The year 1997 saw Mexico emerging with some sense of dignity and achievement from the political upheavals that marked the preceding years, even as the country's political, economic, and moral structures were widely regarded as still shaky. In this period, the Mexican political system was remaking itself—from the centralized control of one-party government (the Revolutionary Institutional Party, PRI) to a new government composed of multiple parties of diverse ideological persuasions. One sign of the changing order was the death of the iron-fisted ruler of the Mexican labor branch of the PRI, the largest confederation of labor unions in the country, Fidel Velázquez, at the age of 97. Since 1941, and with only a three-year hiatus, Velázquez had been elected and reelected ten times to a position that some considered the second most important in the country. It could be said that his life and career symbolized the old authoritarian system and its demise.

The changes in the political arena were dramatically highlighted by the national and state elections of July 1997, which were monitored by the new Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), an independent organization headed by José Woldenberg. On July 6, 30 million Mexicans (an electoral participation rate of 58 percent) changed the political balance of power and ended 70 years of one-party rule. The PRI lost control of the Congress when two opposition parties, the left-wing Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and the conservative National Action Party (PAN), together won over 50 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house. Also significantly, the first election ever for mayor of Mexico City (previously an appointed position) was won by PRD leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano, and two out of six state governorships (Nuevo León and Querétaro) went to the National Action Party.

In December, when the mayor of Mexico City announced his cabinet choices, many minority representatives were included, a welcome "mouthful of fresh phonetics" enthused the writer Carlo Coccioli. Four Jews—Clara Jusidman, Roberto Eibenschutz Hartman, Rene Druker, and Jeny Saltiel Cohen—were invited to be
part of the new team, although not yet confirmed at year's end. Only one of the four, Jusidman, was currently affiliated with the Jewish community.

Although the economy was severely hurt by the bungled devaluation of the Mexican peso in December 1994, which unleashed perhaps the worst economic crisis since the Depression, some signs of recovery were evident. As a result of political changes, foreign money rushed back into the Mexican markets, strengthening the peso against the dollar. Yet more than a quarter of the workforce remained unemployed or underemployed; the already alarming lack of personal security in Mexico City, as well as in other large urban centers, was overwhelming; and the economic difficulties affected large segments of the middle class. The challenge to the government was clearly to listen to those seeking reform while not abandoning a commitment to economic modernization.

*Israel and the Middle East*

Israel and the Middle East remained topics of interest and strong opinions in the country. Despite the success of specific exchange programs between Israel and Mexico—academic, political, economic, and cultural—media reaction to Israel and its policies was often negative. Coverage of the September 4 terrorist attack on Ben Yehudah Street in Jerusalem was generally sympathetic; however, it was eclipsed by the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Moreover, sympathy for Israel and Israelis was short-lived and had no effect on the generally lukewarm or negative attitudes that permeated the press. Discussions in the press by journalists who systematically analyze the Middle East and Israel, in particular after the failed Israeli attempt to assassinate a Hamas leader in Jordan in September, mostly expressed solidarity with the Arab position. In such cases it was left to committed Jewish journalists to explain and argue the case for Israel in the national press.

Since the mid-1970s, when Mexico voted for the "Zionism is racism" resolution in the UN and expressed sympathy for Yasir Arafat and the PLO, relations between Israel and Mexico had been somewhat strained. The visit to Israel of Dr. José Angel Gurria in February 1997, the first by a Mexican foreign minister in 22 years, helped to improve the atmosphere. Gurria had meetings with President Ezer Weizman, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Foreign Minister David Levy, as well as leaders of the opposition, business representatives, and even old acquaintances, such as Prof. Jacob Frenkel, whom Gurria knew from their joint work for the International Monetary Fund. Gurria's schedule included visits to universities and research institutes and the promotion of cultural exchanges between the two countries. The visit provided an opportunity for the Mexican ambassador to Israel, Dr. Jorge Alberto Lozoya, to give a lecture on "Mexico's Foreign Policy for the 21st Century," and for the Mexican government to host a reception at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem to inaugurate the Rosario Castellanos Chair in Literature, in memory of the deceased Mexican ambassador and writer.
Minister of Health Dr. Juan Ramón de la Fuente visited health institutions in Israel to discuss the renewal of exchanges of information and technology. Other sectors in Mexico, including agriculture, technology, and medicine, continued to exchange information and products with Israel. For example, Kibbutz Eilon proposed a project for the automatic canning of peppers and tomatoes on Mexican farms. The visit to Israel of Mexican deputy minister of international trade negotiations Jaime Zabludovsky highlighted the $100 billion in bilateral trade between the two countries. His visit was followed by that of a group of bankers and entrepreneurs seeking to continue and expand economic exchanges between the countries. In the arts, the visit of Itzhak Perlman with various Klezmer music groups and that of Zubin Mehta with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra were major events in the artistic life of Mexico City in August 1997. Israeli cellist Zvi Plessner performed in Mexico in May, under the sponsorship of Keren Hayesod, and Mexican pianist Jorge Federico Osorio went to Israel to perform in the festivities of Jerusalem 3000.

Perhaps the largest area of exchange was in various academic fields—medicine, engineering, feminist studies, literature, and philosophy. The Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, Bar-Ilan University, and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev carried out exchanges with the major universities in Mexico: the UNAM (National Autonomous University), UIA (Iberoamerican Autonomous University), and other specialized institutes of higher learning. The Center for Judaic Studies of Iberoamerican University and Tribuna Israelita sponsored a colloquium on Judaic studies, February 27–March 3, 1997. Participants from Israel included professors Haim Avni, Nahum Megged, Shlomo Ben Ami, and David Bankier; a special guest was Argentinian Jewish writer Dr. Marcos Aguinis. Prof. Ephraim Meir, head of Bar-Ilan’s philosophy department, participated in a colloquium on the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas in June, joined by Mexican academicians Enrique Dussel, Silvana Rabino-Vick, Márcio Costa, Gabriela Travesso, and Fabián Giménez of UNAM and UIA. Also in June, Dr. David Galinsky, Israeli specialist in geriatric medicine, addressed a conference organized by the newly formed association of Mexican Friends of Ben-Gurion University and also spoke at the Centro Deportivo Israelita (Jewish Sports Center). The Health Ministry of Mexico joined Tel Aviv University in organizing a symposium in November on “Developments in Biomedicine.” It was coordinated by Dr. José Halabe Cherem, who was elected to the presidency of the Mexican Council of Internal Medicine. Minister of Health Juan Ramón de la Fuente was present, as well as the representatives of all the institutions involved.

Israeli institutions hosted Mexican specialists, including Prof. Josefina Z. Vázquez of the Colegio de México and Prof. Leopoldo Zea of UNAM, at a Tel Aviv University conference on “Latin American Thought” in November 1996.

The Mexico-Israel Cultural Center, led by new director Monica Dinner, prepared an extensive and varied program to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the State of Israel. A sculpture competition, an exhibition by the renowned sculptor Sebastián (Enrique Carbajal), concerts, conferences, a photographic
Scholarships were given by the Weizmann Institute to allow three Mexican students from the Instituto Educativo Olinica, Colegio de Ciencias y Humanidades, and Preparatoria Pedro de Alba to travel to Israel. The Hebrew University provided scholarships in agricultural studies.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

The Mexican Jewish community, an estimated 40,000-strong, maintained its demographic stability. Most of Mexico's Jews lived in Mexico City and its suburbs, while the rest (about 2,500) resided in the cities of Guadalajara, Monterrey, and Tijuana.

Suburban developments built over the last ten years had become the residential areas of choice of Jewish families, and now included some schools, communal organizations, and institutions that decided to follow their constituencies.

Communal Affairs

Although the effects of the country's economic crisis were felt by most social classes, the community took emergency measures to help its most needy members. Schools provided large amounts of scholarship aid for parents who could not pay full school tuition, and holiday food baskets were provided to needy families. Specific subcommunities even went so far as to purchase cars to organize taxi services, in order to provide work for the jobless. Many areas of community life, however, continued to function as before.

The political turbulence of the country was mirrored in a dramatic and unprecedented upheaval within the community: the Ashkenazi Kehillah Nidkhei Israel, the central institution of Ashkenazi Jewry since 1958, was officially dissolved in October 1997, in what was effectively a coup. The activists who carried out the coup announced the formation of a new organization, under new leadership, to be called the Ashkenazi Community Council.

The Kehillah, which represented the 50 percent of Mexican Jewry who are of Ashkenazic origin, was an umbrella organization encompassing a wide range of ideologies, bridging the political and religious differences of the Bundist, Orthodox, and Zionist Jews who had joined forces to create the organization. Sephardic Jews, divided into several subcommunities, have their own communal structures and institutions.

Under Shimshon Feldman, who took over leadership of the Kehillah soon after its creation and remained its central leader and most powerful figure until his death in 1989, the organization was responsible for and controlled virtually every
domain of Ashkenazic Jewish communal life—synagogues and religious rites from birth to death (all Orthodox), cultural affairs, food supervision (Kashrut), internal legal courts for conciliation and arbitration (which managed to enforce their verdicts mostly through the charismatic power of Feldman), modern religious education (Mizrachi), support for secular Jewish schools (Vaad Hachinuch), Zionist organizations, the management of the old-age home's facility, and ORT (Organization for Rehabilitation Through Training).

While the Kehillah that Feldman managed was officially democratic in structure, it had evolved into a bureaucracy autocratically controlled by Feldman and a small cadre, in which ideologies had ceased to play any major role, dissent was mostly silenced, and the injection of new ideas was discouraged. While this style benefited the leadership, it became increasingly anomalous as society at large moved to embrace democratic ideals and practices.

After Feldman's death, his son, Israel, stepped into what some regarded as an inherited post. Although the younger Feldman had spent many years in training and learning about the management of the institution, he was less charismatic than his father and saw his role as essentially managerial. The weakening of the venerable position held by the father offered an opening to those in the community who were seeking change. Individual congregations saw an opportunity to achieve more freedom, to reduce accountability to a central body, and to reconfigure positions of prestige and authority within the community.

The initiators of the coup were a small group, mostly from the Ramat Shalom Congregation, a new Orthodox congregation in the suburbs of Mexico City that now surpassed in size and wealth the Kehillah's main congregation in the city, Nidkhei Israel (founded 1922). Guided by Dr. Hugo Yoffe, a psychologist and consultant on organizational behavior, the group spent nearly a year developing a blueprint for change and maneuvering behind the scenes—trying to build support and testing possible internal resistance. None of this activity was known in the larger Jewish community.

The group made its takeover plan public at a meeting on October 13. A notice published in the local Jewish press had announced that a meeting would take place at which elections would be held. The meeting drew a small attendance of about 100, many organizations were not represented, and no vote was taken. But the meeting was the occasion for an announcement of a fait accompli: the Kehillah was officially dissolved, and its functions would be assumed by a new organization, the Ashkenazi Community Council. The new leadership group consisted of 12 men, mostly self-appointed activists but including Israel Feldman, who had evidently decided to let himself be coopted, with Yoffe as executive advisor. The new group presented itself, at the meeting and later in the local media, as "a true outgrowth of democracy, modernity and consensus" within the community, whose goal was to create a more inclusive body than had existed previously. Significantly, nothing was said about making the body more democratic, nor was any substantive program put forward.

Religious identification and control of religious life played an important role
in the takeover, highlighting the declining importance of Zionism and other secular ideologies among Mexican Jews. A challenge mounted to the traditional positions of religious authority led to the dismissal of the only Mexican-born rabbi, Abraham Bartfeld, the rabbi of the Kehillah synagogue. At the same time, other Orthodox congregations within the Kehillah asserted new independence, taking advantage of the changes that had occurred in the urban geography and economic status of their constituencies. Acknowledging the growth and increasing influence of the Conservative Congregation Bet El, whose membership was several fold larger than that of the Orthodox congregations, the new leadership indicated willingness to include it as a constituent (a step that the Orthodox Kehillah did not allow during the life of Feldman and avoided for a time following his death). However, the largely self-sufficient Bet El apparently did not perceive any practical gain to itself from "official" recognition.

The coup met with no dissent, nor did it require public acquiescence to gain legitimacy. The Ashkenazi Community Council opened new offices in an effort to establish its separate identity, and moved to consolidate new alliances while distancing itself from old ones. As it began to exert authority, it clearly faced problems—the disgruntled feelings of some of its members, internal power conflicts not yet manifest to outsiders, and the tensions inherent in the unfulfilled promise of eventually uniting all organizations. The president of the new body is Bernardo Waiss; presidential advisor is Jaime Bernstein; vice-presidents with various portfolios are Isaac Friedman, León Waiss, Samuel Schuster, Sergio Abush, Israel Feldman, Mario Duke, Bernardo Broitman, Luis Epelstein, and Alejandro Kampler; general secretary is Max Wornovitzky. No women were given or attained positions of importance.

The Jewish Central Committee remained the chief representative body of Jews in Mexico, including all subgroups, Sephardic and Ashkenazic, as well as the communities in Guadalajara, Tijuana, and Monterrey. Isaias Gitlin was the group's current head, under its two-year rotating presidency. The Central Committee took on added importance in light of the changes taking place within the Ashkenazic segment of the community.

The Monte Sinai community, made up mostly of Jews originating in Damascus, celebrated over 80 years of communal activity. The Maguen David community, made up of Jews from Aleppo, undertook to rebuild its community center, to include a synagogue, educational halls, youth centers, and other facilities. The project was launched only after a long campaign to gain consensus for the enormous project, during which all relevant issues were fully aired. Despite the current difficult economic climate, the majority decided in favor, and a substantial sum of money was raised the same evening as the vote.

Three new mikvehs (ritual baths) were opened in Mexico City, one by Ashkenazim, one by Sephardim, and one by the Conservative Bet El Congregation. The Eishel of Cuernavaca, the old-age home sponsored by the Kehillah, celebrated renovation of its facilities with a series of activities, including visits by lead-
ers of the Kehillah, by Rabbis David Tabachnik, Marcelo Rittner, and Rafael Spangenthal, and various women's groups, and concerts for the elderly. Retorno, an organization providing emotional support and guidance for persons addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, continued its work. Kadima, the advocacy group for the disabled, sought to raise its profile by expanding the range of its services and by increasing consciousness-raising activities. A new membership group for homosexuals, Shalom Amigos, was described in the communal press as the first Latin American Jewish organization of its kind.

FEMUJ, the Mexican Federation of Jewish University Students, was about to get permanent offices at the Kehillah building, at no cost, as part of a reorganization. Some 80 young people attended the 1997 national seminar, held in Puebla. The group planned to participate in the International Congress for Jewish Youth in Cuernavaca in 1998.

Jewish women's voluntary organizations continued to support projects of the Mexican Red Cross such as the Hospital of Naucalpan, the Hospital for Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation in the northern part of Mexico City, and the expansion of medical services at the Itzjak Rabin Center for Community Development. They also worked at Isla Marias in providing social rehabilitation for ex-inmates.

Circumciser (mohel) Nissim Michan traveled to Cuba to perform ritual circumcisions on 21 males ranging in age from 3 months to 42 years old.

Israel-Related Activity

In November 1996 the community organized several ceremonies in remembrance of Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin, murdered two years earlier. The main event, organized by the Central Committee, was attended by Mexican dignitaries, representatives of the State of Israel, and members of the community. At Anahuac University, a student-initiated memorial service was held the same month.

A now well-established annual program of the Mexican Friends of the Hebrew University in February brought four distinguished female academicians from Israel to interact with the Jewish community and with specialists in their own fields in Mexico. This year's lecturers were Tamar El-Or, an anthropologist; Batsheva Keren, a geneticist; Yehudith Birk, an agriculturalist; and Elisheva Simchen, a public health physician.

Education

The network of communal day schools, the hallmark of the community, which encompassed about 70 percent of all Jewish children, was expanding despite economic problems and difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers of Yiddish and/or Hebrew. Responsibility for this area of communal life, specifically all sec-
ular Jewish education, was completely in the hands of women, who continued to be excluded from other communal positions.

To the already impressive list of existing day schools (Colegio Israelita de México; Nuevo Colegio Israelita I.L.Peretz; Escuela Yavne; Colegio Hebreo Tarbut; Colegio Bet-Hayeladim; Tarbut Sefaradi; Colegio Monte Sinai; Colegio Maguen David; Yeshiva Emuna; Colegio Atid) was added a new school, Gan Montessori, with an enrollment of about 30 children. Launched by four women teachers, the school teaches in Spanish and celebrates the Jewish holidays as part of Jewish culture. This represents a departure from the rest of the community day schools, which are not necessarily religious in orientation but which teach Judaic subjects in Yiddish and/or Hebrew. Another exception is Atid, which teaches mostly in English and has minimal Judaic instruction.

The list of schools does not include all the afternoon religious schools, adult education, or kolels (adult yeshivahs) that proliferated in the last decade, nor the activity of the Universidad Hebraica, which offers adult education in Judaic studies.

Community Relations

With the changes in the political system and the new saliency of electoral politics, Jewish communal leaders and heads of the Central Committee met with government officials, including President Ernesto Zedillo, as well as with opposition leader, now mayor of Mexico City, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, to discuss issues of concern to the Jewish community. Jews joined with others to protest the crime wave that threatened to engulf the capital city and the lack of police protection.

The ORT organization continued to expand its technical training programs in the capital and also in the interior states of Coahuila, Baja California, Nuevo León, Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas. Its more than 50 centers cooperated with the Iberoamerican University, the Instituto Politécnico Nacional, and the Tlaxcala University.

Culture

One of the last events organized by the Ashkenazi Kehillah before its reconstitution was a colloquium of journalists, mostly but not exclusively engaged in writing in the Jewish-Mexican press. It was held at the Kehillah building in September. Participating were journalists from all the Jewish-Mexican news media as well as independent journalists and representatives of communal organizations. Among the topics discussed were whether the internal communal press should be institutionally controlled or independent, and how writers should deal with efforts at communal censorship. Another discussion focused on encouraging non-Jewish journalists to write about Jewish issues as a means to combat the latent anti-Semitism in the country.

Among established activities in the cultural life of the community, the Aviv Is-
raeli Dance Festival, sponsored by the CDI (Sports Center), continued to draw large audiences. Held in March, the event is a highly professional undertaking that features the participation of large numbers of children and adolescents. In the larger cultural world, a short film by Ariel Gordon, Adios Mama, the only entry submitted by Mexico, received a prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

Jewish-Christian Relations

As it had been doing every two or three years, Mexican B'nai Brith organized a “Friendship Seder” on May 8, 1997, at the Bet-Itzjak Synagogue in Mexico City. Among the distinguished guests were Norberto Rivera Carrera, the archbishop of Mexico; Ernesto Corripio Ahumada, the cardinal emeritus of Mexico; Sergio Carranza, bishop of the Anglican Church; Lic. Rafael Rodríguez Barrera, deputy minister of the interior; and Moshe Melamed, ambassador of Israel to Mexico. Hosting the event were Jose Kably, president of the Judeo-Christian Commission of B'nai Brith, and Manuel Taifeld, president of the Spinoza Lodge. Rabbi Samuel Lerer of the Bet-Israel Congregation also took part.

The Center for the Study of Religions (CEREM), the Secretaría de Gobernación, and the Universidad Americana of Acapulco cosponsored a symposium in July on “The Role of the Churches in Mexico Today.” An attempt was made to analyze the implications of the changes taking place at the national level in the political, economic, and social spheres.

Publications


New works of fiction included Manuel Levinsky's Alex, Perfil de joven sin rumbo (Alex: Profile of a Youth Without Direction); Gildy Bardavid's Parábolas para trascender (Parabolas to Transcend); Luis Feher's El Bostezo (The Yawn); and Silvia Hamui Sutton's Huellas Plasmadas en el Espacio (Prints Left in Space).

Two distinguished works by Mexican Jews about Mexican history and culture were published this year. One was historian Enrique Krauze's Mexico: Biografía de un pueblo, A History of Modern Mexico, 1810–1996, which was translated almost simultaneously into English. The second was a volume compiled and edited by Boris Rosen, a respected left-wing intellectual, of writings by Guillermo Prieto. This volume is part of a series of modern editions of the works of 19th-century classical Mexican thinkers.

The Documentation Center of the Kehillah received a grant from the National
Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) for publication of a study of Mexican policy during World War II: *El Convenio Ilusorio: Refugiados de Guerra en México* (The Illusory Agreement: War Refugees in Mexico). *Eslabones*, a semiannual journal of regional studies sponsored by UNAM, published an issue on religions that included material on the Jewish community in Mexico.

**Personalia**

The election of architect Sara Topelson de Greenberg as president of the International Union of Architects (1997–99), an organization representing more than a million architects around the world, was greeted with excitement in the Jewish community. Topelson was also named Woman of the Year for 1996 by the National Anthropological Museum. A similar cause of pride was the induction of Margo Glantz into the Mexican Language Academy—a noteworthy achievement for a woman and for a minority member in particular. Glantz, a professor of literature at UNAM and winner of many literary prizes, is the daughter of the immigrant poet Jacobo Glantz, whose work has not been translated and is therefore largely unknown in Spanish-speaking circles.

After a 27-year career as a newscaster, Jacobo Zabludovsky, the foremost figure in television (and press) in Mexico—the Walter Cronkite of Mexico—announced his retirement. Zabludovsky was clearly identified as a Jew but had no specific links to Jewish communal activity. Although some suggested that his long, successful career was due in part to the Televisa network’s close ties to the government, no one denied his professional abilities and his contribution to modernizing newscasting in Mexico.

Marcos Moshinsky, a nuclear physicist at UNAM, was awarded a 1997 UNESCO Prize at a ceremony in Paris for his contributions to world science. At UNAM, Dr. Bertha Fortes was honored at a special convocation for her work as a clinical psychologist and professor.

Dr. Teodoro Cesarmann, an eminent cardiologist and well-known personality within the Jewish community and the country at large, died in September 1997 at the age of 74.
Argentina

National Affairs

DURING THE PERIOD 1995–1997, the Justicialists (PJ) continued to rule Argentina under President Carlos Menem, the country’s chief executive since 1989; he was reelected in May 1995 for a four-year term under the country’s 1994 reformed constitution. The PJ also outperformed former president Raúl Alfonsin’s Radical Civic Union (UCR) in the 1995 legislative elections, while a left-of-center front (FREPASO) also did well on that occasion. However, in the legislative elections of October 1997, the PJ fared poorly and was likely to be dependent on UCR participation in setting a parliamentary agenda. Reverses for the PJ nationally and in some key local elections signaled the public’s dissatisfaction with high levels of unemployment and the electorate’s heightened perception of corruption, exacerbated by the belief in a judiciary subject to pressures by the ruling party.

The 1996 rate of economic growth was 4.4 percent, almost a fifth higher than that predicted by a host of forecasters, with an inflation rate of 0.054 percent being the country’s lowest for over half a century; a year later the estimated rates of GDP growth and inflation were 8 percent and 0 percent respectively. While those securely employed continued to benefit from the end of hyperinflation under Menem, the heavy social cost of the government’s economic policies was impossible to ignore. Unemployment increased from 16.4 percent in 1995 to 17.3 percent in 1996. With some government officials candidly admitting abroad that it might take generations to lower the rate of joblessness significantly, the decrease in the official level of unemployment to 13.7 percent, as recorded during 1997, was largely due, among other things, to a World Bank and government-funded scheme providing six-month-jobs for those prepared to work for $200 (U.S.) monthly. Moreover, foreign investment in the first five months of 1997 was nearly equivalent to the annual average for 1990–95, with official forecasts for that year of $8 billion being exceeded by a confirmed influx of $12 billion.

In 1997, seeking to close a dark page in Argentina’s recent history, the government offered the sum of $200,000 as compensation, payable in bonds, to each of the 7,000 families of those who were abducted and killed during the 1976–83 military regime. Inasmuch as the package’s terms entailed acknowledgment by the bereaved families that their loved ones were in fact dead, without necessarily knowing what happened to them post-disappearance, some refused the compensation. Among them was the founding leader of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the human-rights group established by relatives of the military regime’s victims.
Under Foreign Minister Guido di Telia's stewardship, the Menem government continued its close alignment with the United States—the foreign-policy counterpart of Argentina's commitment to neo-liberal economic policies. The country's international realignment since Menem was voted into the Casa Rosada, the presidential palace, which resulted in the United States granting Argentina extra-NATO ally status in 1997, also led Argentina to adopt an increasingly pro-Israel line, while attempting to retain a measure of independence.

The acknowledged improvement in Argentine-Israeli relations under Menem largely survived intact the transition from a Labor to a Likud-led government in Jerusalem in 1996. Even as the peace process lost momentum, Foreign Minister Di Telia made no apologies for Argentina's moderation, which he described as reflecting domestic considerations.

Considerable controversy swirled about Israel's ambassador, Yizhak Aviran, who was reprimanded on at least one occasion by Argentine officials. Such a dressing down took place in November 1996, following one of Aviran's not unusual forays into Argentine domestic affairs. Speaking at a vandalized Jewish cemetery, the Israeli envoy was quoted in *La Nación* (October 28, 1996) as saying, "We see nothing but darkness, more attacks, more threats, more hatred, and less security." Mincing no words, the outspoken ambassador's speech also affirmed that it was no longer enough "to be told that something is being done." Angered by what was generally seen—not just in Argentine government circles—as yet another undiplomatic statement representing "an interference in domestic affairs," Foreign Minister Di Telia had his deputy, Andrés Cisneros, meet with the Israeli envoy; an official communique let it be known that Aviran had been apprised of Menem's and Di Telia's "surprise and malaise" at this outburst.

Over the years Aviran's behavior generated a degree of resentment among Argentine Jews and others. His vitriolic attack on Supreme Court member Ricardo Levene, Jr., late in 1995 and call for the investigation of the Israeli embassy bombing to be taken away from the country's highest court in March 1997, or his criticism of the Catholic Church and government responses to anti-Jewish attacks in 1996, would undoubtedly long since have resulted in harsher measures in any other country. There were in fact calls for stronger action against the envoy. During 1997 a right-wing lawmaker, Guillermo Fernández Gill, declared himself in favor of Aviran being declared persona non grata for "grave intromissions in our internal affairs" that injured "national sovereignty," as well as for his "disrespect towards ministers of a democratically elected government." This last was a reference to Aviran moving away from where Interior Minister Carlos Corach, Foreign Minister Di Telia, and other officials were standing at the third anniversary commemoration of the AMIA bombing in July 1997. For their part, four Justicialist senators—Angel Pardo, Osvaldo Sala, Alberto Tell, and one-time Menem brother-in-law Jorge Yoma—urged the president to bring to Jerusalem's atten-
tion that Aviran's attitude was inconsistent with "the most elementary principles of international law" and deserved "the Argentine government's strongest protest," an implicit call on Israel to replace its long-serving diplomat in Buenos Aires.

The tilt in Jerusalem's direction went hand-in-hand with gestures designed to create the impression of a degree of evenhandedness toward the Arab world in general and the Palestinians in particular. For instance, Interior Minister Corach's visit to Tel Aviv in March 1996 yielded a bilateral agreement with the Israelis on terrorism, and a complementary draft accord with the Palestinians on the exchange of information on the same subject, which he ordered after meeting with the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) president in Gaza. Moreover, while Yasir Arafat failed to get Menem to intercede with Jerusalem to lift its ban on Palestinian workers, the Argentine government presented the PNA with a building for its diplomatic representation in Buenos Aires. This was an unpleasant reminder to opponents of Palestinian national aspirations that, no matter who ruled in Jerusalem, Argentina was on the side of those who viewed the PNA as an inevitable Palestinian state in the making. This was not the sole instance where Argentina's distaste for some Likud government policies coexisted with a commitment to a pro-Israel foreign policy orientation. Argentina unashamedly backed the UN General Assembly's condemnation of Israeli settlement activity in April 1996 and called for a halt of the Jebel Abu Ghneim/Har Homah project in Jerusalem.

Conditional support for Israel was also now generally endorsed by the two main opposition parties, as seen, for example, in multipartisan initiatives in Congress "to energetically repudiate" the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 and Hamas's three suicide-bombing attacks on Israeli civilians in March 1996. Both government and opposition reproached Israel for the civilian casualties in Lebanon in April (Operation Grapes of Wrath), and expressed concern over Israel's legalization of the use of torture in November.

A pro-Israel stand by the ruling party, along with Argentina's alignment with the United States under Menem, may have been factors in the traumatic bombings that wrecked the Israeli embassy in February 1992 and the Jewish community's AMIA headquarters two years later, with a combined toll of over 120 dead and several hundred wounded. This assessment can be gleaned from the conclusions of the multipartisan congressional commission monitoring official probes into both terrorist attacks, which were released in December 1997. Although the committee's fractiousness resulted in three different sets of conclusions — by mainstream Justicialists, opposition party members, and a Justicialist dissident — they all stressed, among other things, that changes in the country's international relations were not accompanied immediately by accommodation in the security and intelligence apparatus. The implication was that the attackers were able to exploit the weakness in the security and intelligence areas caused by that lag.

Despite the existence of antiterrorism agreements stemming from Interior Min-
ister Corach’s 1996 visit to the Middle East, and the confirmation by Rubén Beraja, the president of Argentine Jewry’s representative body (DAIA) in October 1996 that Israel’s Mossad continued to cooperate with Argentina’s State Intelligence Secretariat (SIDE), officials feared that Argentina could still witness a third terrorist megabombing. Neither all Argentine officials nor all Jews, however, shared Ambassador Aviran’s certainty that Iran and the armed wing of Lebanon’s Hezbollah were the “intellectual authors of the [two previous] attacks.”

European advice to avoid incurring Iranian wrath and a reluctance to give up the country’s foremost Middle East export market—one which, according to Iran, yielded an accumulated surplus in Argentina’s favor of over $10 billion since 1984—had long been seen as compelling explanations for Argentina’s unwillingness to sever relations with Tehran, as urged by Israel and some quarters in the United States. After the AMIA bombing in July 1994, Argentina had downgraded links with Tehran to the level of chargé d’affaires, but it resisted efforts to take stronger measures, especially after a former Iranian intelligence operative who had implicated Iranian diplomats in the attacks in Buenos Aires was discredited.

Foreign policy was clearly a consideration in the decision by government to give a piece of prime real estate in Buenos Aires to Saudi Arabia for a Sunni mosque and Islamic center. (Iran had supported the construction of the city’s one existing mosque in the 1980s.) Apart from the rejection of the proposal by the Radical bloc in the lower house of the legislature, the Catholic primate of Buenos Aires, Antonio Cardinal Quarracino, expressed distaste for the project in the largest circulation Argentine daily, Buenos Aires’s Clarin (March 27, 1996), in which he referred to Islam as a great heresy, and portrayed the prophet Muhammad as the descendant of “degraded idolaters from savage Arabia.” Protest of the cardinal’s words was minimal, and came chiefly from the Iranian cultural attaché, Hojjatulislam Mohsen Rabbani, who took serious issue with Quarracino in print. If Quarracino’s view could be seen as emblematic of the Argentine Catholic hierarchy’s pre-Vatican Council outlook, the deafening silence on the part of other parties vis-à-vis the country’s aggrieved Muslim and Arab-descended citizens clearly reflected the prejudices of Argentine society. Responding to this, Argentines of Arab descent, especially the Muslim minority among them, were moved to increased assertiveness. In April the Buenos Aires Council of Islamic Institutions (CEIBA), called for an immediate halt to “anti-Arab and anti-Islamic racism; anti-Muslim discrimination and defamation; baseless accusations, e.g. the [Israeli] embassy and AMIA [bombings]; and media censorship.”

By August 1996 the foundation stone of the future mosque and educational center—a project valued at $40 million that was likely to become the city’s foremost Muslim prayer house—was laid in an official ceremony attended by, among others, the Wahabite kingdom’s minister of Islamic affairs, Abdullah al-Turki,
and his Argentine counterpart, Foreign Minister Guido Di Telia (whose portfolio also covers religious affairs), as well as Mayor Fernando de la Rúa, whose record as a Radical senator had included being the sole upper house opponent of the government's gift. Before the end of 1996, Congress also sanctioned draft legislation first introduced in July 1995 that declared the Islamic new year and two other festivals as nonworking days for the country's Muslim inhabitants. The number of Muslims was variously estimated but was undoubtedly less than the upper-ceiling self-estimate of 650,000. Moreover, nearly a century after the first Druze arrivals in Argentina, this Muslim group was recognized as a separate faith in December 1997.

**Holocaust-Related Matters**

Argentina's efforts to disengage from the image it earned during the Nazi era, still perceived as a hurdle in the way of optimized relations with the United States, translated, among other things, into Supreme Court endorsement of government efforts to cleanse the country of war criminals, a presidential decision to release records of past gold bullion transactions, and the setting up of a commission to look into the number of war criminals and stolen assets that may have come to Argentina.

None of these actions pleased the country's officially marginalized ultranationalists. However, because of the country's antidiscrimination legislation, they were unable to give vent to their sentiments in mass circulation publications, rather than their diminishing number of fringe newsletters. A possible exception was the case of Ayer y Hoy, a recently established and seemingly well-endowed Buenos Aires-based publishing house responsible for some quality publications that convey their coded message, while so far carefully managing to avoid provoking legal action. Among Ayer y Hoy's catalogue of publications is the magazine *La memoria argentina*, whose third issue was entirely devoted to Adolf Eichmann in Argentina, as well as a separate biographical volume entitled *Martin Bormann*. Both publications skillfully exploit, among other things, important factual errors and exaggerations made by Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal over the years, in a clear attempt to discredit the man and, by implication, the cause of Nazi hunting. Ayer y Hoy also focused attention on Israel's infringement of Argentine sovereignty when kidnapping Eichmann in May 1960 and argued that Argentina altogether "bears no responsibility for Nazi crimes."

**NAZI GOLD**

In light of the fact that Argentina was among several Latin American states long suspected of holding Nazi assets in custody or serving as trans-shipment points for these—including gold plundered from the exchequers of countries invaded by the Third Reich and that taken from its Jewish victims—there was con-
siderable interest in the U.S. interagency study of the subject, the so-called Eizenstat report, released in May 1997. The report’s conclusion that there was no hard evidence among U.S. archival materials that plundered gold ended up in Buenos Aires would, if independently verified, neatly puncture the rationale for some of the blanket condemnation long directed at Argentina.

Argentina’s decision to set up its own commission of inquiry into the influx of Nazis and tainted gold was viewed as a necessary step toward understanding the country’s contemporary history. It was preceded by other steps taken by Menem and the ruling party’s opponents in Congress. In December 1996 Ricardo Mercado Luna, a UCR lower house member, introduced draft legislation designed to create a special inquiry commission that would investigate any illegal Third Reich gold transfers to Argentina's Banco Central. According to a report in Clarin (December 8, 1996), Mercado proposed that such a commission should include legislators, journalists, and representatives of the Argentine Academy of History, the World Jewish Congress, and the Wiesenthal Center. Concurrently with this, an initiative of Radical senator Javier Meneghini set its sights on legislation that would declare illegitimate any former Third Reich assets still in the country. Three months earlier, President Menem had already agreed to subject Banco Central documents to public scrutiny, and in November 1996 Martín Lagos, the bank’s vice-president, handed over to an interested party records of transactions in gold bullion since the 1930s. Moreover, in a December 1996 meeting between an American Jewish Committee (AJC) delegation and Foreign Minister Di Telia, Chief of Cabinet Jorge Rodriguez, and presidential secretary general Alberto Kohan, Di Tella requested whatever data the AJC might have on the entry of Nazi gold. Ultimately, Argentina’s recent record on the Nazis was recognized by the London-based Inter-Parliamentary Council Against Antisemitism. Led by Greville Janner, a Labor MP, the council welcomed President Menem to membership in June 1997, as well as Foreign Minister Di Tella a few months later.

**NAZI WAR CRIMINALS**

In November 1995 a convincing though not unanimous Supreme Court supported Judge Leónidas Moldes’s decision to grant Italy’s extradition request of former SS captain Erich Priebke. Moldes’s extradition order had been overturned in August by an appellate court on the strength of Argentina’s statute of limitations for cases of homicide. While the Supreme Court was asked to consider Priebke’s situation, a German extradition request was filed, presumably as a fallback position in case the Italian request collapsed. In its ruling the Supreme Court noted that the charges against Priebke did not amount to homicide, but represented prima facie a case of genocide and crimes against humanity for which no statute of limitations applied. The ruling also broke new ground by giving precedence to peremptory norms of general international law over bilateral treaties, in this case an Argentine-Italian treaty, that conflict with such norms. This last
was regarded as a significant decision that could prove valuable in future cases involving extradition requests. Priebke's extradition also resulted in the interior ministry-decreed suspension of three federal policemen for embracing the suspected Nazi war criminal after escorting him from his home in San Carlos de Bariloche, Neuquén province, to the airport.

Later, the government took measures to preempt any return of the temporarily freed former SS officer. In August 1996, as soon as the Italian military tribunal's ruling on the former SS officer became known—guilty of participation in the March 1944 German reprisal execution of 335 defenseless civilians, including 75 Jews, in the Ardeatine caves, but freed on the grounds that his was a homicide case, which had since lapsed—Interior Minister Corach and Foreign Minister Di Telia jointly announced that, irrespective of Priebke's fate, his return to Argentina would not be countenanced under any circumstances. (See "Italy," elsewhere in this volume.)

An international conference on "War Criminals and Nazism in Latin America Fifty Years Later," organized by B'nai B'rith at Washington's United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in October 1996, heard about the presumed Argentine abode of Dinko Sakic, a commander of the Jasenovac concentration camp of Croatia's Nazi puppet government. Despite a July 1995 request by B'nai B'rith to the Croatian head of state to have Sakic brought to justice, and the latter's attendance at a veterans' meeting in the Croatian capital two months earlier, President Franjo Tudjman's reply that this would have to wait until the former Yugoslavia's conflicts in which his own country was involved were over essentially meant that Sakic remained at large, whether in Croatia or Argentina. Although reportedly on the U.S. Justice Department's watch list, neither Croatia nor the countries with legislation claiming jurisdiction in such cases showed active interest in Sakic's prosecution.

**HOLOCAUST MEMORIALS**

In May 1996 the national legislature approved the construction of a monument for Jewish victims of the Nazi genocide, to be erected on the square opposite the legislature in Buenos Aires. As publicized in the Boletín Oficial, draft legislation to this effect was introduced by Claudio Mendoza, a ruling PJ lower house member, and was sponsored by another 14 parliamentarians from the three main parties, including such luminaries as the UCR's lower house bloc leader, Federico Storani, and FREPASO's Graciela Fernández Meijide. A winner of the B'nai B'rith Human Rights Award in 1994, Mendoza was earlier behind the building of a similar monument in the northeastern provincial capital of Resistencia, Chaco province, "because there is always a need to remember, increase awareness and educate to prevent the recurrence of such a moral catastrophe as the Holocaust." The monument's design will be chosen through a competition organized by Argentina's Culture and Education Ministry.
Anti-Semitism

A recorded increase in anti-Jewish manifestations could be attributed to a combination of conditions conducive to the growth and spread of racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism. Among those were peak levels of unemployment since 1995 and inequality in the distribution of income; the intensified perception of corruption; the discrediting of key institutions; and the long-festering sequels of Argentina's imperfect transition from military to elected rule, i.e., without a thorough cleansing of the former regime's main security agencies.

Rodolfo Barra, a former minister of public works and Supreme Court justice, named justice minister in 1994, was ousted from the position two years later when it was revealed that he had a record of association with right-wing and anti-Semitic groups since his high-school days. As a law student he participated in an ultra-nationalist forum and was a devout follower of Leonardo Castellani, a Jesuit intellectual and unsuccessful parliamentary candidate for the anti-Semitic National Liberation Alliance (ALN) in 1946. Although Barra was more recently identified with the Opus Dei, a Spanish-created conservative Catholic organization, which cannot legitimately be accused of being a neo-Nazi outfit, by June 1996 he had lost the confidence of a section of Argentine society. Whereas DAIA vice-president Luis Steinberg declared that if Barra had once been a Nazi "he has now shown himself a democrat, and this is praiseworthy" — a view supported by his co-authorship with Interior Minister Corach of a book on Argentina's reformed constitution of 1994 — the average Jew found it "inadmissible that Barra should continue in charge of a ministry," and the DAIA was forced to revise its approach. Appointed temporarily to handle the justice portfolio was Barra's deputy, Elias Jassán, a one-time solicitor in the Menem brothers' law firm and a man active in the tiny Jewish community in La Rioja province. He thereby joined Corach as the second Jewish cabinet member in the present PJ administration.

While the U.S. State Department regarded Barra's fall from grace (in its human rights report for 1996) as evidence of "the government's desire to accommodate the sensitivities of the Jewish community," it could also be viewed as confirmation that the country's organized Jews had achieved a degree of political clout. Barra's departure in disgrace was above everything a sign of Jewish frustration at the complete failure of the investigation into the Israeli embassy bombing and meager achievements of the probe into the AMIA attack. The explanation for other former ultra-nationalists still holding office probably had to do with their lack of jurisdiction over the investigations, as well as their more convincing break with their ultra-nationalist past. In Barra's case, there was no evidence of his present attachment to an ultranationalist ideology or group and, not surprisingly, he was subsequently appointed as a congressional legal adviser.

Since 1991, Buenos Aires Jewish cemeteries had been vandalized seven times, including three attacks on the main burial ground in the greater Buenos Aires district of La Tablada — twice during 1996 and once in December 1997. Other Jew-
ish cemeteries in greater Buenos Aires and throughout the country were also targeted during 1996–97. The vandalism of the Ciudadela Jewish cemetery, under the jurisdiction of the Buenos Aires provincial police jurisdiction, happened a few days after the third attack against La Tablada. The Jewish cemetery of Rosario, Santa Fe province, witnessed the desecration of 14 tombs and destruction of three tombstones in October 1997; its Villa Clara counterpart, in the province of Entre Ríos, was attacked in November 1996 and July 1997. In September 1996 a total of 66 tombs were defiled in two different attacks against Córdoba’s new Jewish cemetery, in the neighborhood of San Vicente, the first of these on the Jewish New Year. Also during 1996, the Jewish cemetery of Salta, in the northwestern province of the same name, was vandalized. Like the Buenos Aires cases, the provincial ones all awaited clarification. While it was tempting to attribute the poor police work to political unwillingness on the part of the national and/or provincial governments concerned to get to the bottom of these cases, natural impatience with lack of results led many to ignore the difficulty of such cases—as witness the fact that it took longer, in fact several years, for the more experienced French to solve the vandalization of the Carpentras Jewish cemetery.

A few days after the first La Tablada attack in October 1996, when 100 tombs were defiled, some with graffiti reading “Holocaust, the great Jewish lie,” a caller to the capital city’s Jewish hospital, Ezrah, proclaimed that a National Dignity commando was responsible. Federal police cooperating with the Buenos Aires provincial police force in the investigation (the latter not entirely above suspicion of anti-Semitism and in the middle of a process of self-cleansing), produced some immediate results. Four people, all of them alleged members of a self-proclaimed Catholic ultra-nationalist Truth and Justice group, were detained and accused of the first attack. Their hatred of Jews was substantiated by their possession of hate pamphlets and publications that had been previously distributed among judiciary and university authorities in the greater Buenos Aires district of Morón. Among the four, Ricardo Russo, a PJ activist, had served as head of the foundation that promoted the creation of the University of Morón during the four previous years. Judging by press reports, the link between the detained and the attack was not their anti-Semitic literature but possession of aerosol paint similar to that used for the swastikas daubed at La Tablada. Whereas DAIA president Beraja initially said that it was too early “to be sure that the detained are directly linked with this attack,” by November 1996 the four detainees were charged. However, because of the flimsiness of the evidence, they were to be tried for the dissemination of anti-Semitic literature rather than the attack on La Tablada.

In 1997, 35 tombs were destroyed at La Tablada, with over half as many damaged at Ciudadela, though unlike earlier attacks, however, no swastikas and/or anti-Jewish inscriptions were found in La Tablada and Ciudadela this time. As with previous attacks, the vandals went undetected, though former Buenos Aires policemen (and perhaps even other elements associated with that police force)
were under suspicion. Since 1991, especially after the embassy and AMIA bombings, some 6,000 corrupt and otherwise unsuitable policemen had been purged from the 47,000-man Buenos Aires provincial police force, with some 500 dropped during 1997 alone. At the same time, the provincial legislature had extended the emergency legislation legitimizing such purges, though limited this time to the highest ranking officers. A willingness by some police officers to engage in activities aimed at sabotaging the reform effort had to be considered a possibility.

Reacting to the 1996 vandalization of La Tablada, President Menem issued his “most energetic repudiation of such an attack,” while Interior Minister Corach declared himself overcome by “an admixture of horror, indignation and shame” and proclaimed that the authors of the outrage were “barbarians.” Corach, Chief of Cabinet Rodriguez, and Menem’s personal physician, Alejandro Tfeli (like the head of state, the descendant of Syrian Muslims), visited La Tablada to express government solidarity with Argentine Jewry, while the Buenos Aires provincial vice-governor, Rafael Romá, offered assurances of his administration’s “profound desire to turn existing clues into results.” Likewise, the 1997 attacks were described as “deeds, shameful to all Argentines” by Interior Minister Corach, who also offered the central government’s undivided “collaboration and backing” to punish the perpetrators. In parliament and in the Buenos Aires provincial legislature, the 1996 vandalism of La Tablada evoked statements by UCR as well as PJ legislators demanding punishment of the vandals and swift police action. These and other expressions of solidarity with Argentine Jewry, though unlikely to bring about concrete results, at least indicated sympathy for the Jewish community and a resolve to address social tensions generally.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Demography

A revised estimate by demographers of the Hebrew University’s Institute of Contemporary Jewry (ICJ) put the size of Argentine Jewry in 1994 at 208,000, making it the world’s seventh-largest Jewish community outside Israel. According to the same source, 180,000 Jews — some 90 percent of the country’s total — lived in Buenos Aires, making it the third-largest Diaspora metropolitan area outside the United States. There were smaller Jewish concentrations in Córdoba, Rosario, Santa Fe, and Tucumán, among other Argentine provincial cities, most of which had lost population to Buenos Aires.

The Institute of Contemporary Jewry’s figure for Argentina was disputed by some Jewish leaders as being too low, perhaps by as much as 20 percent. The ICJ’s Sergio DellaPergola urged the launching of a new demographic study of Argentine Jewry.
Jewish-Christian Relations

The Catholic Church’s record during the period of military rule was the subject of a meeting of the plenary assembly of the Catholic Episcopal Conference in April 1996. Nearly 13 years after the restoration of elected governments in Argentina, it approved a consensus document that lamented Catholic participation in human-rights violations and admitted that all it had done “was insufficient to prevent so much horror.” The document was criticized by Monsignor Miguel Hesayne, bishop emeritus of Viedma, Neuquén province, and a human-rights campaigner, for the absence in the document of “gestures of repudiation of violence.”

Following the series of cemetery vandalizations, Monsignor Casaretto, bishop of the greater Buenos Aires district of San Isidro, addressed a letter to the Masorti affiliated Bet El temple expressing the Catholic church’s sympathy for the attacks the Jewish community had suffered. Though not written on behalf of the Episcopal Conference, news of the letter was leaked by Monsignor Guillermo Leaden, chairman of the Conference’s Christian-Jewish dialogue sub-commission, in October 1996, after the Israeli ambassador chided the Catholic Church for its “silence” on the “reawakening” of anti-Semitism in Argentina.

Father Rafael Braun, a Catholic theologian, was among the recipients of the B’nai B’rith Human Rights Award in December 1996. The cleric was honored for his indefatigable efforts in behalf of Christian-Jewish dialogue, in which, he declared in May 1997, he always started by acknowledging the Catholic Church’s “centuries-old anti-Semitic attitudes.”

In May 1997 a permanent mural commemorating the Jewish victims of World War II, as well as those killed in the Israeli embassy and AMIA attacks, was placed in the Metropolitan Catholic Cathedral. It was inaugurated by Cardinal Quarracino at a public function attended by Interior Minister Corach, Buenos Aires mayor De la Rúa, former Polish president Lech Walesa, and an array of Jewish and other leaders. The project was undertaken at the initiative of the Argentine House in Israel, an institution created by a former Jewish school teacher in Buenos Aires and later successful entrepreneur abroad, Baruch Tenenbaum. Some objections were raised to the mural’s implied equivalence of the Holocaust and the bombings in Buenos Aires.

In November 1997, AMIA, B’nai B’rith Argentina, and the Buenos Aires Archdiocese organized their third annual walk on behalf of the disabled. Three months earlier, the same institutions sponsored a two-day series of workshops titled “Together We Can,” which brought together some 2,000 secondary school students with special needs for a variety of artistic, sport, and dialogue-based activities.

Publications

Yiddish and other foreign-language newspapers were no longer published in Argentina, but three longtime Spanish-language Jewish periodicals—La Luz,
Mundo Israelita, and Nueva Sión—showed a remarkable degree of resilience. Comunidades and Masorti, also weekly papers, began publication during the past ten years. Conservative Judaism's Majshavot, the Latin American Jewish Congress's Coloquio, and the Latin American Sephardic Zionist Federation's Sefardica are quasi-academic journals providing, periodically, the fruits of historical and other research and critical essays. The most recent issue of DAIA's Indice was on the 60th anniversary of the Jewish umbrella organization (1995), and the WZO published an issue of Controversia de ideas sionistas in 1996.

Radio, television, and other media had eroded the importance of journalism in print and become a dynamic presence in the Jewish community. Most noteworthy are the Chai (transliterated in Spanish as Jai) radio station and the Alef cable television channel.

Several recent collections of scholarly essays are noteworthy. Among them, German and Italian Jewish Scientists in Argentina and Brazil (Ibero-Amerikanisches Archiv 21: 1-2) includes a unique reconstruction of Albert Einstein's visit to Argentina in 1925 (hitherto one of the father of relativity's least studied international trips), and devotes attention to the important contributions of the scientists who settled there in the 1930s and 1940s. Another collection—Discriminación y racismo en América Latina (Buenos Aires 1997), with an English-language selection appearing as two monographic issues of Patterns of Prejudice in 1996-97—contains proceedings from a conference at the University of Buenos Aires sponsored by, among others, the Latin American Jewish Studies Association, the Institute of Jewish Affairs, the Agudat Mechkar Americá Halatinit, the Argentine Senate, and the Argentine Foreign Ministry. Like other collections of academic papers, these include important contributions by non-Jewish authors, attesting to a noteworthy and stimulating development. Whereas topics of Jewish concern were in the past the exclusive province of Jewish scholars, chroniclers, and publicists, there is heightened interest in such subjects among researchers and academics of various nationalities and ethnic-religious affiliations, one that translates into a healthy and enriching debate.

Among new works of fiction published in 1995 was El fantasma del Reich (The Ghost of the Reich) a collection of horror stories by the young writer and poet Marcelo di Marco, winner of an Antorchas Foundation award. The title story is a hair-raising account of ultra-nationalist Jew-baiting in the country, as fantastic as it is reminiscent of some of the goings-on in Argentina's secondary schools of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. A noteworthy anthology of out-of-print works by poet César Tiempo (Israel Zeitlin's permanent nom de plume) — Buenos Aires esquina sábado (At the Crossroads of Buenos Aires and Sabbath) — artfully selected, annotated, and introduced by Eliahu Toker— was attractively published in 1997 by the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Argentina's national archive. Interior Minister Corach hailed the publication, saying that "remembering its best sons is part of any country's permanent debt with itself, one seldom settled," reflecting, perhaps, Toker's concluding comment that "hitherto, no Buenos Aires street or square bears his [Tiempo's] name."
A best-selling novel of 1997 was Marcos Aguinis's latest work, *La matriz del infierno* (The Womb of Hell). Aquinis is a former Latin American Jewish Congress deputy associate director and secretary of culture in the Alfonsin administration. The novel, which takes place in Buenos Aires and Berlin in the 1930s and is described as "a biography of an epoch," had three South American editions, which opened the way for a German-language translation, another feather in the cap of this multiprize-winning author.

**Personalia**

Late in November 1995 Alejandro Orchansky and Gerardo Belinsky were designated as Israeli honorary consuls. They were among 42 Argentine citizens approved by the lower house to act as honorary consuls, vice-consuls, and consular agents for 23 different countries. The list also included Luis Svatez Eichenberger and Saul Breitman, put forward by Honduras and the Dominican Republic, respectively.

Evidence that the Argentine foreign service, once an exclusive redoubt of the country's patrician families, was undergoing transformation was the designation in 1997 of Diego Guelar, a former ambassador to the European Community and Brazil, as the country's top diplomatic envoy to the United States. That Guelar—a one-time member of a Masorti community youth group and PJ lawmaker—was not an exception was highlighted by the presence of other politically appointed Jewish diplomats. More importantly, two Jewish gold medalists graduated from the Instituto del Servicio Exterior de la Nación, the training ground for Argentina's aspiring career diplomats: Luis Levitt (1991) and Claudio Rozencwaig (1996), the latter the winner also of the Elena Holmberg Prize for excellence in diplomatic theory and practice.

Writer Ricardo Feierstein, formerly in charge of the AMIA-initiated Milá publishing house, was among the winners of a 1996 essay competition on the role of the country's different immigrant groups in the development of Argentina. The competition was organized by the popular history magazine *Todo es Historia* (with funding from the Argentine education ministry's culture secretariat).

Legal counsel Esther Labatón was among the 1996 recipients of the B'nai B'rith Human Rights Award, for campaigning from her wheelchair for the right of the disabled to become fully integrated in society. A recipient of the 1989 Alpi Prize, Labatón was chairwoman of the Argentine bar association's commission on the disabled.

IGNACIO KLICH