

THE FALKLANDS AND THE JEWISH QUESTION

Great Britain has the fifth largest Jewish community in the world, about 400 thousand; and Argentina, with over 300 thousand, is tied with Canada as the sixth largest Jewish community in the world.

As far as long range hospitality-towards-Jews is concerned, it would be hard to give either country a prize. Jews settled late in England and were immediately in big trouble. England was the site of the world's first "blood libel" charge against Jews, in 1144. There were special taxes on Jews, and periodic pogroms. Small Jewish communities were wiped out. Beleaguered Jews committed mass suicide in a York tower in 1190.

In 1290, all Jews were expelled from England by Edward I. They began to trickle back centuries later when England was beginning to develop its modern democratic institutions. In 1753, the English government proposed a Jewish Naturalization Bill, known generally as "the Jew Bill," but it was withdrawn because of the agitation against it. The House of Commons passed a Jewish Emancipation Bill in 1833, but it was rejected by the House of Lords.

By this point, English Jews were not suffering any serious civic disabilities in fact, but the dark luggage of the middle ages was such that it was not easy to formalize the new status of the Jews. Nathaniel Rothschild was finally raised to the peerage in 1885, and, of course, there was Benjamin Disraeli. It was only in that part of the 19th century that English Jews began to feel like first class citizens. In the United States, by contrast, there was a kind of "big bang" creation of democratic life which legally embraced the Jews.

Argentina did not have a bad record with respect to Jews in the middle ages, because Argentina did not have any Jews in the middle ages. Jewish migration began in the late 19th century. There were anti-semitic episodes here and there, notably *semana tragica*, the tragic week in January, 1919, when Jews were killed. Then, in the 1930s,

Nazi groups began to flourish in the extensive German colony, partly explaining the fact that Argentina became such a refuge for fleeing German Nazis.

Many Argentinian Jews insist that they do not suffer from anti-semitism today, their formulation being that Jews are no more victims of political oppression than anyone else. However, there seems to be ample evidence, at the least, that when Jews are imprisoned for whatever reason, they receive special anti-semitic treatment.

In any case, however, it is a characteristic of foreign relations that one does not pick sides because of history, or "friendship." In international affairs, there is no past, only the future; no friends, only allies. And the prime stake of world Jewry is in the survival of the ideal of political freedom -- without which we would all be back in the cruelty of the middle ages, implemented with 20th century efficiency.

England is part of the free world, that group of nations which, whatever their sins, keep the ideal of political freedom alive; and an ally of the U.S. Argentina is not itself a practitioner of political freedom, but *is* something of an ally of the U.S., which is the main force in the world keeping the ideal of political freedom alive.

If England "loses," the free world, the U.S. and the idea of political freedom are diminished. And, ironically, they are diminished if Argentina "loses." Argentina would become more oppressive than ever, and less an American ally. America's enemies in Latin America would be able to advance their position. The American failure to mediate this one before it came to shooting is already a signal of American weakness. The Falklands Affair may turn out to be one of those subtle places in history which, in retrospect, mark a lurch downward; in this case, a downward lurch of democratic civilization. If so, the Jews of Israel will feel the effect; and so will the Jews of Argentina.