

Accused war criminal Konrad Kalejs is leaving England and will return to Australia where he is a citizen. The Federal Government says he is welcome, but the accusers say justice will not be done until their accusations are tested in court. PAUL LLOYD reports.

KONRAD Kalejs is coming home to Australia. The 86-year-old says he's had enough of being persecuted by what he calls "liars and storytellers" in England. And Australian Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone welcomes the return of a man dignified with the presumption of innocence that characterises the country whose citizenship he adopted in 1957.

This all sounds quite noble. But there are dark undercurrents. Mr Kalejs is, in effect, being kicked out of Britain, just as he has previously been kicked out of the United States and Canada.

His crime? Well, it was more a case of accusations. Courts in the US and in Canada in the early 1990s heard that Mr Kalejs had been a lieutenant in Latvia's Araj Kommando, helping German SS executions of Jews and others during World War II.

But the courts, at least in Canada, also heard that during the war Mr Kalejs had been a farmhand and was "kind to Jews".

So, he was simply kicked out, sent back home to Australia.

He's pretty safe here. Australia is culturally and politically not quite as beholden as many other countries are to the self-appointed ethical guardianship of Israel's Simon Wiesenthal Centre, which has been driving the international case against Konrad Kalejs and others.

Australia's (now disbanded) war crimes unit had already investigated Mr Kalejs. The conclusion: "Without additional evidence, it is unlikely that he will be prosecuted in Australia under the War Crimes Act." That position still holds, according to Senator Vanstone. She rather courageously adds: "Australia is not the sort of country that engages in show trials for the benefit of one person or one group of people."

However, the Jewish voice which seeks to perpetuate memories of the Nazi Holocaust in Europe is a loud voice. It echoes through our culture.

Thus Effraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, can brand Australia as "the best place in the world for war criminals to hide"; and that can easily stir guilt.

Opposition MHR for Melbourne Ports, Michael Danby, jumps in on Mr Kalejs: "He is just bolting once again for his safe haven in Australia." Mr Danby's electorate is said to have the nation's highest proportion of Jewish Australians.

The phrase "safe haven" is widely used. "Several hundred suspected Nazi war criminals, who participated in some of the most unspeakable crimes against humanity, effectively have had safe haven in Australia," says Dr Colin Rubenstein, executive director of the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council.

In the aftermath of World War II, between 1947 and 1950, a confident and compassionate Australia took 170,000 refugees from Europe. It should be no surprise that some accused of being on the "wrong" side in the war, or worse, would be among that number.

Professor Konrad Kwiet, deputy director of Macquarie University's Centre for Comparative Genocide Studies, reckons about 4000 of those refugees could have been party to war crimes. The Simon Wiesenthal Centre says that as many as 20 per cent of the suspected Nazis among that refugee intake settled in South Australia. Australia, the centre claims, was one of the major destinations for Nazi operatives fleeing from postwar recriminations. South America, and specifically Argentina, led the field, with the US and Canada also being

popular.

As many as 20,000 Nazis got out of Europe through the Institute of San Girolamo in Rome, according to the book *Ratlines*, by journalists Mark Aarons and John Loftus. Under the cover of a fiercely anti-communist Vatican, Bishop Alois Hudal and Father Kurnoslav Draganovic provided the papers, usually Red Cross passports, and shipped off such infamous names as Klaus Barbie and Franz Stangl.

The Simon Wiesenthal Centre has hunted them all relentlessly.

It found an ally in Australian prime minister Bob Hawke, with his soft spot for Israel and justice. He set up a War Crimes Investigation Unit under Bob Greenwood, QC.

At a cost of \$30 million until its disbandment in 1994, it investigated 800 people. It decided on only three prosecutions. Charges against Heinrich Wagner were withdrawn because of his ill health and there was insufficient evidence to take Mikolay Berezowsky beyond a committal hearing. So only Ivan Polyukhovich went to trial.

Mr Polyukhovich went before Adelaide's Supreme Court charged with murdering 25 Jews in the Ukraine during 1942-43 and with being "knowingly concerned" in the death of up to 850 others.

The jury promptly acquitted him and, on May 18, 1993, a sad-looking old man with his walking stick was left blinking in the crisp autumnal sunshine of Australian freedom.

So Australia continues to have "clearly a worse record" than the havens of South America when it comes to getting these Nazis, says the Simon Wiesenthal Centre.

Mr Greenwood, who had headed Bob Hawke's Special Investigations Unit, reckons there could still be "a dozen or so Nazi war criminals alive in Australia. They're in the major cities, country towns, living very ordinary people-next-door type of lives," he says.

But clearly, there cannot be many left alive now. Possibly the last of the "big fish" to face the courts was SS officer Erick Priebke, whom an Italian military tribunal acquitted in 1994. Even if time and mortality are misting over the window of opportunity, Mr Greenwood is still concerned that Mr Kalejs and his likes may "possibly" be benefiting from a collusion of Australian and British governments to bury evidence about Nazi war criminals. This is a sensational charge. And it may be possible from a distance to see the European wars of the 1900s as some sort of family squabble; so that Britain and its allies would feel reluctant to drag up too much dirt on the Nazis, lest it tarnish some of their own laundry. And it has been alleged that Nazi sympathies in England extended even into the royal family.

More likely, however, the Western Allies, from the Vatican through to Australian prime minister Bob Menzies, had a postwar obsession with fighting communism, to the point where a blind eye could be turned to some anti-communist Nazis left over from World War II.

Age is a second important issue affecting attitudes to prosecution. World War II operatives are dying off, or are at least now frail old men, making them figures of sympathy.

ATHIRD factor is that Australia's remoteness, in time and in place, give a different perspective. Evil the Holocaust was, indeed, but evil also the Khmer Rouge genocide of Cambodia, evil the ethnic cleansing of the former Yugoslavia, evil the Hutu killings of the Tutsi people. There is no relativity. It is all evil.

Western civilisation labors under the paradox of the Christian gospel of love being overlaid on the Jewish precept of an eye for eye.

How we resolve that paradox to face these evils of life will be a hallmark of our civilisation. The return to Australia of Konrad Kalejs will be a significant test.