

Interviewee: Benzion Epstein

1984

Interviewer: Professor Leo Senkman

Benzion Epstein was born in 1913.

The arrival of Jewish immigrants affiliated with the Bund and other leftist organizations after 1929. The Zionists campaign against Birobidjan. The founding of a synagogue for the progressive left-wingers in the San Miguel colony, in 1933-34.

Benzion abandons the colony in 1929 after a difference of opinion with his father about how to run the farm. Particulars about the farm, education, etc. The town of Rivera. Supporting the Jewish National Fund.

Benzion's activities and affiliations in Buenos Aires: the Gordonia Zionist Youth Movement, the Bialik Center, the group called "Tzeire Tzion". The participants came from many countries: Poland, Galitzia, White Russia, Lithuania. The anti-Semitic President Uriburu was in power. Trying to find employment in times of economic crisis was difficult. The groups wanted to make money to emigrate, as a group, to Israel, and found a kibbutz. The youngsters lived in a commune-like home. The Zionist elders were against this kind of living arrangements. Some of the elders names mentioned were: Guesang, Regalsky, Susheim, Feferman, Malinovka, Rosenbum the engineer. The girls' parents started to use the argument that the boys were trying to market the girls for prostitution. (Benzion wrote a book, in Spanish, "The Beginnings of the Zionist-pioneer movement in Argentina", reporting these conflicts.)

Benzion and his wife immigrated to Israel in 1949, after representing the Gordonia movement in several countries: Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador.

Short question (and answer) about the Halacha views of Buber and Rosenzweig.

A discussion about the origins of the Gordonia movement in Argentina. (In this interview, Mrs. Epstein participates also.)

David Spiguel, founder of the movement in Galitzia, Poland, arrives in Argentina. The Gordonian principles (working the land.) The “Iuguent Veig” journal.

Activities of Gordonia and of its members. During Uriburu’s presidency, there was always a Jewish police officer who understood Yiddish to monitor the proceedings. A short bio of Jana Epstein, wife of Benzion. She was also born in a colony: Esperanza. Her father was the ritual slaughterer Glasserman. Jana was already second generation born in Argentina. The colony today.

On the way to Israel, while passing through Paris (in 1949) they understood for the first time what had happened to the Jews in Europe through conversations with refugees who were there. The passage, with the refugees, from France to Israel on the “Negba” ship. The dire conditions. While in Argentina, because that country was “neutral” they did not have any news of the Holocaust.

The Epsteins lived in the kibbutz Ginegar for a year and a half, and later went to revive kibbutz Givat-Zait that had been abandoned.

The couple opined that the colonization of the Jews in Argentina was positive at the beginning from the point of view of giving the Jews a new approach to a productive life, and that influence was also felt in the big cities. Nowadays, there are very few Jews still living in the

colonies. The ideals of A.D. Gordon, that the Jews should return to work the land, was actualized in those colonies. Many of the young people there at the beginning, ended up in kibbutzim in Israel.