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# Latin America \*

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## INTRODUCTION

**I**N varying degrees, most of Latin America experienced economic strain and political unrest during the period under review, mid-1958 to mid-1959. All were affected by steadily worsening terms of trade, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America reporting that prices of Latin America's industrial imports had risen seven per cent since 1955, while the prices of its exports, chiefly raw materials, had fallen four per cent. In addition, some of the products which Latin American countries sold on the world market had fewer customers, either because of declining demand or more frequently because of increasing production in other parts of the world. As a consequence, unsaleable surpluses of some commodities piled up—e.g., coffee—while cutbacks in the production of others, especially metals, resulted in increasing unemployment. These factors affected different countries in different degrees. Bolivia, still almost a one-industry country, was especially hard-hit by the almost permanent crisis of her tin industry, while Venezuela, although her oil industry suffered somewhat from Middle Eastern competition and United States import quotas, still derived a high and steady income from it, while increasingly supplementing it with the development of other natural resources and industrial production. For some countries, notably Argentina and Brazil, further economic difficulties arose from the costs of past, present, and future programs of industrialization. In Cuba and Venezuela hundreds of millions of dollars had been embezzled by exiled officials of their deposed regimes.

Unemployment and inflation produced unrest in a number of countries. Some countries, like Argentina, prodded by the International Monetary Fund and the United States Export-Import Bank, tried to apply classical deflationary techniques to reduce consumption. Others, like Brazil, fearing the political consequences of holding down wages and cutting back production or skeptical of the economic value of such measures, sought to expand production by currency and credit inflation, while hoping for increased markets and higher prices for their exports. Neither technique seemed particularly effective. Almost everywhere prices continued to rise, and the lag in the rise of wages led to repeated large-scale strikes. The repression of such strikes sometimes brought on political crises. In Argentina a special complication resulted from the continued loyalty of large sections of the urban and rural workers to the exiled Juan Domingo Perón.

In the Caribbean, tension steadily increased. The overthrow of the Venezuelan dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez in January 1958 was followed

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\* For meaning of abbreviations, see p. 359.

by the fall of Fulgencio Batista's Cuban dictatorship in January 1959, and the dictatorial regime of Rafael Trujillo Molinas in the Dominican Republic seemed to be threatened.

Whereas Venezuela held free elections within ten months after the ouster of its dictator, and was then governed by a coalition of three major parties (a unique experiment in Latin American politics), Cuba remained a *de facto* dictatorship with no democratic form of government even in sight. Venezuela maintained a common front with Cuba against common enemies like Trujillo, but internally President Rómulo Betancourt of Venezuela was firmly for democracy and against military juntas and Communists alike, while Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba, given to radical slogans and precipitate reforms, was dangerously close to the line which a Communist-led united front would follow if in power. Increasing divergencies between Premier Castro and such democratic leaders as President Betancourt of Venezuela and ex-President José Figueres of Costa Rica, and tension between Castro's regime and the United States, added a new complication to the picture.

The Jewish communities in the various countries continued to prosper. Many Jews were in the consumer-goods industries, which kept expanding and were even favored by measures designed to conserve foreign exchange by limiting imports. Immigration continued, especially to Brazil. Emigration to Israel was exceeded by immigration from Israel. Relations between Israel and most Latin American countries continued to be very friendly, and were strengthened by Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir's visit to Latin America from May to July 1959.

## ARGENTINA

**I**N the eight months after the inauguration of President Arturo Frondizi on May 1, 1958, serious inflationary developments had taken place and an unfavorable foreign-trade balance had reduced Argentine foreign-exchange reserves drastically. The government then appealed to the United States and the International Monetary Fund for aid. In return for its pledge to devalue the peso, make it convertible, impose various controls, and cut Argentine consumption, the government received credits of \$329 million—\$200 million from various United States government agencies, \$75 million from the International Monetary Fund, and \$54 million from a group of private banks. At the same time, it received a credit of \$90 million from the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey and Royal Dutch Shell Oil Company, which were among a group of companies that received contracts for the development of Argentine oil resources. In 1959 a further \$250 million was advanced by the International Monetary Fund and a group of private banks in the United States and Europe. With the aid of these credits, the government was able to bring Argentine reserves up to \$250 million by the end of 1959. The country's economic situation seemed likely to improve somewhat as a result of a rapid increase in petroleum production. A 450,000-ton steel plant was to begin production in 1960 and reach its full capacity in 1961, United States

auto companies were building assembly plants, and other factories were also nearing completion. But disastrous floods were a heavy blow to the grain and beef crops; in 1959 industrial production fell nine per cent, and in the first ten months of the year the cost of living rose almost two-thirds.

As a result, general strikes were an almost monthly occurrence. These were usually incompletely effective, because the democratic unions frequently failed to support the Peronist unions, which had the support of the majority of the workers, and because the government regularly resorted to mass arrests, suspension of constitutional guarantees, and the use of troops. (Legislation passed in August 1959, providing for only one union to be recognized in each industry, seemed likely in most cases to leave the Peronists a clear field.) Despite some concessions, wages continued to lag well behind prices. And because the armed forces increasingly resented being used by the government to break strikes, in the summer of 1959 President Frondizi was forced to dismiss his army, navy, and air ministers. Minister of Economy and Labor Alvaro C. Alsogaray, appointed in June 1959, sought to avoid the need for military repression of strikes by a policy of limited concessions.

A minor political crisis occurred in November 1958, when President Frondizi decided to force out Vice President Alejandro Gómez. It was quickly surmounted, however, since Gómez lacked a large personal following. More serious for the Frondizi government was its loss of popularity, as indicated in provincial elections. Thus in Mendoza province in April 1959, Frondizi's Intransigent Radical party polled only 22 per cent of the vote; the Conservatives led the poll with about a third of the vote; blank ballots, cast on the instructions of the illegal Peronist movement, were almost as numerous, and the Communist vote quintupled to a seventh of the total. The parliamentary elections due in March 1960 seemed likely to produce further trouble for the president.

In October the parliament approved a Catholic university system granting degrees equal to those of the state universities. Protesting students battled police in a series of skirmishes.

### *Jewish Community*

The Jewish population of Argentina was 400,000 out of a total population of 20,248,000.

The Jewish community, in the words of President Frondizi's Rosh ha-Shanah message to the Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA; central representative body of Argentine Jewry), made "a fruitful and constant contribution to the spiritual and material progress of Argentina."

In 1959 the community celebrated the 70th anniversary of the first Jewish agricultural settlement in Argentina, Moisesville, established in Santa Fé province in August 1889 by 136 Russian Jewish families, numbering over 800 persons. They had come to Argentina with the help of the Alliance Israélite Universelle and Baron Maurice de Hirsch. Later, the Jewish Colonization Association (ICA), founded by de Hirsch, settled almost 30,000 Jews in 25 Jewish agricultural colonies. In 1959, 2,000 Jewish families, or 8,000

persons, remained on the land. Six thousand to 7,000 other Jews lived in and around the agricultural settlements, making a Jewish rural population of 15,000 in all. Although this was only half the Jewish rural population at the peak of ICA's activities, the production of the colonies had not fallen. The Jewish colonies had pioneered in the Argentine agricultural cooperative movement, and thus made a major contribution to the development of Argentina.

In the cities the Jews were engaged mainly in the manufacture and sale of consumer goods.

The Federation of Argentine Jewish Communities, meeting in May 1959 in Buenos Aires with more than 300 representatives of 110 *kehillot*, called for greater cooperation between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, and also pledged full support for the emigration of pioneering youth to Israel.

#### MIGRATION

In 1958, 552 Jews left Argentina for Israel—323 professionals and artisans, and the rest *halutzim*. There were only about half as many Jewish immigrants to Argentina in the same period, despite the efforts of UHS and the Sociedad de Protección a los Inmigrantes Israelitas (SOPROTIMIS) to facilitate the entry of special groups such as refugees from the Arab countries.

#### INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Jews played a significant role in Argentine public life. There were four Jewish members of parliament and two Jewish governors, and for a time in 1959 David Blejer was minister of labor and social security.

In May 1959 the government gave the DAIA representation in the Argentine committee for UNESCO.

Antisemitism existed in some circles, and occasional incidents occurred. Thus in April 1959, 30 young nationalists smashed windows at the Sociedad Hebraica Argentina, the largest club of Spanish-speaking Jews in South America, with shouts of "Death to the Jews" and "Down with Bléjer." (David Bléjer was then minister of labor and social security.) A second attempt to attack the club was frustrated by the members, who had organized themselves for defense. Wide publicity was given to the incident by major Argentine newspapers. This was but one of a series of disorders in Buenos Aires and other Argentine cities, following widespread labor unrest.

In August 1959 DAIA asked the government to take action against the wreckers of an exhibit about the Hebrew University on the campus of Buenos Aires University and against other anti-Jewish actions, which were becoming more frequent.

In October 1958 a principal of a public commercial high school for girls in the center of a Jewish residential district in Buenos Aires made Jewish and Catholic girls sit apart. All the members of the parent-teachers' committee, both Catholics and Jews, resigned in protest, demanding the dismissal of the principal. An official investigation found "that the principal had engaged in discriminatory and antisemitic tactics."

## RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

The visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir to Argentina in May 1959 was the occasion for many demonstrations of friendship and cooperation between the two countries. The two houses of parliament held a joint session in her honor.

In August 1959 the chief chaplain of Israel's armed forces, Rabbi Solomon Goren, visited Archbishop Fermin Lafitte of Buenos Aires, vicar general of the Argentine army, and presented him with a Bible used in the Israeli army. In the same month former President Pedro Aramburu visited Israel "to see how Israel succeeded in raising the standard of living of inhabitants coming from various countries, and to view the country's achievements in conquering the desert."

The economic ties between the two countries were strengthened in May 1959 by the establishment of a £1-million bank, by the Koor Industries of Israel and the Argentine Jewish shareholders of the Agrobank of Buenos Aires, to facilitate transactions with Israel. The Argentine-Israeli Shipping Company was established on a parity basis to facilitate trade between the two countries.

## PERSONALIA

Pinie Katz, a noted Yiddish writer, founder and for many years leading editor of the Yiddish daily *Di Presse*, died in August 1959 at the age of 77. Born in Russia, he came to Argentina in 1889. He translated into Yiddish Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and many works by contemporary Argentine writers.

In September 1959 Marcus Regalsky died at the age of 74. He was a leading members of the editorial staff of the daily *Yiddishe Tzaytung* for 30 years. He also edited the Labor Zionist weekly *Naye Tzayt*. Born in Moscow, he emigrated to Argentina in 1918.

## BRAZIL

**I**N 1958 and the first half of 1959 Brazil enjoyed greater political quiet than in previous years. The main opposition party, the National Democratic Union, had cooperated with President Juscelino Kubitschek, whose term of office was to end in January 1961. However, the rampant inflation, the constantly rising cost of living, and the ensuing economic difficulties, as well as the approaching national elections, produced political agitation toward the end of the year.

Inflation raised the cost of living 34 per cent in the first nine months of 1959, and the cost of food 41 per cent. The daily meal of the Brazilian masses, rice and beans, had become almost a luxury which many could not afford, despite United States surplus beans, sold to Brazil at a nominal cost. Since the government failed to stimulate agriculture to keep pace with the rapidly growing population—from 36 million in 1929 to 65 million in 1959—low production, high prices, and a mass exodus to the cities ensued. The government's solution was to print more money.

The opposition blamed the government's stubbornness in building an unnecessary, ostentatious, and costly new capital, Brasilia, and its policy of encouraging rapid industrialization at the expense of a lagging agriculture. The government contended that Brasilia had nothing to do with the economic crisis, which it attributed to the unfavorable foreign market, especially for coffee. Even so, Brazil still led the effort to bring all coffee producers, including those in Africa, into an agreement to fix annual export quotas.

Brazil's petroleum industry, from which foreigners were excluded, produced 35 per cent more by mid-1959 than a year earlier. Steel production in 1958 totaled 1.5 million ingot tons, and it was estimated that in 1960 this amount would be doubled.

A relatively small United States credit to Brazil—\$233 million in all—was announced in August 1958, when Secretary of State John Foster Dulles visited that country: \$100 million from the Export-Import Bank, \$75 million from the International Monetary Fund, and \$58 million from a group of New York banks. As Brazil did not accept the deflationary recommendations of the International Monetary Fund, unlike Frondizi's Argentina, further credits were not forthcoming. But the Soviet Union expressed its willingness to buy Brazilian coffee in exchange for crude oil and industrial equipment, and the Brazilians agreed. This implied renewed Brazilian recognition of the Soviet Union in the near future.

### *Jewish Community*

The Jewish population of Brazil was 125,000 out of a total population of 62,725,000.

The Jewish population, belonging largely to the commercial and professional middle classes, suffered less from the unstable economic situation than most city dwellers. The community in the boom city of São Paulo was particularly able to strengthen its social and cultural services. At the end of March 1959 a new building for the \$30-million Jewish community center was dedicated. It contained a library, rooms for kindergarten, youth, and Boy Scout activities, a solarium, a swimming pool, and a well-equipped department for religious instruction. A synagogue seating 1,200, with offices and a social center, was opened in 1958.

### IMMIGRATION

From 1957 to 1959 close to 4,200 Jewish immigrants settled in Brazil with the assistance of UHS and the local communities—2,900 Egyptian refugees, 700 Hungarian refugees, 380 Polish, Rumanian, and other East European immigrants, and 180 from North Africa, Syria, and Lebanon. About 1,000 additional immigrants came from Israel. The adjustment of the new immigrants was highly satisfactory. Some of them settled in the region of the country's still unfinished Brasilia.

### CIVIC AND POLITICAL STATUS

Many Jewish citizens played an important part in Brazil's economic and political life. In August 1959 former Finance Minister Horacio Lafer, head

of the huge industrial enterprises of the Klabin family, was named minister of foreign affairs. Another prominent Jew, Israel Pinheiro, was in charge of the construction of Brasília, the new capital scheduled to be inaugurated in April 1960. Henrique Henkin of Porto Alegre, the son of one of the first Jewish colonists in Brazil, was appointed chief of police of Rio Grande do Sul in February 1959.

All observers agreed that there was little bias against any minority group in the country. The Rio de Janeiro city council renamed an avenue after Sholem Aleichem in honor of his centenary. But in September 1959 a São Paulo court held that Jews must vote, under Brazil's compulsory voting laws, even though the elections fell on a Jewish holiday.

#### RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

In June 1959 Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir received the highest Brazilian decoration for foreigners, the Gran Cruz Ordem Nacional Cruzeiro do Sul, and was honored at a joint reception by the two houses of parliament. A cultural-exchange treaty was signed during her visit.

One of Israel's leading painters, Moses Kastel, received a prize of 100,000 cruzeiros (about \$550) for works submitted to the fifth biennial São Paulo exhibition of modern art in September 1959.

## URUGUAY

URUGUAY experienced an economic crisis. Her main exports, cattle and wool, were hard hit when the United States-owned Armour and Swift packing companies abandoned their plants in Uruguay at the end of 1957 as a result of a strike of the packing-house workers. For several months, despite an increase in the capacity of the government's own packing houses, a large part of the country's production could not be processed and exported. By the time the plants were taken over and reopened as workers' cooperatives in the autumn of 1958, the damage had been done. Commercial slaughter for the year fell 39 per cent and meat exports 59 per cent. The Uruguayan peso fell sharply and prices rose about 25 per cent, although stringent controls kept the country's foreign trade in balance.

The disastrous effects on agriculture led to the defection of an important bloc of small farmers from the liberal Colorado party, under which Uruguay had become known as the most democratic country in South America. In the elections of November 1958 the rightist Blanco party also appealed to pensioners and others with fixed incomes by charging that inflation was destroying the value of their incomes, and promising to save the peso. As a result, it succeeded in defeating the Colorados for the first time in 93 years. The dominant wing of the Blancos, led by Luis Alberto de Herrera, had in the past been extremely antagonistic to the United States and friendly to Juan Perón, and during World War II had been widely regarded as pro-Nazi. To form a government, however, it had to have the collaboration of the small farmers' group which had come over to it from the Colorados.

The two Blanco factions managed to reach an agreement on a cabinet, and Martín R. Etchegoyen was named chief of state. The new government took office at the beginning of March. Early in April Herrera died.

The new government removed exchange controls and discontinued many other controls and subsidies, and prices promptly rose 40 per cent. They might have risen more if the government had not imposed a "retention" tax on the proceeds of exports (50 per cent for wool) and used it in part to subsidize certain imports. It also confronted troubles not of its own making when, in the spring of 1959, disastrous floods ruined much of the grain and animal crop. As a result, Uruguay was forced to purchase for domestic use United States surplus agricultural commodities which it normally exported. Rising prices led to strikes throughout the year, especially among civil servants and in government-owned enterprises; in general, these resulted in wage increases of 30 per cent, so that wages still lagged substantially behind the increase in prices. The unfavorable trade balance, \$55 million in the first ten months of 1959, caused a sharp drop in the country's gold reserves. A new trade deficit seemed likely for 1960, and the government entered into negotiations for assistance from the International Monetary Fund and various United States agencies. It also secured a loan of \$8 million for livestock rehabilitation and improvement from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

### *Jewish Community*

In 1958 the Jewish community of Uruguay celebrated its 50th anniversary. Of an estimated 50,000 Jews in a total population of 2,700,000, 90 per cent lived in the capital, Montevideo. In Paisandu and Salto there were well-organized small Jewish communities, and small numbers of Jews were scattered among 50 other towns. The Jews in the provinces tended to migrate to the capital as soon as their children grew old enough to need more adequate educational facilities than were available in the small towns and villages. (The Yiddish Sunday schools in the cities of Salto and Rocha recently closed down because so many of their pupils had moved to Montevideo in order to continue their education.) Only Paisandu, among all the smaller communities, still had a fully organized Jewish community life, with all religious and educational facilities.

There were four separate Jewish groupings in Montevideo: East European, with 4,000 registered members (a registered member was usually the head of a family of three or four); Sephardi, 1,500; German, 1,400, and Hungarian, 800. All were united in the Jewish Central Committee, which represented the Jewish community in its relations with the authorities.

Of the six rabbis in Uruguay, all in Montevideo, the East Europeans had three. There were six synagogues in Montevideo and one in Paisandu, all Orthodox. There were also three Jewish schools, each with its own building, and a small yeshivah organized by newly-arrived ultra-Orthodox Jews from Hungary. About 1,100 Jewish children attended supplementary Jewish schools in Montevideo, and there was a similar school in Paisandu. About a fifth of

the Jewish families observed *kashrut*, and Montevideo had two kosher restaurants.

Through the Cooperativa Comercial, several thousand small merchants were able to buy and sell, on credit, commodities ranging from housewares to automobiles. It was the main bastion of Jewish economic life in the country. A cooperative bank made small and medium loans. The Banco Palestina financed not only business with Israel, but also local enterprises.

The long-established Centro Médico Israelita, a mutual institution for aid to the sick, bought a sanatorium building in 1958 and planned to open its own hospital. In 1959 Hebraica, a club for the youth and adult intelligentsia of all the four major Jewish communities of Montevideo, completed a seven-story building with all social and cultural facilities. In 1958 ha-Koah Maccabee, with a membership of over 2,500, completed a huge sports stadium, one of the best in Uruguay. The stadium and Hebraica helped to strengthen the younger generation's ties to the Jewish community.

Most second-generation Uruguayan Jews tried to obtain higher education. It was estimated that Uruguay had more than 400 Jewish physicians, lawyers, engineers, and architects.

#### MIGRATION

From 1948 to 1959, 2,000 Jews immigrated to Uruguay and 1,200 emigrated to Israel. According to the Jewish Agency, the latter included 612 middle-class emigrants, 550 *halutzim*, and 38 professionals.

#### JEWISH PRESS

There were two Yiddish dailies, *Folksblat* and *Unzer Fraynt*, and one Yiddish weekly, *Der Moment*. In Spanish there was the semimonthly *Revista Familiar Israelita*. The weekly *Boletín Informativo-Gemeindeblatt* was the organ of the German-speaking Jewish community, and there were several minor publications in Yiddish and Spanish.

## VENEZUELA

IN 1958 the revolutionary junta that had taken power after the overthrow of the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship in January had to normalize Venezuelan political and economic life and prepare the ground for democratic elections. It also had to suppress a series of attempted counterrevolutionary coups. One of these, in July 1958, had the support of part of the army. After its suppression Defense Minister General José María Castro León was forced to resign and leave the country as a result of the widespread belief that the conspirators had had his sympathy. Despite this and other attempted military revolts, free elections were held in December 1958. Former President Rómulo Betancourt, candidate of the Democratic Action party, was elected by a wide margin, and his party won control of congress. In the city of Caracas itself, however, he ran second to Admiral Wolfgang Larrizábal, who had headed the revolutionary junta and ran as the candidate of the Republican Demo-

cratic Union. (Larrizábal also had the support of the Communists, to whom Betancourt, a democratic socialist, was anathema.) After the election Betancourt formed a coalition government in which his own Democratic Action party joined with the Republican Democratic Union and the liberal Catholic COPEI.

Both the junta and the Betancourt government had to deal with difficult financial problems because the Pérez Jiménez regime had not only used up Venezuela's large current oil revenues, but had also contracted external and internal short-term debts totaling \$1.5 billion. To meet the most urgent debts, the junta negotiated a loan in New York—on favorable terms, because oil revenues assured repayment. The major oil companies also helped out both the junta and the Betancourt government on a number of occasions by paying taxes for several months in advance.

Although Venezuela's oil income suffered somewhat from the existence of a worldwide oil surplus and from the imposition of import quotas by the United States, it still remained ample for the country's needs and provided the means for an ambitious program of agricultural and industrial development. Some aspects of this program were undertaken by private foreign capital; United States steel companies, for example, were active in the exploitation of Venezuela's huge reserves of iron ore. But the Betancourt government was not content to have the country's economy dependent solely on exports of raw materials. It planned to use these resources to create steel and petrochemical industries. It also sought to end Venezuela's dependence on imports of food and consumer goods, which made the Venezuelan cost of living one of the highest in the world. To increase domestic food production, it sought to expand the cultivable area by irrigation. At the same time it inaugurated a land-reform program intended both to benefit the peasants and to encourage more intensive use of the land. And it encouraged the development of consumer-goods industries by both domestic and foreign capital.

Unemployment remained a major problem, especially in Caracas. Where possible, the government tried to resettle on the land the rural workers who had been attracted by the boom atmosphere of the mushrooming capital. It also provided some temporary employment on public works. However, a reduction in the public-works program led to large-scale riots in Caracas in August 1958, and the government was forced to suspend certain constitutional guarantees for a month. From time to time, groups close to the former regime also attempted to incite revolts. The government was able to repress these without much difficulty, since the overwhelming majority of the people were determined to prevent any return of the military dictatorship. A more substantial danger was that the Communists, already strong among students and in some unions and professional groups, might be able to cause serious trouble if the government's economic-development program was inadequately successful in increasing employment opportunities and bringing down the cost of living.

### *Jewish Community*

Of Venezuela's population of over six million, about 8,000 were Jews. The Jewish communities of Caracas and Maracaibo continued to develop normally. At the beginning of 1959 immigration was virtually stopped by the government, for the time being, because of the overcrowded condition of Caracas, and Jewish immigration was limited to family-reunion cases. About a fifth of the Jewish population of Venezuela—over a thousand persons—had entered the country since 1957. About half came from Eastern Europe, Egypt, and North Africa, and were assisted in their emigration and resettlement by UHS in cooperation with the local communities. The other half came from Israel on their own. The Jewish immigrants had adjusted well and rapidly, and it was expected that Jewish immigration would resume when the restrictions were relaxed.

## MEXICO

**I**N the presidential elections of July 1958 Adolfo López Mateos was chosen to succeed President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, in whose cabinet he had been minister of labor. As the candidate of the government-backed PRI (Party of Revolutionary Institutions), he was elected overwhelmingly, although the opposition vote was larger than in previous elections. For the first time women voted in a presidential election.

Despite the recession in most of the free world, the Mexican economy continued to expand in 1958. Gross national production in real terms rose four per cent. Crop prospects for 1959 were excellent, and exports and imports were roughly in balance during the first quarter of 1959.

In March 1959 Mexico was granted \$190 million in stand-by credits by the Export-Import Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to help bolster the peso. Government expenditures in 1959 were expected to run slightly below 1958, and private foreign and domestic investments were expected to expand as a result of greater confidence in the peso.

In 1958 there were strikes of telephone operators and railway, textile, and oil workers. In large part these strikes were conducted by insurgent groups seeking to oust the officially recognized union leaders. The government charged that they were Communist-inspired and arrested many of the strike leaders, holding some for months without trial.

Another event which marred the economic picture, and also United States-Mexican relations, was Mexico's lead and zinc slump, because of import quotas established by the United States.

The visit of United States President Dwight D. Eisenhower to President López Mateos in the spring of 1959, and the subsequent visit of Milton Eisenhower, improved relations between the two countries.

During Israeli Foreign Minister Meir's visit to Mexico in June 1959, a cultural agreement was signed.

## *Jewish Community*

The Jewish population of Mexico was estimated at 26,000 at the end of 1958, of a total population of 32,348,000. Somewhat less than two-thirds were Ashkenazim, and the rest were Sephardim, more than half from Syria. About 23,000 lived in the capital, 450 in Monterey, and 300 in Guadalajara. The rest were scattered throughout the country. About 80 per cent were Mexican citizens.

The community was organized in the *Comité Central Israelita de México*, but every congregation and group maintained full autonomy. The governing body of the *Comité Central* consisted of delegated representatives from the Ashkenazim, the European Sephardim, two Syrian groups, and separate German, Hungarian, and American congregations.

In July 1959, for the first time since 1948, the Yiddish-speaking sector of the community held elections to choose its 45 delegates to the *Comité Central*. Only 1,540 voted, about half of those eligible. Of the 45 seats the Zionist Religious bloc received 20; OSE, 7; the Jewish School, 5; the *Hilfsverein*, 4; the Bund, 4; *Agudat Israel*, 3, and I. L. Peretz School, 2.

The smaller congregations had neither synagogues nor rabbis, and depended on the larger ones for Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur services.

### EDUCATION

The Jewish school system in Mexico was one of the best in Latin America. It consisted of nine all-day schools, seven in the capital and one each in Guadalajara and Monterey. About 90 per cent of the Jewish children of school age attended those schools. The largest were *Colegio Israelita de México* (Spanish-Yiddish-Hebrew), *Escuela Israelita "Yavne"* (Hebrew-Spanish), *Bet-Sefer Tarbut* (Hebrew-Spanish), *Colegio Hebreo Sefardí* (Spanish-Hebrew), *Colegio Hebreo Monte Sinai* (Spanish-Hebrew), and *Escuela Nueva I. L. Peretz* (Yiddish-Spanish), all in Mexico City. Of the 4,200 pupils in the Jewish schools, 55 per cent were boys. There were 210 teachers in the Jewish school system, 60 for Jewish and 150 for general subjects.

The Jewish Teachers Seminary was still not able to meet the need for Jewish teachers in Mexico, vacancies being filled by teachers from Israel and the United States.

### OTHER ACTIVITIES

Interest in Zionism and pro-Israel activities predominated, but a strong minority (Jewish Socialist Bund) worked mostly in the local social and cultural field. All shades of the Zionist movement were separately organized. *Po'ale Zion* had a membership of 600, General Zionists 500, Mizrahi 450, and Revisionists 300. Local social services were provided by the *Hilfsverein*, the main Ashkenazi aid society. Various women's committees specialized in family and child care. WIZO and the Pioneer Women had 700 and 150 members respectively.

## PRESS

For a small community, the Jewish press both in Yiddish and Spanish was varied. It included *Der Veg*, appearing three times a week, Yiddish, pro-Zionist, circulation about 800; *Di Shtimme*, twice a week, Yiddish, nonpartisan, 1,000; *Mexicaner Leben*, weekly, Yiddish and Spanish, nonpartisan, 2,000, and *Prensa Israelita*, weekly, Spanish, nonpartisan, 1,500. The monthly organ of the Bund, *Foroys*, in Yiddish, had a circulation of 1,000; another Yiddish monthly, *Tzionistische Tribune*, issued by the General Zionists, had 1,500, and the monthly *Tribuno Israelita*, Spanish, nonpartisan, had 2,000. The schools published annual reports containing abundant material on Jewish education in Mexico and other countries.

## CUBA

ON January 1, 1959, the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista came to an end with the flight of the dictator and the capitulation of his armed forces to the revolutionary Twenty-Sixth of July Movement headed by Fidel Castro. Castro's movement, which had been conducting guerrilla warfare against the Batista regime for over two years, had gradually expanded until Batista's forces were no longer able to hold their own. Batista's sudden capitulation, which came as a surprise to his supporters and his opponents alike, appeared to be due primarily to the belief of his commanders that they could no longer depend on their own forces.

The Castro movement was drawn from diverse sources, although the middle class, students in particular, had furnished it with most of its active support. It had never formulated a precise ideology or program, except one of uncompromising enmity to the Batista regime and all who had given it active support or even passive tolerance, as well as to the old-line politicians whose corruption had helped to pave the way for Batista. Castro, who took the title of premier in February, dominated the government and set its policies—sometimes, apparently, on the spur of the moment, in long speeches to crowds or television addresses, without consulting his cabinet.

The new government was faced with many problems, both political and economic. Its first concern was to liquidate the remnants of the Batista regime and, so far as possible, undo its consequences. Special courts, a species of revolutionary tribunals, tried the officials and agents of the former dictator, and hundreds were executed, mostly for participation in the murder and torture of Batista's political opponents. This aroused widespread criticism in other countries, particularly the United States, although Cubans pointed out that the executions were far fewer than those carried out by the previous regime, with or without trial, and that prisoners were not tortured, as they had been under Batista. Since the Batista regime had had a part in almost every aspect of the country's life, the purge effort had to be disruptive in some degree, both in the government and in the economy.

Unemployment increased as a result of the government's measures and the decline in tourism. The country's finances were hard hit by the plundering

of decamping officials of the Batista regime. Sugar, the basis of the Cuban economy, was at its lowest price in many years, though the effect of this was somewhat cushioned by an increase in the quota Cuba was permitted to sell in the protected United States market, where prices were almost twice as high as the world level.

Of the government measures designed to redistribute wealth and income, the most important was land reform. Agriculture was essentially based on large plantations, many foreign-owned. Through the National Agrarian Institute, the Castro government attempted to replace these with cooperative farms, but often the peasants simply divided the land into small holdings and left the government little choice but to ratify their action. A number of industrial properties were also taken over by the government, either as the property of Batista officials or because they were foreign-owned.

Many Castro policies aroused opposition among his former middle-class supporters, as well as in the United States. From the beginning, Castro and many of his followers had been bitter about the United States' supplying arms to Batista until shortly before his fall. This resentment was intensified by American criticism of the new regime's executions and charges of Communism. At the same time, the United States objected to the seizure of United States-owned lands and businesses without what Washington regarded as prompt and adequate compensation. The United States was also disturbed by Castro's increasing tendency towards neutralism and his agitation against the United States at home and in other Latin American countries. Castro, in turn, charged that the United States was permitting his enemies to use Florida as a base of operations against him. (Federal Bureau of Investigation investigations showed that operations against Cuba were indeed based on Florida. But they were carried out despite the efforts of the United States to prevent them, as had also been true of anti-Batista operations based on Florida in previous years.)

The precise degree of Communist influence and power in the Cuban government was hard to determine. After he forced out President Carlos M. Urrutia in July, Castro gave increasingly open expression to his antagonism to the United States, and his domestic program grew steadily more radical.

### *Jewish Community*

The Jewish community in Cuba suffered no special difficulties in the course of the revolution. There were no antisemitic acts by revolutionary forces. Among the leaders of the new regime were a few sons of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, but they were not closely identified with the Jewish community.

Of Cuba's population of over six million, the Jewish population remained static at about 11,000; 7,000 to 8,000 Jews lived in Havana and the remainder in Santa Clara, Camaguey, and Oriente. About three quarters were Ashkenazim and one quarter Sephardim. Three quarters of the Jewish working population were small retailers, 15 per cent had larger stores, and 10 per cent were in consumer goods.

There were no changes in community organization. Efforts to create a

kehillah on the pattern of that in Buenos Aires failed, mainly because of the opposition of the religious Jews in the Ahdut Israel congregation and of the old Centro Israelita, which tried to maintain itself as a representative organization for the entire community. The Council of Jewish Women, with a membership of 1,000, and WIZO, with 1,500, continued very active. Israeli Bonds and the other pro-Israeli campaigns were successful. B'nai B'rith, with about 400 members, continued its cultural work in Spanish, mostly among the youth.

## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

**T**HE Dominican Republic, since 1930 a dictatorship under Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molinas, became the refuge of a succession of fallen Latin American dictators, from Juan D. Perón of Argentina to Fulgencio Batista of Cuba. (The latter appeared to be a distinctly unwelcome guest; while Trujillo gave substantial support to anti-Castro elements formerly connected with Batista's army and police, the ex-dictator himself was frequently attacked in the Trujillo-dominated Dominican press.)

During the year, the Trujillo regime was subjected to major external and internal stresses. Relations with the United States, already bad because of the FBI's interest in the circumstances surrounding the kidnapping from New York of the anti-Trujillo scholar Jesús de Galindez in 1956 and the mysterious death in the Dominican Republic of the flier Gerald Murphy in 1958, deteriorated further. In June 1958 the Dominican consul in Miami was caught attempting to bribe United States officials to permit the smuggling of arms to anti-Castro plotters in Cuba. And the spectacular activities of the generalissimo's son in Hollywood, while he was supposedly studying at the United States army's command and staff school at Fort Leavenworth, were followed by the school's refusal in June 1958 to graduate him. Also in June the Dominican government dispensed with the services of the U. S. navy's training mission in the country on the ground that it was too expensive. (Most of the cost was paid by the United States.)

At the same time, the government sharply increased its military expenditures, which amounted to over half the national budget, importing jet planes and expanding its army. This was a result of the strained relations between Trujillo and some of his neighbors, especially Cuba and Venezuela. Additional large sums were spent on activities directed against these governments, such as the training of an "anti-Communist foreign legion" and smuggling arms. These expenditures placed a heavy burden on the country's already weak economy. For the first time in many years the Trujillo regime, whose proudest boast was that it had liquidated the country's foreign debt, was forced to borrow abroad.

There was some industrial expansion, and a large-scale program of public works helped to keep down unemployment. But the public-works program was threatened with contraction because of the country's financial problems, and unemployment seemed likely to grow.

*Jewish Community*

In August 1959 the Jewish community of about 600, out of a population of over two million, included 168 persons (121 adults and 47 children under the age of 16 years) in the agricultural colony of Sosua. The rest were mainly in Ciudad Trujillo. The colony, spread over 27,000 acres of coastal land in the northern part of the island, was divided into individual homesteads of 75 acres, which engaged in cattle breeding and dairy farming. The colonists employed about 300 Dominican farmhands, and their annual production came to about \$1 million a year. Sosua included a cooperative, a school, and a synagogue.

The Jews in the capital were engaged mainly in furniture manufacturing and other small-scale production of consumer goods. The community center in Ciudad Trujillo, started in 1957 with a government subsidy of \$60,000, was completed in 1959. It included a club, library, and synagogue. Alfred Rosenzweig was named member of parliament from the province of Puerto-Plata, which included Sosua.

ILYA DIJOUR