

## II. LATIN AMERICA<sup>1</sup>

### POLITICAL SITUATION

The situation in ARGENTINA was the key to Latin America's future. The significance of events on the South American continent during the twelvemonth which ended with the formal assumption of the Argentine Presidency by General Juan Domingo Peron on June 4, 1946, would become manifest only when the Peron regime made clear the direction it intended to take. The fate of the Jewish communities, deeply troubled by the anxieties and confusion of the past year, was intimately bound up with the prospects of democratic survival in the countries of Latin America. Peron's inaugural speech proved still equivocal. While he promised social improvements along democratic lines, nothing was said about Argentina's international pledges to purge all traces of Nazi influence.

For three years—ever since the military coup d'état of June 1943 had boosted the colonels' government of Farrell-Peron into the Argentine saddle—domestic as well as international politics in Latin America had pivoted around the suspect policies of that regime. Despite repeated denials by Farrell-Peron spokesmen, evidence of Nazi sympathies, anti-democratic trends and dictatorial trappings had led the United States State Department, sparked by Spruille Braden, to insist on Argentine fulfillment of the democratic obligations it had assumed at Chapultepec and San Francisco. Buenos Aires continued to hedge. The Act of Chapultepec was signed and, at the eleventh hour, Argentina declared war on an already beaten Germany in order to gain admission to San Francisco. But no concrete steps were taken to nullify Nazi influence. Suspected Hitlerite Germans continued to figure prominently in governmental circles and a mildly disguised fascist dictatorship prevailed. With barely concealed official sanction, anti-United States agitation was given free rein in Argentina's principal cities.

<sup>1</sup> Prepared in the office of the American Jewish Committee.

The free Argentine press was subjected to censorship for pointing out irregularities in government, while the pro-Peron newspapers became the beneficiaries of official favors. Nor was this all. A wave of persecutions against leaders of democratic parties forced many of them to seek refuge outside the country, particularly in Uruguay, whence they continued to expose the dictatorial tendencies of the Farrell-Peron government. Some even called for United Nations intervention.

Democratic counter-movements which threatened to turn into a popular revolt at the end of 1945 were stifled, university students who participated being subjected to severe repressive measures. At the same time, anti-Jewish demonstrations on the part of Peron supporters, previously sporadic in nature, assumed pogrom proportions. Anti-Semitic bands, apparently enjoying complete immunity, roamed through Jewish neighborhoods in Buenos Aires. Jews were beaten up, synagogues defiled, community buildings stoned. Several deaths occurred. For a time the Jewish community lived in a panic atmosphere of pogrom and threat of pogrom. Repeated protests by the leaders of the DAIA (Delegacion de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentina), representing the Jewish community, elicited official condemnation of these overt anti-Semitic manifestations. But within a few days the attacks were renewed. Jewish youth, aided by democratic elements, organized to repel the attacks of the Peronistas, affording a unique demonstration of courage and dignity but also calling to mind the tragic parallel of the defense of the Warsaw ghetto.

It was in such an atmosphere that the government called for presidential elections in February, with Colonel Juan Peron as official candidate. As vice-president of the regime, Colonel Peron was widely regarded as the outstanding exponent of the anti-democratic and anti-American policies of the country. His choice as candidate at the head of what threatened to become a full-fledged fascist movement was all too reminiscent of Germany in the last days of the Weimar republic. The United States Department of State, interested in averting a major threat to the Pan American democratic entente solidified at Chapultepec, published a Blue Book on February 12, 1946, setting forth a series of acts

which, in its judgment, constituted virtual sabotage of Allied interests during the war and revealed Nazi sympathies. According to the documentary evidence, the Argentine government under the Farrel-Peron regime, had been engaged in a plot to undermine American interests in Latin America and had through its agents attempted to create an atmosphere which menaced the peace of the continent. The Peron government denied the Blue Book charges, claiming to have fulfilled its international commitments to purge Nazi influences and denouncing the State Department for what it termed interference with its internal affairs. Most disappointing was the reaction of other Latin American countries which either maintained diplomatic silence or pretended that the Argentine situation was not their concern. The elections were held in February as scheduled and Colonel Peron became Argentina's President, assuming office on June 4, 1946.

Between election and inauguration, Peron forces appeared to be engaged in a campaign to woo democratic sentiment. The Argentine government reiterated assurances of its desire to maintain unity with the democracies and denied its anti-United States orientation. Internally a series of social reforms was promised and the government pledged itself to maintain constitutional processes. The democratic parties defeated in the election were invited to cooperate in restoring domestic tranquility and harmony. Attempts were also made to reassure the Jewish community. Newspapers which had backed Peron candidacy joined in condemning the anti-Semitic incidents, while the Minister of Interior, General Felipe Urdapilleta, renewed assurances to the leaders of the Jewish community that the government not only did not identify itself with anti-Jewish elements but condemned all anti-Semitic manifestations as well as all other forms of racial persecution. Despite these assurances the Jewish community continued to live in an uneasy atmosphere, for anti-Semitic propaganda persisted. Moreover, although some liberties, such as the use of Yiddish at public meetings, have been restored, veiled discrimination continues.

Argentina's attitude towards immigration was a case in point. According to a statement on April 19 by Genaro Cooke, Consul General in New York, Argentina hopes to

see her population increase from fourteen to forty million before long. But, his statement implied, increase by immigration would be promoted on a selective basis, subject to the immigrant's capacity for adapting himself. The criterion suggested had racist overtones. "We will welcome especially agricultural workers and technicians," Cooke remarked, adding however that "immigrants from Italy, Spain, Ireland and the Low Countries are principally sought." Along the same lines was the government decree of April 3rd establishing an "Ethnographic Office" to be administered by the *Dirección General de Inmigración*. This office was charged with making a study of the composition of the Argentine population from the ethnic and anthropological points of view. An ethnographic map was to be set up and the conditions of adaptability and assimilation of various population elements studied. All this was designed to "select and orientate rationally" the current of immigration, setting up criteria which departed radically from the principle established in the Constitution which is addressed to "all the people of the world who might want to inhabit the soil of Argentina." In his statement the Argentine consul also placed emphasis on preference for agricultural workers, noting that credit grants to immigrant farmers would be provided by the Central Bank of Argentina. Jewish farmers, it is relevant to add, could also count on the assistance, both financial and technical, of the Jewish Colonization Association. As against this stress on agricultural preference, the Union Industrial Argentina, a powerful association of manufacturers, has been urging the lifting of immigration restrictions, asserting that added technical assistance to industry would serve to expand the Argentine economy. In this connection it has been noted that Jews who migrated to Argentine cities played a major role in the development of the textile industry.

In BRAZIL, the military coup of October 30, 1945, ended the dictatorial regime of Getulio Vargas. Power passed into the hands of the Supreme Court of Justice, whose president served as provisional head of government until the national elections elevated General Eurico Gaspar Dutra to the Presidency. New democratic trends were soon evident. The Supreme Court, under the direction of the provisional Min-

ister of Justice, Judge Sampaio Doria, drafted a new constitution based on that promulgated in Brazil in 1891, which was itself patterned on the United States Constitution. President Dutra assumed office on January 31, amid assurances of liberal and democratic conduct as well as respect for religious freedom. Looking toward prompt promulgation of the Constitution, he declared: "It is expected that the new Constitution will include provisions devised to give full insurance to human rights." President Dutra has since adopted a stand in favor of freedom of immigration, with preference for persons affected by the war in Europe. He also reaffirmed Brazil's traditional friendship for the United States, whence new capital for the expansion of Brazilian industry is anticipated.

The policy on immigration was thus interpreted by the Brazilian delegate to the Special Committee on Refugees and Displaced Persons, held in London on May 6, 1946:

This law opens the door to all foreign elements likely to prove useful in the development of the country. In Brazil's case, no group of immigrants or refugees is excluded provided they conform to the principles of rational selection, preference being given to those elements who, for a century past, have shown a genuine capacity for adapting themselves to Brazilian life or to such other elements who seem likely to exhibit similar adaptability. Apart, therefore, from certain justifiable and understandable preferences, there is no discrimination as to race or origin.

Having suffered a certain degree of discrimination and even hostility during the Vargas regime, the Jewish community has attained a greater measure of freedom. Yiddish had been prohibited at public meetings and publications in that language as well as in Hebrew were forbidden. These restrictions have now been removed and secular cultural life is free to leave the synagogue where it had taken refuge. A bilingual newspaper in Yiddish and Portuguese has been announced for early publication.

Opposed to this liberal trend was the political current evident in the reactions of CHILE, PERU and CUBA to the

Blue Book on Argentina. The Chilean Foreign Minister declared that he lacked proof confirming the Blue Book charges that the Argentine military government sought to provoke a revolution on the Nazi pattern. On April 7, Cuba hastened to state that the Argentine nation is and always has been an integral part of the union of American republics, while Peru agreed the same day that there must be confidence that Peron's future actions would subscribe to the principles of liberty and democracy. It is relevant to note that in all three countries government is being subjected to the turbulence of anti-democratic pressure by reactionary elements, accompanied by a growth of anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, it is also true that all three governments have condemned and exhibited active opposition to anti-democratic manifestations. Chile, however, has taken no steps to abolish discriminatory restrictions on Jewish immigration which has been practically suspended for some years. Nor did the immigration decree of January 18, regulating future entry, materially expedite immigration procedure; the decision has been left largely in the hands of Chilean consuls who are not encouraged to interpret the law in liberal fashion. Jewish leaders in Chile who requested clarification of the proviso that immigration preference would be given to elements having "affinity with the Chilean race" were told that this referred to Europeans in general. The vice-president of Peru, during his recent visit to Santiago, expressed his sympathy for the Peruvian Jewish population and recognized its contribution to the economic progress of the country.

Exhibiting its traditional democratic spirit, the government of URUGUAY proposed joint continental action against any American country which violated basic human rights. This proposal for Pan American enforcement of individual liberties guaranteed by the respective national Constitutions found little support elsewhere and merely served to provoke the reactionary element in Montevideo to counter-demonstrations rallying at the cry "We want a Peron." The Uruguayan government has consistently demonstrated its sympathy for Jewish suffering and has opposed energetically all anti-Semitic manifestations. In December 1945, the government declared itself in favor of granting refuge to Jewish victims of war, while in the following March a

member of the Cabinet, Rodriguez Larreta, approved the request of HIAS for the entry of 250 Jewish immigrants. At the conference of Polish Jews, held in Montevideo in April, Vice President Alberto Guani expressed once again, on behalf of the government, its feeling of solidarity with the Jewish tragedy.

COLOMBIA, though a country of democratic traditions, was the scene of anti-Semitic demonstrations, provoked by students, during the May election campaign which resulted in the triumph of President Mariano Ospina Perez, the Conservative candidate. The building of the *Centro Israelita* was stoned amid shouts of "Death to the Jews." Several Jews were beaten. While vigorously denounced by the government and people, the outbreak in Bogota was the symptom of a reactionary trend led by Hitler's apostles in Latin America. Colombian Jews refused to be content with a protest; they closed their businesses and suspended all activities until the government furnished guarantees of safety. Senator Daria Samper, interviewed in New York in October, stated that Colombia was prepared to adopt a non-discriminatory immigration policy which would, however, grant preference to persons with technical and professional skills useful in industrial development.

ECUADOR's constitutional crisis was resolved without violence and without impairment of democratic liberties. The Cabinet, which remains unchanged, has assumed legislative powers until the Congress next meets as a Constitutional Assembly. Immigration policy, though liberal, has been translated into action at a slow pace and on a relatively small scale. Sixteen visas were granted in March to Jewish refugees who were not required to furnish the usual cash deposit, while the following month thirty-one immigration applications were approved amid expressions of good will on the part of public officials.

In CUBA, an estimated 2400 Jewish refugees continued to suffer special restrictive regulations. The majority of them had entered the country between April 1941 and April 1942 and were listed on the registry as "enemy aliens." Late in 1945 the Democratic Association of Hebrew Refugees presented a memorandum to Dr. Felix Lancis, the Prime Minister, who is at the same time head of the Council of War

Refugees, requesting normalization of their status. Documents of residence and the right to apply for citizenship were the basic demands. At the same time, the Association petitioned for return of the \$500 deposit paid by refugees on entry to the country and requested that relatives, saved from Nazi massacre, be permitted to join them.

In COSTA RICA, just as in the other countries of Central America, the small Jewish community is encountering a wave of anti-Semitism artificially created by the reactionary forces. These forces, which have had the audacity to form an anti-Jewish Committee, center around the political party in opposition to the democratic government on the one hand, and a group of Spanish Falangists on the other. It should be noted that the Jewish population of Costa Rica consists of 108 families totaling 702 individuals. The majority of them are in business and some in agriculture.

The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, during December, renewed its unique invitation to Jews to immigrate en masse. On December 17 a national committee for Jewish immigration was created. Regardless of the practical possibilities implicit in the Dominican offer its attitude had no parallel in recent history. The Dominican invitation concluded with the following comment: "The Dominican government has no desire to interfere with Zionist ideals, but points to the abundant possibilities offered by our country in the event that the ideal proves impracticable or inadequate in solving the problem of Europe's Jews."

MEXICO's election campaign, which at times reached a fever pitch, demonstrated once again the essentially democratic and liberal character of the regime of Avilo Camacho. All attempts by reactionary and Sinarquist forces to appeal to anti-Jewish prejudice during the campaign were vigorously resisted. That a strong racist and anti-Semitic current found favor among some elements of the Mexican population cannot be denied. The reaction of government, liberal and labor leaders to these manifestations, however, was heartening. An education law to combat racial and religious prejudice in the schools has been prepared by the Minister of Education. At the same time, under the sponsorship of liberal deputies led by Ramón J. Bonfil and José Martínez Suarez Telles and with the aid of the Comité Nacional

Antiracista, a proposal was introduced in the Chamber of Deputies to convoke an inter-parliamentary, anti-racist conference on a continental scale to study the possibility of joint action to combat racism. Warm approval of the plan was voiced by the newspapers *El Popular*, *Excelsior*, and *Novedades*.

Immigration remains one of the post-war problems on which no government policy has yet been declared. So far right of entry has been limited to Jewish university students who must submit proof of registration before they are allowed into the country. Even this concession was won through the efforts of the representative agency of the Mexican Jewish community, the *Comité Central*, which has been engaged in an intensive campaign to further friendly relations with the general community. The B'nai B'rith journal, *Tribuna Israelita*, has been active along the same lines. A recent survey by the journal of the problem of anti-Semitism in Mexico elicited sympathetic response in government, military and university circles. None too heartening, however, was the implicit assumption in all the responses that racist propaganda, particularly as applied to the Jews, had made notorious progress in certain sections of the population.

## JEWISH COMMUNAL AFFAIRS

Under the impact of these events the Jewish communities of Latin America have been gaining a new maturity. The European tragedy, post-war problems of relief, refugee settlement and Palestine, as well as those relating to the survival of Israel as a religious and cultural entity, have forced upon the young Jewish congregations responsibilities on an ever larger scale. As a result, campaigns for financial assistance to Hitler's victims have been broadened, activities on behalf of Palestine and other areas of Jewish resettlement accelerated, and a general effort to strengthen the bases of local communities has been intensified. In addition, relations with the American Jewish community have become closer.

ARGENTINA, home of the largest Jewish population in all of Latin America, was the scene of two over-all fund-raising campaigns for relief of Jewish war victims, both of which

were more successful than similar drives the previous year. The fact that two separate campaigns were held reflects the sharp cleavage between local factions which differed both as to the purposes for which funds collected should be spent and as to the proper agency of control and distribution. The first campaign, directed by the Council for Aid to Jewish Victims of War, was sponsored by the Joint Distribution Committee and stressed that agency's traditional policy of "non-political" relief activities. The second campaign was conducted by the Central Committee for Rescue of Jewish War Victims under the auspices of the World Jewish Congress and had the cooperation of the existing representative body of the Argentine community, the DAIA. The split had repercussions in the field of communal representation. While the DAIA continued to serve as the central community representative agency, the opposing faction created a new body called the Organizacion Judia Argentina.

Civic-protective activity on behalf of the Argentine community claimed a major share of the energies of DAIA during this period. The anti-Semitic manifestations, mentioned in the first section of this review, had reached dangerous proportions during the winter of 1945-46, becoming particularly virulent with the approach of elections in February. Repeated protests were made by Dr. Moises Goldman, President of DAIA, eliciting official disclaimers. Government condemnation, however, was not enough to prevent the attack on the community center at Cordoba, defacing of synagogues in Buenos Aires, and two successive anti-Semitic forays on the building of the Argentine Hebrew Society. To the annual assembly of DAIA, held on May 14, Dr. Goldman reluctantly admitted that "anti-Semitism, which was virtually unknown in Argentina twenty years ago, is now growing daily." On the other hand, it was heartening to observe that agitation died down after the February elections and that at no time had it gained open official sanction.

New impetus was given to Jewish cultural activities. The Congregacion Israelita de la Republica Argentina, oldest Jewish congregation in Buenos Aires, increased its budget for religious education and opened a Yeshivah for the training of rabbis, teachers and Jewish social workers. A cul-

tural event of marked significance was the opening of the new Chevra Kedischa building (rivaled in all of South America only by the community center of the Sociedad Hebraica, also in Buenos Aires) to serve as a cultural center and housing, among other institutions, the Hebrew Teachers Seminary and the library of the Yiddish Scientific Institute. Of interest also in the field of education was the inauguration by the Zionist Federation of an institute for the study of Zionism.

Progress in publishing was no less marked. In addition to the Yiddish newspapers, *Di Idische Zaitung* and *Di Presse*, and the Spanish-language periodicals, *Mundo Israelita*, *La Luz*, and *Judaica*, a new monthly review in Spanish, *Davar*, appeared under the auspices of the Sociedad Hebraica, with Bernardo Verbitsky as editor. Israel, Argentina's Jewish book publishers, introduced a Spanish translation of Margolis' and Marx' *History of the Jewish People* (*Una historia del pueblo judio*) which earned special mention at the officially-sponsored Argentine Book Conference. The Sociedad Para el Fomento de la Cultura Judia (Society for Promotion of Jewish Culture) initiated its activities with publication of a review, *Heredad*, and a Spanish-version Passover *Hagadah* by the Jewish poet, Carlos M. Grunberg. A new departure in Argentine activities was the formation by Dr. Joseph Mirelman, founder of the publishing firm of Israel, of a corporation to stimulate commercial intercourse between Argentina and Palestine. Named ARPALSA, the corporation plans to promote not only trade but investment in Palestine housing.

Argentina's growing feeling of solidarity with the Jews of Europe and Palestine was expressed at many public meetings in Buenos Aires, one of the most outstanding being the meeting in Luna Park to protest the British White Paper policy on Palestine. A further expression of Argentine interest was the representation of the Jewish community, by Grand Rabbi Dr. G. Schlesinger and Jedidio Efron, at the Conference of Jewish Organizations held in London under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee and the Anglo-Jewish Association.

In other Latin American countries Jewish communal activities were likewise accelerated. The community in URUGUAY

organized the Congress of Resident Polish Jews, attended by delegations from Argentina, Chile, Peru, Brazil and Paraguay. Delegates adopted the resolution that all Polish relief funds be distributed through the Jewish Central Committee of Warsaw, directed by Dr. Emil Sommerstein, and urged cooperation between the Joint Distribution Committee, the World Jewish Congress and the Union of Polish Jews.

The most significant communal development in CHILE was the organization of a Central Committee for Jewish Education, supported by the representative agency of the Santiago community as well as by the Zionist organization, which launched a campaign for one million pesos to promote Jewish education. In Santiago, the newspapers *Dos Idische Vort* in Yiddish and *Mundo Judio* in Spanish continued to serve as the cultural organs of the community.

ECUADOR welcomed the appearance of the Spanish-language periodical *Dos Mundos*, edited by Benno Weiser. The community at Quito also sponsored publication, in booklet form, of a lecture on "The Jewish Problem and the Christian Point of View" by Ponce Ribadeneira, a Catholic Priest, containing an impassioned denunciation of anti-Semitism. Publication was authorized by the Church.

In COLOMBIA, the Union Federal Hebrea, which serves as the central community agency, launched a campaign to promote religious education for Jewish children. A parochial school, complete with dormitory facilities for children residing at a distance, was opened in Cali under the direction of Rabbi S. F. Breger Halevi, who has also been acting as spiritual leader for Bogota. A central synagogue has been established. To foster closer religious and cultural ties with American Jews, Rabbi Breger Halevi visited New York in April. PERU's Sociedad Union Israelita has been carrying on the activities of a central agency. Aside from meeting local welfare and cultural needs, its efforts have included fund-raising for Jewish causes abroad.

Under a freer regime, BRAZIL's Jews have made plans to branch out into cultural activities outside the synagogue, to which they were confined under the Vargas government. The communities of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro have conducted campaigns for the Joint Distribution Committee, the World Jewish Congress and the Zionist Organization.

*Cronica Israelita* of Sao Paulo, sole Jewish periodical in the country, has served as the organ of Jewish cultural endeavor in Brazil. Announcement has been made that it will soon be joined by a newspaper in Yiddish and Portuguese.

In MEXICO, major efforts of the *Comite Central* and the *B'nai B'rith* were directed toward combatting anti-Semitic tendencies manifested during the election campaign. Positive Jewish values, however, were not neglected, special attention being paid to religious education. Four institutes of Jewish instruction, a *Yeshivah* and various cultural institutions continued to enjoy the support of the community, as did the periodicals *Tribuna Israelita* and *Revista Israelita*, as well as the Yiddish newspaper *Der Weg*. Preparation of an authoritative Jewish encyclopedia in Spanish was undertaken. It was particularly in Mexico that increasing ties between Latin America and the Jewish community in the United States were evident. Exchange of delegations was frequent during the year. Indicative was the move made in January by the American Jewish Committee to establish liaison with the Jewish community in Mexico City.

This phenomenon—growing ties between the Jewish communities on a Pan American scale—was probably the most significant development of the year. Delegations from the United States, representing every conceivable type of institution, streamed southward as interest in Latin America quickened. Among the more notable emissaries were Dr. A. S. Yuris and J. Klinow for the *Keren Hayesod*, Mr. Nathan Bistrisky for the *Keren Kayemeth* and Zevi Kalitz for the Zionist Revisionist Organization; A. Tartakower and Leon Kubovitsky for the World Jewish Congress; Dr. Henry Shoskes for HIAS; Mr. Louis Kraft for the Jewish Welfare Board; and Rabbi Bernard Lander for the American Jewish Committee. At the same time, closer ties were being established among the Latin American communities themselves. For example, the Zionist campaigns for *Keren Kayemeth* and *Keren Hayesod*, directed by Dr. A. Mishaban from a central office in Buenos Aires, were conducted on a continental scale. The urge to unity was strong.