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# Brazil's Jews During the Vargas Era and After

Robert M. Levine

Jews have played a significant role in Luso-Brazilian history, although scholarly research has concentrated upon the period before 1800, neglecting their presence in Brazil in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After independence, Brazil welcomed all European immigration; Jews, save for a fifteen year period of fear during the Vargas regime, have flourished there. This paper will examine the anti-Semitic manifestations of these years, and consider the subsequent development of the Brazilian Jewish community up to the present day.

Luso-Brazilian Judaism barely managed to survive between 1496 and the establishment of Brazilian independence in the early nineteenth century. Nearly 200,000 persons, or one-fifth of the population of Portugal, were affected by the royal decree of 1496 which expelled all Jews who would not convert to Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Spain, where the majority of the Jews left, most Portuguese Jews accepted nominal conversion. These New Christians contributed generously to the development of Portugal's New World Empire, despite frequent harassment and efforts to unmask secret Jews, or *marranos*.

The first New Christian to land in Brazil was Gaspar da Gama, Vasco da Gama's European-born pilot, who had been kidnapped by the Portuguese from his Arab employer in Goa and forcibly converted to Catholicism. Another, Fernando de Noronha, helped to finance Vespucci's voyage to Brazil in 1503-05, sailed with him, and became the first *donatário*, or land grantee, in Brazil. New Christians helped establish sugar cultivation on the northeast coast, owning as many as half of the 120 sugar mills

<sup>1</sup> João Lúcio d'Azevedo, *História dos cristãos novos Portugueses* (Lisbon, 1922), p. 32, cited in Arnold Wiznitzer, *Jews in Colonial Brazil* (New York, 1966), p. 1. Spain's Jews were expelled four years earlier, in 1492.

which were in operation by 1600.<sup>2</sup> King Manoel and his successors toyed with the New Christians, alternately forbidding their emigration from Portugal and relaxing the restrictions in return for exorbitant payments of blackmail.

A Jewish Golden Age in Brazil came briefly when the Dutch West India Company, financed heavily by Amsterdam Jews, forcibly secured Pernambuco in 1629 and established a Dutch colony in the northeast under the governorship of Prince Maurice of Nassau. By 1627, two synagogues, *Zur Israel* and *Mogen Abraham*, had been established. As many as a thousand Jews migrated from Holland, and were joined by hundreds of Brazilian New Christians who now openly embraced their former Jewish faith under the official guarantee of religious tolerance. When the colony fell to the Portuguese in 1654, 1,450 Jews—half the European population of Pernambuco—were expelled. Some of the refugees ultimately landed in New Amsterdam, where they formed the first Jewish settlement in North America, like Pernambuco, under the protection of the Dutch West India Company. The Portuguese Inquisition thoroughly investigated the cases of New Christians who had cooperated with the Dutch or abandoned their Catholicism, but the Holy Office initiated no sweeping purges—fewer than two dozen implicated Jews were burned at the stake between 1644 and 1748, a mild record in comparison to the Inquisition in other places.<sup>3</sup>

By the early nineteenth century, most New Christians in Brazil had lost their Jewish identities, although mysterious practices—possibly rooted in forgotten Jewish religious ritual of earlier generations—such as the covering of mirrors in periods of mourning, have been observed in modern rural Brazil; a tiny community of secret Jews survived hidden from the outside world in a small Portuguese village through 1967.<sup>4</sup> Euro-

<sup>2</sup> Wiznitzer, pp. 1–13. The role of the New Christians in colonial Brazil has been extensively documented, most notably by Arnold Wiznitzer. See also his *Records of the Earliest Jewish Community in the New World* (New York, 1954); Isaac Raizman, *História dos judeus no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1935); Salamão Serebrenick, *Breve história dos judeus no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1962); Solidono Attico Leite, *Da influência do elemento judaico no descobrimento e comércio do Brasil (séculos XVI e XVII)* (Rio de Janeiro, 1938); Kurt Loewenstamm, *Vultos judaicos no Brasil*, Vol. 1 (Rio de Janeiro, 1949).

<sup>3</sup> Wiznitzer, pp. 58–130. Other accounts exaggerate the number of Jews in Dutch Brazil. See American Jewish Committee (hereafter A.J.C.) report, “Brazil,” May 1958, p. 15. Jews under Maurice’s administration were still restricted by certain prohibitions, including the right to intermarry, proselytize, or mention the name Jesus Christ in the presence of others.

<sup>4</sup> This hidden New Christian community in Portugal is described in Anita Novinsky and Amílcar Paulo, “The Last Marranos,” in *Commentary*, Vol. 43, No. 5 (May 1967), 76–82. Shlomo Carmeli of the University of Jerusalem has been investigating Marrano cultural survivals in Minas Gerais.

pean Jews began to immigrate to Brazil after the weakening of Portuguese political control. The first formal Jewish colony, an agricultural group from Switzerland, settled near Rio de Janeiro in 1818. A secret *marrano* group in northern Pará suddenly declared its Judaism in the early 1820's and established a synagogue; it was joined by Sephardic immigrants from Islamic countries who settled after this time in other northeastern provinces.<sup>5</sup>

Ashkenazim, or Jews of non-Iberic origin, comprised most of the Jewish immigration during the remainder of the nineteenth century. At first they came from Holland, Alsace-Lorraine, and Germany; after 1890, Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe dominated. By 1900 there were two Ashkenazic and one Sephardic synagogues in Rio de Janeiro and others scattered throughout Brazil. The federal government offered no barriers to Jews, who were generally accepted without incidents prior to the First World War. In the first decade of the twentieth century, a Baron Hirsch-sponsored Jewish Colonization Association financed emigration of East European Jews to farming colonies in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, an enterprise which paralleled similar ventures among German, Polish, Italian, and later, Japanese groups. In 1924, Rabbi Isaiah Raffalowitz arrived from Liverpool as Brazil's chief rabbi. When the United States restricted its immigration quotas after 1924 and the rise of European fascism precipitated the exodus of thousands of Jews from the continent, Latin America became a general haven for refugees. But the situation in Brazil was influenced by Vargas' successful revolutionary *coup d'état* in 1930, which produced, among other by-products, a militant nationalism, itself conducive to echoes of growing European anti-Semitism.

Between 1928 and 1934, Jewish immigration to Brazil increased sevenfold; by the year 1934, the Jewish community was estimated at 42,000.<sup>6</sup> With so many members newly-arrived, the community was neither organized nor unified. Nor was a need for organization seen at this time. Meanwhile, the Vargas regime slowly curtailed European immigration after 1930, in response to pressure from its new Ministry of Labor. Jews continued to arrive after 1934, but the entry process became increasingly difficult.

The 1934 Constitution imposed formal quota restrictions on immigration, but refugees continued to be able to purchase visas on the black

<sup>5</sup> A.J.C. report, "Brazil," May 1958, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> No exact figures for annual Jewish immigration to Brazil are available. Brazil's total Jewish population, listed as 1,021 in the 1900 census, was estimated at 7,000 in 1917; 42,000 in 1934; and 55,600 in 1940. (Elias Lipiner, *A nova imigração judaica no Brasil* [Rio de Janeiro, 1962], p. 114). The Jewish immigrants who arrived between 1914 and 1930 came as part of the general wave of immigration which averaged about 100,000 persons from Europe annually during this period. See Ministério das Relações Exteriores, *Brasil: 1955* (Rio de Janeiro, 1956), p. 79.

market. In contrast to the impoverished Eastern European element which dominated Jewish immigration to Brazil from 1900 to 1930, the new immigrants came almost entirely from German-speaking countries. Most had been highly skilled professionals or tradesmen in Europe. Their cultural sophistication, in fact, gained them access immediately to upper middle class society in terms of material comfort if not in terms of social integration, since they retained their use of German and formed isolated urban colonies wherever they settled.

Although anti-Semitic propaganda rose sharply after 1933 and local Jews were hindered annoyingly by growing official hostility, the threat remained potential, not actual. Brazilian Jews never faced anti-Semitic violence. The general public reacted calmly to the commotion, and did not support the campaign instrumented by the domestic fascists and other anti-Semites. The green-shirted *Ação Integralista Brasileira* (A.I.B.), founded in São Paulo in 1932, was suppressed in 1938, despite the regime's clear move to the right between 1935 and 1940 and sympathy for the Integralists in military circles. The A.I.B.'s failure to gain national mass support facilitated Vargas' ability to deal with it harshly, a welcome event for the Brazilian Jews and other anti-fascists.

Post-1930 anti-Semitism reflected a directly politico-economic flavor. It was rarely directed against individual Jews, but attacked Jewish commercial influence and the resistance of Jews to assimilation. Domestic anti-Semites repeated foreign-bred references to alleged international Jewish financial and political conspiracies. This fit well into the general atmosphere of anger and frustration at Brazil's helplessness in the face of the world-wide depression, which was reflected among the intellectual community in the 1930's by extensive self-doubt and lamentations over Brazil's disunited and heterogeneous society. Brazilian nationalists, influenced by their deeply conservative tradition, looked for scapegoats as the decade progressed. For some, Jews provided a natural target. Unhappily, even the wildest allegations went unchallenged from moderates, as Brazil's political atmosphere became uglier, particularly after 1935, when the government suppressed the left and silenced potential opposition by censorship and fear of arbitrary arrest.

Anti-Semitic sentiment, dormant although never openly expressed among Brazilian conservatives, emerged as the decade progressed. Some Brazilian officials, after the first Latin American Eucharistic Congress in Montevideo in 1933, allegedly warned against excessive immigration by "cosmopolitan Jews" fleeing from fascist Europe.<sup>7</sup> Nationalistic publicists like Afonso Arinos de Mello Franco, a leader in the movement among

<sup>7</sup> Courtesy of Aron Neumann, Rio de Janeiro, Oct, 14, 1966.

Brazilian intellectuals in the 1930's for national regeneration, advocated government by the "clean blooded (and) well-born," and attacked Jews for their internationalism and their predilection for liberal democracy.<sup>8</sup>

The unorganized Jewish community mobilized slowly against the attacks against them. Attempts in 1934 to establish a national confederation of Jewish leaders failed, although it functioned unsuccessfully for several years. Most of the immigrants from Germany prior to 1946 still arrived in leisurely fashion, for the most part affluent, able to bribe officials and to transport their household goods from Europe to their new Brazilian homes. These German Jews frequently opened retail and commercial enterprises, often returning to Europe to accompany other members of their family to South America or to purchase goods for import.

The Eastern European Jews in Brazil, most of whom had fled Russian or Polish persecution in the early years of the century, fared less successfully as the atmosphere darkened. Most were economically disadvantaged. Many of the later arrivals huddled in the slumlike Bom Retiro district of São Paulo, the East European Jewish colony, unable to secure work. Brazilian Jewry remained separated into the Sephardic, German, and East European groups, which spoke different languages (Portuguese-Ladino, German, and Yiddish, respectively) and faced their different problems separately.

While the Vargas government was not overtly anti-Semitic, it tolerated the rise of anti-Semitic activity as the 1930's progressed in order to mollify right-wing militants, and, probably, in order to flirt with foreign fascist embassies. The anti-Semitic campaign began in earnest in 1933, with the publication of a translated version of the falsified *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Rio de Janeiro. The spontaneous growth of the fascist Integralists after 1933 boded ill for the Jewish community, but internal division and lack of significant political influence restricted any possible action in its defense.

Plínio Salgado's A.I.B. aped German fascist forms, including the goose-stepping militia, Nazi salutes, and extensive use of mystical symbolism and mass psychology. Ideologically, Integralism drew heavily from Italian and Portuguese fascist movements, although a pro-German faction existed within the A.I.B., especially strong in southern Brazil, among the so-called *Auslandsdeutschen*. Salgado was a writer and critic from São Paulo state, influenced by the modernist rebellion which developed in Brazil after São

<sup>8</sup> Afonso Arinos de Mello Franco, *Preparação ao nacionalismo* (Rio de Janeiro, 1934), pp. 31-136. Academician Mello Franco cites indiscriminately from such anti-Semitic works as Henry Ford's *International Jew* and the Portuguese Mário Saa, *A invasão dos judeus* (Lisbon, 1926).

Paulo's Modern Art Week in 1922, and which demanded use of native forms and national themes in art, music, architecture, and literature.

The A.I.B. enunciated a super-patriotic program calling for national unity, corporatism, and the abolition of *laissez-faire* capitalistic domination. It attacked the alleged financial empire of International Jewry, although it also attacked Jewish bolshevism. Integralism prescribed Catholic moral faith, although in deference to southern German Protestants it spoke in terms of general Christianity there. The Brazilian Church supported Integralism in every way short of formal recognition; many Churchmen—including the future archbishop Dom Helder Câmara, known during the 1950's as a radical—endorsed the movement and joined its activities.<sup>9</sup>

The Integralist movement devoted an entire branch of its secret service organization to the surveillance of Brazilian Jewry. Its tasks included the maintenance of files on all prominent Jews and Jewish enterprises.<sup>10</sup> The Integralist press ran extensive and vociferous anti-Semitic campaigns; the movement sponsored publication of anti-Jewish books written locally and imported from abroad.<sup>11</sup> A.I.B. state organizations established such front groups as its Belo Horizonte Center for Anti-Jewish Studies, but these were less widespread.

*A Offensiva*, Rio de Janeiro's principal Integralist newspaper, printed a daily column entitled "International Judaism," which was reprinted widely in the nearly ninety other Integralist periodicals throughout Brazil between 1934 and 1938. Integralist authors brutally attacked the leaders of the Jewish business community in Brazil, particularly São Paulo's industrialist Klabin and Simonsen families. Foreign Jews were vilified for evils ranging from white slavery to perversion of the international motion picture industry.<sup>12</sup> An article appearing in 1936 showed photo-

<sup>9</sup> Integralists frequently cited the writings of Alceu Amoroso Lima (Tristão de Ataíde) in *A Ordem* (Rio de Janeiro), the journal of the Dom Vital Center—for example: "Integralism is the most intelligible and useful movement of the current political moment." (from an advertisement for a book by Integralist Gustavo Barroso, *Integralismo e Catolicismo*, clipping file, Gustavo Barroso archive, Museu de História, Rio de Janeiro, hereafter cited as GB).

<sup>10</sup> Francisco de Paulo Queiroz Ribeiro, Chefe, A.I.B. Departamento Nacional de Polícia, No. 1, 1934, pp. 2-3, memorandum, in Archive, Departamento Federal de Segurança Pública da Polícia Política e Social, Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>11</sup> Domestic anti-Semitic volumes included Tenório D'Albuquerque, *O domínio do mundo pelos judeus* (Rio de Janeiro, 1935); Padre J. Cabral, *A questão Judaica* (Pôrto Alegre, 1937); and various works by Gustavo Barroso, cited below. Ford's *International Jew* was translated in 1933. Publishers of anti-Semitic books included the O Globo company in Pôrto Alegre and the José Olympio and Civilização Brasileira houses in Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>12</sup> See Ernani Fiori, "Pan-Semitismo," in *O Integralista* (Pôrto Alegre), March 3,

graphs of black-skinned Jews in East Africa gnawing raw meat.<sup>13</sup> Other attacks usually demonstrated more subtlety, but shared similar intent.

Gustavo Barroso, the A.I.B.'s brilliant theorist and the director of its national militia, directed the movement's anti-Semitic campaign, while Salgado himself remained relatively silent on the issue. Barroso, born to a German mother in the northeastern state of Ceará, became a journalist and historian after abandoning the study of medicine. In 1923, he was admitted to the hallowed Brazilian Academy of Letters, its youngest member. Despite his neurotic temperament and predilection for violence, he became its president in 1932 after actively seeking the office. Four years later Barroso's anti-Semitic writings became so vitriolic that Salgado banned him temporarily from the pages of *A Offensiva*, although Barroso continued to publish in other Integralist journals.<sup>14</sup> Ironically, he welcomed the Baron Henri de Rothschild to the Academy meetings; one of his articles written in October, 1936, praised a weapon called a "Kike-Killer," which he claimed had been registered in the United States' Patent Office earlier in the year.<sup>15</sup>

Barroso's anti-Semitic books included *The Paulista Synagogue*, a slander against influential Jews in São Paulo, including Congressman Horácio Lafer; *Roosevelt is Jewish*, published by an anti-Semitic organization in Buenos Aires; and *Brazil: Colony of Bankers*, an attack on Jewish capitalists.<sup>16</sup> Yet Integralists consistently denied that they opposed Jews on ethnic grounds. "(O)ur anti-Semitism," one wrote, "is the consequence of the overabundance in our country of undesirable foreign Semitic elements, unadaptable to the land, given to usury, and (to) subversive tendencies against the Christian order,"<sup>17</sup> Barroso himself declared

1934, p. 4; *Monitor Integralista* (Rio de Janeiro), May 7, 1935, pp. 1-2; *A Offensiva* (Rio de Janeiro), August 30, 1934, p. 1; August 3, 1935, p. 3; January 30, 1936, p. 1; February 12, 1936, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> *A Offensiva* (Rio de Janeiro), February 9, 1936, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> See *Diário da Noite* (Rio de Janeiro), April 13, 1936, p. 1. In May, Plínio Salgado defended the Jewish people for having produced Jesus Christ (June 10, 1936, n/p, GB). Barroso's attacks were suspended from *A Offensiva* but continued to be published in *Século XX* and *Fon-Fon*, both Integralist journals. The brief exile was not publicized; he returned to *A Offensiva* after a few months.

<sup>15</sup> Gustavo Barroso, welcoming speech for Baron Henri de Rothschild, in *Revista da Academia Brasileira de Letras*, XL, No. 132 (December 1932), 432-436; Gustavo Barroso, "O Kike-Killer," *A Offensiva* (Rio de Janeiro), October 10, 1936, n/p, GB.

<sup>16</sup> Gustavo Barroso, *A sinagoga paulista* (Rio de Janeiro, 1937); *Roosevelt es Judio* (Buenos Aires, 1938); *Brasil, colônia de banqueiros* (Rio de Janeiro, 1934). Barroso also produced *Judaísmo, maçonaria, e comunismo* (Rio de Janeiro, 1937); and *História secreta do Brasil*, 3 vols. (São Paulo, 1939), in which he "unmasked" New Christian activities and abuses during the colonial period.

<sup>17</sup> Antônio Galloti, discussion with Samuel Guy Inman (of Columbia University), reported in *A Offensiva* (Rio de Janeiro), January 15, 1937, p. 1, slightly paraphrased.

that anti-Semitism was a political necessity of the times, freely equating Judaism with Bolshevism and alleged international conspiracies.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that the Integralists did not attack Brazilian capitalists and industrialists—many of whom contributed to A.I.B. coffers—or the stagnant rural land tenure system, the cause of Brazil's agricultural backwardness and a prime reason for Brazil's inability to integrate nationally, points to the artificiality of the A.I.B.'s anti-Semitic campaign. But the anti-Jewish propaganda encouraged anti-Semitic manifestations among non-Integralists. Moderate newspapers repeated the Integralist charge that Jews threatened to form a "state within a State."<sup>19</sup> An article in a southern journal entitled "Integralist, No; Anti-Jew, Yes" attacked Jewish financiers, as did various articles during the same period.<sup>20</sup> The respectable *Diário de Notícias* in the federal capital, without apparent provocation, demanded that Jews be expelled from Brazil as a question of "honor and hygiene."<sup>21</sup> During the trial of communist leader Luís Carlos Prestes, the press emphasized the Jewish origin of captured Comintern agent Harry Berger (Ernst Arthur Ewert) and the "Israelite profile" of Prestes' German-born wife Olga, who subsequently was deported to Nazi Germany by the Brazilian police.<sup>22</sup>

Still other newspapers stressed the high percentage of Jewish-sounding names in the lists of suspected radicals expelled from the country after the anti-Vargas insurrections in late November, 1935.<sup>23</sup> "The Hebrew race is educated in the hate of the foreigner," a supposedly moderate journal declared in opposition to the immigration of "parasitic" German Jews, "... the Old Testament is a book of hatred and vengeance;" it added, "the Jew is implacable in his rancor against Christians."<sup>24</sup>

Yet in spite of the vehemence of the attacks, non-Jewish spokesmen rarely came to the defense of their Jewish brethren.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the anti-Semitic campaign remained largely a battle of words. Few acts

<sup>18</sup> Gustavo Barroso, *O que o integralista deve saber* (Rio de Janeiro, 1935), p. 119-33.

<sup>19</sup> Geraldo Rocha, *Nacionalismo político e econômico* (Rio de Janeiro, 1937), p. 79, from *A Nota* (Rio de Janeiro).

<sup>20</sup> Paulo Araujo de Nascimento, "Integralista, não; anti-judaico, sim!" *A Nação* (Uruguayana, Rio Grande do Sul), March 19, 1937, n/p, GB; "Importância do judeu," in *A Nota* (Rio de Janeiro), October 22, 1937, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Diário de Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro), December 3, 1935, cited in *A Ordem* (Rio de Janeiro), December 8, 1935, page unknown.

<sup>22</sup> *O Imparcial* (Rio de Janeiro), May 20, 1936, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> See *A Rua* (Rio de Janeiro), December 4, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Geraldo Rocha, op. cit., pp. 198-199.

<sup>25</sup> See discourse by A. Vicente de Azevedo in São Paulo State Assembly, attacking Barroso's *A sinagoga paulista*, in *Diário Oficial* (São Paulo), No. 178, August 10, 1937.

of violence against Jews occurred during the Vargas years; anti-Semitism never won genuine popular support. In rural areas, Jews were rare; in the cities, particularly in melting-pot Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Jews often were indistinguishable to the average Brazilian from the many other immigrant groups present in significant number.

In the elite, a privately-expressed and subtle anti-Semitism survived from the nineteenth century, taking the form of the genteel anti-Semitism of Henry Adams in the post-Civil War United States. *Tenente* hero and Vargas intimate João Alberto Lins de Barros criticized the government's reluctance to break with "International Judaism" and "Jewish bankers," in his personal correspondence.<sup>26</sup> Oswaldo Aranha, the Brazilian ambassador to the United States, a public friend of the Jewish community and a sponsor of Israeli independence in 1948, privately wrote that Jews in the United States were driving the New Deal toward communism. Reacting to the anti-Brazilian campaign after the proclamation of the corporatist *Estado Novo* by Vargas in late 1937—which he personally opposed bitterly—Aranha identified the communists as its source, led by American Jewry and radical newspapers such as the *New York Post*.<sup>27</sup>

The position of Brazilian Jews deteriorated sharply as official policies hostile to civil liberties intensified after 1935. The post-November 1935 state of siege marked Vargas' abandonment of liberal constitutionalism and his regime's turn to policies designed to forge national unity and eliminate sources of internal intransigence. After the establishment of the *Estado Novo* in late 1937, Vargas symbolically burned the individual state flags, reduced annual immigration to approximately 50 per cent of post-1930 and 10 per cent of 1917–30 levels under quotas imposed by his National Council of Immigration and Colonization, and curtailed foreign language schools and cultural activities in an effort to combat Nazi influence in areas heavily settled by Germans and Italians, to circumvent regional divisiveness, and to mold Brazilian patriotic sentiment, a major propaganda goal of his regime. A decree-law of April 18, 1938, threatened deportation to any foreigner guilty of "political activity"; in mid-June 1938, foreign-language periodicals were required to publish simultaneous translations of all articles. In 1941 foreign-language publications were banned, effectively dooming the Jewish press as well as all other non-

<sup>26</sup> João Alberto Lins de Barros to Luís Carlos Prestes, Rio de Janeiro, June 8, 1935, in Getúlio Vargas papers (hereafter cited as GV). During the war, João Alberto was known as a friend of the Jewish community for his help in protecting individual Jews from police abuse.

<sup>27</sup> Oswaldo Aranha to Getúlio Vargas, Washington, May 19, 1937, GV; Aranha to Vargas, Washington, December 7, 1939, Oswaldo Aranha papers, hereafter cited as OA.

Portuguese newspapers and magazines for the duration of the war.<sup>28</sup> The regime studied a proposal to issue special identity cards to all Jews—native and foreign-born—but it was not implemented. Now frightened, Jewish leaders appealed unsuccessfully to Brazilian government officials, who denied anti-Semitic intentions. The American Jewish leader Nahum Goldmann protested to the United States Ambassador to Brazil, Jefferson Caffery, in late 1937 but was rebuffed, allegedly in a sneering and hostile manner.<sup>29</sup>

The pro-Axis orientation of the Vargas regime between 1937 and 1939 led to complete legal restrictions on Jewish immigration despite the rising flow of German refugees; thousands now entered Brazil only by bribing Brazilian officials (and continuing to pay blackmail throughout the war). Jewish cultural organizations continued to be harassed, although welfare and relief groups were not hindered. Refugees were not allowed to work unless they could receive permanent status; this was granted only with difficulty before August 1939, and forbidden by law thereafter. Only Jewish agricultural workers were allowed to enter after 1939; in 1940, an odd group of three thousand German Jews converted (at least tacitly) to Catholicism was settled in southern Brazil, supposedly as a counterweight against the spread of Nazism among the German population there.<sup>30</sup> Anti-Semites continued their barrage against what they called the “human garbage” fleeing from German-occupied Europe; these outbursts diminished only after 1942, when Brazilian policy shifted and embraced the Allied cause.<sup>31</sup>

Official anti-Semitism during the *Estado Novo* was most evident in the area of refugee policy. Not only were Jews of all nationalities barred access to Brazilian visas—an order disclosed apologetically afterward by Vargas’ post-war Foreign Minister, João Neves da Fontoura—but refugees residing in Brazil continued to be harassed.<sup>32</sup> German Jews were required to report every week to police headquarters during the war as German nationals, although their legal situation was eased through the efforts of João Alberto Lins de Barros, the only Vargas official who publicly extended help to the Jews during this period. In the Federal District, police captain Dulcino Gonçalves followed a particularly anti-Semitic program, incurring the enmity of Jews and moderates alike. Newspapers

<sup>28</sup> Eliezer Greenberg, “Yiddish Press on Jewish Life in Latin America,” *Yiddish News Digest* (New York), No. 583, December 7, 1950, and Lipiner, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>29</sup> Aron Neumann, “Como Aonde Vamos? chegou a ser o que é,” *Aonde Vamos?* (Rio de Janeiro), XXI, No. 1,000, September 27, 1962, 46–125.

<sup>30</sup> A.J.C. report, “Brazil,” May 1958, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> Gustavo Barroso, “Lixo Internacional,” in *Gazeta de Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro), August 21, 1940, p. 1, 12, GB.

<sup>32</sup> Lipiner, op. cit., p. 146.

protested to no avail the refusal of Brazilian officials to allow a shipload of German Jewish refugees to disembark in Brazil, despite guarantees from the Jewish community to maintain them financially.

The atmosphere of actual and threatened persecution had the effect of unifying the Jewish community, but to varying degrees in different areas. Relief efforts centered in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the two major centers of Jewish settlement. In São Paulo, German Jewish refugees were aided by the efforts of Dr. Ludwig Lorch, who constructed a flourishing community complete with welfare and employment services, medical centers, trade and language schools, and synagogues. But Lorch was accused of discrimination against non-German Jews, who lived in Bom Retiro at a lower standard of living than the Lorch-aided newer arrivals. In the federal capital, the situation was better: several welfare organizations were active, including the Jewish Benevolent Association, established in 1936, and the Hebrew Organization for Immigration and Colonization.<sup>33</sup>

Despair continued to grip the Brazilian Jews in the early years of the war. The Jewish Telegraph Agency was not permitted to operate, cutting off Jewish leaders from information and communication with Zionist groups. The Austrian-Jewish writer Stefan Zweig, author of the well-known *Brazil: Land of the Future*, committed suicide in his Petrópolis home in a fit of despondency over conditions in Europe. News of his death greatly depressed Brazilian Jewish leaders. The war brought some of the members of the Jewish community together—alliances which for the most part dissolved after the war, a product of the strong feelings of cultural separation among the Brazilian Jewish groups. Small acts of bravery were noted—such as a public declaration of faith on *Rosh Hashanah* by the twenty Jewish families in São Caetano do Sul, in São Paulo state, after a decade of terrorism from local Integralists and non-Jewish Germans and Italians.<sup>34</sup> In September 1942, the Brazilian Jewish community dispatched an eloquent petition to Getúlio Vargas pledging complete solidarity with the struggle of the Brazilian government and people against the Axis. Yet Brazilian Jews remained isolated from the international rescue efforts; their sense of despair continued until at least the termination of the war.<sup>35</sup>

The first breakthrough came in late 1944, when Viriato Vargas, the

<sup>33</sup> A.J.C., "Digest of Information about [the] Situation in South American Countries," January 1940, p. 3; Aron Neumann, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Eliézer Strauch, "São Caetano do Sul: o dia em que deixamos de ser marranos," *Aonde Vamos?*, XXI, No. 1,000, 126–128.

<sup>35</sup> Correspondence between Aron Neumann and Nahum Goldmann, reproduced and explained, Neumann, op. cit., 118.

President's brother, conceded an interview favorable to Zionism to the weekly Jewish-oriented journal *Aonde Vamos?*, the first such article permitted by government censors since 1937. But immigration restrictions continued through 1947. At the request of Jewish spokesmen, Brazilian officials, led by sociologist Arthur Heyl Neiva, visited European displaced persons camps, but reported no interest there in migration to Brazil. Pressure from the United States and the United Nations' Inter-governmental Committee on Refugees on Foreign Minister Oswaldo Aranha, however, led Brazil to admit a total of six thousand displaced persons in 1947. The domestic press, less reluctant than before to criticize the military regime in the freer postwar atmosphere, defended the cause of the refugees and attacked the government for anti-Semitic immigration policies.<sup>36</sup> By 1947, Brazil's Jewish population had reached a high of 110,000 persons, and conditions similar to the pre-1933 period were returning.<sup>37</sup>

The post-war Jewish community remained almost entirely urban. The Sephardic group—twenty percent of its total—achieved greatest geographic and occupational assimilation, a product of its more lengthy presence in Brazil. German Jews in general prospered, dealing in commerce, particularly in semi-luxury retail trades and small manufacturing. A growing number of second and third generation Brazilian Jews entered local universities to study for the professions and engineering. Jews of East European origin attained neither the general affluence nor retained the sharp group identity of the German Jews; exceptions notwithstanding, many remained scattered in the poorer residential districts, working as shopkeepers and at industrial trades. The German Jews established "progressive" religious bodies, adapting to Brazilian customs and conditions (although not nearly to the extent of reform Jewry in the United States and Canada), while the East European Jews more often retained the Old World orthodox religious practices. Although anti-Semitism diminished sharply after the war, Jewish groups still remained effectively segregated in most cultural and social areas.

From 1946 to 1958, 35,000 additional Jews arrived in Brazil, including nearly 700 refugees from the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and several thousand from North Africa and the Middle East following the Suez crisis of that same year. Ironically, the appointment of the first Jewish cabinet

<sup>36</sup> *Correio da Manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), June 13, 1947; *O Mundo* (Rio de Janeiro), September 12, 1947; *O Jornal* (Rio de Janeiro), August 25, 1947, cited in Sidney Lisofsky, "Documentation for Governor Lehman Regarding Recent Discrimination against Jews in Brazilian Immigration Policy," A.J.C. report, February 1948.

<sup>37</sup> Jacob Fried, "Jews in Latin America," *Jewish Affairs*, III, No. 1, January 15, 1949, p. 6. This was 0.24% of the national population, but 2.2% of the population of the city of Rio de Janeiro, and 3.0% of the population of the city of São Paulo.

member—Horácio Lafer as Kubitschek's Foreign Minister in 1959—raised fears among Jews that he might follow a cautious policy on further immigration, to avoid charges of special interest. On the other hand, the Kubitschek regime demonstrated warm friendship for the Jewish community; mass media increasingly defended Jewish rights after infrequently reported acts of anti-Semitic vandalism or cemetery desecration, and took a consistently pro-Israel stand in Middle East politics. A campaign by lawyer Fernando Levitsky to purge flagrantly anti-Semitic references from school texts and dictionaries met with general success and was well-received by most of the Jewish community.

A few thousand *yordim*, or Israeli Jews, entered Brazil after 1950. Many settled in the underdeveloped Amazon region, only to return discouraged to the cities, where their families had to be supported temporarily by charity. Zionism remained strong among Jewish groups, but fewer than a hundred Brazilian Jews annually left the country after the establishment of the Jewish state.<sup>38</sup> Of nearly 85,000,000 Brazilians in 1966, the Jewish population was estimated at 125,000: 50,000 in Rio de Janeiro; 45,000 in São Paulo; 12,000 in Pôrto Alegre; 3,000 in Recife; and 2,000 each in Bahia, Belo Horizonte, and Curitiba. More than thirty Jewish day schools operate today, in part a reflection of the paucity of free education on primary and secondary levels. About one-half of the Jewish population currently supports these schools; the other half—mainly the German Jews—attend Catholic or non-sectarian private institutions. Brazilian Jews comprise perhaps five to ten per cent of the national university population, especially in the study of architecture, engineering, medicine, and physical science (rather than the traditional Brazilian faculties of law, philosophy, and letters).

Few barriers remain to native-born Jews today, and obstacles against naturalized but not native-born Brazilians are rapidly disappearing. Unlike Argentina and some other Latin American countries, in Brazil the Catholic faith is not prescribed for public office. Jewish legislators have been elected since the 1940's; in 1966, there were six Jewish generals in the armed forces.<sup>39</sup> Yet Brazilian Jews as a group have not embraced assimilation as a vehicle for social acceptance, at least to the degree apparent in the United States and Canada. The failure of Brazilian Jews to assimilate despite their unquestioned affinity for their country may be attributed in part to the absence of overt anti-Semitism in post-war Brazil (a luxury not shared by Argentine Jews, who were unified by it), and to

<sup>38</sup> Abraham Monk to Dr. Simon Segal, memorandum, A.J.C., "Notes on Brazil," September 1959, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Phil Baum, "South American Jewry: Attachment and Withdrawal," *Congress Bi-Weekly*, A.J.C., April 25, 1966, pp. 14–16.

the deep differences within the Jewish community, which still is separated internally among Sephardic, German, East European, and North African Jews, the latter currently occupying the bottom of the Jewish status ladder. But changes are occurring rapidly in the post-war Brazilian-born generation. Distinctions within the community may disappear with haste as Portuguese becomes its universal language, although thorough assimilation into Brazilian society may take longer.

With the exception of radical factions among Jewish university students (which shared the same fate as all radical groups in Brazil after the 1964 revolution), most Brazilian Jews today share the political conservatism of the middle and upper classes to which they have adhered. Lack of complete social integration—typified by separate schools, clubs, business organizations and social sets—may indicate the presence of a Brazilian social structure basically resistant to genuine change. It also reflects attitudes among Brazilian Jews to retain separation, which, among some German Jews, takes the form of feelings of cultural superiority.

The Brazilian Jewish community is currently prospering and moving toward a more tolerant internal outlook and the establishment of new conditions for assimilation. Whether the spectre of nationalistic reaction and anti-Semitism which temporarily enveloped Brazilian society during the pre-war Vargas era augurs a future difficulty, or whether it represents a never-to-happen-again exception to the otherwise tolerant evolution of Brazilian society, will only be demonstrated in the coming years. To be sure, the conditions within Brazil which precipitated the rise of Integralism and general anti-Semitism in the early 1930's have not been entirely eradicated: economic instability; frustration among conservative intellectuals; the search for convenient scapegoats. But it is to be hoped that the international conditions which preceded these circumstances during the pre-war era will not be seen again.