

Interviewee: Isaac Breiter

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Interviewer: Lic. Ana E. de Weinstein

Isaac Breiter was born in Bahia Blanca, in the Buenos Aires province, in 1908. There were 7 sons and a daughter in his family. His father was born in the Ukraine, and his mother came from Russia, from the area of Telnoslava (?) The parents met and married in Europe. Father came alone to Argentina in the year 1904 or 1905, and settled in a farm, in the area of Bernasconi, in the La Pampa province. (He came on his own, and not through the Baron de Hirsch enterprise.) When he could, he brought his wife and his 3 older children. After a few poor harvests, he moved to the city of Bahia Blanca. His only daughter was born there in 1906. Isaac's father's home was a Yiddish speaking one. His wife came from a religious home but Isaac's father did not. He respected his wife's traditions though. Isaac's father also brought to Argentina his mother-in-law and his brothers-in-law, trying to unify his family. They stayed in Bahia Blanca until 1918. There, the children went to elementary and high school. When the older son needed to go to the university, (it was a settled fact that all the children will attend university) he was sent to Buenos Aires but the father, seeing how he managed his life there, decided to move his entire family too. Father started making bricks in Bernasconi and then he opened a small department store which prospered, and thus was able to move his entire family to Buenos Aires. Isaac remembers that in his store, many Jewish flags were sewn the year of the Balfour Declaration.

In Buenos Aires, Isaac entered the School of Engineering in 1926. He remembers the Tragic Week when his father locked them all up in the

house. The family lived in the Jewish neighbourhood. The next day, they went up to the roof, where they collected many small bullets and cartridges.

In 1926, he joined the Zionist Federation, where he and other created the Zionist Youth Cultural Association which became, for many years, the spiritual leader of the youth in the capital city. He was there with Yagupsky and Jacobo Bronfman, among others. In addition to cultural and Zionist activities, they established contact with other youth organizations in the world (among them the Universal Union of Jewish Youth, in Paris, whose founder was a non-Jew, Enet Palier, who was imbued with Jewish ideas and opened branches around the world. During WWI, the whole organization disappeared with no traces.)

Isaac received his enlisting document at the age of 18, and it was then that he decided to become active in Argentinean politics. He checked all the political parties, and decided to join the Union Civica Radical. His only activity was to paste posters on the streets for the reelection campaign of president Yrigoyen in 1922. In 1946, upon his return from the province of Entre Rios, where he worked in his profession, he decided to become more active in the party. He met then Arturo Frondizi (who later became president of the republic) and with whom he established a very close friendship. For the 1958 elections, they were sure the winner will be one Balbin (who had split from Frondizi.) When Isaac was offered a position of deputy (representative) for the capital city in the list of Frondizi, he was not interested but was sure he was low enough in the ranks that he will not be elected, but he was! He then decided to abandon his profession in the hands of other engineers, and devoted his life to do what he was elected to do: to represent the Buenos Aires constituency.

The Student Center at the School of Engineering in the Buenos Aires University. Isaac's activism there. Anti-Semitism.

Isaac's jobs in Viale, Nogoya and Entre Rios prior to his return to Buenos Aires in 1946.

Since he had been sickly in his youth, Isaac could never fulfill his wishes to immigrate to Israel, at first because of the impossibility to receive visas and then for other circumstances. He continued being active in his center, though. Also, Isaac continued celebrating the main holidays, (always hosted by his mother, even after he married.) The Youth Center as well as the Zionist Federation, were not affiliated with any political party which-Isaac thinks-contributed to their demise around 1936.

He remembers having read that in the years 1938, 39 and 40, many Jews who arrived by sea from Europe to Buenos Aires were turned away.

Because of their youth, Isaac's generation did not know much about the Holocaust. He remembers a lecture he was asked to give in the interior, in Parana, where half the audience was in tears. He spoke about the Nazis atrocities against the Jews. It was 1942-43. Isaac does not remember any anti-Jewish demonstrations. Also, very few news arrived.

Upon his return to Buenos Aires, Isaac was active in the DAIA, as a representative of Federation.

Some other Jews active in the Radical movement were: Berta Feiguin de Ferrari, (from the Cordoba province); Simon Goldstraj, Simon Junin, Arnaldo Kronhaus, Rozenkraz and Bernardo Sweitzer. Isaac was deputy between the years 1958-62. In the Senate, there were also Jews: Salomon Trunsky and Jose Jaritonsky. None of the above mentioned activated, ever, as members of the Jewish community. Isaac never

experienced anti-Jewish bias from anyone, especially not in the years of Eichmann's capture and the debate of the relations with Israel then.

The popular anti-Semitic demonstrations of 1959 are detailed in Leonardo Senkman's book: "Anti-Semitism in Argentina". The attack against the main JCC in Buenos Aires, and more.

Isaac's policy as a deputy was to stay in the background when Israel or problems in the Jewish community were discussed. His name doesn't appear at all during the crisis about Eichmann. But he would request the pertinent information materials from the DAIA and distribute them among deputies and senators. When Eichmann was taken, the Argentinean sovereignty was affected, but everyone agreed that if his extradition had been requested, it would not come to pass. Isaac was angry about the deed; he thinks that it put the Israeli ambassador in a very difficult position. Also, he criticizes Ben Gurion who, in Paris at the same time as president Frondizi, refused to go to meet him saying instead that Frondizi can come to his hotel which would be the same distance for both! Isaac mentions the efforts he made to establish good relationships with the deputies and senators of Arabic origin, which were more numerous than the Jewish ones. They represented the provinces of Salta, Santiago del Estero and Catamarca. Isaac says that when Golda Meir visited Argentina, all of them came to raise a glass for peace in the Middle East. The Arab deputies supported the reestablishment of relations with Israel after the Eichmann chapter.

Isaac's opinion about governmental solutions in anti-Semitic cases or kidnappings: it doesn't last, even if the ones in charge are the military.

In 1961, Isaac had a stroke and was confined to a wheel chair.

Article 28 (?)

The fight between “free” and laic education. Isaac supported the free education a misnomer for supporting private schools.

Isaac tried to visit other countries privately but, because he had been a government official, he could not get away. In 1953, he was a delegate to the World Jewish Congress in Geneva, and then he was invited to Israel. In 1961, the governments of England, France, Belgium and Germany invited a delegation from the Deputies Chamber to visit those countries. He refused to go to Germany, but was forced to do so because this was an official visit. He then participated in the World Jewish Congress again. From there, he and his wife went to Israel, on a private visit, but they were greeted at the airport by the Argentinean ambassador and others.

Isaac’s children did not receive a Jewish education. Their father’s activism in Jewish circles turned them off.