

# The Last Battles of Old-World Ideologies in the Race for Identity and Communal Power: Communists vs. Bundists vs. Zionists in Mexico, 1938-1951

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This essay describes the ideological conflicts and disputes within the Ashkenazi community in Mexico City from 1938 to 1951, spurred by various party-like communal organizations and their leaders attempting to gain control of as yet undefined parameters of political life. I undertake to show the process by which a pattern of political unidimensionality took root in this community and discuss the consequences of such a political reality. In other words, political conflicts exist in all societies, and there is always someone that becomes a winner while another may become a loser. However, not all confrontations produce either/or situations. In fact, in most cases, especially in societies that incorporate democratic values, the loser is not expected to just disappear. Neither is it expected – regardless of the desires of the competing agents– that he or she should alter his/her views and be prepared to align with the new power structure and the groups that maintain it. However, in the case analyzed here, this is precisely what evolved. When Communists, Bundists and others lost to Zionists, the political fights between these party-like groups had clearly become fights for control – who could speak, what could be said, and how should it be said –, foreclosing, so to speak, all non-aligned options. This was not just a matter of language. There was a clear attempt to impose a pattern of total allegiance to the dominating party. Zionism, becoming the central political power in *Eretz Israel* and aiming to secure support in the Diaspora, pursued political exclusivity in the community without the choice of political and cultural diversity that might have been expected given the history of the community and Diaspora conditions, which differed from the Israeli ones. In other words, once a group

won, there were no concessions made to any of the losing contenders, no matter what and whom they represented, so that a process of political and cultural unidimensionality remained the only available option in this community that had seen diversity and plurality in abundance. The newly-defined political line of behavior became the essential test for measuring loyalty to the ethnic group.

Political contention in this community had existed since its inception in the early 1900s, when the Sephardic Jews from Aleppo and Damascus welcomed the incoming *Ashkenazim* and incorporated them into their rudimentary organized society. For a time, there were even many examples of mutual assistance and coordinated religious activities between the groups. However, these cooperative years were short-lived. By the end of the second decade of the century, differences in religious practice<sup>1</sup> and the feeling, on the part of the *Ashkenazim*, that Mexico provided an open forum for variegated political expression eventually drove them apart. The *Ashkenazim* had arrived in Mexico with various degrees of political awareness, that they articulated into political platforms drawn from the European experience according to which they defined themselves. Mexico seemed to offer them the possibility of a three-dimensional life: economic opportunities, intellectual exchange, and the pioneering experience of control over their lives. *Ashkenazim* and *Sephardim* separated organizationally; each began to explore new constructs of political expression that would reflect their own historical experience and their own views of their socio-political conditions.<sup>2</sup>

Georg Simmel's seminal concept of conflict<sup>3</sup> seems to describe quite adequately the patterns of interaction that occurred in this small community. However, since the political confrontations and battles that the *Ashkenazim* entered into during the 1940s-1950s caused the profound modification of their political structure, disciplining the community towards a process of unprecedented political unidimensionality, it is not enough to account for the period simply in terms of the phenomenon of conflict itself, even if one takes into consideration the centripetal and harmonious quality of conflict (*Vareinigung*) that is often a concomitant outcome of confrontations.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the clashes that are dealt with here, and their consequences, are presented, instead, as part of the political arena, reflecting the new patterns of thought that marked Ashkenazi Zionist efforts to give permanent, definitive shape and direction to their social structure.

Although the dramatic changes of this period may be approached from a number of angles,<sup>5</sup> here they are regarded as conflicts between political groups – political parties – aiming to determine a winner. Again, this did not mean the attainment of a dominant position by a group that was to be challenged routinely within a democratic framework; neither was it a

temporary amalgam of all political views under the leadership of one party, promoting a kind of political average. Rather, it resulted in the consolidation of *one group as the only "authentic" representative of Jewish interests*. All along, contenders sought to obtain from their audiences support for their world views and, in so doing, to legitimize their social interpretations and definitions of the situation. Communists, Bundists and Zionists endeavored to be recognized as the true representatives of the community. Eventually, however, it became a combativeness for *exclusive* representation of the community. And that meant a dramatic change in the political life of this community.

The Jewish community in the 1940s exhibited a political structure which was far from determined, where the rules of the political game were still being negotiated, and where definitions of Jewish loyalty remained open and varied.<sup>6</sup> In 1939, for instance, the newly-formed *Tzentral Komitet*, an organization created to guard against defamatory activities in the country, attempted – as a multi-sector representative body– to step into the role of central communal power. It was felt that given the plurality of organizations that existed, a central body would be useful for coordinating communal life. The *Tzentral Komitet* failed, however, for reasons that cannot be addressed fully here, to centralize control, as did the *Hilfs Fareyn*, and the Congregation *Nidkhei Israel*. Whether it was the religiously orthodox *Nidkhei Israel* or the socialist *Hilfs Fareyn*, each entering the contest with its own, entirely different style and agenda of priorities for the survival and continuity of the community, no one ever suggested that a single group could represent all varieties of Jewish thought; no one sensed, either, that a single group was soon to be the only legitimate representative of the community. A major change took place in the decade of the '40s, when the race to centralize the political power structure between the different organizations that existed revealed the possibility of establishing clear boundaries concerning the acceptable definitions of Jewish communal loyalty; and it is in the practical translation of these new limitations that specific participant-contestants were either accepted or rejected from the political arena of the community. For the first time, groups were to be excluded from the activities of their social domain.

It stands to reason that, if there was such competition for centrality and control, this was due to the existence of an institutional network comprising numerous minor organizations of diverse ideological persuasion, each of which sought control over the others. We do not have a complete list, but we can assume that there were many such organizations,<sup>7</sup> as distinct from other specifically cultural groups that participated in the political life of the community. In such a heightened ideological context, with so many ideas and

ideologies being flaunted in public forums,<sup>8</sup> gaining control of the network was no simple matter. For one organization to dominate the others, it required enforcing compliance and obedience, which not only had to be justified, but also had to be socially forged. With the Second World War at the beginning of the decade and the creation of the State of Israel at the end, we encounter external forces that finally exhausted for some groups some of the political alternatives available, while fomenting others as real possibilities. In the face of changes, which would only become clearer in the '50s, after the establishment of the State of Israel, the need for formal structuring of the community became more pressing and, in 1957, the *Kehillah* was created; a new central institution to fulfil that purpose. There is no doubt that even though power and control were attractive to all the groups, it was direction that was at stake. In other words, the outcome of the local conflicts did not by themselves restructure the local Jewish political scene; by narrowing the viable political alternatives within the community, it eventually became possible to establish a central defining group that attempted successful control over the entire communal landscape.

In the story of how this came about, three variables should be kept in mind. I begin by studying the groups that formed and functioned as political nuclei—Bundists, Communists and Zionists— and trace their development as they exchanged views about the political reality. Next, I take into account the background of national politics. President Cárdenas (1934-1940) had leftist sympathies and, during his administration, selected ideas of this type flourished and took root institutionally. By the 1950s, with the onset of the Cold War, this trend was blatantly reversed.<sup>9</sup> Both situations had an effect on the contending Jews. Finally, I consider the Jewish presence on the international scene during the period beginning with the Second World War and the Holocaust, and ending with the establishment of the State of Israel. These changes in social reality, more dramatic and profound than in any other period of Jewish history, had enormous consequences and affected all Jews. Certainly the tiny enclave examined here was no exception.

Given our protagonists, their dialogue, and their fluctuating status and prestige, the results attained are somewhat unexpected. Following the internal logic of their contentions, one would expect the winner to be determined first and foremost on the basis of each group's merits. However, perception of what was meritorious in a group changed in accordance with the external influences of political events. Less able to react instantaneously to change, the leaders of the groups assimilated and reacted to the external variables that affected them slowly and belatedly, so that even though they were aware of these changes, the actual results appeared to "surprise" them too.

Without a doubt, Jewish Communists had the upper hand at the beginning

of the period in question. For a very small group of activists (we lack exact statistics), they nonetheless commanded extensive visibility, prestige and public support, though other political groups attacked them. The most systematic onslaught and threat to their position came from the Bundists, who managed to dethrone them and drive them from the political scene, but not win. Nevertheless, even if the Bundists did remain their most formidable enemy, they were ineffectual in themselves. Zionists, on the other hand, were far more effective at playing their cards politically. For a time, they were strong allies of the Communists; in fact, Mexico is the first country in which such collaboration affected non-Jewish Communist circles as well.<sup>10</sup> However, when the balance of international forces changed during the Cold War, and with the establishment of the State of Israel, most communal sympathizers distanced themselves from the popular Communists, including leftist Zionists, who retreated in the face of a losing battle but felt strong enough to ride on their own. Thus, with the help of an "unexpected" change in the international scene, they managed to upstage all other contestants and gain popular support. The Bundists, who had contributed so much towards change, were left to search for coalition partners. The outcome of the conflicts was determined, then, not only by the intrinsic merits of each group, but by the way in which international events affected the existential, material and ideological resources of the political contenders. Hence, the "unexpected" result. The winners then sought to incorporate the idiosyncratic group formations within the community into an institutionalized structure.

While not strictly parallel, there are significant similarities between the goings on in the political life of the *Ashkenazim* in Mexico and the political scene in Mexico in general. Just as there was an openness towards leftist ideas in Mexico at large, so was Communism enjoying a surge of popularity in the community. In both cases, the situation of the groups was not consolidated, but it certainly allowed them the possibility of attempting to participate as major players in the political scene.

For those Jews who came to Mexico with the feeling that here was a country in which the world order was being modified without eradicating Jews and democracy, Mexico seemed like paradise. President Cárdenas was coping with the enormous shake-up that societies everywhere had experienced because of the international economic crisis of the previous decade. Cárdenas's answer to strikes and agrarian revolts was labor and land reform.<sup>11</sup> But the overtures he made to left-wing groups and their ideas were never meant as an open and free hand for either Socialists or – in particular – Communists.<sup>12</sup> The Communist Party of Mexico was created in 1919 and enjoyed a better relationship with Cárdenas than with other presidents, but their relationship was never a "love" story; at best, a courtship of sorts. Even

though the Communist Party had long stayed away from government workers' organizations, which were too attached to the government for their taste, they did get close to the new C.T.M.<sup>13</sup>, and this, despite the fact that it indicated a change in their policy, all the more significant given the shaky start of their relationship with President Cárdenas: in 1934, at the beginning of his presidency, they had accused him of being too closely linked to Calles, a fact that antagonized the President and turned him against them. Because Communists never aligned with the government completely, a slow process of enforced detachment began in 1936: first, they were expelled from the C.T.M.; then, in 1937, they were expelled from the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, the official party. Although Communists would later make a new attempt at what they called a policy of "unity at any price," they nevertheless protested Cárdenas's response to Soviet policy regarding Finland and his having welcomed Trotsky to Mexico. This prompted Cárdenas, in the last days of his administration, to authorize massive arrests of members of the Communist Party.<sup>14</sup> The breach was never repaired.

While it is hard to make a case for the direct influence of the Mexican political system on communal politics, it is certainly possible – and easier – to argue that the Mexican political exchanges of the '40s created a context in which the Jewish left could develop. Although by the 1940s Communists were being persecuted, it did not affect those Jews who defined themselves as such, since they were active in a separate body, having been denied acceptance to the "cells" of the official Communist Party. Given the importance attached to social issues in the country, as the restoration of certain rights, land, etc. shows, and the fact that these had not just been granted to certain groups but were the result of conflict, confrontation and consolidation,<sup>15</sup> leftist ideas enjoyed an established and acknowledged respect in the Jewish community, so that the pronouncements and ideological interpretations of the Communists enjoined prestige in the community. The left had room to maneuver.<sup>16</sup> With an openness that the context allowed, the Jewish left were in the mid-'30s and '40s perhaps the most vocal of the Jewish groups. Loosely identified, they encompassed Socialists, Communists, some Anarchists, Territorialists and intellectuals sympathetic to Socialist issues. Their central purpose was to examine and translate, for their audience, the activities of the USSR from a Jewish angle.

In the '20s, when the National Communist party was a fresh organization less than a decade old, some contact had existed with Jewish Communists.<sup>17</sup> In fact, in the purges of 1929, some Jews were also expelled from the country or sent to the "*Islas Mariás*," a prison off the mainland, depending on the national or residential status of the "offenders."<sup>18</sup> That contact was not renewed, however. When some sympathetic Jews attempted, in 1928, to offer

support for the Stalinist Soviet project of Birobidzhan, which designated the province in eastern Siberia a Jewish homeland, as had been the case with Crimea sometime earlier, Communist Jews in Mexico comprised too small a group to organize separately. Then the purges of '29 left their group shattered. Nothing much happened in the way of reorganization during the *maximato period*, as the years 1928-1934 are known in Mexico, with the presidencies of Emilio Portes Gil, Pascual Ortiz Rubio, and Abelardo L. Rodríguez. Mexico had broken off relations with the Soviet Union and any activities which were defined as subservient to the USSR were looked upon as unacceptable and not tolerated. Nevertheless, the Jewish left managed to stay active through the local press and continued to express their views of the possibilities that Socialism and Communism held for Jews. In the '30s, the national Communist Party reorganized. Though Jews were never incorporated, those that defined themselves as Communists remained "loyal", following indirect guidelines. For example, the Cárdenas regime offered asylum to Trotsky, but the Jewish community did not have much to do with him, with the exception of some interviews that he gave to some of their journalists.<sup>19</sup> The painter Diego Rivera and others who had petitioned for the asylum were expelled from the Communist Party for doing so. Jewish Communists followed the official line too, and so took little interest in him.

Between 1934 and 1946, the Cárdenas and Avila Camacho regimes provided a favorable political climate for the left<sup>20</sup> and things began to change substantially. Jewish Communists reorganized (1934) officially with a group called *Gesbir: Gezelshaft far Birobidzhan*. This time they were more successful.<sup>21</sup> They promoted their ideas through lectures and publications, and maintained basically friendly relations with other left-wing Jews, even with the Bund. By supporting a Communist platform, the Bund hoped to bypass old differences between the groups and forge new productive links between them. In their formative years (1890s), it must be remembered, all Jewish Socialists started out sharing the views expounded in *Wir Sind keine Juden, Sondern Jiddisch-sprechende Proletarier*. Eventually, the more nationalistic among them formed the Bund, while the internationalists joined the ranks of the Communists, determining the stance that bitterly separated these two groups in later years. The Second World War reawoke strong animosities and the conflict between the Bundists and the Communists was exacerbated by the resurgence of nationalism.

The USSR was respected in those years in most progressive intellectual circles, and Socialist groups in the community were, for the most part, active devotees. Almost in every aspect of their work, they exalted the USSR as being on the threshold of a new social world.<sup>22</sup> Its appeal to a broad base of support and its effort to embrace a variety of ideologies made the Communist

platform appear as the most influential, sophisticated, and dedicated to the community, more than any other practical movement. Notwithstanding the seeming prestige of the Communists, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939 violently shook intellectual circles. It created massive confusion within leftist groups and signalled the beginning of the end of Communist hegemony in the community. Too many questions arose, even among their followers: was it possible that the enemies of fascism had made an open agreement with Hitler? Was Stalin the leader the Communists would have everyone believe, or was there a thick cover-up obscuring his true political intentions? Distress, astonishment and confusion were the paralyzing emotions that surfaced when no explanation was forthcoming; there was much disappointment and disillusionment at the fact that politics subsumed principles. Even Communists were not satisfied with what increasingly appeared to many anti-fascists as an indefensible policy.

In order to counter widespread public remonstrance and to appease their loyal constituency, Jewish Communists organized a simulated trial of USSR policy a few months later, on July 31, 1940. It was held in the I.L.Peretz Club and was very well attended.<sup>23</sup> The all-Communist panel attempted to justify the pact. Presented as an exchange between a defense lawyer who followed the Stalinist position (Boris Rosen),<sup>24</sup> a prosecutor (Dr. Moisés Lisker),<sup>25</sup> and an arbitrator (the late Mexican philosopher Dr. Eli de Gortari), the trial was intended to appease the disenchanted left. Despite their intentions, the discussion brought to the fore the political/ethical questions and demands for accountability that had become such a dilemma for the Communist platform,<sup>26</sup> and, finding themselves unable to provide adequate explanations for Stalinist policy, they only aggravated their cause. Lisker's support of the Communists, for instance, diminished – true to the role he had assumed in the trial. Instead of securing a consensus, the already fragile equilibrium of the "left" was further eroded.<sup>27</sup> The action had unintended consequences. Although Bundists were the most vocal accusers and persistently demanded an explanation from the Communists, similar outbursts occurred worldwide. In response, a new concerted effort was launched by Communist central policy-makers to repair the severed relationships,<sup>28</sup> but the pact had rendered the Communists helpless; exactly where things went wrong would only become clear years later. Abrogation of the pact afforded some of the disaffected activists a means of returning to the Communist fold but, for others, it was all over.

After the Second World War, the left continued to work to bolster its image and secure adherents. Attempting to sidestep the hurdles erected by the pact, Communists created first the Jewish League for the Soviet Union (1942), and then, in 1945, changed it to *Folks Lige*, in an effort to make the platform



accessible to all groups in the community.<sup>29</sup> This change of name no doubt was also prompted by the need to continue the fight against fascism, in which Jews had an obvious stake,<sup>30</sup> as much as by the desire for a wider and stronger political base. Many Bundists, Zionists and Communists cooperated, and most of those who defined themselves as "progressive" were active to a degree.<sup>31</sup> Not only was this group distinctive for its relatively large cultural output, but it was also notorious for sending packages, money and other material resources in support of the Red Army.

The then president of the *Yidishe Folks Lige*, Mordkhe Korona, stressed the need for such a widened platform.<sup>32</sup> At the inauguration ceremonies, representatives from 20 organizations were present: among them were the *Nidkhei Israel* Congregation, the United Zionist Organization, the *Tzentral Komitet*, the *Histadrut* (representatives of the General Federation of Labor in Israel), and the representatives of the Jewish World Congress (the voluntary Jewish body representing communities throughout the world).<sup>33</sup> The most unexpected source of support for the Communists, however, which enabled them to retain their centrality a little longer, came from the strong alliance at that time between Communists and Zionists, particularly left-wing Zionists. The Communist monthly *Fraivelt* had been turned into a weekly and become an open forum for Zionists like Zevulun Berebiches, Chaim Lasdeisky, Kalmen Landau, Avner Aliphas and Mordkhe Korona.

The Bund, though, remained distant.<sup>34</sup> The estrangement between the Bund and the Communists had been essentially disguised by the fact that both groups in Mexico were small and needed each other as audience and constituency. But, at the first opportunity for an outbreak, such as the aforementioned pact, differences surfaced. The official break occurred after the execution of Bund's leaders Victor Alter and Henrik Erlich, accused of spying, in the USSR in 1941, after they had escaped from Nazi-occupied Poland. World Bundist outrage was enormous. Local Communist justification further inflamed Bundist animosity: "We do not believe that Erlich and Alter were killed as criminals, but rather as activists-fighters who were against the Soviet regime; the Soviet Union did not commit a murderous act, rather they defended their interests and ideology."<sup>35</sup> For the Bundists, the acceptance and justification of these deaths revealed the degree to which local Jewish Communists had become blind to USSR policy. The Bund felt that the fate of European Jewry was secondary for the Communists, far less important than the much-praised achievements of the Red Army. Moreover, the Bund distrusted on the whole the politics and diplomacy of the USSR, therefore the uncritical reverence which these Communists manifested for the USSR was intolerable to them. After this incident, Bundists systematically

sought to discredit what appeared to them as unquestioning Communist positions adopted with respect to Jews in the Soviet Republics.<sup>36</sup>

Soviet Jewish leaders, actor Shloime Mikhoels and poet Itzik Fefer, visited Mexico, the U.S., Canada and England in 1943 on behalf of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, an organization monitored by the Soviet government, with the aim of strengthening the waning but much needed support.<sup>37</sup> The broad recognition these leaders received in Mexico on the part of their colleagues, some Zionists, and even some government representatives, makes it unclear who the target of their efforts was; perhaps they were geared towards everyone. One can assume, in any event, that any support was welcome. Within the community, this Communist-Party initiative was welcomed by many. Jews mostly saw it as an effort by Jewish Communists to justify Soviet policy towards Jews and to help sustain the eroding sympathy for the Soviet government. But it is obvious that the aim of these messengers was far more comprehensive.

One very clear purpose of their visit was to highlight what Soviet leaders defined as the beneficial aspects of Soviet policy towards Jews. The USSR's willingness to make specifically Jewish issues, even nationalistic Jewish issues, a central concern, sharply contrasted – they held – with the claims made by other countries – and there were not many – concerning their interest in protecting Jews and their needs. The support given to Mikhoel's and Féfer's work by the Soviet Ambassador to Mexico, Constantin Umanski, lent credibility to these claims. A distinguished diplomat, previously Ambassador to the US, and a Jew, he became a kind of liaison between Jews, Jewish Communists, Mexican Communists and world governments.<sup>38</sup> With his clear political authority, skills, linguistic tools and ethnic ties, he was able to reach diverse audiences, and was especially popular with the Jewish community. Umanski certainly contributed to promoting and sustaining Jewish faith in Soviet policy. He also helped to forge a genuine link between Jews with different ideologies.<sup>39</sup>

The collaboration between Jewish Communists, other intellectuals and the Zionists was not limited to the use of a common press.<sup>40</sup> Many activities were shared. Umanski was a much sought-after guest at Jewish communal public meetings. It should be noted that during the Mikhoels and Fefer visit (which Umanski attended), not only Communists hosted the visitors. Zionists were at the forefront of the activities, too. An open reception was organized at the Zionist *Tarbut* school, with 45 presidents from diverse organizations present. Ambassador Umanski addressed the meeting.<sup>41</sup> Another meeting, with similar attendance, took place with 30 distinguished Mexican and Latin American artists, including the painter Chávez Orozco, the playwright Alfonso Gómez de la Vega, the poet Pablo Neruda, the composer Carlos

Chávez, the philosopher Alfonso Reyes, and others. The *Tzentral Komitet*, the most general and representative organization at the time, received the guests separately. Jews tried to make it a Jewish event, while Mexicans regarded it as a Soviet-Mexican exchange. Regardless of the success of each group in appropriating the event, its ample visibility and the interest it awoke dramatically illustrate the importance and widespread acceptability of the left at the time. However, despite the prolonged centrality and visibility that they enjoyed, the Communists in the long run were not able to secure a widespread and stable following.

The break between Communists and Bundists in 1941 had a dramatic effect on the Communists, though the full extent was disguised in the first few years of their conflict by a series of alliances and political relationships that tended to obscure the larger context. Communists repeatedly received boosts of energy; the above-mentioned connection with left wing-Zionists, one of many, was beneficial to both parties in that one attained recognition for the goals of the USSR, while the other gained a forum to express their views and canvass for recognition as well.

A second source of energy came from the exiled European Communists, mainly German and Austrian Jews and non-Jews, who ended up in Mexico in those years as temporary guests.<sup>42</sup> In 1942, these refugees formed the *Bewegung Freies Deutschland* (Movement for a Free Germany). Although the Mexican government had distanced itself from the Soviet Union during what some Mexicans called the "Wall Street influence" period, things changed when Mexico joined the Allies in the war in 1942, and the two countries reestablished relations some time later. The impact of this group of refugees was particularly felt by the *Ashkenazim* because of their contact with the Jews among them. Refugees found it easier to establish contacts within the community either as members of the minority that shared common interests or as spokesmen for certain communal issues that local Jews were otherwise unable to articulate. Often, these Jewish refugees were guests at communal activities. Introduced as "Jewish writers in foreign languages," they participated in internal discussions about Jewish continuity and goals. Egon Irving Kish, Andre Simon and Dr. Leo Zuckerman conferred with such local activists as Kalmen Landoi, Jacobo Glantz, Abraham Golomb and Zevulun Berebiches.<sup>43</sup>

The refugees, Communists, and leftist-Zionists created a sort of network, energetically and spiritedly exchanging public and ideas. Refugees, including Paul Meyer, Bruno Frei, Otto Katz and Theodore Balk, took part in communal activities and some even contributed to the Jewish organ of the Bnei Brith, *Tribuna Israelita*. These activists shared not only a Marxist-Leninist ideology, but also an interest in the practical tactics of the

international Communist movement, particularly its efforts to broaden its support by developing "popular fronts."<sup>44</sup> These sophisticated and internationally renowned intellectuals also helped the community by articulating for them the need for general concern over the responsibility that Germany had incurred towards the Jews over Nazi policies, as well as the idea that Jews, as a minority, deserved the right to express themselves nationally.

The most important "broker" in this relationship between the Jewish sectors and the Communist refugees in exile was Leo Katz (1892-1954). Very well connected among the refugees, he was deeply versed in Jewish culture, history and language.<sup>45</sup> He also knew Yiddish, an advantage that allowed him close contact with the activities of the community, as well as access to the Yiddish press.<sup>46</sup> With his distinguished career in the German, Austrian and French Communist parties, Katz became a natural link between the two groups in Mexico. Finding himself a grown man in a vibrant environment, concerned not just with the public cause but suddenly also with issues imbued with a Jewish context, seems to have awakened in him an awareness – apparently dormant, or absent, in his exiled Jewish colleagues– of the political potential of his Jewishness. Jewishness, which up to that point had been for him, as for his colleagues, a subtext of his thought, was now at the forefront of his thinking, an active point of reference to which his other political ideas had to relate. Katz, in many ways, is paradigmatic of the atmosphere of the time for these Jews; a time when Jewish issues became the prism through which international politics could be understood.<sup>47</sup> More than any of the others, Katz intervened in internal communal affairs that affected other areas, too. Very much involved in the local Jewish press, he was concerned with many communal problems, some of which seemed very far from his earlier preoccupation with anti-fascism. He confronted people in the community over educational issues, and discussed others concerning cultural continuity, etc. He was the only one of the Jews in this group who, after leaving Mexico, seemed to retain a fast bond with Israel and with Judaism, that nearly superseded his previous Communist activities.<sup>48</sup>

In the meantime, the Bund did not stand by in silence. The press served as a forum for their exchanges. By splitting away from the Communists, the Bund forfeited the chance of sharing a common platform and, though it had its own journal, it soon discovered that it could not build an equally wide membership. Communist centrality was rooted in the stability of their international contacts and left-Zionist support for the international political discourse in which they participated. The Bundists failed to rouse a comparable socialist base locally, in much the same way as the local Communists had trouble widening their membership. Thus, while one group

celebrated, the other felt it was being ousted from the ideological discourse central to political debate and discussion.

The Bund systematically attacked Jewish Communists and Communism. Much of it seemed irrelevant to the Communists, who seldom responded and mostly continued to praise and highlight the actions of the Soviet army. However, something changed with the intervention of an "outsider," not so much with respect to the internal political dialogue, but marginal in terms of Communist thinking generally. Communists started to retaliate and turned the disagreements into outright war. Avraham Golomb (1888-1982), a renowned pedagogue, writer and ideologue, then director of the *Yidishe Shule* in Mexico, decided to engage in the political discourse at the time by publicly raising his objections to the specific treatment of Jews and Judaism in the Soviet Republics.<sup>49</sup> He published two letters from a colleague and friend from Rumania.<sup>50</sup> Non-aligned personally since expounding his own political ideology, which he sought to implement through the school system, Golomb was recognized as a man of stature and standing not just by this community, but among a larger group of people worldwide who knew him and respected his goals. However, by advocating his own notions of Jewish continuity and survival, he was detracting from the Communist agenda, as well as from specific Jewish Communist loyalties. Until he attacked Communism, Communists did not attack him and, in fact, they often praised him.<sup>51</sup> Once he intervened, however, a response seemed imminent. Communists gained legitimacy through their direct response to his criticism. Golomb was immediately seen by Communists as the "enemy", and the Bund seized the opportunity to highlight their friendship with him, polarizing the situation further. The Communist response came from a powerful figure, who felt himself to be an equal match for Golomb: Leo Katz saw this as an opportunity, not so much to defend the Soviet position, but to discredit Golomb. When he became vituperative in his attack of Golomb's ideas,<sup>52</sup> Golomb remained silent and temporarily withdrew from these communal political confrontations. Nevertheless, he still managed to deliver a dramatic blow to the Communists, whose position continued to come under attack.<sup>53</sup>

Still without a defined following, the Bund intensified its attack, turning also against the Zionists on the left, who were forced to re-examine the meaning of their coalition with the Communists.<sup>54</sup> The Bund exposed inconsistencies in Zionist ideology and activity. Bundists were appalled, for example, by the apparent disingenuousness of the question that occupied the Zionists: "Where should we help: Palestine or Poland?." For the Bund – within the context of the war – the question revealed the Zionists' lack of a sense of proportion; it posed an altogether false dilemma. As they saw it, European Jewry was already sequestered by the question itself. Zionist

political interests and intentions were focused clearly and uncompromisingly on Palestine; for Polish Jewry, they only "shed a tear" and "offered a *Kaddish*."<sup>55</sup> Was this a real interest in Jewish future? Dr. Nahum Goldman, a Zionist who fought openly for supporting Diaspora Jewry within Zionism, was criticized for doing too little and too late. He visited Mexico, together with Rabbi Stephen Wise, to find solid communal support, but the tension did not disappear.<sup>56</sup>

Zionism in Mexico had organized its base around the *Keren Kayemet*, the National Fund, whose activities centered on festival celebrations and commemoration ceremonies, which gave them an opportunity to collect money for *Eretz Israel*. It was a form of support that allowed the public a less formal commitment, while educating it in the process.<sup>57</sup> The Zionists also had been trying to unite their diverse organizations within a federation, under what the press reported as the Ben-Gurion Plan, put forward in April 1937.<sup>58</sup> Left-wing Zionists like Mordkhe Korona, Avner Aliphaz, Kalmen Landau, and others, all worked with the Communists publishing in *Fraivelt*.<sup>59</sup> But there was one factor that helped the Zionists overcome the negative consequences of their Communist associations. In contrast to the Communists, Zionists had representatives in most, if not all, communal organizations; teachers, writers, journalists, professionals, and activists, all contributed to and used the services of the community. This involvement and interaction became increasingly useful as the community absorbed Zionist ideology, and Zionist positions and principles gained prestige. In an adequate environment, these scattered seeds could grow and flourish.

The Bund, however, ridiculed the Zionists' links with others as crassly political in intent; the association of "Zionists, with Reform Rabbis of the USA, the wealthy Jews and the progressive Communists"<sup>60</sup> betrayed their deceitfulness, the Bundists argued. Their criticism, however, failed to undermine the relationship that these organizations had forged with each other. The Bund continued to denounce the Communists for their supposed trickery with regard to Bundists in their country, Zionists, or, for that matter, Jews in general. Why would an Ana Berkovna need to become, for example, Ana Borisovna in Russia? Was this not subtle pressure to change ethnic Jewish identity? How could Zionists interpret Communist policy as pro-Zionist? Or, was it that Zionists also did not stand for all Jews?<sup>61</sup>

Criticism of the Communists came from other quarters, too. Though Mexico had few Jewish anarchists, the movement's spokesman was a distinguished man, of much integrity, who had arrived in Mexico in 1926 after taking part in a notorious anarchist struggle in the United States in 1918.<sup>62</sup> Jack Abrams distrusted Communists as much as they did him. In the midst of the controversy that raged in the '40s, he added his contention that

the USSR was not, as Communists claimed, the ideal society. Neither was the upheaval of Western society due to strikes and disagreements: "Do not believe in this silence, [he exhorted his readers], jail is not a cemetery," he quoted from a Russian prison song.<sup>63</sup>

Among the Communists, not all types of Zionism found favor. When Dr. Nahum Goldman and Baruch Tzuckerman, major Zionist leaders from the World Jewish Congress, visited Mexico, their failure to address the problems of Soviet Jewry showed, many argued, their distinct lack of interest and support for Zionism everywhere.<sup>64</sup> Communists felt that this lack of support from the General Zionists – the group and ideology that eventually became dominant – was something they had to come to terms with. In their criticism, Communists resented what they saw as an essential characteristic of Zionism, which permeated its ideology and showed itself clearest in the Zionist position towards the USSR: making the link that they harbored not an ideologically "organic" relationship but, rather, an opportunistic one. The Communists went on to reject the support they received from the Jewish orthodoxy, which, as far as they were concerned, was essentially of the same type as they understood Zionist support to be: sympathetic to Communism and its causes only as long as it gave them an outlet for expressing their outrage and desire for vengeance stemming from the war.<sup>65</sup>

If, within the prism of these competing forces, one is able to discern the alliances – some weaker, some stronger – between key groups, one can just as well see the deep-seated enmities that, by weakening these relationships, eventually rendered them powerless. No one group was fully committed to another. Communists had a relationship with left-wing and other Zionists, but not with the main stream of a movement they later censored. Bundists were critical of Communists as well as Zionists, and moreover were unable to secure a majority for themselves. Communists, in turn, criticized Bundists. At all times, the shortcomings of each group's ideological position were made public. All were aware of the possible sources of contention between the others. There was fierce competition for the support of the masses, which implied the need for detachment from the others; but, since control over the masses was still in dispute, the coalitions held so long as individual groups were willing to gamble on the relative benefits to be derived from them. The fact that each group was so adept at picking fault with the other, while maintaining the relationship at the same time, enabled them to make a final break when that became necessary, as was the case of the Zionists with respect to the Communists.

The Communists, with their *Folks Lige* actively claiming to represent the community at large, were the first to experience difficulty in retaining that power. After 1945-46, Communists began to perceive that their ability to

exert control over the social landscape was limited, and they were then overtaken by fear of being displaced from their central position. The communal solidarity for which they had fought so determinedly, and which they had guarded with such fervor, was dissolving, or rather, shifting sectors. However, the Communists' understanding of the forces at play was limited. It was difficult for them to identify the source of the problem; to do so would have required making some concessions to the changing political reality and negotiating with the challenging groups. Instead, as a first step, Communists sought justification by elaborating criticism which focused mostly on the issue of communal representation. They criticized local communal organizations for not being "cemented," and for failing to institute "democracy." The criticism was now centered on the internal structure of the community. But, since they had never raised these issues before, it would appear that they were interested less in democracy per se than in some political mechanism that could secure the shaky future of the organization.

The Communist journal *Fraivelt* repeatedly publicized the achievements of the Red Army, especially the achievements of Jews in the military field. At the same time, from 1943, Communists claimed, the journal always aimed to "respect all Jewish positions even when not in accordance with the Soviet Union [and] to be a non-partisan organ, with a platform against Fascism." All these arguments attempted to further the political designs of the Communists to be part of a larger unity and yet still retain control. *Fraivelt* presented itself as a "synthetic approach to all Jewish life," as the representative of what it felt was at the forefront of Jewish needs. In support of this point, the early experiments of Crimea and Birobidzhan were often cited, as well as other government initiatives that protected Jewish culture and survival.

Communists, from afar, believed that the structure of Soviet society had changed, and with it, Jews had changed too. They used the metaphor of the stereotype "hump" of the Jews, and argued that, as a social characteristic, it was gone: "It is not surprising that the Jew in Russia has stopped missing a personal country. Can one want another mother when one has a perfect one? This could only occur when one has a stepmother, as is the case everywhere in the world but not in the USSR. Further, even the Jews of Palestine feel that whatever they want to achieve, the Russian Jews have achieved already."<sup>66</sup> Later, Hirsh Minski, a contributor to *Fraivelt*, attempted to articulate the differences between Zionism, Communism and Bundism, and the goals of the *Folks Lige*. Drawing heavily on Golomb's work, he differentiated between the three major political parties on the basis of their positions with respect to the external political condition of Jews; but, since Golomb had been the only one to address the internal political and cultural quandary of Jews, Minski hoped



that a combination of Communism and Golombism would allow the *Lige* to focus not only on *Eretz Israel* Jews or European-Polish Jews, but on American and Soviet Jews, who also needed support for their continuity, as well.<sup>67</sup>

Further attacks came from the Bund, who publicized the liquidation of Zionism in Rumania.<sup>68</sup> The attacks became more frequent and more acute; more direct and more daring. Then, something happened. The old alliances started to crumble and each group began to break away. It was no longer a confrontation between the Bund and the Communists. The Bund now attacked the left-wing Zionist alliance with the Communists and the General Zionists. Communists, in turn, protested what they called the Bund's lack of "political vision." They also went on to criticize the larger Zionist body and local Zionists in particular,<sup>69</sup> although they did see a fundamental link with the Zionist cause. After all, it was a movement joining in the attempt to rid the world of the last bleak forces of fascism. But not all that Zionists stood for internally was either desired or accepted; neither did it offer, according to them, full options for all Jews. As for the Zionists, they rejected the Bund's strong interest in localism. Thus, all the alliances weakened and the groups became politically vulnerable. However, because of the international changes whereby Zionism was emerging as the most vocal and most powerful agent for Jews in world politics, it was becoming not only clear but imperative that the community needed to establish a central body that could interact and deal with the changing demands of the new political reality. In the midst of such structural demands, coupled with the general feeling of vulnerability, the attacks between the groups turned lethal and stakes were at their highest.

For the first time, the Bund openly demanded that the general community impose a ban on Communists and that it stop tolerating their organization.<sup>70</sup> Limited censorship had been applied before; however, these had been specific cases of authorities with limited impact, in search of an as yet undefined ethnical centrality.<sup>71</sup> The Bund sensed that the atmosphere was ripe for a new attempt to define centrality, and acted upon their sense that the emergence of a unifying factor could help create and solidify a defined institutionalized structure. They also may have been hoping for some direct political rewards. In any case, the action of the Bund turned out to be politically timely and accurately focused.

In the end, the community did unite and allowed the Communists to lose, but not because of the anti-Communist demands of the Bund or of anyone else's attacks. Communists lost ground because Zionists found them, as a group, to be too far out of line. And a very particular line was at issue: an invisible line of attachment, bonding and loyalty was forming the new roots of Jewish communal relations; other factions accepted or supported the

Zionist position, and its developing structure helped enforce the new boundary. When Soviet support for Israel eroded, parallel feelings were expressed by local Jewish Communists. In 1951, during a dispute in the *Tzentral Komitet* over the Communists' position on this issue, local Communists sided with the Soviet Union and proceeded to attack the imperialism of the USA.<sup>72</sup> Discontent had grown after Communist leaders of the community were denied visas to the USA because of their affiliation. It was, after all, the Korean War period. Increasingly frustrated, the Communists banded together Israel, the USA, and the unsympathetic local communal structure as enemies. It was this that precipitated their downfall, for the response of the community was to apply to them, in turn, the Cold War attitude,<sup>73</sup> thus sealing the future of the Communists in this community. They were immediately ousted from the joint organizations and, with no place in the political arena, abandoned the scene altogether. They left.

How was it that the Zionists established hegemony? No confrontation had given any group a clear victory. Sensibilities were changing and Jewish ideas and affiliations were shifting with them. In the process, the left lost; of all the contending forces, only the Zionists offered the prospect of real change.

Still, the bitter exchanges between the groups had not fallen on deaf ears. The ideological attacks of the Bund, if they failed to win supporters for their own cause, educated the public and tempered their enthusiasm for the Communists. Bundists never stopped protesting what they called the "double standard" of the Communists: their criticism of the Nazis and yet their silence over the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact; their praise of Zionism while supporting the Arabs, etc.

The Communists retaliated by raising issues that the Bund, in turn, had trouble refuting. They claimed that the Bundist defense of vanquished Polish Jewry was empty politically and ideologically.<sup>74</sup> They further suggested that Bundist positions were short-sighted and unable to deal with the political crises of war. Communists and Zionists alike criticized the Bund for their fixation on the war issues.<sup>75</sup> The Bundists, in turn, criticized all pro-Soviet organizations for their detachment from Jewish concerns and for failing to pursue agendas that actively furthered Jewish interests. They felt that the Communists used the Marxist paradigm to understand the Second World War, while selling out with respect to the Jewish question.<sup>76</sup> Ideology controlled most explanations, the Bund contended, while the realities of history were all too often denied or ignored. Drained from all the political fighting, only Zionism benefitted. Although linked at one time to Communism, their locus of action was *Eretz Israel*, which ideologically and geographically now offered a new sphere of action.

For the Communists, the *Folks Lige* was weakening. The refugees had

returned to Europe after the war, most of them to work in regimes that ultimately contributed to their premature and unnatural death.<sup>77</sup> The support of the USSR for the new State of Israel was eroding in theory and practice, and most Communists followed suit. Such behavior, however, alienated the vast majority of the community, even those least politicized; limits to communal political toleration were being enforced. Communists lost the undefined coalition with the left-wing Zionists, and even some of their own supporters abandoned them. Attacks against the new Jewish state after the Holocaust were not about to be permitted, particularly when no other political "solutions" seemed to have worked.

The birth of the State of Israel was a balm for the suffering survivors of the war, and a dream come true for most Jews. More than anything else, the founding of the State of Israel offered the most independent political solution available to Jews, regardless of the inevitable and possibly irreconcilable ideological differences between them. The "Jewish street" in the community was in a mood of intense and heartfelt euphoria; the very existence of Israel signified absolute legitimization of Zionist work and activity. With the founding of the State itself, gains acquired from previous struggles could and would be integrated into the local institutionalization process.

Zionism had become the most effective political vision and now it had also become a reality, the power of which began to be recognized. Zionists became the undisputed winners in the struggle that gave all Jews an international political victory. Locally, however, they were unorganized and unprepared to cope with their newly-achieved recognition. There was no single Zionist organization fit to take over the direction of the community; there were just prestigious Zionists. Even after the creation of Israel, there was not one communal organization able to coordinate the celebration arrangements.<sup>78</sup> In 1948, two days after the proclamation of the new State, a pro-Palestine committee was formed, filling the vacuum and helping to organize the festivities for the event.<sup>79</sup>

With the consolidation of power, Zionists now took charge. The Bund conceded victory to Zionism before anyone else. No matter what shortcomings remained, they felt that Zionists provided a viable answer to Jewish reality at the time.<sup>80</sup> Other groups followed. One major consequence had a lasting impact on the political rules of this community: exclusive political thought was now the norm. Whether due to the vulnerability of recent gains, or to the abuse of the newly-achieved power, a type of unidimensional thought was being promoted, permitted and fostered. Yet the new reality of the State of Israel coexisting with the conditions of the Diaspora remained in theoretical and practical terms contradictory; from the point of view of the local community, this Diaspora required the articulation of new ideologies.

And these were not forthcoming. Local Jewry, despite its support, happiness and dependence on the new State, never proposed to dismantle itself and remained a minority in another state. That condition needed addressing; and even though the supreme result of 1948 affected them, their choice to remain in the Diaspora, however, left many issues that needed to be attended. Yet they lacked the parameters to comprehend this reality from the perspective of the community. Zionists were not interested or able to promote that process. The political unidimensionality that was starting to take over presented itself in terms of a fundamental cultural and political alienation, with all the problems that such a condition implies.

Very soon, the first signs of this condition became apparent to the local Jews, and although it was clear that a new ideological agenda needed to be defined, they remained unequipped to address its political consequences, unable to confront and work on their condition as a minority.

The UN vote for the State of Israel, for instance, showed 10 abstentions, and Mexico was one of them. The seemingly silent posture of the government spoke loudly and affected Jews there more than it appeared to at first. As one Jew analyzed the abstention in the press:

"It hurts me as a Mexican Jewish citizen. What hurts me is not so much the abstention from voting, as the added flattery that was given in the declaration, when the Mexican representative De Colina had so much to say in this world forum about the goodness of the Syrian-Lebanese citizens and only a few, cold statements about his Mexican Jewish citizens. We, Mexican Jewish citizens, think and we are sure that we have helped along very much in the local economic development of the last 25-30 years. De Colina should know all this. It is our fault that we did not disseminate more information about our community."<sup>81</sup>

After four decades of productive exchange, nothing had altered the ambivalence of the Mexican Government towards Jews; not the Holocaust, not the State of Israel, and not the local productive Jewish citizens. The fact of the "moral necessity" of the State of Israel had not been understood or agreed upon by the Mexican Government.<sup>82</sup> The reasoning for the Mexican abstention revealed less the supposed neutrality of the government, than it did the thoughts about Jews that it still harbored.<sup>83</sup>

Jews did accept, almost as a prerequisite, the "moral necessity" of the State of Israel. It was becoming an undisputed fact politically. However, the way in which this fact was worked into their local political thinking left no room either for dissension or for a shift of emphasis in the priorities of Jewish

communal life without risking the possibility of being labeled and treated as disloyal. The Communists had become the most patent example of this.

Local concerns did not disappear. Since the winning group's ideology failed to address philosophically and politically local issues, which are always an important register of political efficacy, these became only the subtext of the perpetual efforts of dominant groups to retain power and control. The price – the sociological inability of communal leaders, as of the general minority, to understand their social condition – would become clearer only years later.

## NOTES

1. Specific differences in ritual, in the administrative policies of the cemetery, made for great tension. See Cimet de Singer, Adina, *The Ashkenazi Community in Mexico, A Dialogue among Ideologies*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University 1992, Ch.3.
2. See Susanne Langer's suggestion of how a social agent acts upon his social context, using "the common dimensions of [his/hers] experience," in Douglas, Mary, "The Idea of Home: A Kind of Space", *Social Research*, Vol. 58, No.1, Spring 1991, p. 291.
3. Simmel, Georg, *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago, 1971), pp. 70-95.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
5. Cimet de Singer, Adina, *op cit.*, specifically, Ch. 5.
6. One should remember that the *Kehila Ashkenazi* came into being only in 1957; and it is with this institution that the structuring of the community takes full form.
7. The conflicting figures we can offer come from observations made by contemporaries in the Jewish press about their own communal network. In 1945, it is suggested that there are over 20 organizations; see *Fraivelt*, Jan.-Feb., 1945, p. 55. Abraham Golomb counted 58 organizations in the late '50s, while arguing for the need for a central *Kehillah*. In a report to the Executive Committee of the World Jewish Congress, Kate Knopfmacher mentions about 40 organizations; *American Jewish Archives*, Hebrew Union College, H231.
8. This refers to public meetings, lectures, discussion groups, etc. Unfortunately, the only available records of the political climate of the period are the local newspapers published in Yiddish and the memoirs of occasional activists, some of whom I have interviewed, and others who have been questioned by the local research team that just recently produced an Oral History Library, under the direction of the Amigos de la Universidad Hebrea de Jerusalén and the Institute of Contemporary Judaism of the same University. See *Testimonios de Historia Oral, Judíos en México* (Mexico, 1990). From reading the local Yiddish press, one gets a clear impression of the tremendous variety and complexity of all Jewish ideologies and their nuances, as they interacted through their representative groups in Mexico.
9. Since the Mexican Revolution of 1910, there has been an important nucleus of leftist thought in the country, from the anarchist brothers Flores Magón, to socialists like Antonio I. Villareal, Manuel Sarabia, Lázaro Gutiérrez de Lara, etc. For an overview of this history, see *Historia General de México*, Vol. 2, Cosío Villegas, Daniel, et al., especially, Ulloa, Berta, "La lucha armada, (1911-1920)," (Mexico, 1988).
10. Bankier, D., "Los exiliados Alemanes en México y sus vínculos con la comunidad Judía (1942-1945)," *Judaica Latinoamericana* (Jerusalem, 1989).
11. Hodges, Donald and Gandy, Ross, *Mexico 1910-1982, Reform or Revolution?* (London, 1983); Ralsky de Cimet and Lerner de Sheinbaum, *El Poder de los Presidentes*, (Mexico, 1976); Zapata, Francisco, *Ideología y Política en América Latina* (Mexico, 1990).
12. Whether the Revolutionary heritage of 1910 is understood as populism or socialism, the left

- was never reduced to a single group activity in the country. By the time of the government of Alvaro Obregón, one can distinguish several left-wing groups affecting the political structuring of the country: Partido Nacional Agrarista, Conferencia Nacional Agraria (1923), Partido Laborista Mexicano (1919), Confederación de Obreros Mexicanos, Confederación General del Trabajo (1921), Partido Comunista, etc. It was the CROM that first gained support from the government and then the CTM. See Delgado de Cantu, Gloria, *Historia de México, Formación del Estado Moderno* (Mexico, 1991), pp. 232-245. The first major shake-up specific to Communists in general that also affected Jewish Communists came with President Calles in 1929, when, after President Obregón's assassination, Calles faced unrest in the country and was unable to secure an easy political transition. During a rebellion staged by General Escobar, the Communist party first sided with Calles and then followed their international line, changing their position of support. All dissidents were persecuted. Communists were arrested, expelled, or even made to disappear. See *Historia General de México, op. cit.*, Meyer, Lorenzo, "El Primer Tramo del Camino," pp. 1192-1194.
13. C.T.M. is the *Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos*, a body linked to the official government party formed in 1936.
  14. Lorenzo, Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 1255. See also, Delgado de Cantu, Gloria, *Historia de México, Formación del Estado Moderno* (México, 1991).
  15. Ralsky de Cimé and Lerner de Sheinbaum, *El Poder de los Presidentes*, pp. 100-101.
  16. There was also a kind of "delayed action" on Communists in the community, since their loss of favor was not linked to specific practical actions such as that of the non-Jewish Communists in Mexico.
  17. The Communist Party in Mexico was created in 1919 as a result of the initiative of the *Comintern*, and with support from the older *Partido Socialista Mexicano*.
  18. Though after the Mexican Revolution Mexico had many political parties – in 1929 there were more than a thousand–, these were not parties in the modern sense. Each was a small following of a leader, cacique or notable, that disappeared as soon as the leader disappeared or lost power. Calles's attempt to create the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* in 1928 was a way of limiting the splintering of forces into mini-parties. The only political party that survived these changes was the Communist Party, which in any case remained marginal. When, in 1929, in the midst of the Escobar rebellion, the Communist Party withdrew its support of the government following international guidelines, the government of Calles took brutal measures against their political move. See Meyer, Lorenzo, "La Encrucijada," in *Historia General de México*, Vol. 2, El Colegio de México (Mexico, 1988), pp. 1212-1218.
  19. Maguidin, Shmuel, interview Oral History, 1990.
  20. The left in Mexico should not be identified with Communist thought only. There were always a variety of positions. The CROM, *Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos*, had very difficult dealings with the Communist Party, who often complained of their relationship with the government but fared better.
  21. They published the journal *Ojiboi*, but also took upon themselves to publish works of their members, such as Jacobo Glantz's "Fonen un Blut," poems about the antifascist Spanish experience.
  22. For a parallel between this Russophilia and that of English and American intellectuals during the '30s, see Coser, L., *Men of Ideas, A Sociologist's View* (New York, 1970), pp. 144, 234-236; Wood, Neal, *Communism and British Intellectuals* (New York, 1959); Howe, Irving, and Coser, L., *The American Communist Party* (Boston, 1957); Webb, Sidney and Beatrice, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization* (New York, 1941). For a very new book and analysis of the reaction of the American government once it felt the "infiltration" of these intellectuals in the American University, see Diamond, Sigmund, *Compromised Campus, The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1945-1955* (New York, 1992).
  23. The club was located in Tacuba 15, the building that housed most of the Jewish organizations of the time.

24. Rosen was then a young activist of the League, who eventually became editor of the Communist journal *Fraivelt*.
25. Lisker had belonged to the young *Gesbir* and was now active in the League. His profession was medicine, but he also had a command of languages. He was used as translator for the Soviet-Jewish envoy in Mexico, the actor Mikhoels and the poet Fefer.
26. Rosen spoke on "The bourgeois-democracy that engendered the fascist monster and the Soviet democracy that will bury them both;" Lisker spoke on "Marxism and Stalinism; not only two different concepts, but really antithetical ones," and De Gortari moderated with a speech on "Stalin's thrust of the USSR and the International towards Socialist triumph." Interview, Rosen, Oral History.
27. The same occurred in the United States, but research needs to investigate the path the break followed there. See *Der Hamer*, New York, Aug. 1939, p. 15; Sept. 1939, Oct. 1939, especially the articles by M. Katz. It seems that Communists rejected the more general Socialist publication, *Yidische Kultur*, because it did not allow them to justify the Pact. The publication defined itself as non-partisan. Dr. Zitlovsky, Dr. Mokduni, Y. Opatoshu, B.T. Goldberg, Peretz Hirshbein and H. Leivik all resigned; the journal survived as a Bundist publication for a short time. See Sept.-Oct. 1939, Nos. 9-10.
28. Bankier, David, "Los exiliados Alemanes en México y sus vínculos con la comunidad Judía (1942- 1945)," in *Judaica Latinoamericana* (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 84.
29. *Fraivelt*, Aug. 24, 1945. This article by Kalmen Landoi recounts the change from *Lige farn Sovietn Farband* to the *Folks Lige*. The change of name contained in itself part of their political agenda.
30. This statement must be read with caution. See Stille, Alexander, *Benevolence and Betrayal, Five Italian Jewish Families under Fascism* (New York, 1991), especially Ch. 1, which describes the Ovazzas of Turin as a fascist Jewish family, not an unusual choice for some Jews in that area.
31. Goldberg, B.T., *Fraindt*, Feb.-March, 1963, pp. 15-16. See also *Fraivelt*, April 6, 1945, p. 6.
32. The opening of the new offices of the *Folks Lige* in Paseo de la Reforma 503 was celebrated on 21 January 1945, *Fraivelt*, Jan.-Feb., 1945, pp. 52-55. The premises boasted pictures of Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin and President Avila Camacho. In the *Fraivelt* office was a picture of Khaim Zitlovsky. The reading room was adorned with pictures of Yiddish writers Mendele Moikher Sforim, Sholem Aleikhem, Peretz and Sholem Asch; and the boardroom had pictures of Shloime Mikhoels and Itzik Fefer. Though the group wanted to stress their non-partisan posture, it is obvious that their leanings were clearly Communist.
33. Ambassador Umanski was also present then and delivered what was to be his last public speech before his untimely death.
34. *Forois*, 1940, pp. 13-14, 20.
35. *Fraivelt*, No. 45, 1943, p. 20.
36. *Forois*, Nov. 1949, No. 100. Moische Kulbak, Maks Erick, Zalman Reizin, etc. were all killed. See also *Forois*, Jan. 1944, No. 20, p. 15.
37. It is thought today that Mikhoels was brutally killed, on Stalin's orders, in 1948; so was Fefer, who had been a KGB agent for a time.
38. There is no doubt that Umanski was considered a useful diplomat by his government. Eventually, he became prisoner of his own "qualities," which made him so useful at the time. When Jews were suspected of anti-Soviet behavior by Stalin, they were soon purged. There is suspicion, though unconfirmed, that Constantin Umanski's death on 25 January 1945, in a plane crash on Mexican territory, was in fact an assassination. There is another version, in which this story is explained as an accident. Mexico had purchased old World War I planes from the USA; two other planes had crashed, and so did the one Umanski used, almost at take off, on what became an aborted trip to Central America.
39. He is quoted as aiming to unite "from Rabbi to Zionist" and all others; *Fraivelt*, July 23, 1945, p. 3.

40. *Fraivelt*, Feb. 1944, pp. 7-8.
41. *Fraivelt*, Jan. 1944, pp. 13-14. (It is said that he understood Yiddish well.)
42. It is useful to remember that Mexico had also given asylum to Spanish refugees at the time of the Falangist-Republican confrontation (1939). Mexico also sold arms to the Socialist-minded Republicans and acted as an intermediary so that others could do the same; Delgado de Cantu, Gloria, *op. cit.*, p. 310. Abrams obtained visas in Mexico that allowed other anarchists to join him, as Mollie Steimer, Senya Fleshin, and others did; see Polenberg, *Fighting Fights* (New York, 1987), pp. 360-362. There were also 29 Polish Jewish refugees accepted in Mexico; see letter of Knopfmacher, Kate, *ibid.*; for an earlier view of the issue in Latin America, see Avni, Haim, "Latin America and the Jewish Refugees: Two Encounters, 1935 and 1938," in Elkin and Merckx, *The Jewish Presence in Latin America* (Boston, 1987), pp. 43-68.
43. *Fraivelt*, Nov. 16, 1945, p. 2.
44. Bankier, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
45. Katz collected material for a history of Jews in the Middle Ages, that he did not manage to publish.
46. He wrote for the *Morgn Fraihait*, was chief editor in Paris of the *Naye Prese*, and, in Mexico, worked for the *Fraivelt*. He wrote his books in German, two of which were translated into Yiddish during his stay in Mexico (1940- 1949): *Nekome* (N.Y., 1946) and *Zrie Tzait* (Mexico, 1949), translated also as *Seedtime*, for which he received extraordinary reviews in 1947, in the USA, in *The New Yorker*, as well as in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, the *Chicago Sun*, *Atlantic Monthly*, etc.
47. Vinietsky, *Der Veg*, Feb. 22, 1958.
48. Interview with Prof. Friedrich Katz, son of Leo Katz.
49. See my analysis of Golomb, "The Ideology of the Outsider: Ideologue, Writer and Pedagogue Abraham Golomb", in *The Ashkenazi Jewish Community in Mexico*, pp. 196-207.
50. *Forois*, Dec., 1947, p. 14; p. 18.
51. *Fraivelt*, April 6, 1945, p. 5, for an article of extreme praise of Golomb's work.
52. Katz was, in turn, attacked by the Bundists for sabotaging the memorials for Alter and Erlich; *Forois*, Dec. 1947, p. 17.
53. For Golomb, the problem did not end with this exchange. It lingered and penetrated his schoolwork later on; see Cimet de Singer, *op. cit.*, Ch. 5.
54. The coalition was not limited to leftist Zionists, though. There was apparent religious cooperation with the Communists, since Rabbi Yosef Rafalin published a *Shana Tova* greeting in *Fraivelt*. The Bund also protested against any such coalition; *Forois*, Oct. 1948, p. 19. It is interesting to note that in the opening ceremonies of the *Folks Lige*, three national anthems were played: the Mexican, the *Hatikvah* and the Soviet, and their respective flags were displayed; *Fraivelt*, Jan.-Feb. 1945, p. 54.
55. *Forois*, July-August, 1944, pp. 8-9.
56. *Forois*, July-August, 1944, p. 7. This time, the attack went so far as to question the legitimacy of Zionist leadership: "Why are you [Goldman] speaking for all Jews?...Zionists feel they represent all!". Kate Knopfmacher, representative of the World Jewish Congress in the early '40s, suggests, in a report filed in the U.S. central body, that Dr. Alcalay should also accompany Dr. Wise and Dr. Goldman, as *Sephardim* in Mexico would see it as an honour and that might improve fundraising considerably among that sub-community. See Knopfmacher, *ibid.*
57. *KKL Bulletin*, No. 7, Sept. 1930-31; No. 9, 1931; 1936.
58. Dulcin, Leibl, *Farn Folk*, Aug. 1937, p. 12. There were a host of Zionist organizations in Mexico; see Austri-Dan, *Di Tzionistische Bavegung in Meksike* (Mexico, 1957).
59. See, for instance, a sample of the support *Fraivelt* offered to Zionists, such as the propaganda they ran for a protest meeting against British policy in *Eretz Israel*, Oct. 19, 1945, p. 1.
60. *Forois*, May 1948, p. 11; see also July 1949, p. 11.



61. Zacharias, Yosef, *Forois*, Dec. 1947; Kahan, Salomon, *Forois*, June, 1949, p. 13.
62. See Polenberg, Richard, *Fighting Faiths, the Abrams Case, the Supreme Court, and Free Speech* (New York, 1987).
63. *Forois*, Feb.-March, 1947, p. 38; January, 1948, p. 13. Abrams used to contribute to the newspaper *Di Shtime*, as did Golomb, Rubinshtein, Dukhovich, Austriyak.
64. *Fraivelt*, Aug.-Sept. 1944, p. 5. Goldman had published a brochure in 1919, "The three demands of the Jewish people," covering issues such as the right of Jews to Palestine, minority rights in the Diaspora and civic equality for Jews. He worked for German Jewry and *Eretz Israel* mostly.
65. Minski, Hirsh, *Fraivelt*, August-Sept., 1944, p. 6; *Farn Folk*, 1936, 1937.
66. *Fraivelt*, Nos. 4-5, 1943, p. 23.
67. *Fraivelt*, Dec. 21, 1945, p. 5; June 21, 1946, p. 4; May 24, 1946, pp. 4-5, 7.
68. *Forois*, No. 86, March 1949, p. 15.
69. Minski is cynical about the international role that local Zionists pretended to play; he attacks Leib Dulcin, Dr. Adolfo Fastlich and Yosef Tchorntitzky. See *Fraivelt*, May 25, 1945, p. 4.
70. *Forois*, Sept. 1949, pp. 13, 15.
71. Cimet de Singer, *op. cit.*, "Definition of Viable Political Alternatives," pp. 120-132.
72. Oral History interview of Boris Rosen, 1989.
73. In the US, McCarthyism pervaded society, blacklisting individuals and organizations. See Diamond, Sigmund, *Compromised Campus, The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1945-1955* (New York, 1992).
74. *Fraivelt*, Jan. 1944, pp. 50-53; March, 1944, p. 38; May-June 1944, pp. 33-36. One must point out that the Bund in Europe could not always be criticized as "politically" empty, since, as a movement, they were the first to promote and fight in self-defense against pogroms; besides, Zygeloim's work was more active than his suicide would let us think. See Penkower, M., *The Jews were Expendable* (Chicago 1983), Ch. 4.
75. Bundists did, on occasion, speak of despair and suicide, but, essentially, agreed and asked to go "back to life," to "build life." However, ideologically speaking, they had no vision of how to do it. *Forois*, No. 25, June 1944, p. 9; Nov. 1947, pp. 2-3. Indeed, as mentioned above, one of their leaders, S. Zygeloim, in despair about the world's indifference to the Jewish plight, committed suicide in London, in 1943. Commemorations were held on the anniversary and these were often boycotted by Communists. Zygeloim had left the underground in 1943 to represent the Bund at the exiled National Council of Polish Government in London.
76. The ghetto uprising, for instance, was portrayed in *Fraivelt* as a step taken by "subjected people" and influenced by the "the historical battle of Stalingrad," *Fraivelt*, April 1944, pp. 33-34.
77. Bankier, *ibid.*; *Forois*, Sept. 1949, p. 15. Leo Katz went to Israel in 1949 for a time, but left for health reasons. He moved to Vienna, where he died.
78. There were plenty of Zionist organizations in Mexico, since the *Kadima* (1925) was organized; *Kapai* (1927-33), *Keren Kayemet* (1926), *Poalei Tzion*, League for Workers of Israel, Pioneer Women, *Noar Hatzioni*, *Naie Tzionistishe Organizatzie*, etc. Committees of *Pro-Palestina Hebreá* were opened as of 1943 in Cuba, Uruguay and Mexico, headed by distinguished personalities, in an attempt to gain the support of the gentile world for the Zionist cause. As for internal organization, less was achieved; though major figures came to the community, most efforts were geared to fundraising. See the case of *Keren Hayesod* leaders A.S. Yuris and Manuel Gravier in Avni, Haim, "The Origins of Zionism in Latin America, in Elkin and Merks, *The Jewish Presence in Latin America* (Boston, 1987).
79. *K.K.L.*, *50 años*, 1980, p. 43.
80. *Forois*, Feb. 1948, p. 13.
81. *Forois*, Dec. 1947, p. 17. It is worth noting that, in 1937, with protests against the partition of Palestine in the League of Nations, President Cárdenas supported political Zionism.
82. The concept of the "moral necessity" of the State of Israel is Emil Fackenheim's. See *The*

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*Jewish Return into History in the Age of Auschwitz and New Jerusalem* (New York, 1978), p. 197.

83. The vote of Mexico in the UN on the "Zionism equals Racism" formula is a further and more eloquent remnant of this old posture. The Mexican position was reversed by President Salinas de Gortari in the 1992 vote.