The New Wave of Anti-Semitism in Argentina

Anti-Semitism has erupted violently in Argentina during the last two years. It is not an isolated phenomenon, but a basic symptom of the struggle between the extreme rightists, who represent ultra-conservative elements in Argentinian political life, and the Communists and their sympathizers, who, while legally barred from the public scene, maintain and are even extending their influence. In Argentina — as in Latin America as a whole — there is developing a polarization of the forces of right and left, both determined to fight to the last, and with every available means, to achieve the ultimate fulfillment of their goals. The liberal and democratic forces, split into a wide range of political groupings, seem to stand apart from the main struggle or at least to be unprepared to defend democratic institutions. Inner dissensions are the chief cause of their weakness, not to speak of their ideological confusion and lack of courage in taking clear stands on fundamental issues.

Governmental Indifference

Anti-Semitism is one of the classical weapons which the ultra-conservative right has taken from its armory. Since the government is eager to appease it with a stream of concessions aimed at winning its support, the present regime has shown little interest in the growing wave of anti-Semitism. Aside from feeble statements condemning vandalist excesses, the authorities have taken no concrete steps to put an end to the activities of the hatemongers. Even in the few instances when some of the offenders were arrested and proven guilty of violations of the law, there was no prosecution and they were released almost immediately without further explanation. The anti-Semitic organizations, especially the Tacuara movement, are secretly sponsored by leading members of the Catholic hierarchy, and the government's systematic refusal to undertake vigorous legal action is clearly motivated by its fear of antagonizing the Church as a whole.

Under such conditions, leading Jewish agencies naturally seek other means of self-protection and the leading defense organizations — the Instituto and the DAIA — have recently focused their attention on the problem and on measures for the defense of the Jewish community.
The official reactions have not been helpful. Recently, community leaders discussed Tacuara's attacks with Interior Minister A. Vitolo, but received no satisfaction. On another occasion, when community leaders complained to the police commissioner of a heavily Jewish district about police passivity during Tacuara onslaughts, he responded in a friendly manner, saying: "Why don't you defend yourselves? We have a tremendous manpower problem. We can do nothing for you."

Tacuara is the leading anti-Semitic organization and has been responsible for most of the recent developments. Although Tacuara's targets are not only the Jews but democracy, liberalism, parliamentary representation, Communism and the "materialistic, imperialist Yankees," their physical attacks have been directed mainly against Jews.

A Meeting with an Official of the Army Security Service

On my arrival in Buenos Aires in mid-October, I learned that a confidential meeting had just taken place with a high official of the S.I.D.E. (the Security Service of the Army), at his request. The meeting was attended by a group of community leaders on a strictly personal basis and not as representatives of their organizations.

According to reports I secured, the following developments took place at the meeting:

1. The S.I.D.E. official strongly denied a previous accusation by some Jewish community leaders that the Army approved of the actions of Tacuara.

2. He "revealed" that the Army's Security Service had learned of a Communist plan to launch a widespread pogrom against Buenos Aires Jews, in order to plunge the country into turmoil and confusion, and to place the blame on rightist elements.

3. He requested the Jewish community's cooperation in preventing the Communist conspiracy from being put into effect by revealing, among other things, the names of Jewish Communists.

4. To prove the truth of his assertions, and this is most important, he offered the group an opportunity to meet again, this time with special Secret Service agents who had cooperated with the Army in discovering the Communist plan.

Thus it appears that: 1. The S.I.D.E. has not offered even the slightest help in fighting Tacuara. On the contrary, the S.I.D.E. official practically dismissed the problem by claiming that it is a transitory phenomenon involving a few hundred youngsters.

2. The S.I.D.E. is solely interested in suppressing Communism and is not concerned about other movements. The meeting was arranged to involve the Jewish community and to divert
attention to the Communist threat. To put it bluntly, the purpose of the meeting was to secure the names of Communists.

A second meeting took place, without any tangible results.

Recently, in a private interview, a high government official said that the Government cannot feel concerned about the anti-Semitic activities of Tacuara, because, he said, Tacuara is needed as an "assault troop" to fight against Communism and everything else is secondary to that requirement.

We have discussed the situation and concluded (1) that the Fascist and anti-Semitic movement is growing by leaps and bounds in Argentina, (2) that the authorities are failing to curtail that movement, and (3) it is a serious mistake to regard those groups as an instrument to fight Communism, since their hatred is directed against the United States as much as against Marxism.

Major Incidents in 1961

Following is a list of major incidents so far this year?

**January:** Anti-Semitic leaflets distributed in the streets of Buenos Aires.

**April:** Swastika desecrations; violent anti-Semitic article in the *Diario Sirio-Libanes* (Arab-Spanish language newspaper); tarring and destruction of street signs on State of Israel Street in Buenos Aires; anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi daubings on several other streets.

**May:** Slogans reading "Jews to the crematory and gas chambers" painted on State of Israel Street and other anti-Semitic slogans on several streets in a largely Jewish quarter; swastika daubings on the building of a Jewish organization, and tarring of the front of a Jewish school.

**June:** A bomb exploded in the La Paz Synagogue; anti-Semitic daubings in several streets; an attempt to set fire to the ORT School; anti-Semitic inscriptions near the Mariano Moreno High School; attack by a gang of Tacuarites during a Jewish public ceremony in the city of Mar del Plata; anti-Semitic demonstrations at the School of Law of the University of Buenos Aires.

**July:** An attempt to set fire to the synagogue at 145 Antezana Street; attack on a synagogue at 555 J. E. Uriburu Street; bomb attack on the Villa Devoto Community Center; anti-Semitic demonstrations after a lecture by Father Julio Menziella, the spiritual brain of Tacuara.
August: A pogrom-type attack on a Jewish farm training center in the city of Mercedes; a pogrom-type attack during a private Jewish party. In these cases, beatings, tar-bombs, tear-bombs and guns were employed by members of Tacuara.

September: Attack on the Sephardic community center of Villa Urquiza; attack on the Max Nordau Synagogue; attack on the Parque Chacabuco Synagogue during a wedding; attack on the Jewish Club of 74 Colombres Street; knife attack by a Tacuara gang on two Jewish youngsters in the vicinity of a synagogue on Rosh Hashanah; bomb and gun attack on the non-Jewish Fray Mocho Theater; bomb attack on the Argentinian Press Association.

October: Attack, with shooting, on the School of Philosophy of the University of Buenos Aires.

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