

intention of the Western Australian people should enjoy a place of honor in the Jewish chronicles of the 20th century, so grimly dominated by facts of quite a different kind.

This achievement did not come about of its own volition. To evaluate Dr. I. N. Steinberg's accomplishment in Western Australia more accurately, let us cast a glance at him through the eyes of a non-territorialist, an opponent, but an honest one. Vladimir Jabotinsky was leader of the Revisionist Zionists and fighter for a Jewish state encompassing both sides of the Jordan River in the Land of Israel. In his last book, *The Jewish War Front*,* he gave considerable space to the Kimberley project. An excerpt follows:

"The most interesting of all the 'territorial' projects is the proposal to settle not British Guiana but Western Australia.

**Jabotinsky, Vladimir, The Jewish War Front, London, 1940.*

"One of the most remarkable features of this scheme is that its advancement is due to the sole effort of one single man, and this man is neither young nor wealthy. Nor is he skilled in the kind of nuisance known as propaganda. His only secret seems to be just that calm obstinacy which still wants today what it wanted yesterday. His name is Dr. I. Steinberg. . . . At some time in the course of the last decade he formed a group called the 'Freeland League for Jewish Territorial Colonization.' Last year he went to Australia and actually converted a State of the Commonwealth to his view. The story is a striking one, for it shows that very important political results can be accomplished single-handed by one quite unofficial person, with little popular backing and no particular credentials . . . simply by talking timely common sense.

"That Dr. Steinberg has converted practically the whole of Western Australia is undeniable. . . ."

Translated from Yiddish by Shulamith Charney

THE FIELD OF YIDDISH

By ISIDORE HAIBLUM

I search for the future of Yiddish and turn up more than I bargained for. I seek a beginning and find it in the past. The date is 1925, the place Vilna. Dr. Max Weinreich has responded to a call from Nahum Shtif, the Yiddish linguist, for the establishment of a Yiddish academy. Weinreich founds YIVO—the Yiddish Scientific Institute. Our story begins.

"The YIVO," Weinreich said, "investigates all aspects of Jewish life—not only rabbis, scholars, and writers, but also the social life of the common people; not only economic life, but also the language, the literature, the mind and spirit of the Jews."

Even Weinreich, however, who was gifted with a remarkable prescience, could not quite foresee the special role destined for YIVO; he had called the turn on a variety of future events. His agile mind had uncovered numerous secrets of the past; but some events lie beyond reason.

The test would come some 20 years later.

Of the six million who died in the German war against the Jews, most were Yiddish-speaking, and their demise all but decimated the Yiddish heartland. The liquidation of the Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union—once, in the twenties and thirties, a hothouse of Yiddish scholarly and artistic activity—along with its poets, writers, and intellectuals uprooted the second great center of Yiddish efflorescence.

YIVO's mission, then, under Max Weinreich's

guidance, would be to act as a nexus between past and future, to preserve the treasures of more than 1000 years of cultural creativity and pass them on to a new generation. YIVO moved to New York during the war years and ultimately settled in a former Vanderbilt mansion on upper Fifth Avenue. It is there now. And its Center for Advanced Studies — one of Weinreich's major projects — spearheads the nascent march of Yiddish onto the nation's campuses.

Dr. Max Weinreich (1894-1969) was a man possessed of a vast, seemingly endless erudition and a phenomenal ability; he was as nimble with a smile or a quip as in the unveiling of a recondite historical truth. Scholar, teacher, author, organizer, visionary **par excellence**, he illuminated all that he touched, transformed those around him—magically—igniting them with his own inexhaustible drive and enthusiasm. At home in twelve languages, he had authored papers in six. The bibliography of his work lists 377 items, ranging from multi-volume tomes to feature articles in the popular press.¹

His first and last love was Yiddish.

In 1919 he astounded his professors at Germany's Marburg University by selecting Yiddish as his major field; in those days, Yiddish studies

¹ *Leybl Kahn, "Bibliography of Max Weinreich's Writing," in Max Weinreich on His Seventieth Birthday, The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1964, pp. 278-305. (In Yiddish.)*

- (d) Careful planning designed to ensure that the economic progress of the region would fit in with the Australian economy as a whole.

To an extent the Government agrees with those points of view.

In your elaboration of the requirements to be fulfilled in the carrying out of your proposed scheme, you mention part of the process by which means you would endeavor to attain these ends.

We have considered these details, and, without any suggestion of detracting from your very ambitious project, submit that the first method of approach for successful settlement is by an extensive and effective pastoral occupation.

We believe that agricultural activities and development would follow as a natural sequence of events following an increased population and their consequent domestic demands.

It may be that not any of the ambitions set out in your memorandum, which include forms of secondary industry development, are outside reasonable possibilities for this area, but we are firmly of the view that successful occupation of this country will depend on its approach being through the already proven successful pastoral industry in the raising of sheep and cattle.

We would be reluctant to agree to altering any existing laws dealing with land settlement or pastoral occupation, but details in this connection may be discussed later.

We do not desire to detract from the very laudable ambitions of your League towards colonization or from the possibilities of this land, which are really your anticipations following inspection.

Further, we do not deprecate the possibilities which have been set out by you, following your personal investigation, and which to some extent are based on actual results and on local opinions.

Your next step appears to make possible your desire to approach the Commonwealth Government and ascertain their attitude to the project and to the introduction of refugees for the purpose of forming a settlement.

To this end, therefore, we desire to advise that we have no objection to your making the necessary approach to the Commonwealth Government in Canberra. Should your approaches in that connection be met with success, this Government would desire its representatives to confer with you and to reach agreement regarding many conditions, among which the following are tentatively suggested: —

1. The Government should be directly represented by one of its own officers at the centre where the refugees are to be recruited for the proposed scheme.
2. The officer in question to have an overriding authority regarding the refugees chosen to come to Western Australia under the proposed scheme.
3. One or more Government officers to thoroughly investigate the proposed settlement scheme before any settlement is attempted in order that the soundness of the proposed settlement scheme might be ascertained.
4. In the event of the proposed scheme being regarded as reasonably sound, one or more Government officers to be permanently stationed on the proposed settlement for the purpose of supervising development and giving advice regarding the

number of refugees to be brought to the settlement from time to time.

5. All officers employed by the Government in connection with the proposed scheme to have their salaries and other reasonable expenses paid by those in charge of the proposed scheme.
6. The Government should not take any financial or other liability regarding the provision of roads, schools, hospitals, or any other public facilities during the first three years of the settlement.
7. A body of reputable and financially substantial Jewish citizens to be formed in Perth to undertake the financial responsibility of supervising the welfare of the refugees in the event of the scheme being approved.
8. In regard to education, any schools established should comply with the standard of "efficient school" as set out by the Education Department and the teachers to be approved by the Education Department.

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd.) J. C. Willcock,

Premier.

The essence of this document was that the Western Australian Government acquiesced completely to the Freeland project. They acknowledged the fact that the planned settlement would be Jewish, built by Jews for Jews.

It is easy to grasp Dr. Steinberg's joy when, on August 28, he cabled the Freeland office in London: "Mazel tov! Today government officially accepted principle Jewish colonization Kimberley. Propose discuss conditions after agreement (by) Federation. Inform friends."

* * *

What took place in Western Australia during the last few months before World War II constituted the greatest political achievement of the Freeland movement. Freeland's emissary played no under-cover game. He went to the whole nation of a democratic country with honesty and frankness, calling upon them to offer a home to his persecuted people. The answer was no ambiguous declaration for the sake of momentary political propaganda effects; there was no promise referring to a country whose opinion had not been asked; the sovereign people of an entire state and its freely-elected government had together expressed their readiness to give Jewish refugees a territory within their own boundaries, so that they might build a Jewish community on virgin soil and develop it "for their and our benefit alike."

Despite the appalling irony of fate, whereby a ray of humane hope shone upon the Jewish people at the very instant that the nazi axe came down upon them—despite the fact that a volume of a regenerated Jewish history was not destined to be started with this bright page—yet the good

were, as yet, all but invisible on the scholarly front.

He aimed to enrich Yiddish with the best products of world culture; as a young man he translated part of Homer into **mame-loshn**. It was his conviction that the Yiddish culture, in all its manifestations, was the Jewish people's gift to contemporary civilization, and he worked toward a cross-pollination. But his most intensive labors were in the field itself.

He said: "We want to fathom Jewish life with the methods of modern scholarship, and further, whatever modern scholarship brings to light, we want to bring back to the Jewish masses."

Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg have called Yiddish "an infinitely plastic and colorful medium of expression," but it is much more. It is a language with a built-in philosophy, with a singular world-view. The renowned sociologist, Dr. Joshua A. Fishman, wrote: "Yiddish has been the officially powerless diaspora language of an officially powerless diaspora people." A language, in short, that has **never quite gone establishment**; one that has usually viewed the claims of indigenous social orders—with their attendant militarism and periodic blood baths—skeptically, at best. In its idioms and attitude words, in its highly characteristic humor, this world-view is displayed as a matter of course. It must be termed a major virtue.

For Max Weinreich the word was **education**.

He provided us with:

YIVO, the world center of Yiddish research; the definitive, soon-to-be-published, monumental five-volume **History of the Yiddish Language**; and

Nahum Stutchkoff's **Thesaurus of the Yiddish Language** (comprising over 150,000 words, idioms and proverbs), which Weinreich edited. His life-long pioneering task of standardizing Yiddish literary usage, spelling, terminology, and grammar are reflected in this giant volume.

Together with his son Uriel (a scholar of truly incredible scope and achievement) he paved the way for the entrance of Yiddish into the colleges and universities of America and abroad: over forty in the U.S. now offer accredited courses in Yiddish studies. In Europe and Israel, the number is growing, too.

The new attitude toward Yiddish is perhaps best reflected at Queens College in New York City; for the first time it is now possible to **major** in Yiddish studies on the undergraduate level. Dean Joseph C. Landis is program chairman, and a full twenty courses covering a wide range of Yiddish literature will ultimately be offered.

The late Uriel Weinreich was professor of both Linguistics and Yiddish Studies at Columbia University; he was Chairman of the Linguistics Department, and occupied a strategic position in the world study of language. The author of an imposing number of pioneering studies in Yiddish and general linguistics, he had an international reputation and his mastery of multiple disciplines, which lent considerable weight to his advocacy of Yiddish. Its present academic success must, in no small measure, be reckoned as his.

He left us:

The Modern English-Yiddish—Yiddish-English Dictionary, an acknowledged masterpiece of lexicography and a teeming storehouse of cultural treasures;

the textbook **College Yiddish: An Introduction to the Yiddish Language and to Jewish Life and Culture** (now in its fifth printing). Along with the dictionary it is the indispensable tool;

The Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry. A pilot project (still in progress) which uses in-depth interviews and Columbia University's IBM 360 computer to chart the geographic distribution of dialects, idioms, word meanings, grammatical patterns, customs, and cultural practices.

Above all, perhaps, the two Weinreichs left us a corps of devoted personnel—students who became friends and associates—to carry on their efforts. Now in their early forties, these scholars and educators are involved in a vast number of projects.

I have spoken to some of them, and offer here a biographical note along with a word or two from each:

Dr. Mordkhe Schaechter taught Yiddish at three metropolitan colleges last year. He is truly **umetumik**—chairman of two YIVO committees, editor of **Yidishe Shprakh**, and President of the Benyumen Shekhter Foundation for the Advancement of Standard Yiddish. His two-volume critical edition of **The Works of Eliakum Zunser** is noted as a model of its kind. Dr. Schaechter is one of the four leading Yiddish linguists of our day.

Dr. Schaechter:

"I see Yiddish not only as an object of study and research, but as a vibrant language to be used in everyday life. It might sound like a paradox, but it still seems to be true: Yiddish is the most Jewish of all Jewish languages; it reflects the experiences, not of our forefathers, two and three thousand years ago, but of two and ten and thirty generations ago.

"Too many discriminate against Yiddish. . . . Minorities are often stepped on. . . . They like to step on something in turn. . . . A small language must **fight** for its existence. We believe that we are a people. And a people needs its own language in order to be relevant."

Dr. Schaechter's home is a Yiddish oasis in New York; his wife and four children—all American-born—are Yiddish-speaking. It is a gathering place of Yugntruf, an organization of high school and college students who speak Yiddish, believe in its future, and regularly issue a spirited Yiddish journal, called—**Yugntruf**. The drive to modernize the Yiddish press is, in fact, led by this young group, which last year picketed the two major Yiddish dailies, protesting their use of outmoded spelling and words of English or German origin inadmissible in Standard Yiddish.

Dr. Marvin I. Herzog, associate professor of linguistics and Yiddish studies, Columbia University, is director of **The Language and Culture Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry**. He was coeditor of Volume III of **The Field of Yiddish**.

Dr. Herzog:

"What is dying is the Yiddish that was. All languages are changing constantly. What's emerging is a standard language which doesn't reflect the regional character that existed in Europe. . . . We've had four good summers (at Columbia's summer Yiddish courses). Students now come from all over the country. . . . Yiddish is being spoken more and more by young American-born Jews who learn the language at school. . . ."

Shmuel Lapin, secretary of YIVO, teacher, administrator, organizer.

Lapin:

"Ten years ago who could have anticipated the rise of black studies? The whole approach to language has changed; the melting pot theory doesn't hold any more. . . . People are seeking a cultural, ethnic identity; they're looking for their roots. YIVO, in its inter-university graduate courses, in its many projects, transmits this direct inheritance . . . the values of a thousand years. . . . There is a growing demand."

Dr. T. E. Bird is a professor of Russian at Queens College.

Professor Bird is our straw in the wind. He is American-born and is learning Yiddish from scratch. He teaches Soviet-Yiddish literature in English translation at Queens.

Dr. Bird:

"The values of a culture can best be understood through its language. It's true that there are two major Jewish languages, but modern Hebrew really began with Eliezer Ben-Yehudah (author of the **Dictionary of the Hebrew Language**) who was born a little over a hundred years ago. Yiddish goes back a thousand years, and was a **living** language for all that time. . . . It is really a matter, I think, of making one's identity meaningful. . . ."

Dr. Joshua A. Fishman is University Professor of social science at Yeshiva University, and chairman and member of a number of YIVO committees. He is the founder and driving force behind the Aaron Fishman Foundation for Yiddish Culture. Currently in Israel, Dr. Fishman is conducting a Ford Foundation-sponsored research project on language planning. He is not here to be interviewed, but he has left us something to think about. Volume 31 of the **International Journal of American Linguistics** is an entire issue featuring Dr. Fishman's study, "Yiddish In America." It is the logical jumping-off place for all those interested in the field; it shows us — in facts and figures—that the vital centers still live—the institutions, authors, and audience.

I add some figures of my own:

4½ to 5 million are estimated to still speak the language;

over 200,000 regularly read its newspapers and magazines;

Yiddish books are printed in 14 countries, and over 265 of them were published during the last two years.

One last person remains on my must-see list. It is Beatrice S. Weinreich, Uriel Weinreich's widow. An Atlas co-worker, she has published several valuable Yiddish folklore studies. I ask her only one question, "Why Yiddish?" and her answer sums up both the past and future of the language. I give it here as a fitting conclusion and as a hint of things to come:

"Because I love it," says Beatrice Weinreich.

A WORD OF GREETING TO DR. L. M. FRUCHTBAUM

The following resolution was adapted by the National Executive of the Freeland League:

"Dr. Lesser M. Fruchtbaum is for us a living example of devotion to a cause. He is always ready to do his share—be it not being absent from any functions of the Freeland League, closing his office for weeks on end to negotiate with governments, or helping out financially when that, too, is necessary. His loyalty to the Territorialist movement is renowned. Therefore, let us work together with him for many more years in behalf of the Jewish people."