

Donors and communal agendas

MAY I comment on the views of Graeme Samuel (AJN 17/3) and David Bernstein (AJN 24/3) on the establishment of the Foundation for Jewish Education? As you have reported, this was Frank Lowy's initiative and I was very pleased to be invited to join it.

My concern is first, that Graeme Samuel, while commending our gift, warned there was "a danger that major donors could set the community's education agenda," and second, that David Bernstein believes it would not be "too cynical to suggest" that Mr Lowy's initiative was primarily directed at "getting (Isi) Leibler off the UJA's back."

As someone apparently stuck with the "major donor" tag I don't want to set anybody's agenda. It's actually the other way around. The community has set the agenda for the Pratt family and the Pratt Foundation. I'm not complaining about that, just stating a fact.

Over the past 20 years or so, quite apart from our giving to the UJA and other Israel-related causes, we have donated to a mix of Jewish

educational activities, not only in Victoria but interstate.

Whether it was for the Mount Scopus College Foundation or the bailout plan to get the Yeshiva out of debt; to Bialik College or the UJEB; for Jewish Studies at Melbourne University or at Monash University; Generation journal or Hillel — in all these and many more, we have given on the basis of appeals put to us. Nowhere did we try to set the agenda; at no time did we ask for anything in return.

What I do insist on, however, is that any donor, major or minor, should have the right to give to any communal organisation, or to set up a new one, without having to conform to what particular political leaders of the day happen to think is communally correct.

In reply to Mr Bernstein: it is indeed far "too cynical" to suggest Mr Lowy's plan, or my support for it, was somehow a response to Isi Leibler's views on fund-raising.

I happen to believe, as does Mr Lowy and many others, that fund-raising for the UJA and local Jewish

educational activities must be kept separate. But I believed that 10 and 20 years ago, long before there was any debate about it. That didn't stop me from donating to Jewish education in Australia then, it didn't stop Mr Lowy from doing the same before he had ever even spoken to Mr Leibler on the subject, and it will not affect us now in promoting the Foundation for Jewish Education.

Israel and Jewish education are both important. The educational, cultural and charitable needs of the mainstream Australian community, which we and other Jewish donors must support, are also important. And we look forward to continue donating to them all.

I and my family have no other agendas and no ulterior motives in giving to all these causes. Except perhaps one. And that is to encourage those who can afford to give more, and who aren't doing enough, to do the right thing.

Richard Pratt
Kew

AUJS and racism

THE AUJS national executive is concerned the article "AUJS won't join anti-Nazi demo" (AJN 17/3).

Firstly, the journalist who wrote the article questioned the Victorian regional president about the rally at a communal meeting of a totally different nature. He was unaware that the answers were to be used as official statements on behalf of AUJS.

Until now, there has been no official statement from AUJS on this matter, and certainly nothing had been "decided" by AUJS (as this article stated). But this is merely the way journalism works, and this is not our main point of concern.

Our main concern is that it could be construed that AUJS is not committed to opposing racism and National Action. This is wrong.

AUJS is 100 percent committed to opposing racism and racist violence in any form and strongly opposes the neo-Nazi group National Action. Whether this opposition manifests itself in direct counter-rallying or completely separate rallying is an issue which needs to be properly analysed, as it uncovers a number of other sensitive matters.

The fact is that AUJS members could not attend the rally on March 18 due to our camp. This was purely a practical matter and not one of

ideology. Therefore, there was no need for any decision even to be taken.

Rallying on Shabbat (within the bounds of Halachah) is not a problem, as we proved last year. AUJS also proved its commitment to opposing racism last year with its two rallies against National Action in Adelaide and by being at the forefront of organising the Jewish Youth Alliance rally against National Action in Brunswick (with which the AUJS Victorian regional president was heavily involved).

AUJS will not be silent when racist groups attempt to undermine the fundamental values upon which our society is based and we will not tolerate the behaviour of groups such as National Action.

In future, perhaps slightly more responsible reporting on such matters would be appropriate.

Roger Schueler
National Small Regions Officer
Julian Devries
Victorian Regional President

▲ The AJN stands by its reporting and rejects any suggestion that Julian Devries did not know that staff writer Margaret Safran was interviewing him for the purposes of publication. The Editor.

THE CONCERT

I WAS under the impression that Concert in the Park was meant to be a family event. On this basis I found the Lesbian stall (AJN 24/3) to be totally inappropriate and in poor taste for such an event.

Sure, in this day and age of openness and enlightenment, we need to be tolerant towards the complexities of human behaviour and its many facets. But this does not mean that we have to accept them.

The Lesbian group and other fringe groups have other forums and means available to convey their message and to gain support. Concert in the Park was not one of them.

Tunya Rosengarten
South Caulfield

CONGRATULATIONS to Skif, the Kadimah, and their members who organised this year's Concert in the Park. It was incredible that such a (numerically) small proportion of Melbourne's Jewish community can consistently stage an event that involves and appeals to the entire community, and engenders a feeling of enthusiasm about Judaism and of tolerance.

It was a wonderful experience to be able to sit in Caulfield Park on a Sunday afternoon and listen to conversations in English, Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian, and to see people of varying (and sometimes opposing) religious and political persuasions mingling as they enjoyed and created the entertainment and atmosphere.

Thank you to the organisers for putting in the hard work required to

provide such a feast of Yiddishkeit.

Zoe London
Elwood

MIKVAH

I AM writing to congratulate Ruth Rosenberg on her excellent article (AJN 24/3) on Mikvah, Marriage and Sexuality.

If any readers would like to discuss any aspect of Mikvah and Family Purity in a totally private and non-threatening atmosphere, they may call me on 527-3943. Private tours of a Mikvah can also be arranged.

Susan Bass
East St Kilda

ON THE SPORTING LIFE

I AM married with three young children who are now eager to pursue Jewish sporting activities. Living only 15 minutes by car from Caulfield in the bayside area we are prepared to make the effort of taking our children to participate in Jewish clubs.

Having made contact with AJAX Swimming Club, it was sad to find a club that is struggling without its own swimming pool or regular usage of a pool. This will not discourage us. But it is a sad reflection on our community that this is clearly not a priority.

Today my six year old son excitedly headed off to Caulfield Park expecting to join an AJAX Soccer team. Upon arrival we were told that all places had been taken and he had no real possibility of joining and playing. My son and his father were not encouraged to return.

Attending the local primary school with only two other Jewish

children means they aren't eligible for any UJEB religious instruction at all.

We have chosen to lead a liberal Jewish lifestyle and attend liberal Jewish events. But we had hoped that the opportunities to participate in regular Jewish sport and encourage friendships with other Jewish children would be easier than it appears to be.

Disappointed
Brighton
(Name withheld on request)

BLUE BOX

RECENTLY I had my first experience as a voluntary Blue Box Collector. I was asked to clear a number of Blue Boxes for the current Pesach Campaign.

The experience was both exciting and disappointing. Exciting, because I met a lot of lovely people who welcomed me to their homes and showed great pleasure in being able to support Israel through their regular contributions to the Blue Box.

Disappointing because there were people who did not make me welcome and made their contribution grudgingly. What is worse, their homes would suggest that they had a greater capacity to give.

We must remember that Israel needs our support today as much as in the past and that we living in the Diaspora need Israel even more.

Voluntary Blue Box collectors who give so much of their time should be welcome in every Jewish home as ambassadors of Israel.

J Gartner
East St Kilda

Hungary's whitewash

THE Holocaust Centre recently received some pictorial and documentary material from the Hungarian government about the ghetto, deportation and forced labour of Jews in 1944. It would have been appropriate to thank to the donor and to report the news in the *Australian Jewish News*.

Instead, a function was held on March 19 which attracted some 100-120 people, where we were treated to a most shameful exercise. Both speakers from the Centre, not to mention the Hungarian diplomat present, engaged in a disgraceful whitewashing exercise, according to which all the evil against the Jews was carried out by the Germans and, of course, the Hungarians were not to be blamed.

For the record, a succession of Hungarian governments followed the German Nazi example, sometimes even preceding it. Since the 1920's a numerus clausus (restrict-

ed numbers) was applied against Jews in universities. The gendarmerie were brutal and patently antisemitic. From 1938 the number of Jews employed in any business or office was restricted to six percent of the workforce. Actors, opera singers, conductors were gradually dismissed. Instead of attending paramilitary training once a week, we Jewish secondary students aged 14-16, were forced to do manual labour wearing a yellow armband, four years before the German occupation. And don't let us forget that in 1946, three Jews were killed by their Hungarian compatriots, with the police assisting the killer mob.

I did not hear one word of apology for any of this from the Hungarian diplomat and it is a disgrace that the otherwise excellent Centre lent an aura of respectability to a past never to be forgotten or forgiven.

John Ziltzer
East Brighton

Hillel is about investing in the future

WHEN you're involved in fundraising you often think you've heard it all. But just before I left for a brief visit to the USA, I was as told by a major donor that he couldn't give to Hillel because he'd just made a donation to the *Jewish Museum*.

Now I have no doubt that Melbourne's Jewish Museum is a worthy cause. But for heaven's sake — we're talking about investing in our future, — not choosing between the future and a Museum to our past.

Without sounding too melodramatic, unless we put some real dollars into expanding the quality of Jewish education post high school, we might not have much of a future, and there'll be a need for an even bigger museum.

Hillel is making a concerted effort to wake the community up to the need for ongoing Jewish education. I am delighted to report that most major communal organisations — B'nai Brith, SZC, JCCV, COSV, VUPJ and Mac-cabi — have accepted our invitation to sit at the Hillel "table."

I am hopeful that the community and its

VIEW POINT

Ron Finkel

major donors will realise that securing the enormous investment they have made in Jewish day school education can be done by ensuring that the effort is continued when our children reach that most sensitive age in their lives — the 18-24 period — when sociologists tell us they are most susceptible to the challenges of the open society.

It is precisely at that age, when we as a community have to show them the continuing relevance of Jewish values.

Put in very simple terms — to invest without covering the critical period when your "product" gets to market would be unthinkable to the average businessman, let alone the money astute and successful business builders who have endowed our community

so generously over the past four or five decades.

How is it then that they lose track of basic principles when it comes to their investments in the Jewish community?

The community has an excellent opportunity to make a real difference by ensuring the resources — both human and financial are available — to Jewish youth.

We're not talking mega dollars — Hillel budget is less than \$200,000, that's \$50 per annum for each of the 4,000 Jewish youth 18-24. Yet we struggle for this pittance, and for lack of investment, take the risk of losing a generation.

Is that dumb or dumber?

And what of that increasingly large number of single graduates — staying home larger and marrying later? Hillel in NSW (a well endowed, strongly supported organisation) has a trained staff person dedicated to creating meaningful networks for the single adults 24-30. Hillel Victoria intends to follow their lead.

What we need is a wholesale change of attitude. Parents must commit to Jewish education beyond the end of Year 12.

The community has to rise to the challenge. Hillel is a communal property. Everyone, every group has a right and an obligation to participate in its work.

The result of our collective effort with young adults will underpin enrolment at day schools in the years to come support for, and participation in, communal organisations well into the future.

Hillel the sage was right:

"If I am not for myself who am I.

If I am only for myself what am I.

If not now, when?"

Hillel, the organisation, throws out the same challenge and we ask — if we don't aggressively, creatively and actively support Jewish youth now — then when?

Perhaps if not now — then in the Jewish Museum.

▲ Ron Finkel is the president of Hillel, Victoria

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