Jewish history in general. Though it did not create a wide Jewish peasant class, it enriched the social structure of Russian Jewry, and this change was destined to exert a great influence on its future history. These colonies were the principal base for the new colonization campaign in Soviet Russia after the years of the Revolution, 1917-18. They were also the predecessors of the colonization movement in the Argentine inaugurated by Baron Hirsch in 1891-2. The population of the Jewish colonies in the Argentine numbered in 1935 about 5000 families (31,500 persons). More than that: even the beginnings of the Palestine colonization are historically connected with the Russian colonies. It was not by chance that the first Zionist association, Chibath Zion, developed in Odessa and other southern Russian towns near the colonies.

The achievements of colonization in Palestine are well known: 237 Jewish agricultural villages, with a population of 108,000 living in the villages, and 14 per cent of the entire Jewish population (460,000) occupied in agriculture. There is no doubt about this: the Jewish masses have never suppressed in themselves the interest and the longing for agricultural toil. The past experiences of their recent history are indications sufficiently convincing to foresee their history in the future.

Let us consider the Kimberley scheme from the Australian point

of view: Is Australia, taken as an economic and cultural unit, interested in the realization of this project?

It seems that everybody knows that this country is in need of a systematic influx of a young, virile and industrious population. Not only the political, strategical and economic conditions of Australia require the increase of population. The cultural and spiritual values, the moral progress of a country as a whole depends on the numbers and the variety of its people. The human basis of a state can be enlarged either by natural trends or by artificial means of immigration. The natural increase of population in Australia is declining from year to year. The late Prime Minister, Mr Lyons, mentioned in one of his last speeches, that in 1927 the population was increasing at the rate of 125,000 a year: 80,000 from natural increase and 45,000 from migration—but that the natural increase has since fallen to 51,000 a year. There are economists who foresee even a standstill of the population in the next decade. So the annual rate of increase per 1000 was 21.1 in the years 1921-6 and only 15.0 in the next five years to 1931. It is significant to note that in the next five years 1931-5, the annual number of births in Australia was 37.0 per 1000 population.

What about the prospects of immigration? It is comprehensible that Australia wants to have immigrants from British stock. Are they available? According to the material supplied by the Australian Institute of International Affairs (New South Wales Branch), for the five years ended 31 December 1938, officially regarded as a time of great prosperity, the Commonwealth lost on the balance of migration, 3389 persons of British birth. The same process is going on in Canada, South Africa, and the colonies of the British Empire. At the Empire Migration Conference in 1937 in London, prominent English economists and statesmen tried to explain this remarkable social phenomenon. They came to the conclusion that there are some difficulties of a social and cultural character, which hinder a systematic flow of British migrants to the dominions and colonies. The French Empire has had the same experience, and it is not difficult to foresee after the war that England, as France, would not be in a position to spare great numbers of her young population for the agricultural pioneering work in the dominions. This is the reason why an increasing number of responsible men in England and Australia have come to the conclusion that they must look for non-British immigrants of a suitable type. In the last report of the Overseas Settlement Board (1938) this idea was clearly acknowledged.

But what type of non-British immigrants should be preferred?

It is easy to realize why Australia has some doubt in regard to Italians, Germans and similar groups of immigrants. It is not because every immigrant of these nations has dangerous intentions, but because they are, even unconsciously, representatives of states and they owe allegiance to their homeland. Thus, we are driven to the conclusion that if this country really wants the increase of the population by a systematic immigration, it should turn to the large masses of the Jewish refugees in Europe. They would represent the wanted type of non-political immigrants, because they have no state behind them, and because they have no alternative but to establish a permanent home in the country of their adoption. By the very nature of their colonization they will become loyal citizens of the new State. So the solution of the problem of immigration into Australia and the contribution to the solving of the refugee problem have become identical.

It is not necessary to underline here how important it would be to Australia to populate and develop the North and North-west of the Commonwealth. While populating of Australia in general responds to its most vital economic and cultural interests, the opening of the North would appear as a political and strategical necessity. There is little doubt that at the next international conference after the war, the redistribution of colonies, empty spaces and raw material will become one of the most important items for discussion. The Australian Commonwealth would also have to present its proposals as a contribution towards the solving of those problems. The Kimberley scheme could be considered as a part of the post-war planning work.

It is significant that in the Kimberley project both aspects, the humanitarian and the practical, are equally represented. Both sides, Australia and the Jewish people would feel that its realization might prove to be for the benefit of both. The Freeland League knows that the pioneers would embark on a complicated enterprise, and would have to overcome great difficulties in the new tropical land. Yet they would be prepared to do this work in order to transform the painful process of immigration into a positive and creative one: the building up of a home. The Australian people would have a unique historical chance, of getting thousands of industrious and loyal citizens who will identify their own future with the future of the country of their adoption. Australia would get more than the benefit of a new type of modern colonization, Australia—and the British Empire—would perform a task of a high moral order. A message of goodwill to Jewry in Europe would bring hope and comfort to millions of distressed souls and so indicate the inevitable coming of a better and happier world.