CHAPTER SEVEN

A PACT OF OBLIVION: THE DE-PERONIZATION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

History books tell us that despite Juan Perón’s efforts to eradicate anti-Semitism and his cultivation of close relations with the State of Israel throughout his years in power (1946–1955), he failed in his attempts to enlist the support of significant sectors of the Argentine Jewish community. Historians and commentators assert that most Argentine Jews remained hostile to Perón,¹ and that Perón’s attempts to ingratiate himself with the community—for example, by setting up the Peronist Jewish organization known as OIA, or Organización Israelita Argentina (Argentine Jewish Organization)—were all to no avail.² Such a short time after the end of World War II, as the magnitude of the Jewish Holocaust in Europe became known, Argentine Jews, who were mostly of Eastern and Central European origin, were understandably wary of a government that in their eyes resembled the defeated Axis regimes. The support Perón received from nationalist and anti-Semitic groups at the beginning of his career, and the alliance he forged with the Catholic Church in the second half of the 1940s only reinforced their suspicions. Moreover, the political and class identity of many Jews contributed to their distrust of a regime that was developing


increasingly authoritarian tendencies and that, in addition, was identified with benefits for the Argentine working class. Perón’s gradual adoption of the struggle against anti-Semitism as an integral part of his policy did nothing to assuage their fears, and they continued to doubt his intentions until his ouster in September 1955.

This view is not mistaken, but it is certainly exaggerated. The Jewish community was never homogeneous and often split over this, as well as over other issues. While not a majority, a substantial number of Jews supported the early Peronist movement. It is true that most of the community establishment had reservations about the Peronist government and the justicialist movement, but many individual Jews identified with Peronism. These included assorted Jewish leaders in the workers’ movement (Ángel Perelman, a founder of the metalworkers’ union, Unión Obrera Metalúrgica, in 1943 and its first secretary-general; Rafael Kogan, secretary-general of the railroad workers’ union, Unión Ferroviaria; Abraham Krislavin and David Diskin of the commercial employees’ union, and others) and in various Jewish associations (such as the Jewish hospital, Hospital Israelita ‘Ezrah’), intellectuals (the staff of the cultural supplement to La Prensa, then controlled by the CGT—the Argentine labor federation—included Israel Zeitlin [César Tiempo], Bernardo Ezequiel Korembít, León Benarós, and Julia Prílutzy Farny), lawyers (such as Liberto Rabinovich), business men (José Ber Gelbard and others), and especially ordinary people who were not affiliated with the community institutions. 

3 On Perelman’s contributions to the worker demonstrations of 17 October 1945 and the burgeoning Peronist movement, see his memoirs: Ángel Perelman, Cómo hicimos el 17 de octubre (Buenos Aires, 1962).


7 For example, Jews in the textile industry who benefited from the Peronist government’s economic policies. For a Sephardic Jew who supported Perón, see Israel Jabbaz, Israel nace en las Naciones Unidas (Buenos Aires, 1960).