

Hobart Congregation's Plight Challenge to Our Communities

By WALTER M. LIPPMANN.

At the recent E.C.A.J. conference it fell to me to sponsor a resolution recommending renewal of a subsidy of £250 per annum to the Hobart Hebrew Congregation for a period of three years. A similar resolution had been adopted by the 1949 conference, and, as a result, a number of Victorian Congregations had contributed the sum of £390 towards the upkeep and maintenance of this old Congregation in the Tasmanian capital.

Although the recommendation was adopted, the discussion revealed doubts in many minds as to the necessity for such assistance. Knowing the parlous state of the finances of the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies and the reservations expressed by N.S.W. councillors, I am afraid the resolution recommending the subsidy might remain a pious hope rather than be transformed into reality.

A recent visit to Tasmania gave me a welcome opportunity to investigate the position on the spot. The result of my investigation is an urgent call to the large mainland communities of Melbourne and Sydney not to allow the Hobart congregation to die.

The community is too large to be allowed to disintegrate, even though it is too small to maintain itself. 91 souls make up the Hobart Hebrew Congregation, but significantly enough a third of this number, namely 30, are children or youths. It is largely for their sake that the community must be maintained.

Rev. Ruben is laboring hard to give them adequate Jewish education, and to maintain some form of Synagogue life in that island capital. His meagre salary of £10 per week is the main item of the Hobart Synagogue's expenditure, which last year amounted to £640. This sum is modest enough and obviously does not allow for any repairs to the beautiful little Shule. It was a shock indeed to find windows broken in the Synagogue and to learn that they cannot be repaired for lack of funds. To see the curtain to the Almemor torn and to hear that it has been in this form for many years, makes one wonder whether the spirit of generosity and even of Jewish religious self-respect, which overseas would have brought a benefactor forward, is completely absent in Australian Jewry.

Perhaps the needs of the Hobart community and the extent to which they have been neglected by suc-

cessors and the extent to which they have been neglected by succeeding generations is best illustrated by the fact that the Royal Prayer

displayed on the Synagogue wall still calls for Divine guidance for Queen Victoria. Funds have apparently been lacking throughout the reigns of Kings Edward VII, George V, Edward VIII and George VI to bring this prayer up to date. The recent ascent of Queen Elizabeth may be a suitable occasion for a patriotic benefactor to make his contribution to this small outpost of Australian Jewry.

The view was expressed at the E.C.A.J. conference that "there are enough Jews in Hobart to pay for the upkeep and maintenance of the Congregation." It is easy to express such views in the comfortable committee rooms provided by the mainland communities. The hard facts of Hobart Jewry's economics are that of the 35 paying members of the congregation, 23 are wage earners, many of them fairly-recent arrivals earning little more than the basic wage, and 3 are without regular fixed income. The remaining 9 members are professional men or in business on their own account.

The maintenance of Hobart's Synagogue and all the incidentals arising from Jewish communal life are just too much for these few pockets to carry. £5 per week or £250 per annum is required to assist the Hobart Hebrew Congregation in maintaining its religious services and providing Jewish education and some form of Jewish life for their children. It would be an unpardonable failure if the large mainland communities of Melbourne and Sydney were unable to raise this small subsidy in full for the next three years.

E.C.A.J. discussion gives rise to the fear that this matter will be pushed from committee to committee like an unwanted child. I hope, however, that the fear will prove unjustified.

that the fear will prove unjustified. To allow Hobart Jewry to disintegrate would cast eternal reflection upon the present generation of Australian Jewry; to provide the grant is no more than our Jewish duty and an urgent necessity.