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Preserving American Jewish History

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Mr. Abe Karlikow
The American Jewish Committee
FAD
New York.

Dear Abe:

First of all, I should like to express to you as well as to the whole AJC family my sincerest SHNAH TOVAH: *נא/ו נא/ו!*

I know that I have should send you the present report some weeks ago; but for reasons they logically come out clearly from following lines, I preferred to defer them, hoping that a time will come when whatever I write to you today will still be valid at the time the letter will reach you. Unfortunately my waiting was in vane. Let me make it clear so as you should know what I mean: The political, social, cultural, moral and economic situation of my country got lately so degraded or degraded that it's very hard if not impossible to ascertain some kind of evaluation, neither a diagnosis nor a prognosis. What ^{we} predict to-day ^{may} happen the opposite a day after. This is as far as the general situation is concerned. And as a consequence - easy to understand - it comes out similarly difficult to ascertain and offer a picture of the Jewish conditions which unavoidable are interwoven in all the local events in some way or another.

In other words and in order to make me better ^{under}stood: As a native of Argentina and therefore an old witness of the fluent events of my country and as an individual who followed the coming and goings of the happenings here, and studied them sociologically in the University during my student time and later on by myself, I dare to say that we never had such an uncertain time, such a confused and cloudy one. Or, if you prefer, Argentina has never before undergone such a miserable time. The government or rather the military dictatorship reached such a wretched and calamitous situation that practically remained without support. Everybody awaits anxiously the elections-day which ^{will} ~~is going to~~ come to state the end of coming month of October, so as to have the government clique out and being replaced by an elective regime (we call it "return to a constitutional democratic regime"). All the papers, no matter their influence in public opinion, are against the government. They do not limit themselves to comments criticizing deeds of the Army clique in power, but they add expressions of grief and sorrow for the national decay and moral bankruptcy. The question is now: Should ^{we} be hopeful vis a vis the new forthcoming elections and the return to a supposed ^{to} democracy? The answer used to be: "not so much". I would rather say: we're

hesitant. Why? Because among the two majority parties, one is the peronista and the other one is the Radical party (which pretend to be similar to the U.S. A. Democratic party). And although we can never predict who is going to win, ~~but~~ one thing is certain, the Peronist party is likely to be the majority as far as voting is concerned. The Peronistas may nevertheless get a fiasco and the Radicals may get more electors through a combination of the other small parties. The clique which made the coup d'etat 7 years ago in order to overthrow the Peronist regime and "put the country in order" is now doing the outmost to make friendship with the Peronists, hoping so to obtain forgiveness for their many mismanagements. But there is still a group of army people who don't make peace with such a tactic, so as we may expect a new "coup d'etat" sooner or later, after elections. On the other hand there is a rumor (published in certain press) spread among Peronistas, that says: "In case we don't win the elections, a "golpe" (coup) is to be expected."

The Jewish side of the medal: The resentment increasing daily due to the unstopped inflation-among the working class and the white-collar people; the bitterness among middle class and ~~shop~~^{shop}-keepers, the scepticism among upper middle class and industrialists, ^{all this} brought the whole country to a point of uneasiness and general discontent.

Now, how does this situation reflect upon the Jewish community? In general terms we Jews never experienced such a time of uncertainty in Argentina, even not in the time of Nazi's "Sturm und drang" in Latin America. At that time we lived under a tremendous moral pressure, expressed in anguish, in sorrow, perhaps in fear too. But nowadays the general bitterness and resentment mentioned above (unemployment, inflation, poverty and hunger) make the Jews (mostly belonging to middle class and above) easy prey for those who are looking for a scape-goat. Anti-Semitism of a brand new form is already rampant among some groups of the lower classes of the country. A new type of Anti-Semitism according to which Jews are not ~~to be~~ blamed for the deteriorated situation; but Jews are the symbol of all the defects the country suffers of. I wouldn't say that this wave of anti-semitism stems from the church as much as from the army ranks through their hanger-ons who badly need to deviate the hatred accumulate against them after their misgivings and "desaparecidos". Of course, Arab propaganda, arab money pouring in, ~~riding~~^{driving} and inciting against Israel. For the first time one of the fascist-Nazi minded guys, a peronist, formerly Rector of the National University and ex-Peronista minister (Otalagano is his name) declared himself a militant fascist-Nazi-minded and anti-Jewish and anti-Israel. (I sent some clippings to Jacobo). Of course the reaction in the general main press as well as from the

part of the intellectuals and politicians was unanimous condemning strongly the fascist spokesman Otalagano and all the anti-semites who "pretend to bring in a split among citizens because of their faith". But as far as the position taken by the heads of both main political candidates for president, the DAIA had to draw out by forcep a word of condemnation. After the insistent pressure indirectly made by the ^{the} main papers (La Prensa, La Nación, Clarin) The Daia could get ^{out} some statement.

The mentioned new wave of anti-Semitism has manifested itself through smearing synagogues, Jewish school walls, attacking with insulting words school children and painting Swastikas in commercial buildings owned by Jews. The protest from the part of the Jewish community got wide repercussion and clear adherence from the part of the main papers, school teachers, intellectual; and professionals. (That means that the people of significance in the country reacted properly and became alert, a matter that confirms that average people is still immune; but as far as the mob, the populace... who knows. As a matter of fact in the foot-ball gatherings, some people when they get angry against one of their play-star; they scream at him: "hay, be careful, otherwise we'll make soap ^{of you} as the Nazis made out of the Jews".

In certain occasion we met (a group of friends) with Dr. Alfonsin, the presidential candidate of the Radical party. At the friendly gathering I dared to ask him: "What shall I tell to my son who asked me whom to vote for in view that no presidential candidate reacted properly against president Bignone when, in India, he hugged Arafat and patted Fidel Castro who both trained terrorist for destroying our western way of life". Alfonsin's answer was amphibological and circlocutory, far from being a clear cut definition os his stand, actually noncommittal. As for Dr. Luder, the Peronista candidate, his answer to the Daia was: the fact that we want friendship with Arabs does not impair our good relationship with Israel. Suming up: Our Jewish feeling is that ^a very difficult time is to be expected for us in Argentina, time to which we are not psychologically well prepared and morally not well equipped. I would dare to advise the American Jewish organizations, particularly AJC to keep alert. At this very moment, when Argentine general feeling towards America is strongly antagonistic (still resenting its having sided with Great Britain during the Falkland war) not to use American diplomatic influence in this respect and rather ~~to~~ reserve the American Embassy's intervention for later on if ^{it} will be needed. What can yes be helpful, and greatly, is the American newspapers and magazines Criticism, comments, etc.

This kind of comments and glossarial notes as well as editorials may help us considerably; because no matter how long a constitutional government is going to last, and whoever wins the elections (Peronistas or Radicals), the democratic minded parliamentarians in Congress will feel the need of criticism abroad; such help in the arena of world public opinion will surely infuse them courage. Aside from that I think that now is a time for AJC to approach the Argentine embassy in Washington, also the Argentine representative at UN, expressing astonishment and bewilderment in view that anti-semitic attacks and almost no reaction from the part of the authorities. Untill recently, to be considered a fascist, a Nazi and even an open anti-Semite in Argentina, was almost an insult, an outmoded shameful offense. Now thanks to the troubled situation reigning in the country, the few hundreds or thousands Nazi individuals stumbling around became vocal and daring. No question that behind the scene there is a backing of influence and money. The democratic influential elements of the country need help in the way of international reaction in order to hearten them. Wouldn't be the time to call a meeting of American democratic public opinion moulders with the aim to organize a protest meeting (mass-meeting) so as it should be a warning of the resurgence of nazism in the Latin American sub-continent? No question that the epidemical anti-Semitic Wave is a contagious matter. The Latin American tottering situation is a propitious terrain for this virus. Perhaps an action should be coordinated with no-Jewish democratic organizations.

An additional item: please, forgive me for the orthographic errors, the calamitous syntactic transgressions. Nevertheless...you'll be able to digest the content...Thank you in advance...

Kind regards and happy New Jewish Year to you and your dears

Maxime

ANTI-SEMITISM IN ARGENTINA - A TIME FOR VIGILANCE

by Dr. Marc H. Tanenbaum

(Dr. Tanenbaum is director of International Relations of the American Jewish Committee.)

An upsurge of anti-Semitism has been taking place in recent months in Argentina that compels the utmost vigilance of the American Jewish community.

Jacobo Kovadloff, AJC's director of Latin American affairs, himself a fifth-generation Argentinian Jew, is presently in Buenos Aires and the reports he and others have sent us are scary. Argentina is in a state of economic and political turmoil. The inflation rate is, unbelievably, 360 percent. There is widespread unemployment, poverty, and even hunger in this once wealthy country.

On ~~xxx~~ October 30th, Argentina will hold elections characterized as a move to restore constitutional democracy. In this unsettled situation, right-wing elements that openly identify themselves as being Nazi-Fascist have surfaced again with virulent anti-Semitic propaganda. They have been promoting such anti-Jewish publications as "the International Jew;" conducting anti-Semitic radio programs; and have generally been behind a series of bombings and attacks on synagogues, ~~xxx~~ Jewish schools and Jewish-owned businesses.

It is reassuring, however, Kovadloff reports, that major personalities and institutions in Argentina - the press, the church, intellectuals and political leaders - have roundly condemned this anti-Semitic campaign. After the elections, when the appointments of government ministers are made we will have a clearer idea as to whether Argentina

ANTI-SEMITISM IN ARGENTINA

Great confusion and uncertainty have marked the last several months in Argentina following the war in the Falklands (Malvinas). The military regime has become thoroughly discredited and at the same time as the election day approaches -- October 30th -- the various political parties have been maneuvering and engaging in the kinds of rhetoric, which have resulted in increasing the sense of anxiety and uncertainty. All the newspapers across the broad political spectrum are against the Government and not only criticize the deeds attributed to the various Armed Forces but continually bemoan what they describe as national decay and moral and financial bankruptcy.

Notwithstanding the constant reiteration of the phrase "return to a constitutional democratic regime," those who have observed the Argentinian political scene for many years are not very hopeful. There are two major parties -- the Peronista and the Radical Party (which is not at all radical but models itself after the Democratic Party in the United States). While it is acknowledged that the Peronist Party is the strongest in terms of the popular vote, the Radicals may be supported by most of the electoral votes of the other small parties. In addition, while the small powerful clique which engineered the coup d'etat in 1976 overthrowing the Peronist regime is now doing their utmost to ingratiate themselves with the party once again, it is never forgotten that there are those in the Armed Forces who have great power and who have opposed elections. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that this group will engineer a coup, especially if the Peronists lose, because among the leadership of the Peronists there are individuals who remain close to the Armed Forces.

Along with the anxiety about the general political situation, there is an increasing resentment expressed by the working and white collar classes at the inflation which seems impossible to control. The middle classes are bitter and the industrialists skeptical about the future of the country.

In this environment the Jewish community feels uneasy and vulnerable.

Jews who have lived in Argentina all their lives claim that they have never experienced such a time of uncertainty, even when the Nazi influence was strong in Latin America. Jews, who today mostly belong to the middle and upper middle classes, are easy targets for those suffering unemployment, inflation, poverty and hunger and are looking for a scapegoat. A wave of anti-Semitism has become rampant among some groups of the country's working classes, fueled, it is believed, by right wing forces with close connection to the Armed Forces who, in addition to their traditional anti-Semitism, are looking to deflect the hostility against them as a result of their failure in the Falklands and the issue of the "Desaparecidos" (disappeared ones). For the first time a prominent Peronist ex-minister and former Rector of the National University, Alberto Ottalagano, declared publicly that he was a fascist who admired the Germans under Hitler and who recommended that Jews "try to refrain from arousing Aryan anger. ...they should avoid...meddling in Argentine politics..." While the press and a number of intellectuals and politicians strongly condemned him, no statement came from the leaders of both of the main political parties until the DAIA (the representative body of Jewish organizations in Argentina) and some of the major newspapers brought considerable pressure to bear.

In the meantime, Nazi-type publications are being openly sold once again in the major streets of Buenos Aires; there have been radio stations which broadcast the most vile and crude kind of anti-Semitism; there have been acts of vandalism perpetrated against Jewish homes and businesses including spraying machine gun fire at a restaurant. Jews have been assaulted and have received threatening phone calls. Anti-Semitic graffiti have appeared on synagogues and Jewish schools; swastikas have been painted on commercial buildings owned by Jews; and even young Jewish school children recently suffered verbal abuse by health personnel during physical examinations. At soccer matches people have been heard to scream at the players, "If you don't do better, we'll make soap out of you as the Nazis made it out of Jews." Of the greatest concern has been the fact that throughout this whole troubled period lasting several months, not one arrest has been made of any of the perpetrators. The Jewish community in its protests has been joined by the newspapers, educators and other professionals and intellectuals. But there remains considerable worry about the feelings of the man-in-the-street.

Concomitant with the above there are reports of Arab money directed toward increasing the amount of Arab propaganda and other materials tending to incite the populace against Israel. Jews were greatly concerned when none of the current political figures reacted in any way when President Bignone while on a trip to India was shown hugging Arafat.

There is a pervasive feeling in the Jewish community that there are very difficult times ahead in Argentina and the situation must be monitored carefully.



The American Jewish Committee

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BACKGROUNDERS: ANTI-SEMITISM IN ARGENTINA

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DEPARTMENT

Great confusion and uncertainty have marked the last several months in Argentina following the war in the Falklands (Malvinas). The military regime has become thoroughly discredited. At the same time, as the election day approaches--October 30th--the various political parties have been maneuvering and engaging in provocative rhetoric, which has resulted in increasing anxiety and uncertainty. All the newspapers across the broad political spectrum oppose the Government. The press not only criticizes the deeds attributed to the various Armed Forces but continually bemoans what they describe as national decay and moral and financial bankruptcy.

Notwithstanding the constant reiteration of the phrase "return to a constitutional democratic regime," seasoned observers of the Argentinian political scene are not very hopeful. There are two major parties--the Peronista and the Radical Party (which is not at all radical but models itself after the Democratic Party in the United States). While the Peronist Party is expected to be the strongest in terms of the popular vote, the Radicals may pull most of the electoral votes of the other small parties. In addition, the small powerful clique which engineered the coup d'etat in 1976 and overthrew the Peronist regime, is now doing their utmost to ingratiate themselves with the party once again. There is a broad concern that elements in the Armed Forces who have great power and who have opposed elections, may engineer a coup, especially if the Peronists lose. Among Peronist leaders, there are individuals who remain close to the Armed Forces.

The anxiety about the general political situation is accompanied by an increasing resentment expressed by the working and white-collar classes over the inflation (now about 350 percent) which seems impossible to control. The middle classes are bitter and the industrialists skeptical about the future of the country.

In this turbulent environment, the Jewish community feels uneasy and vulnerable. Leaders of the 400,000 Jews of Argentina--the seventh largest Jewish community in the world--claim that they have never experienced such a time of uncertainty, even when the Nazi influence was strong in Latin America. Argentinian Jewry, who today mostly belong to the middle and upper-middle classes, are easy targets for those suffering unemployment, inflation, poverty and hunger and are looking for a scapegoat.

A wave of anti-Semitism has become rampant among some groups of the country's working classes, fueled, it is believed, by right-wing forces with close connection to the Armed Forces. In addition to their traditional anti-Semitism, military junta leaders are looking to deflect the hostility against them as a result of their failure in the Falklands and the issue of the "Desaparecidos" (disappeared ones). For the first time, a prominent Peronist ex-minister and former Rector of the National University, Alberto Ottalagano, declared publicly that he was a fascist who admired the Germans under Hitler and who recommended that Jews "try to refrain from arousing Aryan anger...they should avoid...meddling in Argentine politics..." The press and a number of intellectuals and politicians strongly condemned him. However, no statement came from the leaders of both the main political parties until the DAIA (the representative body of Jewish organizations in Argentina) and some of the major newspapers brought considerable pressure to bear.

In the meantime, Nazi-type publications are being openly sold once again in the kiosks on the major streets of Buenos Aires; radio stations broadcast the most vile and cruel kind of anti-Semitism; acts of vandalism have been perpetrated against Jewish homes and businesses, including the spraying of machine-gun fire at a Jewish-owned restaurant. Jews have been assaulted and have received threatening phone calls. Anti-Semitic graffiti have appeared on synagogues and Jewish schools; swastikas have been painted on commercial buildings owned by Jews; and even young Jewish school children recently suffered verbal abuse by health personnel during physical examinations. At soccer matches people have been heard to scream at the players, "If you don't do better, we'll make soap out of you as the Nazis made it out of the Jews." Throughout this whole troubled period lasting several months, not one arrest has been made of any of the perpetrators. The Jewish community in its protests has been joined by the newspapers, educators, church leaders and other professionals and intellectuals. But there remains considerable worry about the feelings of the man-in-the-street.

There are reports of substantial Arab money being spent for increasing the amount of Arab propaganda and other materials tending to incite the populace against Israel. Jews were greatly concerned when none of the current major political figures reacted in any way when President Bignone was shown embracing Arafat while on a visit to a non-aligned conference in India. There is a pervasive feeling in the Jewish community that very difficult times are ahead in Argentina. The outcome of the October 30th elections will be critical for the future of democracy in Argentina as well as for the well-being of its Jewish community.

AJC's Latin American director, Jacobo Kovadloff, is presently in Argentina and will be reporting on post-election developments.



October 1983