

# *Antisemitism World Report* 1993



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however, remain cautious about using the new constitutional laws as a means of combating antisemitism since they do not appear to have resulted in any diminution of antisemitism or positive action by the government and the legal establishment. Brazil's Jews fear that it may even indicate a growing sophistication in masking antisemitism and other forms of bigotry behind "acceptable" rhetoric. The law, however, was used twice in 1991 by the City Council of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul's largest city, to ban the public display of swastikas.

#### COUNTERING ANTISEMITISM

The response to the upsurge in antisemitism was rapid and widespread. The Jewish Federation of São Paulo created a permanent commission to fight racism. In addition, the Movement of Democratic Entities was formed to oppose the growing neo-Nazi movement. At the group's opening meeting in October, São Paulo state governor Luiz Antonio Fleury Filho, São Paulo city Mayor Luiza Erundina and José Roberto Batocchio (President of the Brazilian Order of Lawyers) joined with Jewish, black and north-eastern Brazilian civil rights groups to proclaim that "São Paulo has 1,000 peoples: Say yes to solidarity, say no to racism".

#### ASSESSMENT

There was little popular or open antisemitism, mainly as a result of the limited contact between the relatively small Jewish community and Brazil's impoverished population. However, the growing neo-Nazi movement continued to be of concern to the Jewish community.

Brazil's rhetoric of ethnic, cultural and racial tolerance has been backed up by law, thereby making the public expression of antisemitism a potential crime. This, however, was difficult to implement because it conflicted with laws guaranteeing freedoms of speech and the press.



## Mexico

General population: 88,600,000  
Jewish population: 38,000-50,000 (mainly in Mexico City)

#### GENERAL BACKGROUND

Since Carlos Salinas de Gortari was elected president in July 1988, he has attempted to move away from the revolutionary nationalism of the past towards a liberal and pluralistic society. The ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) won a large majority in the August 1991 mid-term congressional elections but opposition parties accused it of vote-rigging.

President de Gortari had instituted radical reforms in the economy, agriculture, education and religion and carried out further privatization of state-controlled companies. In spite of trade deregulation and low interest rates, poverty remained widespread.

Human rights groups severely criticized alleged abuses by the Mexican government. This issue and calls for a more open and democratic political system formed part of the debate surrounding ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and acted as external pressure for furthering the cause of democracy. The negotiated, though not yet ratified, NAFTA generated growing expectations and much uncertainty about the influence it will have on Mexico. Open

borders have already had a disruptive effect on Mexican industry.

### **HISTORICAL LEGACY**

Antisemitism in Mexico can be traced back to the sixteenth century with the establishment of the Inquisition. However, the absence of a significant Jewish population in the nineteenth century and the liberal struggle for tolerance diluted its impact.

Antisemitism in contemporary Mexico has generally not been government-sponsored. It was initially prompted by the debate surrounding immigration policies from the second half of the 1920s onwards. Groups such as the Anti-Chinese and Anti-Jewish National League, founded in 1930, and the Association of Honourable Traders, Industrialists and Professionals lobbied the government to implement restrictive immigration policies towards the Jews. The activities of these groups reached a climax with the expulsion in May 1931 of 250 Jewish peddlers from the La Lagunilla market and the proclamation of 1 June of that year as the National Day of Commerce. On that date, Mexicans protested about the Jewish presence in Mexico's commercial life.

In the 1930s, Mexico experienced outbursts of antisemitism centring on economic and racial themes. Gradually, racial themes became the dominant tenet of right-wing groups. Among them, the Mexican Revolutionary Action, a group created in March 1934, operated through its paramilitary units, the Golden Shirts. The Pro-Race Committee and the Middle Class Confederation expressed their antisemitism by exerting pressure on the government and by antisemitic press campaigns. These reached their peak in 1938-9.

In the following decades, antisemitism was confined to minority groups with marginal national influence.

In the second half of the 1960s, there emerged a new, quasi-Marxist anti-Zionism and antisemitism which saw Israel as a spearhead of "imperialism". Gradually, the antisemitism became more pronounced than the anti-Zionism.

The financial chaos of 1982 and the social upheaval caused by the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City were used by the media as a pretext for the expression of anti-Jewish sentiment, accusing Jewish

businessmen of exploiting their workers.

### **PARTIES, ORGANIZATIONS, MOVEMENTS**

Throughout Mexico's modern history, with the exception of the 1930s, antisemitism has not been a central issue for political parties or movements. However, the extreme right has proved fertile ground for the expression of antisemitic attitudes. Some of the more significant groups are the Partido Laboral Mexicano (Mexican Labour Party-LaRouche) (on Lyndon LaRouche, see United States), Editorial Tradición (Tradition Publishing House), Falanges Tradicionalistas Mejicanas (Mexican Traditional Falangists), Federación Mexicana Anticomunista (Anti-Communist Mexican Federation) and Tecos. The number and strength of these groups are hard to assess, but they may be regarded as marginal in national terms.

In 1992, some Muslim fundamentalist cells were detected in Torreon, the capital of the Northern state of Coahuila. Though very few Muslim families live in Mexico, this city has a mosque which apparently serves as headquarters for these as yet unidentified groups. Letters from Torreon denouncing the "Zionist-Jewish conspiracy" appeared regularly in *Excelsior*, one of Mexico's most influential dailies. Several were published in December and were sent by, among others, Federico Campbell Peña and Augusto Hugo Peña, both closely associated with the PLO. The letters included such arguments as "orthodox Jews are the true power in the United States".

### **MANIFESTATIONS**

Much anti-Jewish graffiti, in particular swastikas, continued to appear in Mexico City, especially in Jewish neighbourhoods. It also appeared in downtown Mexico City, where some businesses are owned by Jews.

### **PUBLICATIONS**

Antisemitic publications included *La Hoja de Combate* (Combat Newsletter), which is published by Tradition Publishing House and run by Salvador Abascal; the monthly *Surge* (Emergence); the monthly *Verdades* (Truth); and the bi-monthly *Solidaridad Iberoamericana* (Ibero-American Solidarity), which is published by the Mexican Labour Party-LaRouche.

Tradition Publishing House also published works by the prolific antisemitic writer Salvador Borrego, including *World Defeat* (1950) and *America in Danger* (1960), which are now in their thirtieth and eleventh editions respectively.

With the perception that the extreme right has stepped up its activity world-wide, Mexico has felt its effects especially in the written media. Editors like Mauricio González de la Garza, who in the past has expressed xenophobic feelings, nowadays are more blatant. During 1992, de la Garza wrote eight editorials in *El Sol de Mexico*, a well known Mexico City daily, in which he denounced Jews as being foreigners, arrogant and seeking economic and political power.

#### DENIAL OF THE HOLOCAUST

In 1991, the California-based Institute for Historical Review, seeking a foothold in Mexico, began to distribute propaganda in selected areas such as the German School in Mexico City. No further activity of this nature was detected in 1992.

Literature by British Holocaust-denier David Irving, such as *The War Against the Jews*, was sold in some of Mexico's prestigious bookshops indicating that this subject was growing in popularity.

#### EFFECTS OF ANTI-ZIONISM

The most significant channel for anti-Zionism and antisemitism is the press; its impact on public opinion cannot be overstated. The rescinding of the UN resolution equating Zionism and racism seems to have quieted the anti-Zionist rhetoric which reached its peak during the Gulf crisis of 1991. Rabin's rise to power in Israel contributed to improving Israel's and Zionism's image.

Israel's removal of the Hamas fundamentalists to Lebanon in December resulted in dozens of hostile articles. The most pervasive arguments were that Zionism is racism (José Enrique González Ruiz, "Despite it, it's racism", *El Día*, a conservative daily, 24 January 1993) and that Israel is a fascist state, (Daniel Herrendorf, "Fascist Jews", *El Nacional*, a government daily, 4 January 1993).

#### COUNTERING ANTISEMITISM

Jewish writers who work on Mexico's most

prestigious newspapers, *Excelsior*, *El Nacional*, *El Financiero*, and *El Universal*, published articles which put into perspective references used in anti-Zionist arguments. Furthermore, the public relations campaign conducted at different levels of Mexican society by Tribuna Israelita, an agency of the Mexican Jewish community, forged close links between Mexican opinion-formers and Jewry.

Between October and December, more than fifty newspaper articles denouncing racism and antisemitism were published, reflecting a tendency in Mexican intellectual circles to accept Judaism as a legitimate cultural and historical entity, even while distancing themselves from contemporary Jewish existence, Israel included.

There was concern at all levels of Mexican society with racism, antisemitism and neo-Nazism. President de Gortari condemned the resurgence of far-right tendencies through Mexico's representatives in international forums. In the framework of the Third Commission of the forty-seventh General Assembly of the United Nations in September and October, Mexico condemned racism and suggested the proclamation, starting in 1993, of a third decade of fight against racial discrimination. In meetings with Mexican Jewish leaders, the President noted that the expressions of xenophobia occurring in Europe were alien to Mexico's liberal tradition.

#### ASSESSMENT

Positive developments have occurred in recent years regarding a more pluralistic approach to cultural, religious and ethnic diversity, which may be seen as new and strong sources of Jewish legitimacy. These, as well as the country's new international alignment, have been expressed in a lessening of the traditional anti-imperialist and anti-foreign rhetoric which has been related to anti-Zionist and antisemitic expressions in the past.

Although there were great expectations for the success of economic and political projects, which would act as stabilizing influences, there remained much uncertainty about the future. Failure to bring about economic and political change may result in a resurgence of nationalistic rhetoric and anti-foreign attitudes.