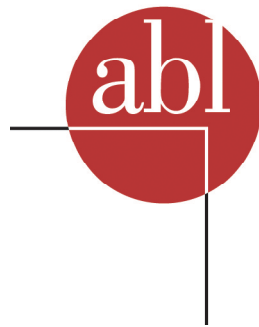


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media release

**Nationalism, racism & political expediency:
19th century France or modern-day Australia?**

***J'Accuse!* The Dreyfus Affair exhibition
to tour Australia**

15 February 2006, Melbourne

Prominent Australian law firm, Arnold Bloch Leibler, is sponsoring *J'Accuse! The Dreyfus Affair*, an exhibition offering a fascinating glimpse into the machinations of power, politics and prejudice. Through a vivid display of original material, newspaper reports, artwork, letters and documents, the Exhibition traces the extraordinary events known to students of law and politics everywhere as 'the Dreyfus Affair'.

About the Dreyfus Affair

The Dreyfus Affair was a scandal that inflamed France at the end of the 19th century and became the catalyst for a new commitment to democracy and human rights. In 1894, Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew and Captain in the French army, was wrongly accused and convicted of being a spy. Right wing newspapers and the Catholic Church campaigned against Dreyfus, fanning the flames of racism by declaring that, as a Jew, his loyalty to France was suspect. In a secret hearing in which he was denied access to the evidence against him (some of which was forged by high-ranking military officers), Dreyfus was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment on the notorious Devil's Island, a brutal penal colony in French Guyana. Even after the real spy was exposed, the military and government were more interested in avoiding embarrassment than in exonerating Dreyfus or bringing the true culprit to justice.

The Dreyfus Affair polarised France. On one side were the nationalists, for whom the safeguarding of authoritarian institutions of Church, military and state were paramount – even at the expense of truth and justice. Opposing them were the 'Dreyfusards' – artists, intellectuals and radicals who were outraged at Dreyfus' treatment. Among the latter was writer Emile Zola, who published *J'Accuse*, a scathing attack on the corrupt government, military and bureaucrats who conspired to condemn the innocent Dreyfus. It galvanised public opinion (and got Zola exiled from France). Thanks to the efforts of Zola and others, Dreyfus was absolved and allowed home in 1906, after 12 years' imprisonment. However, it was not until 1995, more than a century after his arrest, that the French military publicly acknowledged Dreyfus' innocence.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Dreyfus Affair – to Australians at least – is the fact that, as events were unfolding on the other side of the world, 19th century Australians were outraged by what was happening. The trial was widely covered by local and national newspapers. Men and women across the country sent telegrams and letters of support to Dreyfus' wife. Rallies in support of Dreyfus were held across Australia (including one at the Melbourne Town Hall). Sermons from the pulpit expressed outrage and sympathy.

***J'Accuse* and its relevance to modern-day Australia**

Peter Seidel, head of Arnold Bloch Leibler's public interest law practice, observes, "While we might think society has progressed in the last century, many of the moral, sociological, political and ethical concerns raised by the Dreyfus Affair – bully boy tactics; the devalued role of the artist and intellectual in society; individual vulnerability to the State; racial, cultural and religious stereotyping – remain as perturbing and destructive now as they were then, writ large in today's important affairs of the State; no less than mandatory detention, sedition laws, beachside riots and cultural and religious lampooning among them. Now more than ever the Dreyfus Affair can teach us valuable lessons in the struggle for a mature, sophisticated, multicultural Australia."

Exhibition details

Curator Dr Deborah Rechter of Monash University has collaborated with renowned Architect/Designer Peter Corrigan to bring the story of Alfred Dreyfus to life in a vivid and theatrical manner. *J'Accuse! The Dreyfus Affair* is an exhibition from the Jewish Museum of Australia, Gandel Centre of Judaica, comprising original material from The Lorraine Beitler Collection of the Dreyfus Affair, University of Pennsylvania Library. The Exhibition will tour Australia as follows:

Melbourne	26 March - 2 July 2006	Jewish Museum of Australia
Sydney	16 July – November 2006	Sydney Jewish Museum
Adelaide	8 January - 30 March 2007	Migration Museum of SA

A series of public lectures will be held in conjunction with the exhibition.

For further information please contact Stephanie Green, Marketing Communications Executive, on (03) 9229 9715 or 0400 527 005 or at sgreen@abl.com.au.

About Arnold Bloch Leibler

Arnold Bloch Leibler is a leading commercial law firm with offices in Melbourne and Sydney. The firm represents a wide range of individuals and corporate clients, including high-net-worth individuals and entrepreneurs, large family businesses and blue-chip corporations. Arnold Bloch Leibler also has a dedicated pro bono practice providing advice on social, environmental and cultural issues to more than 100 charitable and not-for-profit organisations.

Arnold Bloch Leibler is particularly known for its expertise in commercial law, litigation and dispute resolution, taxation and property. The firm also has an expanding presence in trade practices law. In these areas, the firm has been involved in many landmark matters and transactions.