

## **THE JEWISH PRESS IN AUSTRALIA**

by S. STEDMAN

*The Australian Jewish Historical Society's Journal*, June 1943, contained an article contributed by the late Percy J. Marks dealing with the Jewish Press in Australia. In that article, Mr Marks traced the beginning and the development of Jewish publications in Australia. The original paper on that subject was read by him before a meeting of the Jewish Literary and Debating Society of Sydney in 1913.

Half a century has passed since then and many papers and periodicals have come and gone and, if not recorded, will not even be remembered. Every new publication recalls a desire by a section of our population to be heard, and to add to the community's education or knowledge. Each magazine or paper, particularly if it happens to espouse a political or partisan viewpoint, has for its object the conversion of the reader to its cause, the influencing of his mode of thinking.

Thus, the existence or failure of publications can act as a guide to the public's general tastes and affiliations. Quite a number of these efforts were unsuccessful; their publicans, were short-lived, due, as it seems, to lack of support.

The Community at large did not respond readily to the new ventures and shortage of finance forced the papers to cease publication. Quite apart from the numerous news papers and magazines which appeared during the years an entirely new chapter was opened by the appearance of a Jewish Press in Yiddish. The influx of Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe demanded a Press serving them in a language which was their own, giving them the news in which they felt a personal interest and information concerning their old homes and the lives of their people there. The Yiddish Press also served as a guide to Australia and its ways of thinking and of living. It helped the migrant to understand the Australian and made integration easier. I shall mention some of the papers and periodicals which were published in English and then deal with those in Yiddish. This account which is supplementary to that of Mr. Marks will give a fuller picture of the whole matter and show the modern trends in the development of the Press.

### **THE WESTRALIAN JUDEAN**

*The Judean* was a monthly magazine which began publication in 1929 in Perth, W.A. The publisher was Mr. Pilpel and the editors, Phillip Masel and O. Silbert. The magazine devoted a great deal of space to literary material of a high standard, and short stories were a regular feature. Local news of Jewish interest and communal activities generally, were not neglected" One of its most useful services was the encouragement given to local Jewish writers who had no other outlet for their works. In this respect it occupied a unique position in Australian journalism.

## **THE AUSTRALIAN JEWISH CHRONICLE**

This weekly newspaper made its appearance in Sydney in 1930 and ceased publication one year later. The Editors were, Rabbi L. A. Falk, Israel Horwitz and I. K. Sampson. Mrs. Rachel J Jerdan conducted the Children's Page and wrote book reviews, and the writer had the task of scanning the Yiddish overseas press and translating into English any items of interest. I may also mention that I made my debut as a writer of short stories on a Jewish theme in the *Chronicle*.

The paper set itself an ambitious programme, which in fact proved to be too ambitious as the public did not fully appreciate the effort.

It was an outstanding publication in Australia, and the community at the time was not ready for it. The layout and contents were comparable with any European issue of its kind, and the editors tried to raise the paper above the immediate small local Jewish interests and present an overall picture of Jewish life in every part of the world. Photographs and illustrations were regular features and Jewish literature was reviewed and discussed. The policy of the *Chronicle* was pro-Zionist, as one would expect with the late Rabbi Falk on the editorial panel. Zionism, which was not the burning question then as it became later, did not play a very important part in the life of Australian Jewry.

The Jewish population failed to realise its importance to the youth of this country and to the cultural development of the Australian Jew generally. A paper recording social news and a few items of local news is all that was apparently required.

The *Chronicle* ceased publication and its sponsors lost money, but the effort was worthwhile for it proved that when the Jewish community was ready to recognise the worth of such a paper as the *Chronicle*, qualified people would be found to publish it.

## **JEWISH WEEKLY NEWS**

On 27th October 1933, the late H. Rubinstein commenced publishing a weekly newspaper under the title *Jewish Weekly News*. On May 17th, 1935, the paper's name was changed to that of *Australian Jewish News*. This paper is still in existence and is carried on by a son of the original owner.

On 1st June 1939, a Sydney edition was printed. *The Sydney Jewish News* and the two papers both printed in Melbourne, are widely read by Jewish people in both cities. The Sydney edition contains items of local interest and communal information, but the rest of the matter is the same in both editions.

A supplement in Yiddish is being printed and information on this will be found in the part dealing with the Yiddish Press.

## **THE NEW CITIZEN**

This periodical was published by the Association of New Citizens, consisting of immigrants for the most part from Germany, but including people from other countries occupied by the Germans.

This paper came into existence in 1949 and ceased publication in 1954. During that period, it was under the editorship of S. W. Krieger.

The Association of New Citizens functioned for a period of eleven years and, though the editor of the paper and the president of the Association deplored the demise of both the Association and the paper, and considered their abandonment as premature, time proved them wrong. In the last issue Mr. L. Joseph, the President wrote: "When we founded this Association eleven years ago, we said: The happiest day in the life of this new organisation will be when we can end it, because it will no longer be required." Mr. Joseph thought the time had not yet arrived, but he was wrong. The New Citizens became fully integrated into the Australian Community and there is no longer any place or need for a paper such as *The New Citizen*.

### **THE ZIONIST**

This magazine began its appearance in Melbourne about 1943 under the editorship of Mr. A. Patkin. It was a monthly publication devoted solely to the spreading of Zionist ideas among the Jews of Australia.

It championed the cause with vigour, and though the aim of the magazine was so clearly defined, the editor, a man of knowledge and culture, devoted a large section to matters of general Jewish interests, but rigorously excluded other movements.

Any magazine dedicated to one particular, political cause, is by its very nature, limited in scope, having little interest in the aims and objects of other movements. The *Zionist* was no exception. It ceased to exist soon after its editor's death, and unlike other Jewish publications, lack of finance was not the only reason.

### **THE AUSTRALIAN JEWISH FORUM**

This periodical began publication in 1941 under the editorship of Dr. I. N. Steinberg and ceased to exist in 1950. The reason for its closing was the rising costs of printing and shortage of financial resources. The arrival of Dr. Steinberg in Australia in connection with the Territorialist Movement's wish to establish a Jewish settlement in the Kimberleys, demanded a means of acquainting Australian Jewry with the purpose of the movement generally. A small group of people decided to issue a magazine, but it was no easy task to find the means to carry out the project and to recruit the necessary talent.

The magazine continued to function for nine years. Here again was proof that Australian Jewry can provide the cultural forces required.

Two years after its inception, Dr. Steinberg departed from Australia and an Editorial Committee assumed the direction of the paper. For the next seven years this monthly carried out the task with great honesty and energy. Even after the Australian Government decided against the Jewish Kimberley Settlement, the *Forum* continued to serve the community by becoming a Jewish publication to which everything and anything of Jewish interest was important. During the years of its existence the *Forum* established itself as a highly respected and trusted instrument for the spreading of real knowledge concerning Jewry and Judaism. Much space was devoted to literary articles and short stories. Translations from Yiddish and Russian appeared very frequently and book reviews were a regular feature. The *Forum's* pages were open to all political points of view and often one issue contained articles on Zionism, Territorialism and Bundism.

### **THE JEWISH OUTLOOK**

The first number of this publication appeared in Melbourne in May 1947, but it ceased to be printed after a few copies. The Editor was the late Caroline Isaacson. On the cover it bore a circle with a Star of David in the centre and around the rim were the words: "For God, For King, For Country". This patriotic touch gives the clue to the *Outlook's* general character.

Sir Isaac Isaacs contributed an article for the first issue and by quoting part of this article there will be no need to say more.

Sir Isaac Isaacs quotes Theodor Herzl:

"We are bound together only by the faith of our fathers", and proceeds: "As Australians, and members of the British Commonwealth of Nations, we cannot share even prospectively, our allegiance to our Sovereign with any other ruler or rulers, whether in Palestine or elsewhere should it be under another Government than that of our King."

### **JEWISH YOUTH**

This was a unique publication, for it appeared in three languages, English, Yiddish and Hebrew. It commenced publication in 1946.

This magazine was to be the Organ of Kadimah Youth Organisation in Melbourne. Unfortunately, it was short lived and met the same fate as *The Jewish School-fellow* mentioned by Percy Marks, and which appeared in Adelaide in 1873. The enthusiasm of the youthful editors seems to have run out very fast, probably faster than their finances.

The *Jewish Youth* was quite interesting, for it set itself an aim never before attempted in Australia, namely, to cater for the needs of everybody, and to address the readers in the three languages spoken here.

## SECTIONAL PUBLICATIONS

There are quite a number of publications which serve members of various organisations and congregations, but their circulation is confined to a limited number of people, namely the members of these groups. The following three are mentioned.

- (i) *B'nai Brith Bulletin*, the official publication of the Order of the B'nai Brith in Australia. Its editor is Dr. E. N. Offner.
- (ii) *Ivriah*. This magazine has been in existence for many years and was edited by the late Mrs. Reike Cohen. (The official publication of WIZO).
- (iii) *The Council Bulletin*, published by the National Council of Jewish Women.

Among others are ... The Great Synagogue Journal, and the journals of the Central, North Shore, and Maroubra Synagogues. These contain cultural articles, and items of current activities.

## YIDDISH LANGUAGE PUBLICATIONS

A new interesting and important chapter in the Jewish Press in Australia began in February 1928, with the appearance of the first issue of a newspaper in Yiddish. This was: *Der Yidisher Pioner*.

The paper was printed half in English and half in Yiddish, and the first page of the Yiddish section began, very appropriately with a prayer: "Baruch - - - Shchecheyonu, Vekimonu, Vehegeyonu, Lazman Haze."

The story leading up to this publication is told by the late Pinchus Goldhar in the *Australian Yiddisher Almanach*.

From the years 1910-11 a stream of Jewish immigrants entered Australia and as most of them settled in Melbourne, the need for a Yiddish paper began to be felt acutely. The new arrivals, mostly from Eastern Europe whose language was Yiddish, wanted a paper in their own tongue so that they could keep in close touch with events in the old homes, and bring them news and information concerning the people they left behind. Pinchus Goldhar, who was a Jewish journalist in Lodz, seemed the right man to undertake this task, but there appeared to be insurmountable difficulties in the way. Purely physical and technical obstacles seemed to render the realisation of their hopes impossible. There was no Yiddish type obtainable, and there was no compositor who could set up a newspaper even if the type were found. For a long time Goldhar played with the idea of using a hectograph, but while he was considering the matter in 1927 a man named Altshul arrived in Melbourne.

He brought with him a small quantity of Yiddish type, enough to print invitation cards or small announcements. The idea to publish a Yiddish newspaper appealed to Altshul, and he pursued it with zeal. He approached men of means and influence and outlined his project to various committees of Jewish organisations, but alas! response was not favourable. Nobody shared his enthusiasm or faith in the success of such an undertaking and people doubted the need for a Yiddish paper. The whole project was too new and untried, even the leaders of the Kadimah, whose love of the Yiddish language cannot be questioned, declined to give Altshul aid.

Despite disappointments and rebuffs, Altshul continued to seek ways and means of realising his dream and, at last succeeded in gaining the consent of Mr. Newman Rosenthal, the editor of the *Jewish Herald*, to print a Yiddish supplement.

When it was issued, the supplement consisted of one page and could qualify for a museum piece. Almost every word in every notice was set in a different type. The Yiddish too, was a mixture of German, Yiddish, and English. The life of the Yiddish supplement ended with the first issue.

This failure did not dampen Altshul's desire to have a Yiddish paper, and his confidence of ultimate success never wavered. A serious misunderstanding between two Melbourne Rabbis brought a new newspaper into existence. One of the Rabbis had the support of the *Jewish Herald*, and the followers of the second Rabbi decided to print their own paper. Altshul was close at hand and thus *Der Yidisher Pioner* was born. Unfortunately, this *Yiddish Pioneer* suffered the same fate as the Yiddish supplement of the *Jewish Herald*.

February 1928, saw the first and last number of the *Pioner*. Yet these two failures in Yiddish journalism, instead of producing a depressing effect, seemed to work in the opposite direction. The leaders of the Kadimah did not fail to notice the people's attitudes towards these papers and men like A. Patkin, H. Muntz, and Bar-Cohen approached a Jewish printer in Sydney, Mr. Stoliar, who possessed some Yiddish type. The scheme unfortunately ended with the issuing of a Yiddish leaflet, and so no newspaper was published.

All this would appear to be sufficient to discourage the most optimistic of men, but not Altshul.

During the period of the unsuccessful attempts, Altshul continued to receive parcels of Yiddish type and quietly accumulated the necessary quantity and variety. A little later he brought out from Palestine his son, who was a tradesman compositor. On 16th of January 1931, the first issue of the *Australier Leben* was published, under the editorship of Pinchus Goldhar. The first issue consisted of four small pages, but the second was of six pages and the third of eight pages and all of a larger size.

The reception given to the new venture by the readers of Yiddish appeared encouraging, but the advertisements were very scarce, the advertisers not feeling certain of the value given for their money. After the tenth issue, the financial position became critical and a special committee was formed to raise with the help of the Kadimah money for the paper. The Jewish Dramatic Circle staged a play, Sholem-Aleichem's, "Dos Greise Gevins", and the funds thus raised, helped the continued publication of the *Australier Leben*.

For two years the paper appeared regularly without interruptions, yet Altshul did not succeed in placing the enterprise on a sound financial basis and in the end decided to cease publication.

A financier named Rubinstein bought the paper and its continuance was assured for the time being.

Wishing to consolidate the financial position of the paper, Rubinstein opened negotiations with the editor of the *Jewish Herald* for an amalgamation of the two newspapers. In 1934 a successful end was reached in these negotiations and the two newspapers appeared as one under the name of *The Jewish Weekly News*. It proclaimed itself "The Organ of the Australian Jewish Community, Incorporating "The Australian Jewish Herald and The Australier Leben". The name of the Yiddish part was, *Di Yidishe Voch*.

For various reasons, not particularly associated with finance, the two newspapers dissolved partnership in 1935, the *Jewish Herald* appearing as a weekly instead of a fortnightly paper. Newman Rosenthal remained editor, and L. Rubinstein's father continued to edit the *Jewish News*, only now with a Yiddish supplement, *Di Yiddishe Naes*.

The editor of the *Jewish Herald* having acquired experience in the previous venture, saw the possibilities and the advantages of publishing a paper in Yiddish, and so soon the *Jewish Herald* added a Yiddish supplement to the paper and secured the services of Pinchus Goldhar as editor. The well-known Yiddish poet, Melech Ravitch was then in Australia and he too, was invited to co-operate in the production of the paper. The first Yiddish supplement to the *Jewish Herald* appeared in April 1936. It consisted of four pages, but after seven issues the supplement was discontinued, due solely to financial considerations. At present the *Jewish Herald*, which has recently been sold by the Havin family to a specially established company of Jewish business men, publishes a Yiddish newspaper, *Di Post*.

The *Jewish Herald* has been performing a valuable service to the Jewish Community of Australia since 1879, and is still doing the work, but now in the two languages, English and Yiddish.

With its sister newspaper in Sydney, *The Hebrew Standard* which was established in 1895, they are the oldest papers supplying news to the Jewish Community. Sometime ago, on the death of one of the original owners, the Harris family, the *Standard* was sold to Mr. Shaik, on whose death the ownership changed hands once more, and the title of the paper was also changed to that of *The Jewish Times*.

On the whole the progress in the Jewish Press, though impressive is still far from satisfying. No Jewish journalist can hope to make a living working for it. The Yiddish part contains articles cut out from overseas publications and instead of journalists, the editors use scissors and paste.

This is particularly noticeable in the Yiddish papers, the larger of which is the Melbourne *Yiddishe Naes* which also publishes a similar issue for Sydney called: *Di Sydner Yiddishe Naes*. The Sydney edition contains social news and congregational announcements of interest to Sydney, but for the most part it has the same contents as in the Melbourne issue.

The *Yiddishe Naes* is the more widely read and its circulation has doubled since 1945, when immigration into Australia was resumed after the war. The Sydney editor is Dr. Cymmerman.

I must also mention the now defunct Yiddish paper which was published by the Gezerd Organisation, *Di Gezerd Tribune*.

It first appeared in 1931 and consisted of 16 pages. The character of the paper was distinctly radical, its political affiliations being far to the left. After two issues the paper was liquidated, apparently finding little support in an "unprogressive" Jewish Community.

In 1937 the *Gezerd* attempted once more to find a place in the reader's mind by publishing a Yiddish paper *Dos Nae Vort*.

This met the same fate as the *Gezerd Tribune* and no attempt has been made since to publish this type of newspaper.

### **"OIFBOY" (Reconstruction)**

In 1944 a Yiddish monthly began circulation in Melbourne, under the title *Oifboy*. The editors were the Author, Hertz Bergner, and Journalists, Abraham Shulman and Ber Rosen. The magazine contained several pages of English, as demanded by the Law during the years of war.

The *Oifboy* was a literary magazine striving to acquaint the readers, Australian Jewry, with the creative genius of the Jew. It aimed to inform the people of our past and present and to unite Australian Jewry with their people in all lands through the medium of its literary treasures and to inspire hope and confidence in a creative future. The *Oifboy* existed for close on three years, but our population was not large enough to sustain a magazine of this type.

The Jews were too preoccupied with the catastrophe which overwhelmed their old homes and tried to rebuild their lives in the new land. More pressing thoughts of a mundane character took precedence over those of the mind. Perhaps the time was not propitious, or the people not quite ready, and the *Oifboy* disappeared.

### **"UNZER GEDANK"**

*Unzer Gedank* is published in Melbourne by the Bund organisation. The Bund is Jewish Socialist party and the contents of the magazine is devoted to the discussion of political questions generally and its attitude towards the Bund's political movements.

For the past 15 years, or so, *Unzer Gedank* has continued to appear at irregular intervals. The people behind the paper are the remnants of the once powerful and influential Jewish movement in Poland.

With the destruction of Polish Jewry, the Bund has succeeded in re-establishing itself in many lands, including Australia and Israel. With the changing conditions of life generally, and Jewish in particular an adjustment became necessary in some of the tenets they hold dear, but the belief that only through Socialism can the Jew attain freedom and happiness was never in doubt. Only when the whole of mankind is free and happy can the Jew be free and happy. This is the main object of *Unzer Gedank*.

All these papers and periodicals reflect the restless spirit of the Jew, his search for that which others have denied him for centuries—a free and untrammelled life, an opportunity to live his own life in conformity with his beliefs and convictions. It is in this that we have the microcosm of Jewish life. *The Outlook* seeking peace and happiness in Australia, the Zionists seeking the same objective in Israel, *The Australian Jewish Forum* seeking it in the Kimberleys or anywhere so long as the Jew is allowed to build his life the way he wants it, and *Unzer Gedank*, also seeking peace and happiness, but in a wider field including the whole of humanity are all expressive of the same aim in different ways; and this is the way, Jewry always was and still is, seeking, believing, and creating.