

The Toronto Yiddish Press

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Résumé

Dans ce document, M. Ben Kayfetz, fort bien connu pour son excellent travail au Congrès Juif de Toronto (C.J.T.) et pour ses activités communautaires, se penche aujourd'hui, à 55 ans d'intervalle donc, sur un thème qu'il développa lors de la réunion en juin 1982 de la Société d'histoire juive du Canada et des Sociétés savants à Ottawa. Ainsi que l'auteur le signale: "mes propos sur la presse juive de Toronto ne doivent pas être considérés comme étude définitive du sujet, bien au contraire. Ce ne sont que des observations qui remontent à mon enfance et au fait que j'ai été en contact avec les périodiques juifs de l'époque à Toronto." Un long développement et enchaînement de remarques et propos s'ensuivent et constituent la teneur de ce document précieux et unique en fait. Unique parce qu'il semblerait que ce soit la première étude du genre publiée au Journal, unique également car ce sont des souvenirs d'une enfance, d'une ville, d'un contexte social politique et géographique, unique aussi et enfin car ce sont des souvenirs personnels qui se rattachent tantôt aux fêtes, tantôt au Cheder (l'école) tantôt aux personnes qui ont marqué son enfance, adolescence, etc . . . Le parcours de ce document nous fait donc d'écouvir l'auteur mais surtout et avant tout **l'homme** qui sommeillait au travers de ces nombreuses années.

My remarks on the Jewish press in Toronto must not be mistaken for any kind of definitive study. They are only my highly subjective, very personal, very imperfectly recalled observations based on my casual exposure to the Jewish periodicals of that city since childhood, going back some 55 years.

My first experience was with the *Hebrew Journal* which, despite its name —

*Mr. Kayfetz presented this highly personal and thoroughly irreverent paper at the June, 1982 meeting of the Canadian Jewish Historical Society, Learned Societies' Conference, Ottawa, Ont. It is not intended as a piece of scholarly historical research, although the author's long experience and unique talents give him a special insight into the fabric of the Toronto Jewish Community.

and that was not the only paradox or contradiction about the paper — was not in Hebrew but Yiddish. Why did it use the name “Hebrew”? Possibly back in 1911 or thereabouts when the paper was established the feeling was still prevalent in certain circles that the word Jewish was too stark a word and “Hebrew” was perceived as more “polite” and genteel. But the name persisted, though in Yiddish it was never anything else nor could it have been but *Der Yiddisher Zhurnal*. It came out six days a week, every day but Saturday, and filled the needs of the immigrant population of the 1920’s and 1930’s and even the 1940’s and 1950’s. In my own case at *cheder* my Hebrew teacher spent a few minutes with me every day going over the *Neies Bei Unz in Shtot* section which was a precis of the local general news: a story involving a Jewish pedlar who was arrested, a theft here, a violent robbery or hold-up there, all culled from the metropolitan downtown press. This daily once-over gave me a personal intimacy with the Yiddish press which has never left me to this day. There was a story that circulated in Toronto and it was similarly told in New York about the *Tog* and the *Forverts*: How did the Daily Star learn on Monday, a full day in advance, of the news reports that the *Zhurnal* was to publish the next day? (In New York they substituted the N. Y. *Times* for the *Star* but the story was identical). And since I’ve mentioned the *Forverts* it should be said that in all its history the *Journal* had to withstand the stiff competition of the three (and earlier four) Yiddish New York dailies which were on sale the same day and it is probably certain that when the *Morgen Journal* and *Tageblatt* and *Tog* were going, their combined circulation in Toronto was far greater than that of the *Zhurnal*. This is something the *Globe*, the *Telegram* and the *Star* never had to put up with yet the amazing thing is that the *Zhurnal* survived as long as it did — up to the 1960’s. It lasted 20 years longer than similar Yiddish dailies in cities in the USA with much larger Jewish populations. I refer to the *Courier* of Chicago, and the daily Yiddish papers in Cincinnati, Boston, Philadelphia and Cleveland, which expired in the early 1940’s. For the most part, I know this: in the 1950’s there were no Yiddish dailies anywhere in the USA outside of New York City while in Canada, the *Adler* in Montreal and the *Journal* in Toronto, were still going, not thriving admittedly, yet appearing six days a week. How the *Journal* managed was a mystery that only Shmuel Meyer Shapiro knew the answer to.

What kind of person was Shapiro? He was a virile looking individual of leonine appearance with a luxurious mane of hair that had only begun to show a few gray strands after he turned 70. He was from Mozir in White Russia and therefore a Litvak which put him into a minority position in Toronto where the preponderant majority of Jews were from Poland. But this never diminished him in his influence or his activity. Like the proverbial Litvak he was a skeptic;

more — he was a cynic — a hard-boiled cynic. As the editor of a *Klall Yisroel* newspaper he managed to be all things to all men: he was a card carrying Conservative and also an active proponent of the Histadrut and the trade union movement in Israel and therefore close to Labor Zionism. Being a Tory never stopped him from supporting Liberal candidates for office though one of his permanent proteges was Nathan Phillips all through the latter's 30 year aldermanic career. Shapiro had a black list of persons and agencies who never were to be mentioned in the columns of the paper. What these were I never knew, though I was told of it by an associate.

I do know that Shapiro had a group of "angels" he would turn to when the paper needed an infusion of money or when the creditors were threatening and getting impatient. Among these were Ben Sadowski of Toronto, who likely never looked into the paper but agreed that it should exist, and Sam Bronfman of Montreal, who didn't give without sometimes subjecting Shapiro to a little sharp needling. There were other *gvirim*, I'm sure, who were part of this rescue team and some day a historian should disclose who they were if it should still be possible to get the information. One of them at one time was Melech Grafstein of London, Ontario who was the landlord of the property at 542 Dundas Street West. Those of you who remember Max Grafstein recall him as an eccentric but a successful businessman who saw himself as a publisher, a Metzenat as it's called, a patron of the Jewish arts, of literature, the drama and publishing and culture *bichlall*. As a result of a serious altercation, Grafstein removed his patronage from the paper, and within a few months Shapiro and the *Journal* moved out to new quarters at College Street at Lippincott, just near Bathurst with the tremendous expense of moving the heavy presses and equipment. 542 Dundas Street became a jobbers' warehouse like all the other stores in the block and that period in the history of the *Journal* was over. The paper was only to last 10 years or so in the new location.

Shapiro was a consummate cynic though there were certain causes he was not cynical about, such as the Histadrut and the Congress. He was one of those who, like Archie Bennett, whom he called Ahrtche Bennett (as was the correct Yiddish diminutive of Aharon), were believers in the ideology of Congress, that Congress was the soul of the Jewish "masses", that only it could keep together the integrity of the Jewish people. One group in Jewish life for whom he made no secret of his dislike were the Agudists. In fact there was one distinguished rabbi in the city whose affiliation I did not even associate with the Agudas Israel until I heard Shapiro denounce him once as an *Agudah' nik* (note the derogatory suffix).

Shapiro once commissioned my colleague Nachman Shemen (though this

was before he was my colleague) to do a history of the Orthodox Jewish community in Toronto which Shemen did after considerable research. A fund-raising dinner was held but because the money raised didn't measure up to expectations, Shapiro scuttled the entire project even though the special supplement had already been printed. The copies were stashed in a cellar somewhere, they were never circulated and eventually were lost. Fortunately Mr. Shemen retained a copy and the text wasn't lost to posterity.

Shapiro gathered around him a number of writers of talent and ability. There was Moishe Fogel who had a column in the paper each day. There was Itzhok Feigelman who wrote feuilletons in the European manner. There was Nachman Shemen who wrote under his own name and various *noms de plume* such as Nachmani, N. Boimel, Ben Zalman. This, by the way, must be one of the few cases where a writer's original name becomes one of his pseudonyms. The other writers also had their pseudonyms: Feigelman was understandably Tzip-pori, S. A. Abella would send in reports on the Hapoel Hamizrachi movement. In later years there were Bernard Wind and Jacob Beller, both of them, incidentally, Galitzianer (Beller would bitterly complain to me of Shapiro though I could never judge who was right, though Shapiro tended to play the autocrat). I could tell many stories about Wind who, after studying medicine and living in the States is at present in Winnipeg where up to its demise he edited the *Yiddish Vort*, a weekly. I still correspond with these two. Beller, now in his 80's, lives in Israel. Much of his life was spent in Argentina and he would write correspondences about South American countries for the *Globe and Mail* after yours truly would translate them. There was one year particularly rich in the usual Latin American coups d'état or revolutions and Beller always had an article ready from his wide repertoire on any given Latin American land, whether it was Peru, Brazil or Equador.

Most of these writers doubled as Hebrew teachers at the same time they were employed as writers, or had been teachers previously. This was true of Wind, Shemen, Fogel and in the latter category, of Beller and Moshe Frank.

Before Shapiro was Rhinewine, who came from Mezritch in Russian Poland, a man who before his untimely death at 44 in 1931, managed to do some original research on Canadian Jewish history including the story of Ezekiel Hart. It's a typical story of how rigid party lines were in those days that in 1930 when Sam Factor ran for Parliament in what was later to be Spadina riding and the *Journal* supported him, he was ostracized by the socialist party he belonged to, as he was guilty of supporting a bourgeois, a capitalist candidate. Paradoxically, Rhinewine, who had come from the ranks of the Socialist Territorialists was the author of a book on "Eretz Yisroel in Jewish Literature". Ter-

ritorialists were people who were perceived to look elsewhere than to Palestine for the Jewish solution.

Before Rhinewine's death, there was a breach in the ranks, a quarrel between him and Shapiro, the details of which I am not familiar, and it led eventually to a new Yiddish publication, a weekly named *Kanader Neies* which was published and edited by Maurice Goldstick and his sister Mrs. Dorothy Dworkin. This was not sold across the counter, but was distributed as an insert with the weekend edition of the New York Yiddish papers of which Mrs. Dworkin was the distributing agent. This was able to appeal to both major ideological elements in the Jewish community and performed the uncommon feat of being both pro-Bundist and pro-Zionist at the same time. Pro-Bundist, because Mrs. Dworkin continued the tradition of her late husband Henry Dworkin who was active in the Socialist movement, and Zionist because her brother Maurice Goldstick who edited the weekly was a devoted Zionist. Both ideologies had in common a fervid anti-Communism. Those who didn't see eye to eye with the paper called it the "mamzerel". Why? Because like a *mamzer* it was *untergevorfn* i.e., it was tossed in gratis with the New York papers. Its life span, as I calculate, was 20 years, from 1935 to about 1955, four or five years before Maurice Goldstick's death.

There was also a third Yiddish paper in Toronto that I recall though it was officially considered a New York paper, even if the advertising and much of the writing and editing stemmed from Toronto, where it was printed. This was the *Proletarisher Gedank*, the organ of a very small minority group in the multi-coloured spectrum of Zionism, the left Poale Zion. We have a bound set of a year's copies for 1933-34 at the CJC office in Toronto where the spelling is in the Soviet style with Hebrew words spelled out phonetically though half-way through the set the spelling reverts to the traditional orthography. And the ideology reflected this split personality: the Soviet Union was praised for its socialist achievement but the *Yevsekess*, the Jewish Communists, both there and here in Canada, were denounced in unequivocal terms.

And there was a class-conscious article denouncing the about-to-be-recognized Canadian Jewish Congress as a tool of the Jewish exploiting bourgeoisie. Only a decade later these same men, the Max Federmans and Harry Simons and Moishe Menachovskys were very much part of the Canadian Jewish Congress and were its most loyal supporters.

The Jewish or rather Yiddish-speaking Communist movement in Toronto has a long history of having a press organ. More than any other grouping within the diversified Jewish community they would feel the need of a separate organ. They were so distinctly different in their ideology from all the other factions

that they couldn't expect what they'd consider as fair treatment in a general "Klall Yisroel" publication, so they always had their own paper. Besides which they needed their own organ for political reasons.

Their first paper was called, appropriately, *Der Kamf* (The Struggle) and its first editor was Philip Halpern. He died in 1932. My grandfather's tombstone is a few steps away from the U.J.P.O. cemetery section and it's fascinating to read the inscription on the tombstones of their stalwarts — including Philip Halpern's. The inscriptions are in Yiddish, not the traditional Hebrew: sometimes they take the form of long poems and are full of dedication to the cause of improved humanity, the ideal of the proletariat, a classless society, a "shenen morgen", the world revolution, etc. echoes of the slogans of bygone days.

In 1939 when the Stalin-Hitler pact was in operation and the party was illegal the name was changed to *Der Veg*. And after the war, when the Party was respectable, at least for a few years, the name *Vochenblatt* was adopted — a rather colourless name without the militancy or challenge of the *Kamf*. The editors included Sam Lipshitz (who left the Party after the 1956 revelations). The long-time editor who stuck with the U.J.P.O. was Joshua Gershman and when his health failed about two or three years ago, the paper stopped publishing. It was not, of course, self-sustaining. Gershman himself would take a Canada-wide trip once or twice a year to raise funds to keep it going. The contributors and co-editors included the cartoonist Avrom Yanofsky (who also wrote), Harry Guralnick, Joe Salsberg (until his departure from the party) and Sholem Shtern of Montreal, the noted poet. Nathan Cohen, later to become the noted theatre critic, was editor of its English page in the late 1940's. The most interesting series I recall reading was that written by Joe Salsberg in 1956 in six or eight instalments detailing his various visits to the Soviet Union and how they led to his eventual renunciation of his former links.

I myself had an amusing experience which I will share with you. It was in 1956. I was then on the staff of Canadian Jewish Congress and had just returned from a trip to Winnipeg. Shortly afterwards there appeared an article by Gershman making his periodic commentary on the news. First there was the ritual denunciation of Max Federman, the traitor, the tool of the bosses, the labour renegade, besides whom there is no one lower. This was nothing new. Max Federman had been considered public enemy #1 by them since the crowbar-wielding days on Spadina Avenue.*

But this attack was different. Someone had been found who was even lower

*Mr. Federman was a labour organizer, active in the fur trade unions who was always notably and vocally anti-communist.

than Federman — and these were the exact words used: *S'iz do eyner vos er iz nideriker fun Federman* (There is someone who is even lower than Federman!) I read on impatiently to see who this unspeakable wretch could be. And there it was, in large bold type.

Un dos iz Ben Cheifetz! It was me he was writing about!

There followed a denunciation of me coupled with a real off-beat far-out interpretation of why I had been sent by my Canadian Jewish Congress masters to Winnipeg, presumably to change the community's mind on the issue of West Germany's rearmament — something that had nothing to do with my assignment and on which if I had been asked personally I would have the same view as the *Vochenblatt* i.e. I was opposed to it!

From that point on I had the edge on Max Federman whenever I saw him — I was proud of my distinction — to be lower than Federman was no mean achievement as I assured him!

Before I leave the *Hebrew Journal* let me say something about its English page, a feature it acquired at some point in the late 1930's. Its first editor was the late Moses Frank whom we'll meet later in relation to the *Jewish Standard*. He was a man of many talents and of many languages; at home in Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew and English and who wrote professionally in at least three of these four. Like Shmuel Meyer Shapiro he was from Belorussia and a Litvak but a totally different person in temperament. He was primarily a Hebrew writer and it was in that language that he probably preferred to write. He graduated from the Ontario College of Education and had a high school teacher's diploma but Jewish teachers were not being hired in those days. He was principal of the Brunswick Avenue Talmud Torah, the city's best regarded Hebrew school. He had also been an ill-paid executive-secretary at the Canadian Jewish Congress in those days when the salary was from \$10 to \$15 a week out of which you also paid the stenographer. He was also for a while up to 1937 publisher-editor of the *Jewish Standard*. And the last of these *parnossehs* before he left Canada, and by no means the most glorious of them was when he was editor — the first I believe — of the English page of the *Journal*. He also wrote a column along the side of page commenting on the day's news.

When he went to the States I would see his name in the *Forverts* to which he contributed reviews of Hebrew books and articles of a general nature. And I saw his name as well in *Hadoar*, the Hebrew weekly and much later in the Gabriel Cohen's *National Jewish Post* at which time he held a P.R. job with the city of Haifa. (His son Reuven Frank, now 61, is president of the NBC-TV News Corporation, a leading member of the Eastern News Establishment that Spiro Agnew so vigorously attacked some years ago). Moses Frank and his wife died

in a car accident while visiting Montreal in 1977.

It's not generally known that he used to be a Torontonion but the next holder of this English page editorship was the distinguished David Rome, later to become the noted archivist, historian and librarian that he is today. This was after he left Vancouver but before he settled in Montreal where he was to achieve his true level of accomplishment. David Rome served from January 1940 to November 1942.

David Rome was followed by Ben Lappin who held it the next year when he, like David Rome, was called by Canadian Jewish Congress in Toronto which by this time was in a position to pay a living salary to its staff. Ben stayed with Congress, went back to school, returned to the CJC, became a social work professor at the University of Toronto and is now head of the social work department at Bar Ilan University in Israel.

The next editor I recall is a Rabbi Goodman who wrote under the nom de plume of Ben Tuvim. And in between was Leo Hayman, younger brother to Julius Hayman.

The *Journal*, I must admit, never had the prestige that its Montreal counterpart the *Eagle* enjoyed. Israel Rabinowitz, the *Adler* editor, was a much wider known figure in the world of Jewish culture than Shapiro and I stress the word "Jewish" rather than "Yiddish", for Rabinovitch was an authority on Jewish music. The *Journal* didn't gather around itself a literary coterie comparable to a Melech Ravitch, a B. G. Sack, a I. J. Segal, and the many other notable names including, by the way, the early Conrad Bercovici. But that probably is reflective of the gap that then existed between the two cities and the two Jewish communities. The *Journal* never pretended to be anything more than what it was — a provincial daily serving the needs and interests of a very local public.

What was doing in the meantime on the English-language side of the ledger? Not very much, I am constrained to say, at least not until 1930. The *Canadian Jewish Review* had been founded in 1922 in Toronto by George and Florence Friedlander Cohen, two emigres from across the border in Buffalo, N.Y. This was a publication that gave great attention to genteel "social notes", comings and goings to the Catskills, the Adirondacks and the Laurentians to completely detailed description of what the bride wore at a socially prominent wedding (I clearly recall a recurring phrase: "pulled in at the bodice"), to who held the baby boy at the *briss* and — most of all — to who it was that poured the tea at any given reception (cocktail parties were out as this was still under Prohibition). So much so, that to this day there is a standing, if stale, joke "If I pour the tea will you be sure to put in into the Jewish Review" even though the *Review* has been defunct for many years.

I recall in particular one social note that tells it all — the perfect picture of what a social scientist would call not “upward” but “lateral mobility”. It read like this:

Mrs. A. Nussbaum and her daughter Elaine have moved their residence from 12 St. Andrew Street to 26 Leonard Avenue.

The street number and family name have been changed but the street names are those actually mentioned in the social note. Those of you who are familiar with the geography of the old Ward Four South area in Toronto will get the message. The move is from the address in the old Jewish quarter to another, three or four blocks distant — and equally unfashionable.

After a while when Ontario had introduced the government supervised sale of liquor but still did not permit its commercial advertising, the *Review* then moved its main office from Toronto to Montreal to obtain a better chance of getting its share of advertising revenue — which, incidentally, many much more affluent periodicals also did. It was after this a two-city weekly, establishing a precedent which has been followed today by the *Canadian Jewish News*.

Florence Friedlander Cohen was known by her initials as FFC. The masthead bore a little doggerel poem:

Sometimes when people censure me
I tell them without rancour
For what it costs me to be free
I could have had an anchor

Which may leave the impression that she was a fighting, crusading journalist. Nothing could be farther from the truth. A year could go by — sometimes longer — with no editorial whatsoever. When she did get sufficiently riled up she could pen a vigorous paragraph — but it happened rarely.

The *Review* did not pursue much of an editorial policy in Jewish politics. What it did subscribe to was a mild non-Zionism, even extending sometimes to anti-Zionism, reflecting perhaps the middle class, culturally assimilated, older U.S.A. generation and “classical Reform” background of its founders. You have to keep in mind that non-Zionism was quite acceptable in those days. The American Jewish Committee and its leadership, the Louis Marshalls and the Sulzbergers, the American Jewish Establishment in general, were all non-Zionists. B’nai B’rith was non-Zionist; most of the Reform rabbis were non-Zionist including Rabbi Eisendrath who came to Holy Blossom in 1929 and who contributed a column each week to the *Review*.

Another point — the front page of the *Canadian Jewish Review* rarely if ever

had carried any Canadian Jewish news. It was all culled from the pages of the *New York Times* listing the benefactions or the deaths of various American Jewish philanthropists. The only Canadian news I recall it featuring was when the noted physician Dr. I Rabinowitch delivered his notorious anti-Zionist address to the Canadian Club in Montreal in 1946.

Well, 1929 was the turning point. The attack on the Jews at the Wailing Wall and in Hebron that year put the entire Jewish world in turmoil. In Toronto, however, Rabbi Eisendrath reprimanded the Zionists who in some way were held responsible for the attacks and this was reflected in his column in the *Review*.

The Zionists, led by Mrs. Rose Dunkelman, were terribly frustrated. There was nowhere that the Zionist point of view could be put forward in the English language to reach the English-speaking Jews and the general non-Jewish Canadian public.

What did she do? She started her own paper, and in 1930 begins the history of the *Jewish Standard*.

The man who was brought in to be the voice of Zionism in Toronto was truly a remarkable figure, someone who was larger than life and was destined to play a larger role in world Jewry and Zionism: Meyer Weisgal. He had been serving as editor of "The New Palestine", organ of the Zionist Organization of America where he was continually getting into trouble for exceeding his budget and making extravagant payments to highly paid writers like Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George.

He most assuredly made an impact on Toronto and on Toronto Jewish journalism in the very short period of two years that he lived in the city. He continued his practice of inviting world famous writers and in the next few years the *Jewish Standard* ran original commissioned articles by such noted celebrities as Dorothy Thompson, Pierre Van Paassen, Winston Churchill. He used his Z.O.A. contacts to get writers like Louis Lipsky, Felix Frankfurter, Nahum Sokolow, and Menachem Ussishkin.

Weisgal was not yet the right hand man to Chaim Weismann that he was to become but he was already a defender of his ideas. I recall a two-page spread in the *Standard* with a large portrait of Vladimir Jabotinsky on one side and one of Chaim Weismann on the other — two men who held opposing views on the way Zionist politics and diplomacy were to be directed. The article upholding Jabotinsky was written by Archie Bennet and the article defending Weismann was by Meyer Weisgal. I recall Weisgal once addressing a Young Judaea assembly which I attended. He made some remark mentioning the impact Herzl had made upon him. I immediately assumed he had been contemporary to Herzl and has seen him — after all he was a member of the "older" generation, possi-

bly about 50. I was 13 or 14 and anyone over 30 was a “senior citizen”. It was years later that I realized that Weisgal was only 30 when he spoke to us and was himself a child of ten when Herzl died.

Weisgal in two short years had put the *Jewish Standard* on the world Jewish map attracting the ablest, most popular writers. It was truly an international journal of the highest level which happened to be published in Toronto.

But it wasn’t meant to last. The Depression of the 1930’s and Weisgal’s free hand with money were two mutually incompatible factors. Eventually — he tells the story in his memoirs — Mrs. Dunkelman confided in him that the cupboard was bare and he left Toronto to do other things. He became the organizer and impressario for a Jewish pageant at the Chicago World Fair of 1933 where he made his reputation as a showman. Later he was to make a reputation as a master fund-raiser for the Weizmann Institute of Science.

After that the *Standard* steadily went down-hill. There was a Meyer Steinglass who was editor but of whom I had no personal experience. The ownership went through many vicissitudes and changeovers in the five years between 1932 and 1937. It was sold to non-Jewish publishing firms — J. Laird Thompson, the Age Publishing Company on Willcocks Street and for a while it was one of the Maclean-Hunter stable of periodicals. It then fell into the hands of Moses Z. Frank whom we mentioned earlier. Frank was a good editor but not as good a businessman. In 1937 Julius Hayman, then 30 years old, a newcomer from Winnipeg who had been its business manager and had started a rival periodical, the *Jewish Sentinel*, bought the *Standard* from Frank for under \$1000 and finally brought stability to the publication as its editor-publisher for the next 45 years, which double position he still holds.

In 1941 I was employed by the *Jewish Standard*. This was well after Julius Hayman had obtained control. My job was a melange of advertising salesman, article writer, proofreader, and sub-editor. I did everything but the printing. On one occasion I “borrowed” an article from another periodical, in the best tradition of Anglo-Jewish journalism but in my lack of experience I neglected to ask permission of the author or provide him with an honorarium. Whereupon Mr. Hayman received a threatening communication from the author, a certain Alfred Werner, a recent refugee from Germany who probably needed the money. But did he need as much as \$500, which was what he demanded?

I was quite alarmed as this situation was new to me and I was concerned about how the publisher would extricate himself.

But Mr. Hayman was very cool. He waited a few weeks until Mr. Werner, too, cooled off somewhat. Then he sent him a cheque for \$5.00. We never heard again from Mr. Werner.

I was reminded of this incident within the last year when I noted in the JTA of the death of Alfred Werner who in the meantime had developed an excellent reputation as a writer specializing in the field of Jewish art.

At the risk of revealing my own disorganization I'll beg your indulgence to go back to the Yiddish press and deal with a figure I unaccountably omitted — I mean Gershon Pomerantz. Before Gershon Pomerantz undertook the editorship of the *Hebrew Journal* which he did in its last two years as a regularly appearing daily newspaper he had already experimented in seven careers. Since coming to Toronto about 1930 he had conducted a Yiddish lending library, been an insurance agent, been employed by Canadian Jewish Congress as secretary to its "Peoples Division", owned a printing business, had been a publisher of Yiddish books by distinguished authors like Leivik and Opatoshu and during all these livelihoods had "untergezindikt mit'n pen" i.e. had written Yiddish poetry which appeared in various anthologies. He also contributed essays to the *Freie Arbeter Shtimme* in New York under the pseudonym of A. Sokolover. After all these abortive attempts at a livelihood he went into building contracting and for a brief period was actually a *g'vir*. Though always interested in Yiddish he had always disdained the local daily in that language and once when I saw him buying one, in some embarrassment he explained that he bought it only for the particular paper.

At one time he confided in me that he was planning to publish an English language Jewish paper — a weekly. He had the name chosen — "The Jewish Nation" and had gone as far as a dummy front page which he showed me. This was in his printing period when he possessed the machinery to do it. But nothing came of it.

Eventually he became editor of the paper he had professed to disdain and as a *zetter*, a linotype operator (another one of his *parnosses*), he would type-set the editorials right into the hot type. He had a thoroughly good time: denouncing and criticising right and left, re-printing his literary criticism and poems and reviews and putting out the entire paper himself. He even modernized the spelling, bringing the Journal up-to-date in its old age. But eventually ill-health caught up to him and he had to give up. He, by the way, had a mop of hair — a *tchuprina* — that was more luxuriant than Shapiro's.

There was a long period through the 1940's and 1950's when Toronto had no English language Jewish weekly. The *Jewish Standard* was at various times a monthly and a fortnightly but never a weekly, The *Review* had moved to Montreal. It was in 1960, when M.J. Nurenberger switched languages, that we enter the current period.

A very important personality of the Jewish press in Toronto — or for that

matter in all of Canada — has so far been overlooked. I refer to Archie Bennet, olov hasholom, and the omission is strange for two reasons: (a) he towered so tall over so many others and (b) I had made mention of his name twice earlier in the paper in relation to other matters, yet that did not remind or impell me to talk of him as a journalist. The reason isn't hard to find. Archie was so many other things and wore so many other *hitlech* (I daren't say *yarmulkas* because of his well known anti-yarmulka campaign of the 1960's). * He was first and foremost a community leader, he was a major businessman, though many didn't realize it — he and his brothers pioneered in the building of shopping centres or plazas in Canada back in the 1950's — and only after all this was he a journalist, who played at it as it were and dabbled with his column. Well, that may be the way some of us perceived it but not the way he saw it. The ballot for the election of Toronto delegates to the first assembly of the Canadian Jewish Congress in 1919 identified all the candidates by their occupation. And what do you think he was tagged as? As a journalist of course and probably very proudly. I think what he most dearly wanted to be in this world, next to teaching philosophy at Queens, was a working full-time journalist. Archie was probably the first bilingual Jewish journalist Canada had. He used to contribute to *Kanader Adler* when his friend A.A. Roback was editor and he wrote ponderous essays on Old English literature i.e. the Anglo-Saxon epics, probably the only time in history this subject was ever dealt with in that language. Also he was the first truly national journalist we had in the East. Being raised in Kingston he was open to both Toronto and Montreal. He wrote for the old Jewish *Times* of Montreal, the Jewish *Chronicle* of Montreal, the Jewish *Review* both when it was in Toronto and Montreal in the last 25 years or so of his writing, for the Jewish *Standard* of Toronto. As a young man in the summer intervals from Queens he was editor of the Canadian Jewish *Times* in Montreal so he was not merely an amateur dabbler when he dubbed himself a "journalist" on that Congress ballot. In his prime, Archie Benett's writing style was much more interesting than his speaking style. One could enjoy his writing more than his speaking. For one thing, his wit shone through his writing much more lucidly. His speaking suffered from an unfortunate muffled mumble which was very irritating and which more than once aroused an audience to protest — even to take up the chorus *Nit Genudyet* in the tune of *Ay — ochnyet* the Volga Boat Song. He loved to play with words, to build little verbal castles in the air with language, to invent and coin words, to wind phrases up and down, and in and out of an imaginary labyrinth and his satiric jousts were delightful. Some day an enterprising editor or publisher will collect his columns — the best of his columns — and put them together in book form. They will form a fascinating picture of Canadian Jewry

* Discussed later in the paper

as Archie saw it from the second to the seventh decade of this century. And he was never without a column. All the time from 1912 to only several years before his passing in 1981 he was never without a vehicle to express himself — and we are the richer for it.

What did he write about? He wrote about the *landmanshaftn* and the sick benefit societies which used to dot the Jewish horizon. He wrote about his friends Moses and Louis Gelber, always making the point in a patronizing but kindly fashion that after all one must remember they were Galitzianer. He carried on his anti-yarmulka campaign, not *cholila* that he was against the yarmulka *per se* or was anti religious. What he vigorously opposed was the tyranny and regimentation in the new post-war congregations, the imposing of the *yarmulka only* rule, the ban against the fedora, the derby, or the peak cap for which he saw no sanction in Torah or *halacha*. He wrote about Sam Kronick and Sam's still living partner-in-charity Willy Agranove. He wrote about Communism, about Zionism, about Weismann, about Jabotinsky, about his contemporaries Ben Sadowski and Irving Oelbaum, Mike Garber and Sam Bronfman, about the Canadian Jewish Congress and the philosophy of Congress. He and S.M. Shapiro were the most ardent exponents of this philosophy of a Jewish populism that arose during and after the World War I. He wrote about Herzl, Stephen Wise and Chayim Greenberg. But above all he wrote about Reuben Braibin who in his Montreal years gathered around him a group of *talmidim* and *chassidim*, an intellectual *coterie*. It was an experience that was Archie's own personal renaissance and *risorgimento* wrapped into one. Archie never forgot or let his readers forget his debt to this intellectual leader and inspirer. And this too was directly linked to the Jewish press, as it was as editor of the *Kanader Adler* that Brainin owed his presence in Montreal and Canada. This, I suppose, is encroaching on the territory of David Rome but since Archie was in the main a Toronto figure, a part of it belongs to my domain in this paper.

There were various other personalities marginally linked with the Toronto Jewish press. The late Cantor Nathan Stolnitz would come to me to translate his writings into a passable English for eventual publication in a book on Jewish Music and Cantorial Neguna in which the author's photo would invariably appear in the company of a Koussevitsky or a Richard Tucker or a Leibeke Waldman or a Pintchik or one or another of the chazzanic celebrities or even a Bobby Breen. There was Israel Plattner who couldn't let a word escape his lips without a pun, a quip, a play on words, generally betwixt English and Yiddish. Plattner and Stolnitz both contributed to the *Journal*, Plattner also doing the oc-

casional poetic effort. Plattner suffered from the illusion that the only obstacle preventing him from achieving the success of a George Kaufman, a Lerner and Loew or any other lyric writer for the Broadway musical comedy stage was the lack of a proper translator. He had had it from Yankev Kalich himself, no less a person than Molly Picon's husband, that if his *chochmess** were put into English, he'd be the toast of Broadway. Plattner died blind with diabetes and confined to a wheelchair at the Baycrest Hospital where I would visit him, but to the end he never gave up his playing with words and his toying with language. Alan Jarvis, for instance, the head of the Canadian Art establishment, was one of his targets for not recognizing the merit of Plattner's wife who was and is a sculptress. Jarvis died in an alcoholic stupor but Plattner forecast this years before it happened. How do I know this? Because Plattner always referred to Jarvis as Jarvisky because of his drinking habits.

One contributor to the Toronto Yiddish press came to my acquaintance in a most unusual way without my having the slightest idea he was a Yiddish poet and in a milieu far removed from the usual ambience of the literateurs. He was a street car conductor whose base was the TTC car barns at Roncesvalles and Queen Street overlooking Sunnyside and I was the newsboy on that corner where my older brother had the corner concession. I knew he was a man who was well read as he would talk to me from time to time about Bernard Shaw and would nod knowingly. The other goyishe TTC conductors and motormen held him in great awe as a man who could handle several languages including French which he had acquired in Montreal.

Years later I came across his name S. Nepom in an anthology of Canadian Yiddish poems and I discovered he wrote for the *Adler*, the *Journal* and the leftist *Kamf*. His tombstone is located in the U.J.P.O. section of the Dawes Rd *beis-oilem*.

I once read a poem of his about a newsboy standing in the rain entitled "Der Newsboi". Aha — this might be me? I thought. But no. It must have been an earlier newsboy as the book's date was 1920, when I was three years old.

One of my favorite stories is about a certain Yiddish journalist. He called once insisting I come to see him in the *Journal* office — on the second day of Sukkos, when Shapiro would be sure not to be there. What did he want? Here's the story.

He was quite satisfied with his job at the *Journal* and had no complaint about the pay. His second job teaching at one of the Hebrew schools was also satisfactory. What, then, did he want? What he wanted was for me to try to find him a

* words of wisdom

third job.

This made no sense to me and I asked how could he possibly handle a third job and if he was satisfied with the other two what did he need the extra money for — was he in serious debt?

Cholilo, not at all.

At the *Hebrew Journal* he had a certain quota of articles, columns and reports to prepare. Because he wrote with such great ease and speed (flink-keit was the word he uses) he was finished well ahead of time. The Hebrew teaching job also didn't take up much of his time (I should have added he was and still is a bachelor). As a result time lay heavily on his hands. And what did he do? He was attracted to the *ferdlach*, the horses, where inevitably he would lose all the money he gained from his two jobs.

So what he, therefore, wanted was a job that would enable him to fill up his surplus time and keep him from the temptation of running to the horse races and thereby keeping his income from running out.

Not that he was particularly interested in hard work. The work ethic wasn't necessarily for him. He even specified the kind of job I was to obtain for him: a factory inspector where he would drop in occasionally, leisurely, and casually and the proprietor would provide him with a free bottle of schnappes for good will purposes. Needless to say such a job never materialized.

When this writer left Toronto it was, believe it or not, to proceed to Switzerland where he had been accepted as a medical student. He was then 38. His plan was to study one year then return to North America for a year to earn enough tuition by Hebrew teaching to cover his fees for the following year. At that rate he would have acquired a medical degree by the age of 50. Needless to say, nothing came of this after the first year.

Despite the rhetoric of the Yiddishists, the Yiddish press in Canada is receding into the past and the Anglo-Jewish press in English is now more of an impersonal nation wide operation with all that bigness brings with it — both the assets and the liabilities. I'm rather pleased looking back at it that I was around in the era when it was still a business for individuals, and when the rugged individual was still very visible. Don't misunderstand what I am saying. I'm not looking back nostalgically to a better day of the past. The public, I am sure, is better served today, but while it lasted, it was enjoyable.