

Interviewee: Jose Epstein

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Interviewer: Lic. Gabriel Trajtenberg

Jose Epstein was born in White Russia, in Slonim (Belarus), in 1910. His family was poor, and the father worked distributing merchandise on his horse. Jose started to go to kheder at the age of 5, but stopped when the war started. Later on, he started to learn a trade as an apprentice, first as a shoemaker then as a carpenter. In 1927, with the help of a sister who lived in the US, he immigrated to Argentina, where another married sister resided. The economy was very depressed when he arrived, and it was very hard to find work. He worked in the finishing of furniture, and later on he moved to putting small pieces together. He joined the syndicate of the carpenters. The syndicate had separate sections for the gentiles, and for the Jews. There was a Yiddish library in the site of the syndicate as there was a large representation of Jews in it. Jose sided mainly with the communists, and was taken to jail many times. The syndicate supported the workers in jail. Jose became a member of the communist Party. In 1930, there was a month-long strike demanding a raise in their miserable pay. The gentile workers worked in larger factories and had better conditions, but the Jews worked in small shops of a few workers. At that time, the syndicate was split between the Sindicato Unico de la Madera (the gentiles) and the Clasist Syndicate (of the little shops,) whose leaders were more leftist.) The meetings of the syndicate were carried in Yiddish and Spanish. There was a section in charge of raising funds to support those workers in jail.

The tailors also had a separate syndicate.

In those years, Jose's Syndicate did not join with the activists who were Zionist.

PROKOR was the organization in charge of talking up the emigration to Birobidjan. Many activists came from the Soviet Union, trying to entice the Jews to join them and leave Argentina. Jose did not go because by then he was married but also rumors began arriving in Argentina about the fate of those who had left.

Later on, Jose managed to create his own furniture factory with a few other partners.

Jose had two sons: a doctor and a merchant. They were both circumcised and also were given a Jewish education, despite Jose's leftist leaning in his youth.