Review of the Year: Foreign

SOUTH AMERICA

By M. Senderey

POLITICAL SITUATION

In analyzing the politics of South America, caution and a constant awareness of South American peculiarities are necessary. Otherwise, what is in reality a consistent development may seem to be incomprehensible and full of contradictions.

Argentina

Argentina is an excellent illustration of the impossibility of applying conventional terminology in defining the political character of South American regimes. Thus, the first two years of the presidency of General Juan D. Perón, whom many observers had believed to be ambitious to establish a dictatorship of the fascist variety, passed without excessive damage to democracy. While it is true that some persons complained of strong pressure against the opposition and actual persecution of its press, the opposition remained unmolested in Parliament and continued to criticize the government and appeal to public opinion. The last parliamentary elections were carried out with unusual propriety and an absence of fraud. The government party won, but it is an old proverb in Argentina that "the sheriff's horse always wins." Parliament passed a law granting political rights to women, and the law was being carried out. The Communist party enjoyed legal existence, which was not true in neighboring Chile and Brazil.
Economic Conditions

While the purchasing power of the peso continued to fall and the cost of living to rise steadily, the government imposed controls on rents and the price of necessities, and in general attempted to combat the high cost of living by pension funds, paid vacations of from ten to thirty days, a yearly bonus of a month's salary, unemployment compensation, etc. Social legislation was at the time of writing better than it ever had been before in Argentina, and the same was true of the standard of living of workers and white-collar employees. The railroads and telephone services had been nationalized, the export industry was almost entirely in the hands of the government and aviation and the merchant marine had been expanded. This trend toward nationalization encountered difficulties, but that was unavoidable.

By and large, despite a few incidents, the Jewish community had little cause for complaint. The use of Yiddish was still forbidden in public assemblies, but this was neither a law nor even an administrative order; it was only a police measure, and exceptions were made for visitors from abroad and occasional local speakers; the Yiddish press, theatre and radio were unaffected. A number of Jews were dismissed from their government posts, especially in the educational system, but other Jews were appointed to offices of some importance. The secretary general of the Ministry of the Interior, for example, was a Jew. All this, however, did not prevent the occasional planting of explosives in buildings housing Jewish organizations, such as political parties (the Revisionists), clubs (the Maccabees), schools (Baron de Hirsch), synagogues (the Congregación Israelita), or even the imposing new offices of the Jewish Agency for Palestine.

Jewish school activities were unhindered; so was anti-Semitic propaganda, which remained constant. The police advised the sponsors to cancel the Luna Park mass meeting called to celebrate the United Nations partition decision of November 29, 1947; their good advice was perforce taken.
On the other hand, the police allowed an even larger meeting in the Parco Retro to celebrate the proclamation of the state of Israel on May 15, 1948, and they did not forbid the spontaneous street festivities, accompanied by singing and dancing, although the required official permission had been neither requested nor granted. The Argentine government had not yet adopted any definite position on the Palestine question at the time of writing, although a motion was presented before Congress to welcome the state of Israel, and the Socialist party arranged a formal meeting in honor of the occasion.

On August 20, 1948, General Perón, in the company of his wife, Dr. J. Bramuglia, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other highly placed persons in the government, came to attend the ceremonies at the laying of the corner stone of the OIA (Argentine Jewish Organization), a Jewish branch of the Perónist party. On this occasion the president declared that discrimination on account of race or religion was contrary to the Argentine tradition of hospitality, and promised that he would not tolerate it.

Chile

In Chile, there was an increase in anti-Semitism. One of the contributing factors was the government's attacks on Jewish immigrants who entered Chile before and during the war ostensibly as farmers, but instead proceeded to establish themselves in the capital. Another factor was the propaganda of the Chilean Arabs, which brought about a change in the pro-Zionist position of the government, whose president, Gabriel Gonzales Videla, was vice-president of the World Christian Committee for Palestine. The anti-Semitism sometimes took violent forms, such as the bombing of Jewish institutions. Thus, on February 3, 1948, the Circulo Israelita, the largest Jewish institution in Santiago, was damaged by an explosion. Despite these events, however, the Jewish community did not feel itself particularly endangered.
In Brazil, there was an improvement in the Jewish situation. The importation of Yiddish newspapers from abroad was once more permitted, as were local Yiddish publications, and the attitude of the Brazilian government to the Palestine question at the United Nations session of November, 1947, was considered very encouraging. Nevertheless, Brazil had not yet recognized Israel. On the unfavorable side was the burning of a Jewish institution in Porto Alegre on April 25, 1948, under rather suspicious circumstances.

In Uruguay, the freest country in South America, the past year was a tranquil one for Jews. In Paraguay, on the other hand, the Jewish community was affected economically by the civil war, though not as Jews. In Colombia, the insurrection in Bogotá at the time of the Pan-American Conference (April, 1948) brought suffering to the Jewish community, though here again Jewish issues were not involved. Fifty-eight Jewish businesses were set on fire and eighty-two pillaged, and the total damage was estimated at twelve million Colombian pesos.

After an encouraging beginning by the government which followed the pro-Fascist dictatorship of General Villaroel (1945), the Jewish community was shocked during the past year by an official decree ordering an investigation into the funds held by the “Semitic” who had entered Colombia since 1947. Several Jewish institutions protested this decree.

The Pan-American Conference will probably be regarded as marking an important stage in the actual Jewish attainment of equality of rights in Latin America. It is true that the Conference produced only a declaration of human rights and did not provide for a formal convention, much less an
international court at which offending governments could be arraigned. But the very declaration itself was a major achievement, though its effect would probably be largely moral. It might curb the appetites of the various local anti-Semitic groups, and incline the governments to pay rather more attention to these groups than they have in the past. Representatives of organizations concerned with the defense of Jewish rights were present for the first time at this Conference.

**Immigration**

Although the large majority of South American governments was favorably disposed towards the existing Jewish communities, they showed no eagerness to have the communities grow through large-scale immigration. Traditionally, immigration policy throughout South America had been based on the principle of economic selectivity; that is, encouragement had been given to the immigration of such elements as were judged capable of contributing to industrial and agricultural, not commercial, progress. In practice, this had been further restricted to favored rural immigrants, and had consequently worked to the disadvantage of Jews, who were primarily an urban group. In recent years, the principle of selectivity in immigration policy had begun to include racial and religious criteria. At the time of writing, it was primarily Christians and “Aryans” who were admitted, though a baptismal certificate usually sufficed to clear immigrants of the onus of “non-Aryan” birth.

Control over the immigration of Jews was exercised with particular severity. To reconcile this fact with the official doctrines of democracy and tolerance, the rationalization was advanced that an excessively swift growth of the Jewish population might tend to increase anti-Semitic sentiments among the population as a whole. The result was that immigrant visas were granted to very limited classes of Jews: close relatives of citizens, skilled laborers who could show an employment contract and persons with technical skills of
which there was a shortage in the native labor force. In a few countries, notably Paraguay and Ecuador, exceptions were made for Jews who promised to engage in agriculture.

It naturally followed, therefore, that while the total immigration could be measured in the tens of thousands, Jewish immigration was a matter of hundreds. Argentina was the most important country of immigration in the entire continent, but one to which it was very difficult for Jews to immigrate. During April, May and June of 1948, a number of illegal immigrants were arrested, but were set free and allowed to remain in Argentina at President Perón’s order.

Ecuador continued to be one of the few countries which kept its doors open to Jewish immigrants, although there were some exceptions during the past year. There was also a large Jewish exodus from this country. One fourth of the Jewish community recently emigrated to other countries, principally the United States, leaving a void which was soon filled by new immigrants, who came mainly from Eastern Europe and Shanghai.

INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS

In 1947–48 the Jewish communities of South America achieved significant results in internal organization and the strengthening of Jewish life.

The development of air transport greatly facilitated intimate contact among the South American Jewish communities and between South America and Israel, North America and Europe. As a result, local Jewish life was enriched by the visits of many Jewish communal leaders and workers from abroad. Among the visitors from North America were Dr. J. Shatzsky and B. Sherman (Yiddish Scientific Institute); G. Bloom (National Jewish Welfare Board); Professor Morris Fishbein; B. Zukerman and Dr. N. Goldman (World Jewish Congress); M. Yagupsky (American Jewish Committee); and M. Adelbaum and Rabbi J. Rosenblatt (Mizrachi). From Israel came Moises A. Toff, Under Secretary for Latin
American affairs, who in the course of his visit addressed the Uruguayan Parliament.

The struggle for the establishment and the defense of the state of Israel served to unify the Jewish communities of the various countries of Latin America and to give them a strong sense of identification with Jewry as a whole. In Argentina, it was possible for the first time to have a united campaign for Palestine and for the relief and rehabilitation of the surviving victims of Hitlerism. This campaign won the support of every section of the Jewish community, including the major Jewish institutions, such as Haganah, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the Joint Distribution Committee, Keren Hayesod (Palestine Foundation Fund), Keren Kayemeth (Jewish National Fund), American ORT Federation and the World Jewish Congress. The example of the American United Jewish Appeal was a major factor in bringing about the united campaign in Argentina. The goal of the united campaign in Argentina was set at fifty million pesos. At the time of writing, receipts were exceeding expectations, and most observers believed that unified fund raising would continue to prevail in the future. Unified fund raising for Palestine had been instituted in Uruguay, Brazil, Chile and a number of other countries, and the likelihood was that this was a precursor of unified campaigns for overseas needs in general throughout Latin America.

It was also reasonable to expect that unity in the face of overseas needs would have the effect of promoting greater unity in domestic matters. In Argentina, an effort was made to establish a co-ordinating body for all communal institutions. Two conferences were held (one in September, 1944, and one in August, 1945) for the purpose of discussing the organization of a country-wide community council. The effort failed, but eventual success was probable. There was a considerable improvement in the relations among the Sephardic, Ashkenazic and German-speaking Jews, due mainly to the common desire to support the state of Israel. Thus, the important Sephardic congregation of Yesod Ha-Dat, whose members were mostly of Aleppan origin and the
most pious of the Sephardim, chose as its rabbi Amram Blum, an Ashkenazi.

The year 1947-48 also saw efforts to establish communal organization on a continental scale. South American conferences were held by the World Jewish Congress, the General Zionists and the Labor Zionists. The World Jewish Congress held its conference in Buenos Aires from June 29 to July 2, 1947; the General Zionists met in Montevideo from November 8 to 11, 1947, and the Poale Zion-Zeire Zion (Labor Zionists) in Montevideo from May 29 to June 2, 1948. Plans were proposed and resolutions adopted to engage in activity throughout the South American continent. These were the beginnings of what might prove to be a very important development.

Progress was also to be seen in the cultural life of the South American communities. The Jewish school system was everywhere strengthened, and a new school opened in Bogotá, Colombia. Of institutions of higher Jewish learning, there were four in Argentina, two in Brazil, two in Mexico and one in Chile; there were indications that they would continue functioning. In Buenos Aires the Hebraica organization, analogous to the Young Men’s Hebrew Association, opened an institution for higher general and Jewish education, and also organized a Jewish choral group. A similar choral group, known as Ha-Zamir, was active in Rosario, the second most important Jewish community in Argentina. Considerable Yiddish and Hebrew cultural activity took place in Buenos Aires. There were two Jewish book publishing firms in Argentina: Dos Poylishe Yidntum (“Polish Jewry”), for books in Yiddish, and Israel, for books in Spanish; both continued to function actively. A few books in Hebrew also appeared. Some non-Jewish publishing firms issued a few books of Jewish interest in Spanish, translated from Yiddish or other languages. Among the books translated from Yiddish into Spanish were several by Sholom Asch (East River, Motke the Thief, The Nazarene, The Apostle, etc.); Sholom Aleichem (Motel Pesy, the Cantor’s Son); D. Bergelson (Absolute Justice); an anthology of stories by Bergelson and others
(The Blood of Your Brother Abel); I. J. Singer (The Family Carnovsky). Argentina was the book-publishing center of the Spanish-speaking world, and Jewish books in both Yiddish and Spanish were sent from Argentina to all of South America and beyond. Special mention must be made of the publication of a Spanish Bible, a reissue of the well-known Ferrara Bible, for which thanks must be given to the Buenos Aires Estrellas firm, owned by German-speaking Jews only recently arrived in Argentina.

The first Argentine celebration of Jewish Book Month took place in Buenos Aires from August 17 to September 17, 1947. Yiddish and Hebrew books were displayed, as well as books in Spanish and English with Jewish content. The celebration was modeled after that in the United States, and the National Jewish Welfare Board and the Central Jewish Cultural Organization of New York were in great measure responsible for its success in Argentina. The Buenos Aires Yiddish Scientific Institute had an interesting exhibition, entitled "Destruction, Resistance and Reconstruction." The theme was the tragedy of European Jewry and its hopes and strivings for the future.

In Montevideo, Uruguay, the foundation stones were laid for two new schools and one cultural center—that of the Herzl School and the Tschernichovski Town Kindergarten on June 9, 1947; that of the Sholom Aleichem School on June 29, 1947. In Chile the Jewish school system made progress, and the local Yiddish newspaper, Dos Yiddishe Vort, formerly a weekly, was soon to appear daily.

A distinct contribution to Jewish cultural life was represented by the immigration of a few Jewish intellectuals who survived the Eastern European catastrophe. Among the most talented intellectuals were Simha Sneh, author and poet, as well as a great number of artists from Europe.

It is appropriate to mention here, as an element of strength in Jewish life, the erection of monuments in memory of the Jewish war martyrs. Such ceremonies took place in the cemeteries of a number of Argentine cities, as well as in the capital cities of Uruguay, Brazil, Chile and Peru.
A special Argentine delegation was present in Warsaw on April 19, 1948, at the unveiling of the monument on the former site of the ghetto. The delegation represented all South American Jewry.

This review cannot close without mentioning the support of Latin American countries for the state of Israel. Of the thirty-three countries which voted for partition at the UN (November, 1947), thirteen were Latin-American: Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Santo Domingo, Uruguay and Venezuela. Of the seventeen countries that had recognized Israel (as of August 21, 1948), eight were Latin-American: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. Dr. Jorge García Granados of Guatemala and Prof. Enrique Rodriguez Fabregat of Uruguay, both members of UNSCOP, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, were among the most important pro-Jewish spokesmen at the United Nations.

By Adolfo Fastlicht

The very young Jewish community of Mexico, numbering approximately 20,000, has already given evidence of a great vitality. During the past year, the various Jewish societies and organizations within the Republic of Mexico were intensely active.

Anti-Semitism

During the year 1947–48, though the number of Jews in Mexico was small and their activities beneficial to the public, there was an intensification of anti-Semitism, due to
the activities of two dangerous political groups, the Sinarquists (Sinarquistas), and the Gold Shirts (Dorados). The Sinarquists numbered 300,000 and were heavily represented in the interior of the country, particularly in the Central Zone of Mexico. The Gold Shirts were active in the large cities.

In 1947-48 the Sinarquists turned to the many Mexicans working in the southern part of the United States, particularly California, and attempted to organize them along fascist lines. They had a military hierarchy and were highly disciplined. In addition, there were important concentrations of Sinarquists in the cities of Morelia and Leon: 40,000 marched in a military parade in the former, and 20,000 in the latter. During 1947-48 the Gold Shirts gave signs of incipient activity. They published numerous anti-Jewish handbills, and organized a public meeting on Sunday in a Jewish business neighborhood. Fortunately, the Anti-Defamation Committee was able to intervene and halt their provocations. The general press published both pro and anti-Jewish articles. The weeklies Omega and Hombre Libre in particular distinguished themselves by anti-Semitic attacks. Both received substantial encouragement.

Particularly important in the Jewish press were the Yiddish newspapers Der Veg, Die Stimme and Freivelt. The four-year-old monthly magazine La Tribuna Israelita was deserving of special mention; it was considered among the most important publications in Latin America, was circulated throughout Mexico and the Latin American republics, and distributed special leaflets describing great figures in Jewish history. La Tribuna Israelita published several booklets which it distributed over all the South American continent. Among them were: Los Catolicos y los Judios (“Catholics and Jews”) and Los Judios en la cultura hispanica (“The Jew in Hispanic Culture”).

There was also an increase of activities in the field of radio. Weekly programs set up were: Vidas Dramaticas: Los que trabajaron por la humanidad (“Dramatic Sketches: Those Who Worked for Humanity”) and Galeria musical (“Musical Varieties”). Both programs were broadcast for
half an hour over an important station to a large audience. A news bulletin service with six to eight-minute broadcasts nightly was also organized.

At the Mexican government's annual Book Fair, the Jewish community put on a special forty-five-minute show in the Book Fair Theater. This program consisted of Jewish music and a specially written fifteen-minute sketch. The entire show was broadcast over several networks.

The first permanent chair in the Hebrew language and culture in the entire continent was established in 1947-48 in the National University of Mexico, which is the oldest on the continent. With the appointment of Zeilik Shifmanovic to this chair there were now two Jewish professors at the National University: Shifmanovic and Jose Silva, professor of economics and social sciences since 1937.

**Communal Activities**

The most notable event of the year for the Jewish community was the sponsorship by the government of a group of school buildings known as the Albert Einstein Secondary School. Accepting the invitation tendered by the government of Mexico to build a Jewish school, the Central Jewish Committee of Mexico (Comité central israélite de Mexico) appointed a special committee, presided over by Max Shein and Arthur Wolfofitz, which supervised the construction of the buildings, costing more than $500,000. President Miguel Alemán was present at their dedication. Studies began with a registration of three classes of 2,250 students. In addition, the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Central Jewish Committee sponsored a nursery which it donated to the Mexican government.

**Zionism**

With regard to the state of Israel, activities in Mexico were quite intensive. In July, 1946, an Emergency Palestine Committee was set up by approximately forty of the commu-
nities and organizations in the Republic. This Committee organized press conferences, sometimes with the aid of the Mexican Pro-Palestine Committee presided over by Alfonso Francisco Ramirez, member of the National Supreme Court. They gave many interviews to the newspapers and over the radio, and organized meetings and conferences both for the Jewish community and the general public.

The Emergency Committee organized a moving ceremony celebrating the proclamation of the state of Israel in a large theater in Mexico City. Similar ceremonies were held in smaller cities in the interior.

Census

A new activity organized by ADC was the commercial and industrial census of the Mexican Jews. All the communities collaborated; especially helpful were the communities of Nidhe Israel, the Menorah, the German Jewish community, the Emuna, the Hungarian Jewish community, the Sephardic community and the Aleppo and Damascus (Syrian) communities.