Argentina

Domestic Affairs

At the end of 1978 liberal Argentines were greatly concerned about repressive tendencies in the country. While the government denied that there were any political prisoners, there was no gainsaying the fact that many thousands of people were being held without formal charges because they were suspected of being linked to left-wing underground movements. On August 10 the Foreign Ministry expressed indignation over charges by United States officials that the Argentine government was carrying out systematic torture and summary executions. A spokesman described these charges as a "coarse distortion of Argentine reality." Other officials complained that the United States was interfering in the internal affairs of the country. The Permanent Assembly for Human Rights, the Argentine League for the Rights of Man, and the Ecumenical Movement sponsored newspaper advertisements, directed to President Videla and the Supreme Court, requesting information about the thousands of missing Argentines. On December 21 a petition signed by 37,000 people, pleading for information about those missing, was presented to the government.

William Horsey, an economic analyst, stated that the purchasing power of Argentines was cut by 40 per cent during 1978. The official rate of inflation for the eleven-month period from January 1 to November 30 was 147 per cent; most economists insisted that the real figure ran as high as 190 per cent. By the end of 1978 Buenos Aires had become one of the most expensive cities in the world in which to live. In November there was a 48-hour illegal railroad strike that left several million Buenos Aires commuters stranded. Jaime Smart, the government minister of the province of Buenos Aires, declared: "The quality of public health and education is a national disgrace, and the state is busy doing everything except what it should be doing . . . Unfortunately our hospitals are badly run, schools are no more than ranch houses, and there is a lack of internal security because there are not enough policemen."

Antisemitism

While leading military figures stated that they were opposed to antisemitism, lower-eschelon officers and enlisted men in the police and military were notoriously
antisemitic. Jewish political prisoners were subjected to particularly cruel torture and questioned about such matters as Israel's plot to take over Argentina and Jewish plans to subvert Christianity. Prisoners reported that in many places of detention there were swastikas and portraits of Hitler. At the end of the year, a pamphlet was distributed within one of the unions which indicated in diagram form that Zionism was the main root leading to the tree of subversive activity. Approximately 800 Jews have disappeared in the last few years.

The most significant antisemitic incident continued to be the Timerman affair. Human rights advocates around the world were shocked by the way the Argentine government treated this Jewish journalist. Timerman was still under house arrest at the end of the year, despite the fact that a military tribunal had failed to come up with any charges against him, and the Supreme Court had stated that there was absolutely no reason for him to be held. Most liberal Argentines took it for granted that Timerman's continued arrest was attributable to antisemitism, and that the whole case started because La Opinion, the newspaper which he published, was regarded as too important to be in the hands of a Jew and at the service of the Jewish community.

In January the University of Buenos Aires reconfirmed the notorious antisemite Walter Bevaraggi Allende in his post as a professor on the law faculty. Cabildo was published monthly throughout the year and continued its attacks on the Jewish community. In March a powerful bomb exploded at the main entrance of the Sociedad Hebraica Argentina, causing considerable damage. The bomb was detonated prior to a planned meeting protesting a PLO terrorist raid on the Tel-Aviv-Haifa highway. The meeting was never held because the government denied permission, stating that such a public manifestation required ten days notice under the laws of the state of siege.

In February the executive branch of the government reviewed a plan to establish a register of non-catholic religious organizations; this had originally been proposed during Juan Peron's first presidency. Many meetings were held during the year between government representatives and Protestant and Jewish leaders to iron out possible difficulties relating to the register. At the end of the year it had not yet been established.

**Relations with Israel**

Ties between Argentina and Israel were strengthened as a result of the latter's sale of planes and armaments to the former, and an increase in commercial traffic between the two countries. Israel ambassador Ram Nirgad was very much in the public eye, appearing on television and radio. He played an active role in Argentine Jewish life and maintained very privileged relations with leading figures in the Argentine military and political establishment.

There were numerous important Israeli visitors to Argentina during 1978: Generals Hod and Gur, Finance Minister Simcha Erlich, Hebrew University president
Avraham Harman, Minister of Industry, Commerce and Tourism Yigal Hurvitz, M.K.'s Zina Harman and Abraham Katz, as well as Faye Schenk, Raphael Kotlowicz, Zvi Adar, Yitzhak Korn, and Haim Finkelsztein. During a six-day official visit to Argentina in March, Hurvitz stated that Israel had imported 45 million dollars worth of Argentine goods in 1977, while Argentina had purchased only 5 million dollars of Israeli goods. Hurvitz indicated his desire to strengthen commercial ties between the two nations.

Bishop Hilarion Capuchi, who was freed by the Israeli government upon direct intercession by Pope Paul VI after serving three years of a 12-year sentence for complicity with Arab terrorism, arrived in Argentina in April. Capuchi celebrated a mass in Buenos Aires' metropolitan cathedral in the presence of the ambassadors of Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Algeria, the chargés d'affaires of Iran and Libya, and the director of the local office of the Arab League. In his public declarations Capuchi spoke with respect about Judaism as a religion while attacking Israel. The Argentine Zionist Organization (OSA) published a statement identifying Capuchi as an agent of the PLO.

The 30th anniversary of the State of Israel was celebrated in May. More than 20,000 people were present for a four-hour program held in Luna Park, Buenos Aires' largest indoor auditorium. It was the first time in many years that the Argentine Jewish community had expressed its solidarity with Israel on a massive scale. The main speaker was the former commander-in-chief of the Israeli Defense Forces, General Haim Laskov. Celebrations were organized by every important Jewish organization throughout the country. The final celebration took place in the beginning of November, when over 13,000 people attended a multi-media show in the Gran Rex Theater in the center of Buenos Aires.

The Argentine aliya figure for 1978 was about 2,000; approximately 37,000 Argentine Jews had made aliya since the founding of the State of Israel.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

The Jewish population of Argentina in 1978 was approximately 300,000. Some 225,000 Jews were living in Buenos Aires, while the leading communities in the interior were (the figures are for estimated numbers of families): Rosario, 2,500; Córdoba, 1,600; Santa Fé, 1,200; Mendoza, 800; Bahia Blanca, 800; Tucumán, 700; Mar del Plata, 600; Paraná, 550; Rivera, 400; Resistencia, 320; Corrientes, 300; Concordia, 250; and San Juan, 250.
Communal Activities

The Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA), a 37,500-member Ashkenazi group, was the largest Jewish organization in the country. Well over 90 percent of its budget came from the four Ashkenazi cemeteries in greater Buenos Aires that it owned and administered. AMIA held elections in May; 8,866 votes were cast. Abraham Grunberg was elected president. The composition of the board of directors reflected the percentage of votes received by the various slates: Labor, 41; Likud, 13; Movimiento Sionista Aparcidiario (General Zionists), 9; Agudat Israel, 8; Mizrahi, 8; Movimiento Sionista Renovador (Shinui), 6; and Freie Shtime, 5. AMIA was the principal source of social assistance to Argentine Jews, handling over 500 cases monthly. It was noted that the number of indigency cases was on the rise.

In March Dr. Nehemias Resnizky was reelected president of the Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA), which officially represented the Jewish community on political matters before the Argentine government. In April Resnizky denounced the existence of pogrom forces in the country, stating that DAIA was keeping a close watch on them. He also spoke of the danger of "internal disintegration" as a result of assimilation.

Marcos Korenhendler was named president of the Organización Sionista Argentina (OSA), which had some 23,000 members throughout the country.

Of Argentina's 300,000 Jews, 70,000 were thought to be Sephardi. Jews of Syrian and Lebanese origin belonged to the Asociación Israelita Sefaradí Argentina (AISA); those of Moroccan origin to the Congregación Israelita Latina; and those of Turkish and Balkan origin to the Asociación Comunidad Israelita Sefaradí de Buenos Aires (ACIS). Each of these groups had its own cemetery. The Entidad Coordinadora Sefaradí Argentina (ECSA) continued its efforts to centralize Sephardi communal affairs. Three hundred students took courses during the year at the Centro de Investigación y Difusión de la Cultura Sefaradí (Center for the Investigation and Diffusion of Sephardic Culture).

Despite repeated calls by communal leaders to unite the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities, nothing was done in 1978 to bring this goal any closer. The two groups maintained separate cemeteries, philanthropic agencies, campaigns in support of Israel, and, with the exception of the Comunidad Bet El, synagogues.

The Organización Sionista Femenina Argentina (OFSA), with over 30,000 members, was the most important women's organization. The Federación Argentina de Centros Comunitarios Macabeos (FACCMA) united the four leading Jewish sports clubs of Buenos Aires, the largest of which was the Sociedad Hebraica Argentina (SHA), with some 22,000 members. SHA, which is similar to the YM-YWHAs in the United States, offered a wide range of sport, social, and cultural activities. SHA maintained the Escuela de Instructores y Tecnicos en Trabajo Institucional (EDITTI: School for Institutional Leadership Training) in cooperation with the Jewish Agency. Club Nautico Hacoach claimed some 11,000 members and had two major facilities—an 11-story building in the center of Buenos Aires, as well as a large
area for open-air activities in the famed Tigre region. Macabi also had a large building in Buenos Aires, as well as a camping area in the suburbs; it claimed a membership of 10,000. The fourth group that made up FACCMA was the Club Atletico Sefaradi Argentino (CASA) with some 10,000 members. CASA was the only club that offered kosher dining facilities and which observed shabbat. CASA added significantly to its physical plant during the year.

Active on the Jewish scene were YIVO (Yiddish Institute for Scientific Research), which completed 50 years of work in Argentina, offering courses in Yiddish (including one in the Catholic El Salvador University directed by Prof. I. Niborsky) and maintaining a library and museum; B’nai B’rith, which sponsored a visit by William Korey, director of international policy research for B’nai B’rith International, at the end of October; the Latin American office of the Joint Distribution Committee, which was headed by Alfredo Berlfein; the Hogar Israelita Argentina para Ancianos y Niños, a home for hundreds of adolescents and aged people; the Consejo Argentino de Mujeres Israelitas (CAMI: Argentine Council of Jewish Women), which sponsored a golden-age club and occupational therapy services; the Asociación Filantrópica Israelita (AFI), which maintained a model old-age home in San Miguel; and the local office of HIAS, which was directed by Alex Rubin. Prof. Manuel Tenenbaum of Uruguay became the new director of the Latin American section of the World Jewish Congress in January, succeeding the veteran Mark Turkow. The South American office of the American Jewish Committee was moved to New York, where it was headed by Jacob Kovadloff, who had been forced to leave Argentina in 1977 after repeated threats against his life. Sheerit Ha-pleita was the organization uniting survivors of the concentration camps; HORIM was the parent-teacher association of the Jewish school system. Keren Hayesod was reorganized under the leadership of Jacobo Fitterman. Keren Kayemet Le’Yisrael continued its work.

In January Zalman Wassertsug, the well-known Yiddish writer and journalist, left his post on the Wa-ad Hakehilot after 25 years of dedicated work. During the same month Die Presse, the only Yiddish daily in South America, celebrated the 60th year of its founding. June marked the completion of the first year of publication of Nueva Presencia, the Spanish-language supplement to Die Presse. Nueva Presencia was well-received by the Argentine Jewish community and quickly built up a sizeable readership. It had a most cordial dialogue with the Arabic periodical Assalam during January with respect to the necessary conditions for peace in the Middle East. In February Héctor Caram and Hermann Schiller, the editors of Assalam and Nueva Presencia, respectively, published a joint communiqué expressing their mutual desire for peace, and congratulating Argentine Arabs and Jews on their fraternal relationship. Assalam was attacked for its pro-Israel stand in February by the Arab-Spanish bilingual publication Bandera Arabe (The Arab Flag).

Dr. Asher Mibashan was given a testimonial dinner in February by the World Jewish Congress in honor of his aliya. Mibashan had been for many years the Buenos Aires correspondent of the JTA and owner-publisher (after his famed
father's demise) of the Editorial Candelabro, one of the few publishing houses specializing in Spanish-language books of Jewish interest.

At the beginning of April, the B'nai B'rith executive committee of District 20 (South America) met in Buenos Aires, and local Jewish organizations and the Latin American branch of the World Jewish Congress participated in the discussions. During one of the meetings, DAIA president Resnizky stated that "Jewish life in Argentina was normal in all aspects: religious, educational, sports, and cultural." Terrorism, he argued, had been almost completely contained. A number of observers felt that DAIA's position was too cautious with regard to exposing the dangers of right-wing terrorism and the failure of the government to halt antisemitic activities in the prisons.

The 35th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising was marked at a large gathering which was addressed by Israeli ambassador Ram Nirgad. In June a DAIA delegation met with Henry Kissinger during his brief stay in Argentina during the World Cup Football Championship. During the same month OFSA held its 15th colloquium and elected Amalia Polack as president. Also in June, at the convention of the International Council of Jewish Women, a special Latin American committee was established, headed by Sara Breitman of Buenos Aires. The 55th anniversary of the weekly *Avoda Mundo Israelita* was observed in the same month.

The Latin American Jewish Congress held its second colloquium on cultural pluralism at the beginning of December in Teatro San Martin. It was attended by government officials and leading Argentine intellectuals. The colloquium was followed by the 26th plenary session of the Latin American section of the World Jewish Congress, with representation from the entire continent.

DAIA, as well as the World Jewish Congress, issued statements to the national press on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Crystal Night. AMIA sponsored its annual Jewish Book Month following the High Holy Days. Approximately 2,700 people purchased books, while some 25,000 people visited the exposition. In November, Nissim Gaon, president of the World Sephardi Association and vice-president of the World Jewish Congress, visited Buenos Aires and spoke at a large number of gatherings. In September the Jewish community of Santa Fé celebrated its 75th anniversary with festive ceremonies. During a visit to Buenos Aires at the end of September, President Abraham Harman of the Hebrew University announced the inauguration of the San Martin Chair of Latin American studies, under the auspices of the Argentine Friends of the Hebrew University.

**Jewish Education**

Jaime Barylko continued as director of AMIA's *Wa-ad Ha-hinnukh*, which was the community's central board of Jewish education. It served some 30 primary schools in the city of Buenos Aires and some 15 in the suburbs, with a total student enrollment of 7,500. There were 35 schools in the provinces with about 2,000 students. There were some 5,500 children in the nation's kindergartens; the high
school and post high school student population was estimated at 3,500. Approximately 900 teachers worked in the Jewish school system. AMIA treasurer Luis Perelmuter, in a press conference in March, stated that AMIA would give its largest subsidies to schools charging the least tuition. Some schools received subsidies of up to 50 per cent. Perelmuter said that almost half of the 7-million-dollar AMIA budget was set aside for education.

The Iosef Draznin Teachers Seminary celebrated its 30th anniversary in February. The school, which was located in the historic agricultural community of Moisésville, had graduated 22 teachers in the past two years; all of them worked in the provinces. Eighty teachers from the interior took part in a summer retreat in Necochea in January, under the auspices of AMIA. In April AMIA's cultural department opened the Instituto de Estudios Judíos Superiores for young adults. ORT, directed by Eva Kamenszain, increased its student body to over 550 young people. The Centro de Estudios Judaicos, sponsored by the Jewish Agency and the University of Tel-Aviv, completed its third year under the direction of Yaacov Rubel.

The Seminario Rabinico Latinoamericano (Conservative), under Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer, opened Abarbanel, a teacher training institute. The Seminario's departments included the Instituto Franz Rosenzweig, devoted to adult education; two secondary schools, Solomon Schechter and Bet Hillel; the Rabbinical Department which in July ordained Mario Ablin, who became rabbi of the B'nei Yisroel community in Santiago, Chile; and the Instituto para Estudios Religiosos Superiores (Institute for Higher Religious Studies), which brought together Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish scholars.

Religion

The declining importance of religious observance among Argentine Jews was evident in the small number of Jews present in the 50-odd synagogues in Greater Buenos Aires during the high holidays. There were no more than 10,000 Jews in all of the synagogues during Rosh Hashanah. Even on Yom Kippur the number probably did not rise above 20,000. A growing number of Jews attended non-orthodox services.

Rabbi Shlomoh Ben Hamu (Orthodox) served as the head of the rabbinate of AMIA, which remained non-pluralistic despite statements to the contrary. At the same time, only non-orthodox rabbis were active in the struggle for human rights in Argentina, and were responsible for practically all significant ecumenical activity. Agudat Yisrael's Seminario Rabínico Marcos Guertzenstein had seven rabbis on its teaching staff; several graduates of the school were pursuing advanced studies in Israel. The Orthodox movement sponsored several other schools, including one for female students.

Roberto Graetz was rabbi of Emanuel, the only Reform synagogue in Argentina; he served also as the Latin American director of the World Union of Progressive
Judaism. Marshall T. Meyer continued to serve as rabbi of the Conservative Comunidad Bet El and as director for Latin America of the World Council of Synagogues. The Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano arranged for Rabbi Seymour Siegel of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America to conduct Yom Kippur services at the World Cancer Congress in Buenos Aires.

Publications

*Mundo Israelita* was the weekly Spanish-language organ of the Avodah political party. Other periodicals included the German-language weekly *Judisches Wochenblatt*; the Yiddish *Davka*, the Mapam fortnightly *Nueva Sion*; the Spanish fortnightly *La Luz*; the DAIA bi-monthly *Informativo*; and *Majshavot*, the Spanish quarterly journal published by the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano and the World Council of Synagogues.

In January the Argentine-Jewish author Bernardo Verbitsky won the Ricardo Rojas Biennial Literary Competition for his work *Critica y Ensayo*. He also received the Carlos D. Liorente Fiction Prize for *Hermana y Sombra*. Also in January, Editors Pelagia published Lazaro Schallman’s *Pela Szechter: The Singer who Survived the Holocaust*. Yehudah & Co. continued the publication of a Pentateuch containing a Spanish translation of Rashi’s commentary by Jaime Barylko. Acerbo Cultural put out additional volumes of a bilingual edition of the Babylonian Talmud; Abraham Weiss served as director of the project. Simcha Snej, the Yiddish and Spanish writer, received the Honor Badge of the Argentine Writers Association, SADE, for *The Peace and the Blood*. Cesar Tiempo received several awards for *Capturas Recomendadas*. Boleslao Lewin and Jaime Barylko received Fernando Jeno prizes in Mexico, the former for his studies of Crypto-Jews in colonial America, the latter for his book *Introducción al Judaismo*. The Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano, in collaboration with the Editorial Paidos, published a Spanish-language version of Martin Buber’s *Hassidic Tales* in four volumes.

Personalia

Moisés Winograd, philanthropist and former vice-president of the Hogar Israelita Argentina para Ancianos y Niños, died in Buenos Aires in February, aged 76. Gregorio Joison, former president of the Banco Israelita and an important philanthropist who had donated the children’s ward to the Hospital Israelita, died in Buenos Aires in March at the age of 83. Luis Kardúner, well-known journalist and Zionist leader, who was awarded first prize by the Argentine-Jewish Institute of Culture and Information in 1950 for his study *Alejandro Aguado*, died in Buenos Aires in June, aged 71. Lázaro Schallman, journalist, publisher, and educator, died in Buenos Aires in July, aged 73. Gregorio Verbitsky, who had been press-attaché at the Israel embassy in Buenos Aires, ambassador to the Dominican Republic, as well as a member of the Israeli diplomatic mission to the UN, died in Buenos Aires.
in August, aged 68. Jacobo Ficher, leading Argentine composer and musicologist, died in Buenos Aires in September, aged 82. Isaac Mizrach, who was active in the agrarian cooperative movement and Zionist affairs, died in Buenos Aires in October, aged 74. Simón Mirelman, a leading communal figure, past president of SHA and Hospital Israelita, and the founder, with the American Jewish Committee, of the Instituto Judío-Argentino de Cultura e Información, died in Buenos Aires in October, aged 84. Jose Aisenson, architect, who designed several Jewish institutions, died in October, aged 65. Jaime Goldenstein, president of the Wa-ad Ha-hinnukh, who developed innovative educational programs, died in Buenos Aires in December, aged 49.

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