

Woman's Part in Jewish Public Life

A TALK WITH MRS. TONI SAPHRA

By Dora Sowden

"NOW that we have a central executive of the Union of Jewish Women of South Africa, we hope to draw in larger circles than we have had up to the present and will extend our activities," said Mrs. Toni Saphra, when I went to see her at her flat in Parktown West.

Mrs. Saphra was elected President of the Union of Jewish Women of South Africa at the First Congress held in Johannesburg last month.

"I am positive," she told me, "that the Congress has roused a great deal of interest. I was approached by many delegates with schemes to extend our efforts. Though our funds are low, we hope soon to embark with enthusiasm on our work.

"I have always been and am still a member of the Union of Jewish Women of Germany," Mrs. Saphra explained. "I keep in touch with what they are doing. It was the International Conference of Jewish Women held before the War and the formation of a World Union of Jewish Women after the War, that made me think that we Jewish Women of South Africa are not sufficiently in touch with each other and with Jewish women overseas. We had participated in neither.

"The World Union was not a great success because it was unfortunately formed during the great depression and has had to cope with many difficulties. There is really at present no satisfactory world organisation, but it will no doubt come into being in time."

WHEN I asked Mrs. Saphra what would be the real sphere of the South African Union, she replied: "We in South Africa do not propose to interfere with the work of affiliated societies, but to offer them a platform for making their achievements and objects known. The Union should have a general appeal for it will embrace many and varied activities. Primarily it will aim at creating a united voice among Jewish Women, but our aims are wide and include

the promotion of world peace and social understanding. We hope one day to have a newspaper or bulletin to circulate among our members.

"It was quite accidental that the First Branch of the Union of Jewish Women was formed in Johannesburg," remarked Mrs. Saphra, when I asked her how it came about that she, as a Capetonian, should not have formed one there first. "Arriving in Johannesburg, after a trip to Europe in 1931, I was asked to address the Women's Zionist League. I used the opportunity to express my sense of the need for a Union. I had previously stated my views in the 1929 Rosh Hashonah Number of the 'Jewish Chronicle.' A few months after, a branch was formed. Later, I had made a trip to the coastal towns and Bloemfontein, other committees were formed. I am sorry to say that they did not all function, because it was not always easy to find someone to carry on, once the work was started.

"We all felt that a Congress should be called, but many people, including Mr. Raphaely and Mr. Alexander, advised us to wait till our branches were functioning and we had created a nucleus of the Union. This we did. Last month's Congress was the result."

MRS. SAPHRA came to South Africa in 1903 and to use her own words, from the time she set foot in Africa, she was roped in to Jewish communal activities. She settled in Capetown, where she remained for thirty years. She was secretary of the Jewish Ladies' Association which amalgamated with the Philanthropic Society to form the Capetown Board of Guardians.

As delegate for the South African National Council of Women, she has attended two international conferences, one at Oslo, in Norway (1920), and another at Vienna (1930). "The one at Oslo," said Mrs. Saphra, "has left an indelible impres-



[Photo: Jane Plotz.]

Mrs. Saphra.

sion on my mind. Everyone was eager to make friends and forget differences, after the War. It was wonderful. I am afraid a good deal of that spirit has gone since."

Among Mrs. Saphra's manifold interests are First Aid and Home Nursing. She was an officer in St. John's Ambulance Nursing Division and a member of St. John's Executive Council, in Capetown. "Two of the delegates to the Congress of the Union of Jewish Women were old girls whom I taught as members of the Jewish Girl Guides in Capetown," she remarked.

Before the War, Mrs. Saphra's interests lay mostly in music and art. She helped to found an Art Club in Capetown, but later, Jewish communal affairs claimed her attention. She has only been in Johannesburg a few years, but has made the city her home, and is already part of active Jewish communal life here.

Zionist Socialist Party Activities

On Saturday, the 7th inst., the regular fortnightly social took place. Miss Price played the piano; Mr. W. Kotkis (accompanied by Mr. Chiltshik) played the violin, and Mr. A. Abramson sang.

On Saturday, the 21st inst., Mr. M. Alexander, M.P., will lecture on the position of the Jews in South Africa. On Thursday, the 3rd prox. Mr. Ovidov will lecture on the "Front Populaire," and the Borochoy evening will take place on Sunday, the 13th prox.

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