

Interviewee: David Bitman

May 19, 1986

Interviewer: Zadoff

This tape deals with the fights and development of the Jewish Communist schools in the 1940s and 1950s; their relationship with the Jewish Board of Education and with the Jewish principal institutions like the AMIA. Also, with the fights between the need of the Zionists to support Israel at its beginnings, and in its war with the Arab armies, and the curriculum of the Jewish Communist schools. (For a short time the two groups managed to unite to help Israel under the aegis of the United Jewish Appeal.) Interesting facts were the 7 million dollars that they needed to donate to the Eva Peron Foundation, and the changes that occurred in the Jewish Communist Movement reflecting the events against the Jews in the former Soviet Union. Many, many activist names were mentioned, but Mr. Bitman was never sure to remember them correctly. A school that was prominent in this account was the Zitlowsky Yiddish School. The fights regarding the government order to have the private schools offer a day-long education. The officialdom maintained that, if the students attended a Jewish school in addition to the secular one, the latter studies were neglected. Many Jewish schools had to close their doors and others decided to offer a day-long education, accepting non-Jewish also in their ranks.

David spent his first years in Uruguay, and many of the accounts of the Zitlowsky schools take place there.

An account about the demise of The Banco Israelita of Uruguay which was under control of the “progressives” from 1930 until “recently”. The problem of writing the by-laws that are usually good for 99 years. (They

finally wrote them for only 30 because, they said, the revolution will come by then. In order to extend the by-laws the original signatories needed to sign, but many had died already.)

Returning to the discussion of the Jewish education. The beginning of the “folks shul”, where the curriculum included now different aspects of Judaism, from history to literature to holidays. The only aspect that was not included was the study of the Bible and of Hebrew as a language. (The activists had realized that the new generation knew nothing of Judaism, and that’s why the new curriculum was adopted.)

David moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina, after the beginning of WWII, because he had a hard time economically. He arrived on February 5, 1940. He immediately got in contact with a Zitlowsky school, in order to register his daughters. The school was affiliated with the ICUF then. Some of the teachers had come from Uruguay. In 1944 or 1945, the school became affiliated with the Jewish Board of Education because after the war it was felt that unity of the different Jewish groups, including the Zionists, was of the utmost importance. (The only items they did not agree on was the singing of the Hatikva, that the Hebraisms that entered the Yiddish language, would be spelled in Yiddish and not in Hebrew, and that no money would be collected in the Jewish National Fund boxes!)

After the creation of Israel, Hatikva was allowed to be sung, and it was even translated into Yiddish so that the students would know what they were singing.

David was invited to form part of the Pedagogic Committee in charge of producing the books for the school.

Some of the leftist schools, like the Peretz, maintained that the Ghetto Warsaw uprising was organized by the Communist Jews there, ignoring

the fact that Mordechai Anilevich was a leftist, but belonging to the Hashomer Hatzair, a Zionist organization.

The inspections of the schools by the Jewish Board of Education. Also, in the Zitlowsky schools it was forbidden to set criticisms of the Soviet Union in writing: all that had to be said orally ONLY. The problem when someone wrote a page of criticism down, and it was found!