

Interviewee: Felix Pashkusz

October 1990

Interviewer: ?

Felix Pashkusz arrived in Buenos Aires in 1947 or 1948, at the age of 20. He left Austria for Bolivia at the age of 11, after having finished elementary school and only 1 year of the next level. He never continued his studies there, but came to Argentina with very progressive political ideas, anti-Fascism of the left. He was not active or interested in the Zionist movement. Upon his arrival in Buenos Aires, he was immediately connected with likely groups. The organization he joined was known as *Fraies Daitchland, Fraies Estraij* (Free Germany, Free Austria.) Many German and Austrian nationals were included in the group, which met in the Forbets club, and which had a sports arena in Quilmes, near Buenos Aires, in addition to the Buenos Aires site. The leaders and instructors of the group were adults who guided the youth in the anti-Fascism idea, the situation in Argentina (where a reigning Peron was very much against any leftist ideologies,) and in general, imparted culture. These young people could not afford to continue their education because they had to work. The organization had hundreds of members, about 50% Jews and 50% non-Jews. Those who came from Germany and Austria maintained their citizenship there, and many even returned to those countries. The organization was maintained by donations. Many of the members had arrived before the war. It was a unique organization that supported anti-Fascist ideas. It sought to understand the reasons for the surge of Fascism in Germany and Austria and, at the same time, to understand what was Peron ideology (opportunist, Fascist, etc.) Felix himself never took an active part in political activities because he had come to Argentina illegally and was afraid to be arrested. Only after the mass amnesty of 1950, he became a legal citizen, but by then the political situation had changed, as had Peron.

Felix never denied his Jewish background. He was a traditionalist, although among the Jews in the Forbets existed all the different nuances, those who denied they were, those who were more or less of the left. All together, they were supportive of the establishment of Israel, although they considered themselves more involved in the political movements of central Europe. Felix also noted that the organization existed all over the world and that some well-known members were Thomas Mann and the poet

Rilke. Among the members, there were some informers who provided the authorities, (including the FBI) with the names of the group's members. That was the reason why Felix was denied a visitors' visa to the US around 1955-56, even after Peron's defeat. In 1955, Felix returned to Bolivia and established a successful business. The visa request was made there, and after being denied, he went to see the US ambassador, who told him of Felix's known association with the Forbets. (Felix said that the organization was more cultural than political) but during the Mc McCarthy era, the US did not take too well to leftist groups.) Finally, after many affidavits, he managed to obtain the visa about 2 years later. After 1955, the organization was splintered into 10 or 15 different factions, according to what they supported. For instance, there were those who were forever for Stalin, even after his defeat. Also, with the passage of time and the higher ages of the members, their political ideology changed drastically. Although the Forbets still exists, it is now a club for rich people and there is no politics involved.