

Thinking Latin

Latin American Jews have become the new focus of concern on the part of Jewish defense organizations and conscientious Jews everywhere. We read of an upsurge in anti-Semitism, of the flight of entire communities, the unjust imprisonment of individual Jews. We are told that the principal threat to Jewish life comes from the left; from the ultra-right; from within, in the form of assimilation. How are we to interpret all this?

Following years of neglect during which Latin American Jewry scarcely appeared either in the press or in scholarly writings, it is hard for the average observer to assess the conflicting and partial reports. This is due to three sets of circumstances: the volatile nature of Latin American politics generally; the substantial differences among the

republics of Latin America; and the fact that Jewish life inevitably moves within the lives of the people among whom they live, acting and reacting with their heterogeneous elements.

Nevertheless, there are certain underlying facts of Latin American life which, if better known, would provide the observer with a better means of assessing the prospects for Jewish survival in that area. Since Latin America is so often seen through the prism of the North American consciousness, I have chosen to frame the following remarks in terms of a comparison with the United States. This should have the advantage of facilitating entry into the Latin American mentality for those who have not encountered it before. The United States experience of the Jewish people is also widely enough known that it provides a convenient benchmark for consideration of the Latin American Jewish experience.

Jews arrived in Latin America at approximately the same time, from the same places, and for the same reasons, as Jews arrived in the United States and Canada. In fact, the Latin American Jewish migration was a branch of that

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great stream of migrants that headed for the western hemisphere in the closing decades of the nineteenth, and the opening decades of the twentieth century. The stream that branched southward was comparatively small, comprising about nine percent of all Jewish migrants. Many of the immigrants to the Caribbean area and Brazil were *Sephardim*, but elsewhere in South America the earliest arrivals were French, German, and Alsatian Jews, fall-outs of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71). They were followed two decades later by Russian and Polish Jews in flight from government repression. The peak of Jewish immigration to Latin America, as to the United States, was reached in the years 1889-1914, and the overwhelming majority of the migrants were East Europeans. Latin America, like the United States, received German and Central European Jews in the period between world wars, and a diversified flow of refugees following World War II. Throughout this time span, Latin America received a larger proportion of *Sephardim* than did the United States, including Portuguese- and Ladino-speaking Jews from the Mediterranean basin, and Arabic- and French-speakers from the Middle East. But overwhelmingly, the origin of Latin, as of North American Jews, is Ashkenazic.¹

The differences between Jewish communities North and South are explicable not in terms of the immigrants, who are siblings and cousins of one another, but in terms of the structures and values of the societies to which they came.

The occupation of South America by the Spanish and Portuguese got underway at the beginning of the sixteenth

century. The conquistadors were the last and most successful of the crusaders, and the societies that they and their successors established in America were structured according to the norms of medieval Spain and Portugal.

What were these norms? Only orthodox Catholics were allowed to emigrate to Spanish America, potential immigrants being required to show a certificate of clean blood proving that all their ancestors had been Old Christians, i.e., not *conversos* (Marranos). The conquerors, having destroyed the Amerindian civilizations, grafted onto the ruins their own vision of the good society: Catholic, hierarchical, patrimonial, and free of Jews. The colonies did, after a while, begin to *look* American, as Indians, blacks, and *castas* (people of mixed blood) were incorporated into society; but the basic medieval orientation of society was never repudiated. To the contrary, it was cherished and sustained by the *criollos* (Spaniards and Portuguese born in the colonies) who benefitted from the system and saw no reason to change it.

Criollos inherited a tradition of disdain for manual labor; they took their profit from an enormous and docile labor supply of Indians and blacks. Purchasing posts in government and church, they became the bureaucrats and managers of empire. The tone of Latin American society was set by royal pensioners and true believers, whose allegiance for the next three hundred years was to remain immutably fixed to their royal masters upon whom they depended for their wealth and status. They would never have left the kingdom had not the kingdom left them. When Napoleon's

invasion of Spain and Portugal cut the tie that bound, Enlightenment and Liberty did not rush suddenly in. Instead, *criollo* elites took their neighborhoods out of the empire, generating "independence revolutions" that guaranteed that nothing in fact would change, least of all the values which had brought them such splendid material and spiritual reward. Thus it came about that medieval values survived in Latin America long after their European originals had succumbed to modernizing forces. These values included legal and social inhibitions upon Jews.

Although the Inquisition was formally abolished by the new republics, the mentality which it had generated lingered on. During the early years of the Latin American republics, it was not legally possible for a Jew to marry, to register the birth of a child, or to be buried. These rights were won slowly, piecemeal, and with great effort. The first Jewish wedding took place in Buenos Aires in 1860, half a century after independence. Seventeen years later, we find a Jew suing in court to force the registration of the birth of his children without baptism. Only after the victory of secularist forces in 1888 was a legal situation created that made Argentina a congenial home for Jews. Chile, considered today as one of the more secularized Latin American republics, did not legally separate church and state until 1925.

In many of the republics, the secularization of legal norms was not matched by secularization of social norms. This was especially true of Mexico, where the great Reforma of 1855

created a legal base for Jewish life, but where Jews continue to be circumscribed by popular beliefs.

North America began receiving European settlers two hundred years after South and Central America. During the intervening period, Europe north of the Pyrenees went through a great transformation. The Reformation and the wars of religion cracked forever the universal pretensions of the Catholic Church, paving the way for religious competition. A wave of rationalism began the rout of all religions, a process that was to bring to birth the age of Enlightenment and lead eventually to emancipation of the Jews. The industrial revolution transformed European modes of production, while capitalism began to alter the relationship between employer and employed. By the eighteenth century, Europe was entering the modern age and Jews were beginning to be freed of the ages-old restrictions on residence, occupation, and family life that had trammelled them about for centuries.

As a result of the difference in timing, the people who settled North America were different in mentality from those who had conquered the South. The Europe that spewed them forth had been disrupted and catalyzed. The settlers who poured out of England and North Europe in the eighteenth century were the unlicensed and the unwanted, dissenters from old religions and castoffs of the new industrialism, looking for land and work to set their hands to. They were workers because they had to be, the alternative being starvation on a continent where there were no wealthy Indian empires to plunder, no settled work force to enslave. There was no bar to the

emigration of Jews to the English colonies; once there, they found diverse and contradictory elements, some of which were favorable to themselves. The climate of the colonies owed much to the Old Testament tradition: the Puritans thought of themselves as children of the covenant who had been brought to New England's promised land by divine providence. Fundamentalists, they taught themselves Hebrew in order to be able to hear God's word in the original. Devoted as the colonists were to a variety of nonconformist cults, they had reason to fear state churches and came more and more to view religion as beyond the grasp of government. Catholics, Lutherans, and others who in Europe had belonged to state churches would in time have to tailor their beliefs to the new American reality.

The anti-clerical thrust of the Enlightenment brought about the separation of church and state without the need to fight a war of religion on American soil. Emancipation of the Jews was achieved without bloodshed and without reference to Jews, for there were almost none in the country at the time.

In sum, the Jewish communities of the United States came into existence within a society which had been spun off from Europe in the Age of Enlightenment;² the Jewish communities of Latin America came into existence in societies that had been founded, and still were grounded, in the pre-Enlightenment past. Jews were emancipated by the fact of their arrival in the United States. Jews of the Latin American republics have not been fully emancipated yet. Everything that distinguishes the Jewries

of the two continents flows from this disparity.

The non-conforming and dissenting colonists of the North rebelled against royal authority on very slight pretext. They then devised a constitution that limited the power of both government and church by forbidding them to buttress one another. Furthermore, the terms of separation from the mother country offered the promise that American society would continue to open outward, rather than collapse in upon itself as had happened so quickly in Spanish and Portuguese realms. The break with Europe allowed Jews to feel that they too had broken with the desolate past, that the United States would be a different kind of diaspora, one in which Jews could live on equal terms with gentiles because their values sprang from the same sources and were compatible with one another.

Lacking an established church, the United States attracted immigrants of every religious persuasion and none. The diverse flow of peoples in turn confirmed that American life would be heterogeneous. Immigrants arrived in such masses, into territory so nearly unpopulated (there were not a tenth as many Indians in the North as there had been in the South) that they changed society irrevocably. No one would deny that it was the white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon male who set standards. Yet, curiously, the social norm of cultural pluralism that developed in response to the immigrant experience was allowed to flourish side-by-side with the WASP ideal. As a direct consequence of this rather muddled system of values, participation by Jews in the life of the

United States has regularly been welcomed as a sign that they were becoming Americanized.

By contrast, the Jewish immigrant to Latin America came to a continent already pre-empted by two powerful cultural traditions that either ignored him or were hostile to him. The first of these, the Amerindian, was not attractive to Jews. The vestiges of Maya, Guarani, Inca civilizations had nothing to offer either *Ashkenazi* or *Sepharadi*; nor did Jews have a place in the indigenous world, save in the role of *diablo* to which the missionaries had consigned them.

Entry into their new societies had to depend on identification with the Spanish or Portuguese. At this point, Jewish immigrants met up with the image of the Jew as devil, deicide, usurer, and bawd, still alive in Iberian-derived cultures. Stereotypes of Jews, drawn from sixteenth-century Catholicism and imposed on pagans who had never seen a Jew, produced a situation where the very word *judío* became a synonym for *devil*.³ As a result of these perceptions, the Jews of Latin America have had difficulty overcoming the view of themselves as alien beings, unwelcome and illegitimate intruders into national life, corrupters of the national spirit.

All immigrants to Latin America had to deal with the weight of the past. For most, there was common meeting ground in the church. But the church, which had compassionately absorbed Indian and black, Italian and Pole, found Jews indigestible. Jews were the one people whom the church had failed historically either to absorb or destroy. In the unreconstructed atmosphere of Latin Catholicism, with an unclear divi-

sion (or none) between church and state, Jews continued to be viewed as unassimilable. If they were outside the church, were they not also outside the state?

Up to the present time, national allegiances in Latin America continue to be filtered through Catholic sensibilities. Church-state rivalries are not so much a struggle to separate the two, as an effort by each to achieve dominance over the other. Most national constitutions require that the President of the Republic profess Roman Catholicism. It is not uncommon for the national army to be dedicated to the Virgin Mary. National holidays may be celebrated by the holding of a mass. The ubiquitous Christ figures deployed on mountain tops are a continual reminder of the Jews' inherited status as deicides. The more compassionate rendition of history, which reminds the faithful that Christ himself was a Jew, invites masochistic submission. The child in the classroom is daily asked to identify with either the crucified or the (alleged) crucifiers. The choice of either role requires continual dissimulation and suppression, for he must either pretend to be that which he is not, or pretend not to be that which he is. Either choice results in utilizing only half his heritage, while expending a good deal of energy suppressing the other half.

There are, of course, ecumenical efforts within the Latin church. The number and influence of clerics working toward rapprochement with the Jews varies from country to country. But the end toward which they strive — the reception of Jews into a brotherhood now restricted to Catholics — represents

a difficult break with the past. This break, the all-important Emancipation, occurred in the United States before the drafting of the Constitution.

On the part of Jewish immigrants, attempts to identify with the majority Latin culture brought them up against its essentially Catholic core, the centrality of the Inquisition mentality, and their own role as its victims. Despite the lapse of centuries and the historical discontinuity between Spain and the Spanish-speaking republics, echoes of the Expulsion from Spain reverberated in immigrant ears. The principal park of Mexico City, the Alameda, where children play and Diego Riviera painted, was known to them as the site of the auto-da-fé, where New Christian pioneers were reduced to ashes by their Old Christian companions. One of the main streets of Lima was known until recently as Matajudíos (Kill-the-Jews); while Havana boasted streets named Inquisidor and Picota (Gibbet). In colonial times, Jews had been pariahs. In modern times, omnipresent Catholic symbolism confirms their status as outsiders, limits their access to education and to politics, and impedes their social acceptability. Often these impediments work together so as to reinforce one another. For example, access to Argentine army officers' fraternities is dependent on *abolengo* (good birth), which excludes Jewish ancestry. The clubs in turn exercise veto power over promotions to command positions.

Despite these severe limitations, the spectacular rate of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews in such countries as Argentina testifies to the paradox that many Argentines are prepared to

welcome into their beds people they would not receive in their social clubs. It is as though the old injunction of the missionaries to the conquistadors, in the face of vast numbers of complaisant Indian women — "baptism must precede fornication" — had been transmuted by secular society into "fornication obviates baptism." Not many people care about baptism any longer in Buenos Aires; the important thing for the Jewish partner is to drop his ties with the Jewish community.

The evidence is that many Jewish immigrants were available for recruitment to Latin American destinations in part because they were already alienated from their Jewish heritage. It was, after all, no secret that there was no organized Jewish life in Argentina or Chile or Mexico during the years of most intense Jewish immigration. An incredibly high assimilation rate prevailed among Jews of Latin America from the start: in 1917, according to a trained observer for the American Jewish Committee, from 50,000 to 60,000 of the estimated 200,000 Jews who had entered the southern republics had dropped out of the sight of the organized communities.⁴ Had the republics signalled their willingness to break with the past by, for example, developing secular national symbols, the way might have been paved for the integration of Jews into national life. There is a world of difference between merging with a secular population, and conforming to Catholic norms. Yet one could place the republics on a spectrum ranging from those which remain most closely attached to Catholic norms (Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Paraguay) to those which have moved farthest

toward secular standards (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay), without reaching the degree of secularization that characterizes life in the United States. To the degree that the republics have not evolved along secular lines, to that degree Jews are closed out of national life.

To the north, Americanization of immigrants was undertaken in religiously neutral terms. Development of secular public life in the United States and consignment of religious belief to the private sector enabled Jews to identify with the nation and to adopt its symbols and heroes without reservation. The religious affiliation of United States presidents is not regarded as relevant in public school textbooks. Old Glory, Mt. Rushmore, Monticello, are national, not religious symbols. No school child is required to learn what church, if any, Davey Crockett attended. The religious sensibilities of a Lincoln are transmuted into a non-sectarian faith that is as acceptable to Jewish as to Christian citizens. To be "religious" is a sufficient value in itself, without specifying the church one attends. Imagine the dilemma of the chief rabbi of Chile, invited to assist at a mass in honor of the anniversary of a military takeover of power.

In the United States, numerous institutions evolved which took as their task the Americanization of the immigrant. Foremost among these was the universal, tax-supported, public school. Notoriously, children were taught the pledge of allegiance to the flag before the alphabet. The primary interest of the state was in Americanizing the child; reading and writing could come later. A close adjunct to this process was the free

night school for immigrants. It is not irrelevant that the prototype of such schools was opened in Baltimore in 1889 by Henrietta Szold, daughter of an immigrant Hungarian rabbi. The assumption of responsibility for this school by the City of Baltimore represented a clear acceptance of the obligation to teach the newcomers English and prepare them for citizenship.

Universal military conscription into a citizen army of World War I was another homogenizing experience in the United States. Work in the industrial plant, where labor, like machines, tended to be viewed as composed of interchangeable parts, also helped obliterate distinctions among white ethnic groups. Standardization of behavior patterns was speeded by the continent-wide network of transportation and communication which made it possible for immigrants to blend to a readily perceived national standard.

None of these nationalizing forces had free play in the Latin republics. Burdened with some of the most difficult terrain in the world, Latin American communications and transportation networks respond to regional, not continental, requirements. Industrialization did not get underway until the first world war; abstention from that conflict meant that citizen armies — the great democratizing force ever since the French Revolution — never developed. To the contrary, in the anomy that followed independence, soldiering degenerated into banditry and armies became the scourge of society. As for public education, it was the victim of the most profound apathy and prejudice on the part of legislators.

In the absence of national institutions concerned with "Argentinizing," "Mexicanizing," etc., the newcomers were left largely on their own when it came to restructuring their lives to suit the conditions of their new homes. Inevitably, they tended to perpetuate the pattern of life of the old country, since it was the only one they knew. This process operated on all nationality groups and marginalized them from the political process. Its impact on Jewish immigrants was particularly severe, since they were not communicants of the church (which was the one all-embracing institution) and since Jews themselves were divided into ethnic groups that did not develop sympathetic relationships among themselves.

The Jewish immigrants in their effort to create needed support networks (schools, newspapers, burial societies, and so forth), reproduced the traditional institutions of their countries of origin. In the process, they unintentionally (and sometimes, as in the case of cemeteries, *intentionally and literally*) walled themselves off from one another. A welter of inter-ethnic rivalries cut through the Jewish communities and incapacitate them for concerted action. The Jewish "community" of Mexico City, for example, which numbers at the outside 35,000, is organized into seven water-tight sectors, each barricaded behind its own (borrowed) language. There are separate *kehillot* for Arabic speakers from Damascus; Arabic speakers from Aleppo; Yiddish-speaking *Ashkenazim*; German-speaking *Ashkenazim*; Hungarians; Ladino-speakers from the Mediterranean basin; English-speakers from the United States. Since these

kehillot openly express their contempt for one another (despite periodic attempts to bring them together organizationally) there is no point in talking about the number of "Jews" in Mexico.

Jewish immigrants to the United States originated from similarly varied sources. The same potential for divisiveness existed among them, and indeed it surfaced each time the immigrant stream shifted from one source to another. But these Jews (or their children) were able to enter a common American culture. Some of them were responsible for marking the Jewish experience indelibly upon the American consciousness. In acculturating to a United States standard, American Jews also acculturated to one another. Inter-ethnic rivalries survive in the US only as a source of humor.

Pressures to conform are felt by all immigrants in all countries. These pressures have been criticized by second and third generation Americans who feel that they were thus deprived of their inherent right to continue living within their own cultural tradition. A good control for the testing of this belief exists with regard to Latin American Jews who were not provided with many societal elements that they could conform to. The result has been to create a split within the Jewish community and within individual Jews. They have had to choose between continuing to feel a part of the Jewish people (which implies separation from fellow Argentinians, Bolivians, etc.), or starting anew as part (but not an integral part) of the Argentinian or Bolivian nation. Those Jews who continue to identify primarily as Jews constructed a highly organized

communal life within which everyone is known to everyone else, and beholden to everyone else. This community is held together by extortionate cemetery fees that permit the *kehilla* to pretend to the monopoly position occupied by the church among the Catholic faithful. It is these Jews, clustered in community centers, orthodox synagogues, and sports clubs, who are so highly visible to the Jewish tourist and who project the impression of a vigorous and thriving communal life. Many of these institutions are intellectually ossified, due to their inability to draw sustenance from the national culture.

And the number of these Jews is declining.⁵ The other Jews are invisible to the Jewishly-oriented observer. They are the persons who prefer to become fully functioning members of their national societies. To do so, they cease paying dues to the *Chevre Kadisha* and drop their Jewish identity. "Passing" by way of marriage, as has been indicated above, is probably easier in Latin America than in the North. Latins, after all, have enjoyed a long history of miscegenation, beginning with 800 years of warfare between Spanish Christians and Moors, and continuing through the conquest of the New World. Many a Catholic family points with pride to a Jewish grandfather or grandmother, and some claim the presence of a *Sepharadi* ancestor as a special badge of merit. In Latin America, the unpardonable sin is not, to have been born a Jew; but stubbornly to remain a Jew in the face of society's sexual pliability.⁶ The complaisance of Latin American Jews in this process is revealed by recent analysis of the 1960 Argentine national census,⁷

which revealed that half the projected Argentine Jewish population simply does not exist. This fact testifies to the willingness of Jews to assimilate, and the ease with which they may do so if they cease to regard themselves as Jews.

Jews of Argentina have been called a "subordinated minority."⁸ They are permitted to occupy a well-defined niche (defined usually in terms of commercial and financial services rendered) but are excluded from centers of decision-making.

Traditionally, power in Latin America flowed from three sources: the church, the army, and the *latifundistas* (large landowners). It was to be expected that Jews and their descendants would be excluded from the hierarchy of the church; that has been official policy since the sixteenth century. In most of the republics (Brazil and Chile the exceptions), Jews are excluded from command positions in the armed forces. As for becoming *latifundistas*, Jews arrived on the scene three and a half centuries late. They are not among those who inherit the great landed estates in which so much of Latin American wealth is immobilized.

If Latin American Jews lack links to the traditional centers of power, they are equally lacking in links to present and potential power centers. Literacy and religion construct a definitive barrier between them and the peasantry. As for the working class, Jewish socialists (*bundistn*) migrated to Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Havana as well as to New York, Baltimore, and Hartford. But their efforts to organize labor unions met little response from Latin American workers, caught in the very earliest

stages of industrialization. Events such as the Tragic Week in January 1919, during which an industrial strike degenerated into a pogrom, drove most Jews out of the working class. The unemployed had to become self-employed peddlers, artisans, or small businessmen. The considerable economic progress which many Latin American Jews have made since that time, becoming manufacturers, industrialists, and shopowners, did not bring about their inclusion in political life, partly because these activities have been so depreciated by the culture. To the South, the ideal has been the *hidalgo*, the "son of someone," warrior, land owner, predator. A far cry from Uncle Sam, merchant and purveyor of stores to the army.

Unrepresented in church, landed oligarchy, army, labor union, peasant syndicate (nor in guerrilla groupings, by analogy with the army), Jews more than others might look to the ballot box for political expression. However, the electoral process functions sporadically in Latin America. It is not generally available to individuals or groups unless these have established their ability to control a mass of pliant "voters." This, because of their isolation, Jews cannot do. They are insufficient numerically to affect the outcome of elections, even if they were to vote as a unit (there is no evidence that they do) and even if elections were to be decided by a count of the ballots (which they generally are not). There is seldom an effort to solicit Jewish support on the part of those whose duty it is to arrange elections. There is no "Jewish vote," nor discussion of one, anywhere in Latin America.

Nor are there many Jewish office holders, either elective or appointive (Brazil, the honorable exception, where there are in fact quite a few elected and appointive Jewish officials at the state and local levels). Those who do hold office in the Spanish-speaking republics become vulnerable to the "charge" that they are Jews, with the implication (often overtly voiced) that they cannot therefore be loyal to the nation. Many Argentine Jews wince when a Jew is elevated to a high position, because they anticipate the waves of anti-Semitism this will engender. Presidents who appoint Jews to high office become subject to the accusation that they are "surrounded by Jews" or "influenced by Jews." Chiefs of state who have been harmed by this canard include polar opposites Salvador Allende of Chile and Juan Perón of Argentina.

In the absence of political and social linkages, Jews came to be defined almost totally by their economic activity, a situation that reinforced the stereotype of the Jew as merchant that has been the target of obloquy in Hispanic culture since the thirteenth century. Their success in this limited role has in some cases been spectacular. But economic success does not bring access to the larger dimensions of society.

Political isolation leaves Latin American Jews vulnerable to shifts in political opinion in areas traditionally characterized by volatile political scenes and by legal norms which do not provide for entry of Jews into society on terms of equality. Jewish vulnerability under these circumstances does not depend upon the ideology of the authority. Jews *qua* Jews fared well under the reac-

tionary Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic and the marxist Fidel Castro of Cuba (until he decided to adopt the role of leader of the Third World). The military junta of Chile has gone to considerable lengths towards reconciliation with its Jews, while the equally authoritarian military junta of Argentina has not made a credible commitment to the principle of equality of all citizens. The common element is expediency. It may suit one government or another to accommodate Jewish interests or to squeeze them; nowhere (except perhaps in Chile) do legal and social norms provide for their treatment solely on the basis of their citizenship. Nowhere is the Catholic past so far distant that it cannot be recalled in order to justify attacks on Jews. Latin American Jews are dependent upon the goodwill of the powers that be, rather than upon legal norms and ingrained habits of toleration. In this situation, it is probably irrelevant whether a dictatorship is of the right or of the left, since anti-Semitism is a tool available to either.

Latent Jew-hatred is widespread in many strata of the Latin American populations, and has been little altered by the enlightened encyclicals of Pope John XXIII. It lies about the political landscape available for use by political parties of the right or of the left. It is utilized by fascist groupings that scavenge on the wreckage of the Third Reich. It is also used by groupings aligned with Third World forces who disguise their ancient wares as anti-Zionism, attacking Jews for having links with Israel, and Israel for having links with imperialist powers that once reduced the Latin republics to appen-

dages of the international commodities market. Persons of high rank in the Argentine army have called for the exclusion of Jews from national life, without this demand creating a ripple in the social fabric. From Argentina to Mexico, anti-Semitic tracts such as *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are sold on street corners along with those other talismans of the disinherited, lottery tickets. Folk anti-Semitism feeds the jealousies and hatreds of a people condemned to poverty by their own elite.

Since the pluralist society of the United States incorporated Jews politically, Jewish Americans can cast their ballots and then sit back to watch the outcome of elections with equanimity for their fate as Jews. Since Latin American societies have not incorporated Jews politically, Jews must constantly gauge the level of anti-Semitism among their governors. Their position is constantly being destabilized by shifts in the balance between other power contenders. Large numbers of Jews (and larger numbers of non-Jews) are displaced by every shift of government from right to left and back again. Political access is never quite good enough, and political activity itself has come to be feared as exacting penalties disproportionate to the benefit to be gained. Losers have always suffered heavily in Latin American politics, but Jewish losers spread their losses to other Jews.

We are at present in a period when Latin American Jews are taking heavy losses. First, there was the flight of Jews from Cuba, largely in 1959. The early seventies witnessed the flight of Jews before the Chileanization policies of President Allende, followed by the flight

of leftist Jews before the junta that displaced him. A few years later, there was the flight of Jews from both army and guerrilla attacks in Argentina. The flight last year of Nicaraguan Jews was followed shortly by the flight of Jews from El Salvador.

But if it is true that the life of Jews flows within the life of the nations among whom Jews live, then we must look at what non-Jewish Latin Americans of similar class and interests were doing during these periods of Jewish flight.

We then find almost the entire middle class abandoning Cuba in 1959 and successive years. We find large numbers of capitalists in flight from Allende's Chile, not Jews only, driven by the fear of expropriation. Marxists of impeccably Catholic family suffered in the Chilean reaction together with Jews, who perhaps were luckier in that the Israeli embassy in Santiago was able to intercede for them. We find thousands of intellectuals, not Jews only, in flight from the war of the Argentine government against its own people; and we find priests as well as Jewish newspaper editors unjustly imprisoned, or worse. We find several strata of the Nicaraguan population who had hitched their stars to the dictator's wagon judging it would be wiser to leave the country when Somoza fell, not Jews only. And so with El Salvador, and, one supposes, Guatemala when the time comes.

We misapprehend what is happening when we impose the "lessons" of Jewish history uncritically on Latin America. Latin Jews live daily — have always lived — with what many would regard

as unacceptably high levels of anti-Semitism. Yet they have accommodated to their Latin homes and lived good, useful lives there. What causes them to flee their homes at specific times? And when hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish Argentines or Chileans or Cubans flee at the same time, are we justified in identifying anti-Semitism as the cause?

The perception of Latin American Jewry as highly endangered by anti-Semitism is reinforced by two factors: the small size of the communities, and efficient reporting by the world Jewish press. The small number of Jews living in each republic tends to exacerbate and accelerate any trend. The departure of wealthy Jews brings on the collapse of Jewish communal institutions, causing demoralization and the departure of other Jews. The departure of college students leads to the departure of their friends. The departure of Jewish intellectuals impoverishes Jewish intellectual life, leading to the departure of other intellectuals — a rout from which the religious are not immune. In many cases, the size of the community is not sufficient to sustain the loss of its leaders.

Secondly, the Jewish press worldwide quite naturally reports news relating to Jewish flights, while it (just as naturally) does not report the imprisonment or flight of non-Jewish Latin Americans. One cannot say that it is incumbent on editors of Jewish periodicals to immerse themselves in Latin American history; yet a little more background information would be highly desirable. Pervasive ignorance of the political and social context of events inevitably opens

the news to distortion. Left in an interpretive vacuum, readers impose their own perceptions on the matter.

What is required is for us to look at Latin American Jews within their own context. Latins have accommodated to life circumstances that include high levels of risk for political activity growing out of a kind of civic intolerance that probably has its roots in the religious intolerance of the Spanish Church. Elements of this intolerance include the lack of legal guarantees of the sacredness of the person, such as *habeas corpus*; unremitting class struggle; and acceptance of violence as a legitimate and necessary way to bring about social and economic change. These circumstances condition the lives of non-Jews as well as of Jews. In addition, a relatively high level of free-floating anti-Semitism is a fact of everyday life. It is balanced by the existence of population sectors that welcome Jewish par-

ticipation in national life, and by the availability of some, very attractive lifestyles. The net weight of these circumstances creates a situation where, when pressures grow too intense, many Latin Americans, non-Jews and Jews, decide to abandon their homelands either temporarily or permanently. There is always the hope that another half turn of the revolutionary wheel will allow them to return.

Throughout Latin America, the struggle over who gets what, when, and how, has always resulted in exile, repression of human rights, and violence. As long as Jews live there, they too will be caught up in the torrents of exile, repression, and violence. These tragedies are now engulfing entire nations — which is an entirely different thing from perceiving them to be engines armed for the destruction of the Jews.

NOTES

¹ A survey of foreign-born Jews living in Argentina and in Canada in the 1930s showed that 80.9% of the former and 83.4% of the latter originated in Russia, Poland, and Romania. (Ira Rosenswaige, "The Jewish Population of Argentina," *Jewish Social Studies* 22 (October 1960): 195-214.

² For elaboration of this idea, see Louis Hartz' introductory essay to *The Founding of New Societies*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964.

³ Standard Spanish dictionaries still define "Jew" this way, despite representations by Latin American Jewish organizations to have the entries changed.

⁴ Sandberg, Harry O. "The Jews of Latin

America." *American Jewish Yearbook* 19 (1917-18): 37.

⁵ In 1974, the *Ashkenazi kehillah* of Buenos Aires (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina), claimed 53,487 member heads of families, of whom the whereabouts of 10,000 families were not known. Lerner, Nathau, *Jewish Organization in Latin America*, p.29.

⁶ A Brazilian Jewish sociologist asked me rhetorically, "Can Judaism survive in a land of mulatas?"

⁷ By Oscar Schmelz and Sergio Della Pergola. *Hademografia shel ha-yehudim be-argentina ube-artzot aherot shel America halatinit*.

⁸ By José Luis de Imaz, in *Los que mandan*.