

The Bolivian Immigration Bill of 1942: A Case Study in Latin American Anti-Semitism

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In 1942, when Jews were facing in Nazi Europe the greatest crisis of their long and eventful history, the congress of meagerly populated, landlocked Bolivia, tucked away in the obscure South American interior far from the horrors of World War II, debated an immigration bill that would have excluded Jews, Negroes, and Orientals. Spearheading the drive for passage of the excluding measure in the Chamber of Deputies was the recently formed *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR), a leftist grouping with overt fascist leanings headed by lawyers Víctor Paz Estenssoro and Hernán Siles Zuazo, both destined to be presidents of Bolivia when the MNR held revolutionary power from 1952 to 1964.

On September 17, 1942, Félix Trigo touched off a flurry of heated debate when he introduced a motion that Jews could not be considered colonizers in the immigration bill then under discussion by the Chamber of Deputies. Deputy Aponte said that the Jews had come to Bolivia as farmers and they should dedicate themselves to that work, except for the technicians needed in the cities. Deputy Humérez countered that the "racist spirit" with which some of the deputies considered the Jewish question was contrary to the constitution. Deputy Siles Zuazo, one of the founders and co-leader of the MNR, responded that it was not a matter of racism, but of national economy and defense. Pointing out the difference between an immigrant and a colonizer, he argued that "not every immigrant possesses the qualities of a colonizer." Bolivia did not need indiscriminate immigration of Jews; the country needed restricted, selective immigrants who would make good colonizers. Deputy Loaiza Beltrán replied that part of the Jewish people had dedicated

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themselves to agriculture, and read from a chapter of a book written by Emehrling about Jewish farmers in Russia. Siles Zuazo then asked if the Jews were "immigrants" or "refugees":

According to my way of seeing, the Semites are refugees who have conditioned their entrance into the country on the obligation of dedicating themselves to agriculture and the exercise of labor which would not prejudice the collectivity. But the Semitic element has laughed at other obligations and they are convinced of the impossibility of throwing them out because there is no country which would resign itself to support them. Therefore, in order to prevent in the future the repetition of similar deceit, I propose the acceptance of the Trigo formula.¹

Deputy Salomon "analyzed" the strategic procedure that he said always followed Jewish penetration: domination of the press, the banks, and politics. He denounced the international character of Judaism as a source of danger to Bolivian institutions. As soon as the Jews obtained citizenship, he maintained, they would be capable of sending to Congress "venal elements which would represent their interests." Salomon concluded, "We are dealing with a defensive measure that is political, economic, and social." Deputy Aponte proposed specifying for the Jews zones of colonization where there would be no ethnic conflict, but after a short debate this project was shelved.²

VERY BEAKED NOSES

El Diario, in which the tin mining magnate Simón I. Patiño held a one-third interest, declared, in an editorial on September 19, that the Chamber of Deputies was considering an immigration bill which would "prevent . . . the entrance into the country of undesirable elements and would obtain, above all, a current of immigration of the first quality that would make possible the realization of a progressive demographic policy." All the Latin American nations were feeling the need for more workers to staff their mines and fields, build their roads, and man their factories, *El Diario* noted.

¹ *El Diario*, September 18, 1942.

² *Ibid.*

Yet those same countries were making their immigration laws ever more stringent, forcing immigrants to work in agriculture under pain of expulsion (as in Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, and Cuba) or in the mines (as in Bolivia, Peru, and Mexico). Other immigrants were admitted only for temporary residence to construct roads or railroads.

These countries were also passing laws preventing emigration of their native sons (and even long-term foreign residents needed at home) to neighboring countries. Bolivia should consider such a law, *El Diario* declared. As for "good immigration," it should be what the country as a whole wanted — considering the moral, social, economic, and even racial qualities of those who were going to live and work in Bolivia, "paying attention, moreover, to the disturbances that could be produced in the present or to the dangers that could arise in the future because of excessive sentimentality and a blindness in the face of evils that could be released against society by permitting the entrance of undesirable elements." No one could deny that Bolivia needed immigration, *El Diario* stated, but "one must prevent the entry into Bolivia of parasitical groups that do not want to work with our Indians and mestizos in the hard tasks of agriculture or in the mines, which need so badly strong, healthy and honest men."³

La Calle, semiofficial newspaper of the MNR, attacked an amendment to the immigration bill that would have permitted the free entrance of Jews. The amendment would have opened the way to "the imminent Jewish invasion of this innocent and beautiful land" which would corrupt "the future ethnic composition of the country and security of the natives." The newspaper continued: "Soon we will have to lament the demolishing effects of new inundations of 'farmers' with very beaked noses, so hooked that thousands of kilometers away they seem to have snagged certain 'fathers of the country' to prepare the new assault on the promised land."⁴

On September 18, 1942, *La Calle* denounced a two-step Jewish plan for gaining control of the government. Referring to "Jewish

³ *Ibid.*, September 19, 1942.

⁴ *La Calle*, September 16, 1942.

infiltration" of the past three years, the newspaper charged that the plot was to get enough Jews naturalized so they could command the vote since suffrage in Bolivia was restricted to literate persons — less than 100,000 in a population of about three and a half million.⁵ The next day *La Calle* scored the proposed relaxed immigration law as a "terrible threat" which would result in "the enslavement of the nation." In two years, the MNR newspaper cried, Bolivia would be in the hands of the *semitas* or *dietas*.⁶ On September 20, a headline declared, BEHIND THE PEOPLE'S BACKS IS PLOTTED THE DELIVERY OF THE COUNTRY TO THE JEWS. In the accompanying story, *La Calle* warned that 40,000 Jews were waiting "to fall like a ravenous invading horde upon the cities of Bolivia."⁷

When Hernán Siles Zuazo led the fight in the congressional debate itself against the ameliorating amendment, he declared: "It especially falls to the congressmen of the left, elected by the popular classes most damaged, humiliated and exploited by the Jews, to prevent that undesirable immigration from continuing to invade Bolivia."⁸

La Razón, spokesman for the tin mining tycoon Víctor Carlos Aramayo, also quoted Siles as saying:

Setting aside considerations of a racial character, of which I am free, I consider nevertheless for reasons totally different that the Jewish race is dangerous to our nationality. As legislators we are under the obligation to watch out for the security and happiness of our people before the happiness of others; therefore, I consider that we have no right to add one more to the problems which Bolivia already has.⁹

On the occasion when Siles spoke, the article excluding Negroes and Orientals was approved, but Siles' addition barring Jews altogether was not voted upon due to lack of a quorum. On Sep-

⁵ *Ibid.*, September 18, 1942.

⁶ *Ibid.*, September 19, 1942.

⁷ *Ibid.*, September 20, 1942.

⁸ *Ibid.*, September 22, 1942.

⁹ *La Razón*, September 19, 1942.

tember 21, the debate continued, with Deputies Tomás Chávez Lobaton and Tumiri Javier, both Roman Catholic priests, declaring that they were voting “not from any dogmatic tendency — on the contrary, with Christian charity we would permit the entrance of the elements in question — but the sight of the ills and miseries which the Semitic element attracts to the country obliges us to vote for prohibiting their entry into Bolivia.” Chávez Lobaton warned the deputies that “above all [the Jews] influenced dolefully the life of the populous cities of the country.” Deputy Roberto Jordan Cuellar said it was not a matter of letting more Jews in, but rather of providing a future for the “enormous quantity” of immigrants already in the national territory, new arrivals who had not fulfilled the functions they had been assigned upon entering Bolivia.¹⁰

THE BASE IS SEMITIC

Deputy Zuazo Cuenca, in the congressional session of September 21, read portions from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and from Henry Ford’s *International Jew*. The deputy declared that “the Semites obey directives foreign to our country, and they constitute a nation apart which will never identify with ours. It has been said that we should admit the Jews through a democratic spirit, but we ought to bring democracy first to the Bolivians.” Zuazo Cuenca turned to the gallery and asked the public to express *their* views on allowing the entrance of more Jews, and the reply was a thunderous negative. “We are the representatives of the people,” the deputy concluded, “and we ought to obey their desires.” Siles Zuazo declared, “If we are branded as Nazis, although we aren’t, by the fact of trying to prevent the entrance of more Semites to Bolivia, I will accept the designation with pleasure because it would be in defense of the interests of the sons of the people.” Immediately the vote was taken, with forty-one deputies voting for the complete exclusion of Jews, while twenty-four voted against the excluding measure.¹¹ Two future presidents of Bolivia, Paz Estenssoro (1952–

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, September 22, 1942.

¹¹ *Ibid.* *La Razón* printed no editorial comment on the move to restrict completely the

1956 and 1960–1964) and Siles Zuazo (1956–1960) voted for the complete exclusion of Jews from Bolivia. Socialist leader Tristán Marof, however, voted against the excluding provision.¹²

When the American Jewish writer Waldo Frank visited Bolivia soon afterward, he published in *El Diario* an article attacking anti-Semitism entitled “The Jew and the Future of Latin America.” Frank admitted that Jews had their faults — above all, superstition and fanaticism — but “anti-Semitism is a Satanic force, a movement directed against the roots of the Jewish religion.” He continued:

Anti-Semitism is anti-Europeanism. Europe represents the roots of Christian civilization, which is the same as saying Jewish civilization. Anti-Semitism thus signifies anti-Christianity. Anti-Semitism does not have the courage to attack Christianity directly; therefore it attacks Judaism. It does not have the courage to attack the son, so it attacks the father. Those who want to introduce anti-Semitism here [in Latin America] should observe its finale in Europe.

Spain and Portugal had had wide contact with Judaism, Frank wrote. “Even though the majority of the Jews found in Latin America did not descend from Spain and Portugal,” he concluded, “the base of South American civilization is Semitic.”¹³

Of the four La Paz newspapers, *La Calle* published the most slashing attacks upon Jews during the debate on the immigration bill, attacks which continued long after the debate ended. *La Calle* always supported the MNR, but the party denied any official connection with the newspaper, the noisiest and the most partisan scrapper in the Bolivian capital.¹⁴ On September 23, 1942, *La Calle* asked, “What patriotic motives impel these men to give the country to the Jews? It will be the people who will decide finally who will

entrance of Jews into Bolivia, perhaps so as not to offend Mauricio Hochschild, a fellow mineowner and publisher of the afternoon daily, *Ultima Hora*.

¹² *El Diario*, September 22, 1942.

¹³ *Ibid.*, September 27, 1942. *El Diario* erroneously identified Frank as a convert to Judaism.

¹⁴ When the writer asked for *La Calle* at the library of the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés in La Paz, the librarian said, “Oh, we don’t have that. That was a very dirty newspaper.” A complete file may be found in the Biblioteca Municipal, La Paz.

defend it and who will sell it.”¹⁵ Again, *La Calle* asked, “Are [the deputies and senators] who voted against the excluding measure representatives of the Bolivian people or of the Jews? Very typical and decisive influences are surely operating from below. There are still deputies who believe that their position is a private business, and therefore they protect with gratification relations with Semitism.” In another story in the same issue, *La Calle* declared, “Here you have another coarse deceit planned against the Bolivian people. The names of Einstein, Mann, and others are used to open the frontiers to 25,000 families of ‘farmers’ of the same caliber of those who are already infesting the country.”¹⁶

In its issue of September 25, 1942, *La Calle* ran an article by Carlos Salazar, entitled “Materialist Foundation of Anti-Semitism, Necessity of Settling the Problem with a Political Criterion.” Referring to the charge by its opponents that the excluding provision represented “aboriginal nationalism,” the writer countered that such nationalism “places the sacred interests of the country before all; it will not do business [with Jews], and it is resolved not to abandon its post of duty.” The “Jewish press,” *La Calle* pointed out, referring to the newspaper owned by Jewish multimillionaire mine owner Mauricio Hochschild, had called the MNR’s attitude “a brutal insult to a persecuted race.”¹⁷ *La Calle* turned charges of fascism back on its critics when it commented, “With the cold sophistry of Nazism [the opposition] is trying to defend the Israelites. This is the cunning desire to blind the eyes of the people so” — here *La Calle* is referring to a recent scandal — “the business of selling passports to Jews may continue.”¹⁸ Again, *La Calle* declared, “Only totalitarian means will permit new Jewish immigration to Bolivia. The immense national majority, the foundation of democracy, opposes and repudiates the ominous big-nosed immigrants.”¹⁹

Opposition to Jewish immigration was not found only in La Paz.

¹⁵ *La Calle*, September 23, 1942.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, September 24, 1942.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, September 25, 1942.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, September 26, 1942.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, September 16, 1942.

In Bolivia's second largest city, the Association for the Public Good of Cochabamba resolved to "aid and applaud" the work of the Chamber of Deputies against Jewish immigration.²⁰ *La Calle* also reported that "the people of Potosí reacted vigorously against the danger of new phalanxes of Jews. The Jewish deputies tried to give an explication that was very poor and childish."²¹ In an effort to extend the base of organized resistance to Jewish immigration, *La Calle* stated, "Only the Bolivian workers can free themselves from the Jewish noose which the 'scientific' representatives are trying to place over their heads." The newspaper also asked, "Open the frontiers to all the persecuted of the world? That's how the hollow and sonorous phrases [of the opposition] serve to give away the country."²²

FOLLOW THE STRING

Representing the far left in Bolivian political life, *La Calle* invoked Karl Marx in its hate campaign, citing the socialist theoretician's strictures against capitalists as applying usually to Jews.²³ Mauricio Hochschild, owner of *Ultima Hora*, the only Bolivian newspaper which opposed the excluding measure, was a good case in point. Hochschild was an Austrian Jew who had come to Bolivia penniless in 1920, and rose to become one of the wealthiest and most powerful of the Big Three tin mining magnates (whose property was later nationalized by the MNR in 1952).²⁴ At the time of the congressional debate on the immigration bill, Hochschild sent a long letter to the Chamber of Deputies in which he stressed the economic contributions of Jews to Bolivian development. "Although I am not a farmer," he said, in an obvious reference to the coloniza-

²⁰ *Ibid.*, September 29, 1942.

²¹ *Ibid.*, October 27, 1942.

²² *Ibid.*, October 28, 1942.

²³ *Ibid.*, October 29, 1942.

²⁴ Hochschild himself was briefly imprisoned when the MNR first held power in a coalition government with the Bolivian military headed by Major Gualberto Villarroel, 1943-1946. See Luis Adrian, *Secuestro de Hochschild* (Buenos Aires, 1951).

tion provisions of the immigration bill under discussion, "I do contribute about \$300,000 to the Public Treasury each month in taxes alone." Hochschild also pointed out that, unlike Aramayo and Patiño, he continued to reside in Bolivia; he was a good Bolivian, and his future was clearly identified with that of his adopted country.²⁵

La Calle printed the full text of the Hochschild letter in its issue of November 10, 1942, and commented later that the national problems pointed out by Hochschild had arisen precisely because of the exploitation and neglect of huge firms such as the Hochschild interests, an international cartel.²⁶ The newspaper would not be put off in its attack upon Jewish immigrants who said that they would become farmers and actually went into business, glutting the cities. Jewish "farmers," wrote "Rembrant" in an issue of *La Calle*, also posed a severe problem in Ecuador, displacing Ecuadorean initiative in business enterprises.²⁷ *La Calle* continued to attack Hochschild and the aggressive capitalism he represented until the newspaper was finally closed by the government of President Enrique Peñaranda on December 17, 1943, never to reappear.

Hochschild's newspaper *Ultima Hora* countered such thrusts with the brilliant satirical comments in which it excelled, especially in the column called "Nightcap" (*El Gorro de Dormir*). The newspaper's issue of September 22, 1942, contained four editorial paragraphs in this column attacking the absurdity of the position of those who defended Jewish exclusion in a racially mixed country such as Bolivia. A typical paragraph stated:

The Statute destined to purify the race, prohibiting immigration, would never have come forth if we had mirrors in the session room of the Chamber of Deputies. Fortunately now, with the Statute, we must Aryanize and Nazify perfectly our indigenous population, achieving thus the racial purity of our honorable deputies.²⁸

In the same column, the writer of "Nightcap" observed that if only racial purity was to prevail in Bolivia, "Parliament will have to

²⁵ *La Calle*, November 10, 1942.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, November 11, 1942.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, December 5, 1942.

²⁸ *Ultima Hora*, September 22, 1942.

remain without a quorum." Take out the Mongoloid (Indian) and Negroid elements and what would remain?

Neither have the Honorables noticed that with the excluding measure they can produce a grave international situation, for we have excellent relations with China and they are fighting at the side of the democracies. . . . This could also originate a difficulty with Argentina, where the little *chinitas* [Chinese prostitutes] are very. . . .²⁹

Editorially, *Ultima Hora* commented, "There is in Bolivia no political or religious or economic or social reason for the furious anti-Semitism that some elements are developing. What is the source of this? Follow the string and you will arrive at the ball of yarn of Nazi action and propaganda, which exist despite all the prohibitions."³⁰

But the major thrust of *Ultima Hora's* defense of Bolivian Jews came in the columns of "Nightcap" which day after day sought to turn aside a serious social threat with ridicule. The column on one occasion published mock telegrams from Hitler, Goebbels, and the Gestapo congratulating the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies on its immigration bill. The one supposedly from Goebbels concluded, "Bolivia is preparing that noble land to offer selected Aryan examples. It is necessary now [having excluded the Jews] to clean out the Indians." A "telegram" from the Holy Father to Catholic priests Tumiri and Chávez Lobaton stated: "Permit me to remind you that Christ was a Jew and the Catholic Church does not permit persecution of races. You had better exchange your clerical collars for black shirts."³¹

When the immigration bill excluding Jews was passed by the Chamber of Deputies, *Ultima Hora* declared editorially that "a totalitarian blow" had been struck in the Bolivian parliament. The newspaper called those deputies who had voted for the bill "cowardly

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, September 21, 1942.

³¹ *Ibid.*, September 23, 1942. For other examples of the column "El Gorro de Dormir," in which opponents of Jewish immigration are attacked, see *Ultima Hora* for September 22, 23, 24, 25, and 30, and October 2 (in which the priest Tumiri was called "Honorable Tumor"), 3, 5, and 16, 1942.

politicians who seek dirty ends." *Ultima Hora* recalled the great talent which Europe had lost because of the Jewish purge of the "Hitlerian racial phobia." Mexico, Chile, and other Latin American nations had welcomed the displaced Jews of war-torn Europe. In Bolivia, of all places, "because of its very ethnic structure, should reign the principle of racial equality," the newspaper argued. The immigration measure passed by the Chamber of Deputies was called "untimely, inhumane and a detriment to the progress of the country." The racial classification of Jews was "rash and absurd," revealing the ignorance of the Chamber. Henry Ford's *International Jew* had been cited as a scientific authority, ignoring Ford's public retraction of his own polemic. In short, the immigration bill was "grave and shameful" because it represented the triumph of demagoguery. The leaders of Socialismo Unificado (Unified Socialism) were following "the directions of Hitlerian dictatorship." The measure was "worthy only of the regimes which today are devastating the world and its civilization." Passage of the excluding immigration bill represented to *Ultima Hora* the depths to which Bolivia's "creole democracy" could descend.³²

A DEPUTY DEFRAUDED

Lucio Lanza Solares, writing on "The Immigration Question in the Chamber of Deputies" in *Ultima Hora* on September 24, 1942, said that the measure was more of a regulation than a statute of fundamental disposition, and the executive should therefore decide the details of Bolivian immigration. The deputies had been guided more by the racial hatred of the public in the galleries than by serene and intelligent criteria, Lanza Solares declared. Bolivia needed *all* people if they were strong and willing to work. Besides, he added, the Socialists who voted for the closed-door policy represented the same party which had established the open-door policy under the government of Germán Busch in 1939.³³

Renán Estenssoro Alborta took up the task of refutation in the

³² *Ultima Hora*, September 23, 1942.

³³ *Ibid.*, September 24, 1942.

columns of *Ultima Hora* on September 26, 1942, when he examined "the lack of ideas and knowledge which the lower Chamber has revealed in the debate on immigration." At the same time, the newspaper published in Spanish the full retraction of his *International Jew* which Henry Ford had made in the *Dearborn* (Michigan) *Independent* when he withdrew the book from circulation in 1929 and had repeated in a letter to Sigmund Livingstone, president of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, on January 7, 1942. Estenssoro Alborta also charged that the deputy who cited *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* got the reference to the book from a pamphlet *Illustrative and Informative Material for Orators* published by the German Office of Propaganda. *The Protocols*, Estenssoro reported, had been declared "immoral and pornographic literature" by the pre-Nazi Nuremberg Court of Justice in 1931 and by a Swiss court in 1935. Estenssoro cited Heinrich Coudenhove-Kalergi's book *Anti-Semitism Through the Ages* as a refutation of *The Protocols*.³⁴

In an editorial examining "The Immigration Process" published on October 1, 1942, *Ultima Hora* discussed the more liberal Argentine immigration law and stated that immigrants to Bolivia had remained in the cities because the Government had been "incapable of organizing an adequate colonization plan for them." The writer pointed out that there had been successful Bolivian colonization projects in the tropical region of the eastern Yungas and at the specifically Jewish settlement at Miraflores. Was Jewish immigration, then, as Siles Zuazo had declared, a "national danger"? *Ultima Hora* found this fear absurd. The newspaper endorsed selective immigration, but a selection based only on talent and professional capacity.³⁵

Deputy Chacón had affirmed, in the session of October 1, that there were 25,000 Jews already in Bolivia. *Ultima Hora* reported that according to the Ministry of Immigration, there were only 3,955. "We have here," commented the newspaper acidly, "a deputy who has been defrauded by his professor of arithmetic." Official figures also showed that 14,000 to 15,000 Jews had come to Bolivia since the Busch free immigration law had gone into effect

³⁴ *Ibid.*, September 26, 1942.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, October 1, 1942.

in 1939. Thus, if the Ministry of Immigration figure was correct, some 10,000 Jews had left Bolivia. Hateful persecution was depriving Bolivia of her best professional and technical elements, *Ultima Hora* charged. Those Jews who stayed did so only because they did not have the resources to leave, the newspaper continued. How could 4,000 Jews dominate a nation of more than three million people? It was a "myopic and bullying" tactic for opponents of Jewish immigration to claim that Jews were taking bread out of the mouths of Bolivians. If the excluding measure were to be allowed to go into effect, *Ultima Hora* concluded, fascist elements in the future could close Bolivia to *all* immigration because they might find the same national threat in a handful of Englishmen or Germans or Czechs or Danes or Spaniards or representatives of any other nationality.³⁶

Finally, on October 7, 1942, *Ultima Hora* published the resolution of the Second Congress of Syndical Workers of Bolivia which had repudiated racism, calling it a way of dividing the working class by its exploiters. The Confederation of Workers of Latin America, on January 30, 1930, also had pronounced against racism, anti-Semitism, and fascism, upholding the rights of asylum, association, thought, and action. The resolution, reprinted in *Ultima Hora*, demanded open doors to all those persecuted politically or socially and equal treatment for them when they arrived. The organization also vowed to resist every movement or tendency designed to arouse race hatred.³⁷ In December, 1942, the workers at tin mines throughout Bolivia stopped work for a few hours to honor the dead Jews of Europe.³⁸

Meanwhile, *La Calle* continued to rehash the congressional debate on the immigration bill long after the issue had been settled in the Chamber of Deputies. Deputy Gustavo Chacón, the newspaper reported, had blamed the increase in the cost of living since 1939

³⁶ *Ibid.*, October 2, 1942. On September 24, 1942, the Chamber of Deputies did authorize the naturalization of Jews, but not of Negroes or Orientals. The measure seems to have been designed to apply to Jewish immigrants already in Bolivia.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, October 7, 1942.

³⁸ *La Calle*, December 19, 1942.

on the Jews who had come to Bolivia. Jews, he said, had become "parasitical suckers of the national moneys," and yet thousands of Jews waited on Bolivia's frontiers to enter the country. "Bolivia needs producers of wealth," he said, "not intermediate speculators."³⁹

ABOVE ALL RACES

When Siles Zuazo spoke again on October 1, he denied that his addition of Jews to be excluded along with Negroes and Orientals was racist, a concept "irreconcilable with our known condition as Bolivian mestizos." The deputy added:

Nothing is more certain than that we urgently need immigration, but an immigration that can identify with our people. To allow the formation of foreign minorities within the national territory would only gravely compromise the future. . . . There has not come to Bolivia a single proletarian Jew, one does not see a single Semite who works as *peon* or *jornalero* [day laborer]. On the contrary, all are overseers, managers, administrators, directors or owners of businesses.⁴⁰

Siles Zuazo denied that racism was a German theory, saying "it has been the burden of all the imperialisms, including the British." He quoted Unamuno as saying, "We live in an agonized age . . . in a desperate fight for survival," and noted the severe medical, educational, and regional problems which Bolivia faced with her own people. "Therefore," he said, "it would be insensitive to add to all of this the possibility that within ten or twenty years, the components of the Bolivian managerial class, which hardly numbers some 10,000 persons, will have to face 25,000 organized and disciplined Semites with the same religion and the same creed of universal conquest." The opponents of exclusion maintained that the Jews were a superior, not an inferior race. Exactly, rejoined Siles Zuazo, and therefore they would become the "owners of the country." Permitting them to come into Bolivia "would produce the classic phenomenon of an exploitative managerial class living upon the labor of the great mass of the Bolivian population, enslaved

³⁹ *Ibid.*, October 2, 1942.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

forever." Throughout Siles' speech, onlookers in the gallery cheered and applauded, *La Calle* reported. When the orator finished, spectators shouted "Long live Siles Zuazo!" and "Long live the deputy of the people!" Others cried, "Down with Marof [the Socialist deputy who had opposed the exclusion]!" "Marof! Jew!" and "Marof, traitor of the working class!"⁴¹

La Calle also quoted extensively from the speech of the Roman Catholic priest, Tumiri Javier, who said, "As a religious man, you cannot accuse me of being a racist or Nazi." Tumiri Javier claimed to have read the works of various religious leaders who had spoken out against the Jews, and he himself had noticed "the sufferings of the people exploited by the Israelite businessmen and speculators." Bolivia must be protected, he said, from the "hegemony of the Jews." He concluded:

A certain segment of our press, particularly an afternoon daily [*Ultima Hora*], has powerful reasons for injuring the two deputy priests of this Chamber. It has called us "henchmen." If that name means I am defending my people against Jewish speculation, it is well merited. I am proud of it.⁴²

La Calle reported the speeches of opponents of the excluding measure only to attempt to refute them, point by point, with abundant editorial comment in ostensibly news columns. Ricardo Anaya, leader of the Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionario (Party of the Revolutionary Left), was jeered when he demanded free Jewish immigration. Yet, reported *La Calle*, Anaya had gone on to deplore the "shameful and fraudulent" entry into Bolivia of Jews who in the past had bribed government officials to obtain their passports. Anaya was quoted as saying that if it had been up to him, "the Jews would never have entered Bolivia," a statement which *La Calle* found to be an obvious effort by the Socialist leader to ingratiate himself with the public at the same time that he opposed the immigration bill. Anaya was charged also with currying the favor of the Jewish community when he declared that "the Jews are now blamed for the guilt of our high officials," the *affairistas* who had allegedly sold passports. The Bolivian people, Anaya concluded, should fight

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*



Courtesy, Harry Simonhoff, Miami, Fla.

New York Chief Rabbi Jacob Joseph

(see p. 159)

capitalism and imperialism, not persecute the Jews. *La Calle* called his arguments "diffuse, contradictory and confused."⁴³

In one of the few signed articles which appeared in *La Calle* on the Jewish question, Formerio González challenged Tristán Marof's assertion that "Spain achieved its glorious past thanks to the Jews." González maintained that the Arabs, not the Jews, were the foundation for Spain's greatness. To be "Jewish," he argued, was more a mental than a racial condition, and the Spanish Catholic monarchs had been right in expelling all Jews who would not convert, for those Jews who lived outside the synagogues did strike true Spanish roots. "Jews hardly figured in the history of our fatherland," González continued. They did not distinguish themselves in Spanish literature or in Spanish military and political life. The writer declared, "as a Catholic, I recognize that the Jewish usurer, blackmailer and felon is a plague which must be fought, not because he is of this or that race, but because he is a corruptor of defenseless people, through his very mentality and social incoherence." Finally, González wrote, Christ was not a Jew! He was "the Son of God and therefore above all races and all peoples."⁴⁴

THE SACKING OF BOLIVIA

Ultima Hora, owned by the Jewish industrialist Hochschild, attacked Siles Zuazo when he said in the Chamber of Deputies on October 1 that he had received veiled threats from some Jews because he had revealed he had once granted six visas to Jews to enter Bolivia. *Ultima Hora* asserted that Siles Zuazo had received 25,000 bolivianos for the transaction. *La Calle* vigorously denied this accusation, pointing out that the six visas had all been for the countryside and not the cities, and that after Siles Zuazo was elected deputy, he had refused categorically to grant any more. If he had received such a large amount of money for doing his official duty, why did he want to shut off "that river of gold" by taking his stand against Jewish immigration? *La Calle* lambasted

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, October 3, 1942.

“the press of the greasy mercantile interests that operates by bullying and intellectual sophistry.”⁴⁵

The newspaper spokesman for the MNR also attacked the great consortiums of Lilienfeld, Allarand, and Anzarut which allegedly were capitalizing the settlement of “whole populations” of Jews fleeing Europe. Such colonies, *La Calle* charged, would make millions and millions of pesos while victimizing the Bolivian people. Those who opposed the exclusion of Jews wanted to continue the negotiation of passports, the newspaper charged. Theirs was a policy of “open doors and full pockets.” The Jewish invasion would make slaves of Bolivia’s two million Indians. The Jews would “find prodigious natural riches to supply international Judaism.” They would bleed the country, destroying an entire people: Bolivia would disappear. Let Jews in? True Bolivians would not stand by like dumb oxen in the face of this “national disgrace” and “sinister conspiracy” while “Bolivia is sold by the Jews to the Jews.”⁴⁶

Pressing this theme of its counterattack, *La Calle* in a subsequent issue said that the attempt to bring “a wave of Jews” to Bolivia had captured not only Bolivian capitalist elements but also certain political leaders of the poor masses, a reference to men like Anaya and Arratia. Would Bolivia allow herself to become a vassal to a foreign element? Placing Jews elsewhere had failed, as in Soviet Birobidjan, and so Bolivia was to be the next target, “the land in which misery makes it easier for money to hold sway.” Bolivian Jews were behind the open immigration agitation because it would be for them “a gigantic business enterprise.” Money was behind it all, not humanitarianism, charity, or love of one’s neighbor, *La Calle* charged. Why had no one raised his voice against the exclusion of Negroes and Orientals? Selling passports to 20,000 Jews would bring in 200 million bolivianos at the going rate; if 200,000 Jews bought their way into Bolivia, corrupt officials would receive 2 billion bolivianos. Why had Waldo Frank written his article against anti-Semitism while passing through Bolivia? Why was the leftist Mexican labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

coming to Bolivia to give conferences in favor of the Jews — without having been invited? Why did thirty Argentine legislators — who were never interested before in the fate of Bolivia — send a petition favorable to the Jews? *La Calle* did not answer the questions it raised, but the clear implication was that Bolivian Jews, led by Mauricio Hochschild, had bought journalists and deputies in their zeal to reopen the lucrative passport business.⁴⁷

Jews were preparing “the sacking of Bolivia,” *La Calle* screamed as its emotional harangues continued day after day. Jews would soon have more money than all the rest of the Bolivians put together; they would force Bolivians from their homes and take over their shops, making them peons and employees. Within three years, the Jews could control Congress and even elect a president. They would organize a “Jewish chamber of commerce” so that Bolivians would not be able to get a grain of rice before the Jews were served. “The railroads, under the control of foreigners, will import only foodstuffs for Jewish firms to satisfy Jewish diets,” the newspaper declared. Jewish “technicians” in the Ministry of Labor would use their positions to gain control of all housing, evicting non-Jews.⁴⁸

La Calle eventually turned its scathing attacks more sharply against Jews already in Bolivia. The newspaper charged that the Committee of Immigration had been composed entirely of Jews since its origin in 1939. This body had brought in 25,000 Jews and was planning to bring in 200,000 more, *La Calle* maintained. Yet Jews had been ordered out of Haiti and the Dominican Republic because they had not become the farmers they had agreed to be, but rather ended up as “pimps and prostitutes.” Did the deputies who spoke in favor of the Jews receive campaign contributions from them? *La Calle* asked. The extreme left, the defenders of the Jews, seemed willing to stand by while the Bolivian people would be “crucified” by the newcomers.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, October 4, 1942.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, October 6, 1942.

JEW'S NEVER WORK FOR NON-JEW'S

Once again *La Calle* attacked the passionate speech of Ricardo Anaya, almost a week after it had been delivered, denouncing it as "dialectical acrobatism." Anaya had said that he opposed the exclusion because it had "a racial content not only unscientific but tremendously distasteful." The measure had an "undeniable Nazi-fascist tendency," he had added, to which *La Calle* responded by quoting Emerson: "We can only see outside, what we carry within us." Anaya maintained that "anti-Semitism has served capitalism throughout the world to throw the hungry masses against the Jews." But the Socialist leader pleaded, "The protest against the Jews is intended to deflect the true struggle of the working classes, which ought to be directed against the social structure, against imperialism and against its agents in Bolivia: the feudal bourgeoisie."⁵⁰

In its issue of October 8, 1942, *La Calle* admitted that it had been mistaken in alleging that one Luis Brieger of the Committee on Immigration was a Jew. The newspaper conceded that Brieger was not a Jew but a Bolivian, "as there are all kinds in the vineyard of the Lord — the Lord who allowed the crucifixion of the Jews [in Nazi-ruled Europe]."

When *Ultima Hora* asked for an investigation of the entire Jewish problem in Bolivia, *La Calle* quickly endorsed the idea, feeling that its position would be vindicated but warning that fifty investigations would not silence its protests against "the dirty Jewish negotiations." Jews, *La Calle* stated, knew why they were isolated in ghettos by "democratic Europeans."⁵¹

Almost a month after the immigration bill was passed by the Chamber of Deputies, *La Calle* was still ranting and raving on the topic. The newspaper was apparently trying to push through action by the Senate and the President, action that was never forthcoming.⁵² On October 15, 1942, *La Calle* declared:

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, October 7, 1942.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, October 8, 1942.

⁵² Interview with Víctor Paz Estenssoro in exile at Lima, Peru, August 16, 1968.

Every national issue seems to the Jews to be a thing of Nazism. At bottom, this Semitic idea is absolutely sincere and reflects, one more time, the criterion which they have towards Bolivians [who] seem so humble, so resigned and above all so stupid before the Jews that they take this fact as if it were an article of the Talmud.

Can only Nazis criticize the Jews? the newspaper asked. "Bolivians, by themselves, cannot do it because their obligation is to keep their thumbs in their mouths even when the Israelites come devouring them piece by piece."⁵³

A census taken in La Paz on October 15, 1942, revealed a population in the capital city of 287,029, but *La Calle* reported the next day that Jews had fled the city or remained behind locked doors to escape being counted. Radio Illimani had denounced this evasion of the census throughout the morning of October 15. *La Calle* considered this maneuver, designed to hide the true number of Jews in La Paz, "audacious, gross, and outrageous," revealing profound disrespect for the laws of Bolivia. The newspaper demanded that a special census of the Jews in La Paz be taken at once.⁵⁴

An article in *La Calle* on October 17, 1942, by Arturo Villanueva, an associate of the Centro Acción Boliviana, declared that "the Semites have not stopped shooting out their tentacles in the saddest hours of their history, and already these are grasping Bolivia. . . ." Jews never work for non-Jews, the author maintained, and they flocked to the cities because only there "exist an infinity of gambling traps, places of libation and corruption, all seeking profit from the ancient Bolivian spiritual and material hardships." Villanueva asked Jews present in Bolivia to leave the country, to "press their seal of culture in other places." The high profits reaped by Jewish shopkeepers had been responsible for the great increases in the cost of living in Bolivia, he maintained. Jews reject physical labor, and "their religion prohibits them from making a profit from another Jew," he said. Bolivian authorities already had given the Jews a special cemetery, special granaries, special schools, special civic registers. "Tomorrow they will ask for a special zone, a Jewish

⁵³ *La Calle*, October 15, 1942.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, October 16, 1942.

barrio; later they will demand autonomy and will become the directors of the economic, social and political movements of the nation," the writer concluded.⁵⁵

This was the last installment of an unceasing hate campaign which had lacerated the pages of *La Calle* for more than a month. But the MNR newspaper failed in its dark quest: the immigration bill passed by the Chamber of Deputies was never taken up by the Senate and thus never became law. Perhaps the very excesses of *La Calle* doomed the chances of the bill's passage. Undeniably, the MNR got considerable political mileage from the issue, but the fact that the liberal political party that was to transform Bolivia from 1952 to 1964 seized upon a gutter issue to help boost itself to power reveals much of the opportunism and fascist leanings of the movement in its early stages. Bolivian society was clearly so sick in 1942 after three centuries of colonial exploitation and a century and a half of independent misrule by a thin feudal oligarchy that the hatred of Bolivians was easily turned against their fellow citizens.

The MNR greatly damaged its reputation among responsible and intelligent liberals such as Anaya and Arratia, who would not join a movement for the social revindication of Bolivia headed by men they considered moral hoodlums. The MNR was to find a much more congenial issue during the congressional enquiry of August, 1943, in the massacre of striking tin miners by government troops at Catavi the previous December. Perhaps strong feelings of guilt over their position on the Jewish question impelled MNR leaders to champion the cause of the slain miners. The Jewish issue led the MNR into a morass of slippery demagoguery that ended nowhere, while the Catavi issue clearly launched the MNR on the road to national prominence and respect. Anaya and Arratia voted with the MNR in censuring the cabinet of Peñaranda in 1943 for slaughtering defenseless strikers, but they valiantly opposed the racial hysteria whipped up by the MNR in 1942 at a time when hundreds of thousands of men were dying around the globe to preserve the dignity and very life of the individual.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, October 17, 1942.