

Early Australian Zionism

Central Zionist Archives

Australian Federation of WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organisation)

The WIZO Federation in Australia was formed in 1937 by the late Mrs Ida Wynn. There had existed a few Groups in Australia but these were reorganised and under the first President of Wizo in Australia Mrs Ruby Schalit, the organisation was well and truly established. Two years later, Mrs Ida Wynn became the federal President and she retained office until her death in 1948. Mrs Marjorie Saulwick acted as Federal President until the Third Wizo conference in 1949, when Mrs Rieke Cohen JP, was elected Federal President and the headquarters seat of the Federation moving to Sydney, NSW.

By 1950 Wizo had considerably widened its activities. Groups had been established in all states, with a total of twenty nine groups in existence, sometimes separated from each other by considerable distances. Membership of these groups was close to four thousand.

Mrs Rieke Cohen founded the *Ivriah* journal in 1936, and maintained it at her own expense. The first conference of the Australian Federation of WIZO was held from 12th-14th August 1941, followed by the Third conference in 1949. Wizo archives up to 1970 are housed in the Central Zionist Archives.

F49/81 1941– 1954

G/7/8 8799 (copy) October 11th, 1941. 104pp.

Dear Miss Rich,

In view of the stage now reached in the battle of Britain and with the enemy concentrating so heavily in London, the London Executive of the WIZO met recently to complete its plans for the future direction of our work, should circumstances compel a change in the existing arrangements.

We have, as you know, been working from the outbreak of the war with more or less skeletal personnel and we hope that it will still be possible for this personnel to go on working as long as the war should last. At the same time, however, we felt it imperative to have all our plans ready and to acquaint you with them beforehand so that all our Federations should know where they stand, in relation to ourselves, Palestine and each other, and also what would be expected of them should such changes have to be made. Our plan, which we have worked out after the most thorough consideration, of all the factors involved will, we believe, command itself to you as the best means of safeguarding the fabric of our Organisation, and of ensuring of continuous support, from all possible quarters for the maintenance of our work in Palestine. It consists, in brief, of a threefold decentralisation and the setting up of Emergency Centres in Canada, South Africa and Australia-cum New Zealand. Each of these centres, in addition of their own tasks in respect of the

development of the work in their own countries, shall be assigned special duties....

With regards to Australia, we would wish Australia and New Zealand to work together in the closest collaboration pooling all resources as far as possible for the maintenance and development of the work, such as, for example, co-operation in the preparation of propaganda and educational material appropriate to the needs of both Federations, interchange of speakers and ideas, mutual consultation on the holding of drives for the Wizo Palestine Fund for Women and Children and of membership campaigns. We do appreciate the fact that, since the inception of the Australian Wizo, there has always been a close contact between you and the New Zealand federation, and we trust that should the need for decentralisation arise, you will strengthen these contacts and work together as far as is practicable as one self-contained unity.

We are, of course, writing in the same strain to New Zealand.

In addition to the forgoing, we are arranging that each of these Emergency Centres shall

1. be in direct communication with Palestine for news, information etc
2. be in direct touch with each other for the exchange of propaganda and cultural material, suggestions and ideas
3. be entirely responsible for the carrying out of all aspects of Galuth work assigned to it.
4. be responsible for the raising of funds for the maintenance of our institutions, and services in Palestine. All funds shall henceforth be remitted directly to our Palestine Office, a notice of advice being sent simultaneously to London or wherever the Wizo Office may be situated in London.
5. send copies of correspondence and material to us in order that a complete record may be kept and also that we here in England should have as full information as possible. Palestine must, of course, remain as the Central Authority for the administration of the work. In the event of an invasion of Palestine, our Centres would naturally have to watch the situation very carefully and to use their own discretion, as to the point at which it would not be advisable to remit money...

We are happy in the knowledge that you and your colleagues have so built up the Australian Federation that it is now in the position to rise to such a situation, to safeguard its fabric and to discharge its responsibilities for our work in Palestine and in the Galuth.

With all good wishes

Yours sincerely

(signed) Rebecca Sieff

Chairman London Executive of Wizo

Letter From Mrs Ida Wynn 289, Flinders Lane, Melbourne To: PWE Publicity Dept. April 3, 1945.

Ready for Newcomers This article reached me and I read it and brought the matter up to our executive. We all found it was too long...in its present condition, it is quite unsuitable for Australian consumption... However, I am ready to cut it down to what I consider suitable...