ARGENTINA

ARGENTINIAN ELECTIONS for a constitutional convention took place on July 28, 1957. They were the first elections since the overthrow of the dictatorship of Juan Peron in September 1955.

All the participating political parties were able to campaign through the media of radio, press, and freely held public meetings. The Peronist Party was not permitted to participate, but Peronist elements tried to present lists and candidates under various disguises. The most prominent expression of the former Peronist movement was the Blue and White group (Azul y Blanco), named for the colors of the Argentinian flag, which put out a periodical of the same name. This group urged the voters to cast blank ballots. Argentina has compulsory voting, so that there was no possibility of an effective boycott of the election.

Seventeen parties were on the ballot in the capital, and thirty altogether in the country. For the first time women took part in the general election. Of approximately 10,000,000 eligible voters, 8,000,000 voted. More than a fourth of the voters (2,100,000) cast blank ballots. The parties in favor of changing the present constitution won a majority in the convention. Despite widespread economic hardship, and the difficulties resulting from the long years of dictatorship, the elections showed a marked popular will to democratization.

None of the issues in the elections was of special Jewish interest. Jewish candidates ran on various tickets, and were elected on the Socialist and Radical lists. But they were not regarded as representatives of the Jewish community. The Jewish Socialist groups (the Mapai and the Bund) campaigned for the Socialists. The Bund arranged an open air public election meeting, where for the first time in twenty years Yiddish was spoken openly. Jewish public opinion and Jewish periodicals in general supported the democratization of the constitution.

Population and Emigration

No accurate figures were available on the number of Jews in Argentina. But it was certain that the figure of 360,000, used for many years, was far too low.

The new government promised to liberalize the highly restrictive policies previously in effect in regard to immigration. Soprotimos, the local Jewish organization working with the United HIAS Service, aided more than 100
immigrant families, comprising 342 individuals, to enter Argentina in the period from July 1956 to June 1957. This figure covered only immigrant families which came to the Soprotimos aid committee. But there were also a good many immigrants who did not need or desire to go to this institution for assistance. Of the immigrants aided by Soprotimos, 60 per cent came from Hungary and 25 per cent were refugees from Egypt; the rest came from Morocco and the European countries.

An increasing number of applicants from behind the Iron Curtain, especially from Poland, sought to join their relatives in Argentina. It was expected that approximately 1,000 Jewish families who had immigrated through various indirect ways would receive a legal right to live and work in Argentina.

**Community Organization and Activity**

The first elections to the reorganized Buenos Aires Ashkenazic Kehilla (see *American Jewish Year Book, 1957* [Vol. 58], p. 406) took place on April 14, 1957. The elected councilmen were to serve for three years. Formerly, elections had been based on a plurality system, and there were usually two or three general lists of candidates. One of the lists was that of the so-called Progressives, the ideologists of the Yiddisher Kultur Farband (YKUF). There was always a danger that this group might elect a majority, if the votes were dispersed among various lists. They sometimes received as much as 30 per cent of the votes; in one year they got about 5,000 out of 15,000. During the elections of April 14, 1957, this danger was averted.

Under the new statutes of the community, ninety members were elected for three-year terms, instead of twenty-four for one-year terms, as formerly. These ninety constituted a kind of parliament, electing twenty-four members of the administration. There were ten electoral lists for the April 14 elections, and they represented all the tendencies in Jewish life. For the first time the elections were a kind of internal plebiscite, indicating the influence of each Zionist group within the Zionist movement.

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poale-Zion Mapai</td>
<td>6,004</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hashomer-Hatzair, Mapam</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisionists-Herut</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Jews</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People's Democrats (YKUF)</td>
<td>2,311</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal-Zionist Party</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Socialist Bloc (Bund)</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achduth-Haavodah—Left Poale Zion</td>
<td>2,490</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Zionist Federation</td>
<td>2,108</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Bloc (Mizrachi)</td>
<td>1,080</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>17,705</strong></td>
<td><strong>90</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of some 48,000 members of the Kehilla, some 38,000 had the right to vote; the others were not in good standing. The 17,718 who actually voted in-
cluded the active part of the community. This number was the largest ever to take part in Kehilla elections.

**Representation**

DAIA (Delegacion de Associaciones Israelitas Argentinas) acted as a coordinating body representing the majority of Jewish organizations in all fields. It was working for the improvement of its structure, so that it might properly represent the whole community. It hoped to eliminate the duplication of activity which existed in some fields between it and other groups, especially the Vaad Hakehilot, which was also a federation of all the communities in the country.

Several proposals were under consideration. One would retain the *status quo*, with certain modifications to broaden DAIA's basis. Another proposal called for broadening the Vaad Hakehilot, to include all other Jewish institutions not presently included in the community framework. The Vaad would then function as a genuinely representative body. A third proposal was for the formation of an Argentine Jewish Congress.

**Vaad Hakehilot**

The Vaad Hakehilot, the federation of all community councils in Argentina, continued during the period under review (July 1, 1956, through June 30, 1957) to work toward the consolidation of the organized communities and the creation of community organizations in places where they did not exist. It was in close contact with fifty-six active community councils in Argentina. In several dozen places efforts were being made to organize community councils. Some places, where the number of Jewish families was too small to permit the formation of organized groups, were united by the Vaad Hakehilot with the larger neighboring communities of the area.

Two representatives of the Vaad Hakehilot traveled through the Argentine provinces in order to stimulate activity, advise the local communities on their communal problems, tie them more closely to the central body, and create communal organizations wherever possible. They coordinated the activities, methods, and work of the community councils throughout the country. During 1956–57 the Vaad Hakehilot took responsibility for Jewish education in the Argentinian provinces.

**Jewish Education**

Until 1956–57 there had been two separate educational bodies, each conducting its own independent activity. These were the Vaad Hachinuch of the Buenos Aires Kehilla, and the Vaad Hachinuch Haroshi, which took care of the educational institutions in the provinces. The Vaad Hachinuch of the Kehillah was created in 1934. By 1957 it had 60 schools with 11,000 students, a teachers' seminary with 700 students, and a seminary for kindergarten teachers with 51 woman students.

The Kehilla subsidized all these institutions with 40 per cent of the tuition fee and serviced them with inspectors and pedagogic material prepared by the Vaad. The Kehilla also gave half the cost of construction or expansion
of school buildings. The Vaad Hachinuch Haroshi, administered and financed by the Congregacion Israelita de la Republica Argentina, possessed 72 schools in the provinces, with about 5,000 students, and some 140 teachers. More than 50 of these were one-teacher schools. Some of these had as many as 50 students.

The Vaad Hachinuch Haroshi also had two teachers' institutes in Buenos Aires (one for young men, one for young women), and a teachers' seminary in Moiseville, called Judaism.

During 1956–57 there was a merger of the two central educational bodies, and by agreement with the Congregacion Israelita, the Vaad Hakehilot took over the supervision of the schools in the provinces.

In connection with this consolidation an Assembly for Education met on March 16-17, 1957. It was the first all-Argentine Jewish educational congress.

In 1955–56 another split which had existed in Jewish education in Argentina for years was ended. The extreme Orthodox sector, under the influence of Agudat Israel, had opposed the Kehilla, and the Orthodox Heichal Hatorah, with about 500 students, was not included in the educational network of the Vaad Hachinuch. It therefore did not receive the 40 per cent subsidy which the other schools received, or any of Vaad Hachinuch's services. The Orthodox group also bought its own cemetery, which placed it in competition with the Kehilla, whose income came largely from its cemeteries. After long negotiations, the new cemetery was transferred to the ownership of the Kehilla, and the Agudat Israel's Heichal Hatorah, and the yeshiva associated with it, were included in the general subsidy program of the Vaad Hachinuch. The YKUF schools, with 2,000 students, remained outside the Vaad Hachinuch's network.

**Religious Activity**

The lack of religious influence in the Jewish life of Argentina was indicated by the fact that only 500 of the 11,000 Jewish students in the capital attended the Heichal Hatorah, and that the religious list received about 1,000 votes out of some 7,000 votes cast in the Kehilla elections.

In the provinces there was no religious education, and not a single organized branch of the religious groups—Mizrachi or Agudat Israel. In the fall of 1956, the Kehilla brought Rabbi Avigdor Cyperstein from the United States to be chief rabbi of Buenos Aires. Under his influence, a beginning was made toward the development of religious institutions. Plans were under consideration for the Kehilla to take over the supervision of the provision of kosher meat. The Jewish communities in the provinces, some with thousands of families, did not have a single rabbi, and many had no ritual slaughterer. The Vaad Hakehilot planned to conduct courses for ritual slaughterers and other religious functionaries.

**Zionist and Pro-Israel Activities**

During 1956–57 the Zionist General Council representing all the Zionist parties undertook to establish a general, nonpartisan Zionist organization.
While all the Zionist parties continued to exist, they all were united in the effort to form a unified Zionist national organization. Registration for this organization was taking place throughout the country, but there were no figures yet available.

Fund raising for Israel was intensified during 1956-57. Besides the usual united campaign for Israel (Magbit), there was a special emergency campaign for arms, connected with the Sinai operation. It was reported that the emergency campaign yielded as much money as the normal yearly campaign, and the regular yearly campaign far surpassed previous years, both in number of contributors and in funds contributed. For the first time, there was also an Israel Bond Drive, but no information as to its result was available.

Zionist political activity was largely devoted to explaining to non-Jewish public opinion Israel's relations with her Arab neighbors and the Sinai campaign. Arab circles in Latin America in general and Argentina in particular conducted quite an active anti-Israel campaign. The local Nazi organ Der Weg also engaged in anti-Israel agitation.

The Zionist movement sponsored a large meeting for "Peace in the Middle East" in Buenos Aires in November 1956. Among the participants were Alfredo Palacios, then ambassador to Uruguay, writers Alicia Moreau de Gusto and Arturo Capdevila, and other prominent leaders of all Argentinian political tendencies and leading Argentinian intellectuals.

An Argentinian-Israel Council for Cultural Exchange was established May 23, 1957. Its provisional administrative committee included many of the most respected personalities of Argentinian intellectual life. Leading federal and local officials including Foreign Minister Alfonso de LaFerrere participated in the ceremonies accompanying the designation of a street in the city of San Martin (in the province of Buenos Aires) as "Republica de Israel."

A number of leading Argentinians visited the State of Israel. One of them was Professor Alfredo L. Palacios, a leader of the Argentinian Socialist Party. On his return he expressed his admiration for Israel at a series of mass meetings.

During 1956-57, 525 chalutzim emigrated to Israel. This included young people who went to collective settlements, families who went to settlements formed by Argentinian Jews, and members of the professions. Numerous groups of young people from the Noar Chalutzi Lochem (Fighting Pioneer Youth) and Year of Service groups also went for two-year visits. Experience had shown that a certain number of these, too, remained in Israel. At five active hachsharah training farms, conducted by the various ideological Zionist chalutz movements, candidates for emigration were prepared technically and spiritually. The Camara de Comercio Argentino-Israeli did effective work for Israel in local business circles, interesting them in the Israel market, and developing commercial relations between Israel and leading Argentinian export and import firms.

**Cultural Activity**

The Midrasha had been founded in Buenos Aires in 1952 by the Histadruth Ivrit with the aim of preparing teachers for Hebrew middle-schools in Latin
Argentina, as well as to create a Hebraist intelligentsia. More recently, it established an institute for Israel culture in Argentina (Instituto Cultural Argentino-Israeli), conducted by a communal governing body composed of representatives of the Histadruth Ivrit, the central committee of the Vaad Hachinuch of Argentina, and the cultural attaché of the Israel Embassy. The pedagogic supervision was entrusted to the cultural department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine.

In 1956–57 the Midrasha had seventy-two students in its four-year course, and graduated seven students. It also conducted special Hebrew extension courses for adults. As many as 300 students took part in these supplementary courses. Three of the six teachers in the Midrasha were from Israel.

Publications

Almost every political trend in the settlement had its ideological periodical in Spanish. In addition, there were a number of nonparty publications during 1956–57. La Luz, a monthly founded by the Sephardic scholar David Elnecave twenty-five years ago, was at first intended only for the Sephardic circles. In recent years it extended its influence to Ashkenazic circles. The nonpartisan weekly Mundo Israelita, edited by Leon Kibrik, had been in existence eighteen years, supplying general information, but giving its primary attention to Israel and Jewish life all over the world.

Eretz Israel, an illustrated monthly, appeared regularly from April 1943 on, under the editorship of Abraham Mibashan. At the end of the period under review, its circulation was 12,500.

Davar, a bimonthly publication established by the Sociedad Hebraica Argentina in 1945, offered works of significant intellectual interest concerning Jewish life and culture. It carried essays on Jewish history, literature, and science. It was edited by an editorial board, whose secretary was Bernardo Verbitzky.

Jerusalem, a bimonthly put out by the united Zionist organization in Argentina, began to appear in January 1953, and dealt with all matters relating to Israel, Zionism, and the relation of Israel to the Diaspora. It was edited by Luis Karduner, with the aid of Isaac Arcavi.


The first number of Amanecer, an independent national Jewish daily with an orientation to Israel, appeared on March 18, 1957, under the editorship of Professor Lazaro Schallman.

A number of publishing houses specialized in the publication in Spanish of books with a Jewish character and content. The oldest of these was Editorial Israel, directed by an editorial board headed by Joseph Mirlman. From its establishment in 1937 to the time of writing, it had published fifty books.

The Sociedad Hebraica's publishing house began its activity in 1925, and up to the time of writing had published thirty-four books.

The Candelabro publishing house, a privately owned firm directed by
Abraham Mibashan, was established in 1953, and as of July 1957 had published twenty-three books.

Another private firm, the Acervo Cultural publishing house, was founded in 1952 by Abraham I. Weiss. It had published seventeen books. The private publishing house of I. Segal had put out a series of ritual-liturgic publications, as well as a number of scholarly works, including Simon Dubnow's *World History of the Jewish People*.

A number of books on Jewish topics in Spanish had also been published from time to time by publishing houses no longer in existence or by individuals.

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**BRAZIL**

The political crisis which followed the suicide of President Getulio Vargas in August 1954 reached its culmination on November 11, 1955, when a bloodless army coup removed Carlos Luz, acting president of Brazil during the illness of President Joăv Cafe Filho. The army did not permit Cafe Filho to return to complete the last months of his term. The aim of the coup was to assure the installation of President-elect Juscelino Kubitschek. The army leaders charged that certain groups were conspiring to keep Kubitschek from the office he had won in the elections of October 2, 1955. Kubitschek took office at the end of January 1956. But the political crisis continued long after the elections. At the same time the economy suffered from a severe and increasing inflation, which in turn led to frequent strikes.

President Kubitschek continued the liberal policy of Cafe Filho toward the Jews. In September 1956 he sent a special Rosh Hashanah greeting to the Jews of Brazil. In the same month he personally intervened on behalf of a United HIAS Service request that the state department for immigration and colonization authorize the immigration of 1,000 Jewish families from North Africa, principally from Morocco. They were permitted to enter over a period of two years in groups of fifty individuals, and to settle away from the large cities.

**Civil and Political Status**

The generally liberal Brazilian constitution of 1946 still included a large number of limitations on the political and economic rights of naturalized citizens. These limitations hindered the participation of Jews in the political life of the country. A proposal to grant naturalized citizens the same rights as native-born Brazilians, except the right to hold the offices of President or Vice President of the Republic or Governor or Vice Governor of a Brazilian state, was introduced in the Federal Congress on April 24, 1957.
Immigration

The Jewish population was estimated at 120,000. The chief change during the period from July 1956 to June 1957 came from the admission of more than 2,500 Jewish refugees, about 1,750 from Egypt, and the rest from Hungary and from the North African immigration previously referred to. The United HIAS Service sponsored 1,975 of the refugees; the rest came privately. Most of the refugees settled in São Paulo. In September 1957, many were still being supported by local immigrant committees, with the aid of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and United HIAS Service.

Community Organization and Activities

The third national assembly of the Confederation of Jewish Institutions in Brazil met from November 1 to 4, 1956, in the city of São Paulo, under the presidency of Professor Fritz Feigel. Of the sixty delegates, twenty were from Rio, twenty from São Paulo, and seven from Porto Alegre. The confederation, founded in 1951, represented over a hundred affiliated institutions, including the federations in the larger cities. With offices in Rio de Janeiro, it was the only organized representative body of Brazilian Jews.

There was a good deal of construction of Jewish community buildings. On August 26, 1956, in Rio, the cornerstone was laid for a large building for the Hebraica Society. In São Paulo on the same day, the cornerstone was laid for the religious educational center Merkaz Chinukh Charedi, to include an elementary school, a middle school, and a talmudic academy. On October 28, 1956, in Rio there took place the ceremony of roof-covering of the old folks' home. And the Circulo Israelita Society, after thirty years of existence, bought a building of its own in September 1956.

Jewish Education

With few exceptions, the whole Jewish educational system of Brazil was controlled and financed by the Zionist National Council for Culture and Education (Moetzah Artzit Letarbut Vechinuch) with headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. The Vaad Hachinuch of the Federation of Jewish Institutions in São Paulo, which formerly controlled the Jewish education system of São Paulo, joined the National Council in February 1957. Beginning in 1952, a large number of teachers arrived from Israel. They revitalized the educational system, permitting the opening of new schools and helping schools which were in danger of losing their Yiddish-Hebrew studies because of a shortage of teachers. At the time of writing (September 1957), some 5,000 children were studying in these full-time schools throughout Brazil. In Rio and São Paulo there were also institutes for Hebrew culture, with a large number of adult courses. From July 7 to 14, 1956, the fourth national assembly of teachers and kindergarten teachers met in Rio under the auspices of the National Council. From May 18 to 20, 1957, an assembly of Jewish school activists from the whole country was held in Rio. General studies in
the Jewish schools were conducted in Portuguese. Their curriculum was the same as that of the national schools, plus two or three hours a day devoted to Jewish studies.

**Zionist and Pro-Israel Activities**

Jewish communal life was dominated by the Zionist movement, to which a large part of the Jewish youth belonged.

During the period between September 1956 and September 1957, there were 147 emigrants to Israel. Ichud Hanoar Hachalutz supplied 101, Hashomer Hatzair 32, Betar 9, and Hakibbutz Hameuchad 5.

On December 13, 1956, the Confederation of Jewish Institutions of Rio brought almost 2,000 persons together in the Theater Carlos Gomes to protest against the persecution of Jews in Egypt. Some non-Jewish members of the Brazilian parliament took part.

On July 18, 1956, Israel's new minister to Brazil, Arie Aroch, presented his credentials to President Juscelino Kubitschek. In August 1956, Aroch opened the first Israel consulate in the city of São Paulo.

**Cultural Activities**

The books published in Brazil in Yiddish from 1955 to 1957 were: *Naye un alte heym*, stories by Malka Apelbaum; *Unzer baytrog*, the first Yiddish anthology in Brazil; *Aspecten funem yidishen leben in Brazil*, by S. Karakus-chansky; *Oyf brazilianishen boden*, stories by Clara Steinberg; and *Baym geroysh fun atlantic*, a book of stories by Rosa Palatnik.

As in previous years, several Jewish periodicals appeared regularly in Brazil, in addition to irregular publications such as party bulletins.

The Zionist weeklies *Yiddishe Presse* and *Di Brazilianer Yiddishe Tzaytung* appeared regularly in Yiddish in Rio de Janeiro. In Portuguese, Rio had the Zionist weekly *Aonde Vamos?*, and *Jornal Israelita*. In São Paulo, the Zionist newspaper *Der Nayer Moment* and the leftist *Unzer Shtime* appeared in Yiddish twice weekly. *Cronica Israelita*, organ of the German-speaking Jews, was published in Portuguese, as was the Zionist periodical *Brasil-Israel*; both appeared fortnightly.

ELIAS LIPINER

**BOLIVIA**

BOLIVIA is both one of the newest countries of Jewish settlement in the Western hemisphere, and one of the oldest. But there is no continuity between the original Jewish immigration and the present Jewish community. Many names of old Christian families in Bolivia indicate that their ancestors immigrated to "High Peru" as Marranos; many families, especially in the cities of Sucre, Santa Cruz, and Tarija, but also elsewhere, still preserve Jew-
ish customs, though usually without realizing it. Thus in these cities, prior to the Chaco War, it was a common custom to light candles on Friday evening. Wars dissolve habits, and so during that war many families abandoned a custom whose meaning they had long since ceased to understand. It is also a common custom in Bolivia to preserve deep mourning (shivah) for seven days after a death, and individual churches preserve modes of worship which point to a Marrano origin.

Many families, especially among intellectuals, are well acquainted with their Marrano origin. But without exception they are good Catholics, and only in their strong interest in developments in Israel does one suspect that the Marrano tradition is showing a last sign of life.

At the beginning of the twentieth century individual Jews began coming to Bolivia, mostly from Alsace and Poland. For the most part they quickly merged with the general population, where only their names still testify to their existence. The small group that held together numbered only thirty families in the entire country in 1930.

**New Immigration**

The first numerically important immigration began with the persecutions in Germany in the 1930's. Bolivia was one of the few countries which put practically no obstacles in the way of immigration, and for a time even encouraged it. Hence, over the years there came to Bolivia many Jews who looked on it as only a temporary stopping-place; especially after the outbreak of World War II, many came in search of asylum, with the idea of rejoining their families elsewhere in quieter times.

During World War II, the Jewish population rose to 10,000. At the end of the war there began an emigration, especially of the German-speaking Jews who at that time constituted the majority. These went to rejoin their families, chiefly in the United States and in the countries bordering Bolivia. At the same time, some survivors of the concentration camps came to Bolivia. The emigration continued until 1954, when the Jewish population had fallen to about 4,000; after that year, it remained stable. (The total population of Bolivia was about 3,500,000.) La Paz had about 3,000 Jews, Cochabamba 800, Oruro 80, Santa Cruz 60, Tarija 60, and Sucre 21. Individual Jews also lived in the tropical zone of Bolivia, the Beni, but communications with that area were so poor that little was known of them. Attempts to secure accurate statistics on the Jews of Bolivia in respect to such factors as age groups had so far been unsuccessful.

After experiencing initial difficulties, the Jewish immigrants established themselves economically, especially in trade and industry. They created a men's and women's clothing industry, which had never previously existed in Bolivia, and which remained almost entirely in Jewish hands. Individual Jews also were successful in the textile industry. A Jew established the only big silk mill in Bolivia, while others went into the cotton industry. Jews were also successful in the shoe and leather industries. A high percentage of Jews were to be found in retail trade.

Only a few Jews were able to establish themselves in the liberal profes-
sions, mainly in teaching. The idiosyncrasies of Bolivian law made the practice of their profession seem unattractive to lawyers. A few former lawyers did build up a practice in restitution questions, but not in the Bolivian courts. A number of physicians were able to establish their right to practice, some by the normal procedures established by law, and others by going into the army, where they served a number of years in remote areas and attained high rank. Nevertheless, the number of physicians who eventually made their homes in Bolivia was very small; in the whole country there were probably not ten Jewish physicians. Nevertheless, Jews in the liberal professions made significant contributions to the country.

Economic Situation

In recent years Bolivia had experienced one of the most severe inflations on the American continent. The boliviano fell from 100 to the dollar in 1950 to 14,000 to the dollar in 1956. In December 1956 President Siles Zuazo and the Congress introduced a stabilization program. The boliviano was pegged at 7,600 to the dollar; between then and the time of writing (fall of 1957) its value had not changed significantly.

Both inflation and stabilization harmed industry and commerce, and disheartened many people. The Jewish community in Bolivia was identified with the effort at stabilization, but was particularly hard hit by the process because of its concentration in industry and trade. An improvement in the economic situation would improve the condition of the Jews. In contrast to the situation in some other countries, the extraordinarily severe economic crisis brought no anti-Jewish discrimination. Hence the prospects for future intercommunal relations, after the economic clouds had lifted, were excellent.

Civil Status

No statistics were available on the number of Jews who had become Bolivian citizens, and the number retaining their former nationalities. But the number naturalized was very large; naturalization was granted very liberally, especially in the year and a half of the Siles Zuazo government. Foreigners enjoyed the same rights as citizens, except of course in the political sphere. In recent years there was no discrimination against Jews; the Comite Central Israelita Bolivia, originally set up by all the Jewish organizations for the purpose of defending the rights of the Jewish population, turned to other tasks. Those Jewish organizations which sought it received personeria from the government; that is, their statutes were officially recognized, and they received legal personality.

Community Organization

The first Jewish organization in Bolivia, the Circulo Israelita of La Paz, was established in 1935 by Yiddish-speaking immigrants. Five years later the German-speaking immigrants founded the Comunidad Israelita de Bolivia. In time other organizations arose, including the Federación Sionista de
Bolivia, Macabi, Juedische Kulturgemeinschaft, and the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO).

These organizations later lost, to a considerable extent, their original character as groups based on the place of origin of their membership. In the provinces they generally united in a Union Israelita, and it seemed certain that the same development would take place in La Paz.

The Circulo Israel had an attractive clubhouse in La Paz, including an auditorium. It employed a shochet (ritual slaughterer) and held religious services. It also conducted extensive philanthropic activities, helping the sick with contributions toward their expenses or loans. The Communidad Israelita had a synagogue in La Paz. It was also the founder of a Jewish school, which in the last two years it conducted jointly with the Circulo Israelita. The Hogar Sara Gruensfeld, presented to the Communidad Israelita by the late Hans Gruensfeld, contained a home for the aged, communal rooms, and a home for the teachers in the Jewish school. The community conducted an adult education program of lectures.

In Cochabamba the Communidad Israelita supported a temple and a religious school, the Circulo Israelita, a clubhouse and a cemetery. The two organizations were at the time of writing (fall of 1957) engaged in merging into the Union Israelita. There were also clubhouses and prayer halls in Oruro, Sucre, and Tarija.

Immigrant Aid

Of special significance were the organizations set up, with the aid of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), for the reception of Jewish immigrants. At first the immigrants had been received by the Circulo Israelita. But the beginning of immigration on a scale unprecedented for Bolivia—neither before nor after did the country ever experience comparable immigration—made special measures necessary. Hence the Sociedad de Protección a las Immigrante de Israelitas (SOPRO) was formed. With the aid of the JDC, it bought two buildings in the Miraflores district of the city, and established offices and a children’s home in them. The good economic integration of the immigrants brought about changes in the work of SOPRO, which also became financially independent of the JDC. It continued its tradition of helping immigrants by supporting a home for the aged. Another home for the aged existed in Cochabamba; with the previously mentioned Gruensfeld home, there were three in all.

Jewish Schools

Perhaps the most important Jewish institution of Bolivia was the Colegio Boliviano Israelita. This school, founded in 1940 by the Jewish community, added a secondary school in 1954. It had two buildings with fifteen classrooms. Its 400 students ranged from kindergarten through six primary and six secondary grades. They received the officially recognized degree of Bachelor of Humanities, and were entitled to continue their education at the university. Thirty per cent of the students were Christian; they received the
same instruction as the Jewish students, except for religion. Seventy-five per cent of the Jewish students of La Paz attended the Jewish school. The number was on the rise. More Jewish children were constantly being drawn to the Jewish school by the steady improvement in its teaching staff and the projected erection of a new school building, for which land had already been acquired and architect's plans completed. Of the thirty-six teachers, six were Jewish, including a teacher of Hebrew from Israel. The school was unable to accommodate all the Christian children who wished to attend it, and the 30 per cent of the students who were Christian represented only a selected part of the applicants.

Zionist and Pro-Israel Activity

The founding of the State of Israel stirred both the Jews and the non-Jews of Bolivia. Consular relations were established between the two countries, but after the death of the consul, Francisco Suess, Israel's consulate in La Paz was abandoned; Bolivia continued to have a consul in Israel. Diplomatic relations between Bolivia and Israel were established in June 1957, and Ambassador Tuvia Arazi presented his credentials at a ceremony in which the entire Jewish population participated. In September the Bolivian government named one of its ablest diplomats, Walter Guevara Arce, who had been ambassador in Paris, as ambassador to Israel. He presented his credentials in November 1957.

The Instituto Cultural Boliviano Israeli united leading Bolivian circles with the Jewish community and with Israel. In May 1957 this institute assembled a representative library of Bolivian literature and ceremoniously sent it to Israel to be set up as a reference library.

Personalia

Roberto Herzenberg of Oruro, originally a mineralogist in the private mining industry, went into the employ of the state after the mines were nationalized; Bolivia recognized his services by giving his name to a new mineral which he discovered. He also performed great services in the educational field as the founder of the Colegio Anglo-Americano in Oruro, one of the most highly regarded schools in the country. Herzenberg, who died in 1956, represented Jewish interests proudly and ably.

Erich Eisner, who also died in 1956, had been a conductor in Munich and organized the National Philharmonic Orchestra, which he brought to a high level. This orchestra, with several Jewish members, remained the only one of its kind in Bolivia.

Jacobo Liebermann, the son of a Jewish immigrant, was the first Jew to become active in Bolivian political life. His intellectual abilities made him one of the leading figures in a La Paz literary circle (Gesta Barbara), and the revolutionary government of 1952 made him director of the department of education of the La Paz city administration. In 1956 the government of President Hernan Siles Zuazo made Liebermann deputy mayor of La Paz,
and on a number of occasions he was acting mayor in the absence of the mayor, until he withdrew from political life in 1957.

A number of Jews became professors in the University of Bolivia, while others served from time to time as advisers to the government in their fields. Arturo Posnansky made important contributions to Bolivian archaeology in connection with the pre-Inca religious sites of Tia Huanaco, and he often received official honors. It is not known whether or not he was baptized.

Günter Friedländer