

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF VA'AD HAHINUCH AS REFLECTED IN ITS BYLAWS (1935-1943)

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*A comparison of four sets of bylaws of the Va'ad HaHinuch of Buenos Aires, approved over a nine-year period (1935-1943), allows us to follow developments in the standing of the organization and its relationships with the Ashkenazi community and other institutions in the city. As its importance and influence increased, the leadership of the community as well as the political forces which comprised it tried to strengthen their control over the Va'ad HaHinuch, in order to limit its authority and prevent any independent activities not under their scrutiny. These years were particularly important in the political life of the Ashkenazi community of Buenos Aires and the Va'ad HaHinuch because it was a period during which the governance of the community moved from the heads of the economic and philanthropic organizations to a political structure in which all the Jewish political parties participated. The documents presented here reflect this transition.*

Until 1935, there was no organization connecting the Jewish schools of Buenos Aires; there was no coordination among the schools, nor did they receive financial or pedagogic assistance from any of the major communal entities. They offered supplementary education from Monday to Friday during the time when pupils were

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not attending public school (either in the morning or the afternoon). The schools were usually traditional — Talmud Torahs run by synagogues, focusing on the study of the *Humash* (Pentateuch) in translation (whether Yiddish, Spanish, or Arabic), of prayers from the *Siddur*, and the laying of *tefillin* (phylacteries); occasionally, pupils learned to write in Hebrew or studied a little bit of Jewish history. Ashkenazi schools favored the Ashkenazi pronunciation of Hebrew, while the schools for Jews from Syria (Aleppo and Damascus) and Morocco, as well as Ladino-speaking Jews, used the Sephardi pronunciation. There were also non-religious schools, some of which had a Zionist and traditional orientation. Subjects such as Jewish history and literature, the Bible, and the geography of Eretz Israel would be taught from a traditionalist national viewpoint, usually in Yiddish, but sometimes in modern Hebrew. Some of these schools were established by parties such as Right Po'alei Zion or the General Zionists. Others, clearly leftist in outlook, were run by supporters of Left Po'alei Zion, the Bund, or the Communists. The curriculum in these schools emphasized Yiddish language and culture and the particular political views of the group they were affiliated with.

In 1935, the Ashkenazi Hevra Kadisha (HK) (burial society) decided to create a committee to deal with Jewish education in Buenos Aires. It invited some of the groups already involved in the field to participate: the Zionist Federation (of General Zionists); the Shul Kult organization established by Right Po'alei Zion; Ze'irei-Zion and supporters of Yiddish-Hebrew Zionist schools; the teachers' association (Histadrut Hamorim), and (at a later stage) representatives from the Talmud Torahs and other Jewish schools. Up to this point, the HK had been providing a number of schools and Talmud Torahs with sporadic financial assistance; there were no consistent guidelines to determine the allocation of financial help.

The new committee assumed responsibility for allocating the funds provided by the HK and — to a lesser extent — the Zionist Federation. Allocations would be based on specific principles and would aim at encouraging pedagogic and organizational improvement within the schools and promoting traditional and Zionist views. The name adopted by the committee was in Yiddish: *Zentral Organisazie far Yiddish Nazionaln Hinuch bai der Hevra Kadisha* — Central Organization for National Jewish Education in the Hevra Kadisha — and in Hebrew: *Hava'ad Hamercazi leHinuch Leumi* — Central Committee for National Education (hereafter known as Va'ad HaHinuch or VH).

One of the first things Va'ad HaHinuch did was prepare a set of bylaws defining its goals and structuring its activities. It also formulated a basic curriculum to be followed by any school that wished to

be affiliated with and receive financial assistance from the Committee. There are two versions of these bylaws: the first was prepared in August 1935 by the VH Executive and was recorded in Yiddish as part of the minutes of a VH meeting; the second was written down in Spanish in the minutes of the Hevra Kadisha in November 1935 and reflects the attitudes of the HK Executive. When we compare the two versions, it becomes apparent that the two groups — the Executives of VH and the HK — held different views concerning the nature and purpose of Va'ad HaHinuch. Furthermore, when we examine the internal discussion that preceded the Va'ad's acceptance of its own proposed bylaws, we see that the school representatives themselves did not always agree.

Representatives from the Talmud Torahs wanted the first clause to state that the form of education was to be "religious," but the majority voted for the vaguer "traditional" — which would include not only a religious viewpoint, but also the teaching of certain components of the Jewish religious heritage (so long as the presentation was in no way anti-religious).

The fourth clause of the VH version aimed at protecting teachers and called for the improvement of their position; however, the third clause of the HK bylaws eliminated any direct reference to teachers and simply focused on the question of enhancing Jewish culture in Buenos Aires. As a rule, the status of teachers in VH was often uncertain, as disputes erupted between the teachers (and their supporters) and the leaders of the schools and Talmud Torahs. When it came to the Executive of the HK, the teachers were at an obvious disadvantage, since they had no representation at all in that forum.

In the fifth clause, the HK disavowed any commitment to provide VH with its own administrative staff, thereby avoiding added expenses.

The seventh clause of both versions omits any reference to the treasurer (mentioned in Clause Six). This may have been because VH did not have its own funds, but was dependent on the treasury of the HK.

The ninth clause of the VH version, which stipulates that the VH Executive may take on new members, is omitted in the HK version.

This comparison of the two documents suggests that the HK Executive took VH seriously enough to be concerned that they might lose control of it, and the changes of wording introduced by the HK are therefore aimed at limiting the independence of VH. In addition, the changes reflect the special interests of the schools' leadership, who exerted influence in the HK Executive vis-a-vis the allocation of funds and were not concerned with improving the teachers' position.

In 1939, a new set of bylaws for VH was prepared, indicating changes that had taken place during the more than three years that the Va'ad had been functioning. During this time, most of the schools in Buenos Aires had become affiliated, and VH was a *fait accompli*. In the course of three years, it had set down a number of guidelines for school activities; allocated tens of thousands of pesos provided by the HK, according to certain agreed-upon criteria; and hired a supervisor who had visited every school several times, submitting reports and advising teachers and lay leaders on means of improvement. It had attempted to better the lot of teachers by taking their side in disputes with the schools, by setting down terms of employment in cooperation with the teachers' professional syndicate, by working towards the unification of various rival teachers' organizations, and by establishing professional training courses. VH had attempted — not very successfully — to raise contributions for an educational fund that would enable the Va'ad to operate more independently of the HK. It had published a periodical on its activities and educational concerns, entitled *Dertziung*. Finally, it had exerted pressure on the left-wing schools to modify their behavior when it came to the observance of Shabbat and holidays and to adopt a different attitude towards the teaching of Hebrew, Bible, Zionism, and Jewish tradition.

In the middle of 1938, we come to a turning-point in Jewish communal organization in Buenos Aires: the Jewish parties became involved in the political fight for leadership of the HK. The first parties to do so were Ze'irei Zion and Left Po'alei Zion, motivated first and foremost by their desire to influence the allocation of HK educational subsidies. By entering the arena, the parties created a new state of communal affairs: in the past, HK elections had only involved leaders of the community's financial or philanthropic institutions; political ideology had not played any part.

The proposed new bylaws were discussed by the VH Executive from March to May of 1939. When compared to the bylaws of 1935, they clearly reflect some of the changes that had occurred in the interim:

The first clause formally extends VH's sphere of influence to the outskirts of Buenos Aires. In fact, since its creation, the Va'ad had been dealing with schools in the suburbs of Avellaneda and Lanus, and later on, schools from other towns in greater Buenos Aires had become affiliated.

The second clause was changed to make it easier for left-wing, secular Yiddishist schools — and, in addition to individual schools,

school associations such as ZVISHO, established by Left Po'alei Zion — to join VH.

Clauses Three and Four deal with the VH Executive. Clause Three upholds representation from school associations (ZVISHO) and parties (Ze'irei Zion), even though this had been opposed by one-third of the VH Executive. The fourth clause stipulates that the HK is to have twice the representation of any other body (6 versus 3), including the positions of chairman and treasurer, and that the schools are to have a total of seven delegates.

The sixth clause acknowledges the right of different schools to retain their own ideology even if they receive support from the HK. VH only requires that affiliated schools adopt certain minimal guidelines; different curricula are to be prepared for the schools in keeping with their outlook. This position indicates an openness towards socialist schools, a desire to attract them to VH by not demanding too many concessions.

The elimination of clauses 11 and 12, which prevented any alteration of goals and outlined procedure for the withdrawal of constituent bodies, may reflect increased self-confidence on the part of VH.

These new bylaws provided public affirmation of the changes brought about by the 1938 HK elections, reflecting a new relationship between schools of various shades, the HK, and VH. They were accepted by a majority vote of all the constituent groups in VH, including the delegates from the HK. However, although the bylaws were then immediately presented for ratification to the Bylaws Committee of the HK, they were not ratified even in September 1941. The Committee continued to debate the question of whether delegates from political parties should be admitted, and apparently the bylaws were never even brought up for discussion by the HK Executive.

It seems that the HK prepared another set of bylaws for VH, without formally consulting the Va'ad or discussing the matter in VH itself. In any event, no such discussion appears in the minutes. This set of bylaws, of which only one copy — undated — has been found, was prepared after the new constitution of the Hevra Kadisha was approved by the authorities in April 1941. At this time, the name of the HK was changed to Yiddish-Argentinian Gezelshaft far Kegnzaitiker Hilf — Asociacion Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA), or the Jewish Organization of Argentina for Mutual Assistance. The change reflects a fundamental shift for the HK, which in effect became a mutual help association defined by a set of bylaws and grounded in the law of the state. With this new status, any doubts the HK may have had concerning the legitimacy of its educational

interests were dispelled. In the previous bylaws, the connection between the HK and VH as set out in the first clause — “*bai*” (“in”) the HK — had been rather vague; however, the new bylaws speak of VH “*fun*” (“of”) AMIA, making the affiliation very clear.

This first clause also modifies the definition of the type of education to be supported: previous versions had stipulated “national/traditional” Jewish education, but these bylaws simply mention “Jewish education.” Thus, they testify to the greater pluralism among schools that were already affiliated with VH or were being courted for affiliation. Up to 1941, the ZVISHO schools affiliated with Left Po’alei Zion and the Bundist-leaning Reizen school of Avellaneda had joined VH. At the end of 1942, a school affiliated with the Bund joined, and in 1944 and 1945, two Communist schools joined VH. The change in the bylaws was clearly aimed at these schools.

The second clause adds to VH’s involvement in existing schools, the creation of new schools throughout the city, as well as efforts to unite smaller schools in the same neighborhoods.

Clauses Two and Three of the previous bylaws, which described the components of VH, have been eliminated — a further sign of change in the VH Executive: instead of representing the various political bodies concerned with education, VH now reflects the existing constellation of power in the HK and the school system. The new seventh clause changes the balance of the VH plenum (as opposed to Clause Four of the previous bylaws): there are to be nine delegates from the HK, nine from the schools, and three from the teachers. Now VH became the framework in which the workers, their employers, and the communal political leadership acted together.

Clause Four prevents schools from acting in organizational, financial, or pedagogic matters without the approval of VH. It represents an important statement vis-a-vis the authorities, making VH responsible for defining teachers’ contracts and influencing curricula. These issues became very important in the early 1940s, with the beginning of state supervision of all supplementary schools, including the Jewish ones. The VH policy also had crucial implications for the attempts being made at the time to determine a consistent pay-scale for teachers, as well as for the new affiliation of left-wing groups that had modified their school programs. Had all the various educational components responded positively, VH would have achieved a uniquely-powerful position, but the schools did not cooperate fully and the plans of VH were thwarted.

The fifth clause placed new emphasis on the need to teach Hebrew in Yiddish schools and vice-versa, apparently in order to

balance requirements concerning the two national languages. Compared to the previous bylaws, there is also greater emphasis on Zionism and the connection to the Zionist settlement in Eretz Israel.

Clauses 7 and 12 of the previous bylaws, which concerned the offices and treasury of VH, became redundant, since VH was now clearly part of the HK. By eliminating Clause 11, the new bylaws made it impossible for VH to alter its constellation of delegates (as set out in the bylaws) without the approval of the HK.

This new set of bylaws reflects the powerful position of the HK-AMIA in the community and strengthens the bond between it and the subordinate VH, now an acknowledged part of the HK. Although the political parties could no longer appoint delegates to the VH Executive, they remained influential, because they now had representation on the HK Executive. In the 1940s, political involvement in the HK increased; the Zionist parties became very active, and supporters of the Bund also began to take part. The new involvement of Zionists and Bundists is reflected in this latest set of bylaws: first, it calls for "Jewish" rather than "national/traditional" education; second, its curriculum guidelines emphasize Eretz Israel and national revival (in other words, Zionism) and formally elevate Hebrew to the same status as Yiddish and require that Hebrew be taught in all schools.

The four sets of bylaws we have looked at reflect essential changes in the way in which the organized Jewish community of Buenos Aires handled supplementary Jewish education. At the outset, a number of bodies had joined forces to deal with one specific afternoon school system and distribute funds earmarked for educational purposes by the HK, even though, at this stage, members of the Executive did not always agree that these activities were necessary or served the best interests of their organization. The first bylaws also reflect a desire to impose traditional-Zionist ideological requirements for schools wishing to receive funds.

Seven years later, the HK's involvement in Jewish education was a *fait accompli*; via VH, now an integral part of the organization, it supported education and encouraged the expansion of Jewish schools in the area of Buenos Aires. At the same time, this question of education convinced the Jewish parties that the time had come for them to be involved in communal politics and take control of the HK — a decision that accelerated its transformation into the "Ashkenazi Jewish Community of Buenos Aires."

**Bylaws of the  
CENTRAL ORGANIZATION FOR NATIONAL  
EDUCATION**

From: Minutes of the Hevra Kadisha, 25.11.35, p. 374.

1. We herewith establish a body to be known as "the Central Organization for National Jewish Education" in the Hevra Kadisha, the goals of which are: to enhance and expand national Jewish education in the city of Buenos Aires.

2. This Organization will be made up of the following institutions: the Buenos Aires Hevra Kadisha, the Cultural Department of the Zionist Federation of Argentina, Shul Kult, and Agudat Hamorim (the teachers' association), with three representatives from each, as well as five representatives from the Talmud Torahs and affiliated schools.

3. The Organization will strive to raise the intellectual and material level of Jewish culture in Buenos Aires, in keeping with the goals set out.

4. The Central Organization will prepare, by means of a pedagogic sub-committee, a detailed curriculum for all affiliated schools, taking into account the environment in which the Jewish children here live.

5. The Central Organization will operate out of the offices of the Hevra Kadisha, which will provide the administrative manpower necessary for it to carry out its functions.

6. The component institutions in the Organization plenum will appoint delegates without predetermining specific roles. By majority vote, the plenum will then appoint delegates to the various offices, renewing half the positions every year. The positions of chairman and treasurer will be reserved for representatives of the Hevra Kadisha.

7. The plenum will consist of the chairman, vice-chairman, two secretaries, and voting members. The plenum will appoint a sub-committee to choose the Pedagogic Committee.

8. Representatives of the various organizations may take part so long as they remain affiliated with those organizations. The five delegates from the affiliated schools and Talmud Torahs will be selected by their own annual general meeting. They will hold their positions for a period of two years. The plenum will report to the General Assembly on activities carried out in the intervening time.



9. The Central Organization's income will derive from subsidies granted by the Hevra Kadisha, as well as various donations. Part of these funds will be allocated on a proportional basis among the schools and Talmud Torahs, with the remainder to be devoted to the establishment of new schools that will serve as models for the existing schools.

10. The Organization established herewith cannot alter its ideological character as set out in the first clause of these bylaws.

11. An affiliated institution wishing to withdraw from the Organization will announce its intention six months in advance, while providing grounds for the decision, and will continue to participate on a temporary basis.

### **BYLAWS Prepared by the Plenum of Va'ad HaHinuch**

Minutes of VH, 24.9.35, p. 195 (discussion), 10.12.35, pp. 193-191.

1. The purpose of the VH in the HK is to enhance and promote traditional and national education in the city of Buenos Aires.

2. VH will be made up of the HK, the Zionist Federation, Shul Kult and Agudat Hamorim, with three representatives from each, and the schools and Talmud Torahs, with a total of five representatives.

3. A Pedagogic Committee of the VH will prepare a detailed curriculum for the affiliated schools.

4. VH will strive to raise the morale of Jewish teachers in Buenos Aires and to improve their financial position.

5. VH will operate out of the offices of the HK, which will provide the administrative manpower needed for its purposes.

6. The affiliated institutions will appoint delegates without predetermining specific roles, which will be determined by a vote in the VH plenum. Only the positions of chairman and treasurer are to be reserved for the HK.

7. The Executive will consist of the chairman, vice-chairman, and two secretaries. [The role of treasurer and the voting members were omitted in both versions — E.Z.] The Pedagogic Committee will be elected from the Executive and will consist of five members.

8. Representatives of the various organizations may take part so long as they remain affiliated with those organizations. The five delegates of the

schools and Talmud Torahs will be elected every two years at a meeting of representatives of all the educational institutions, at which a report on activities will also be presented.

9. New members who are able to assist Va'ad HaHinuch may be added by agreement of two-thirds of the Executive.

10. The income of VH will derive from subsidies granted by the HK. VH will allocate these funds on a proportional basis among the schools and Talmud Torahs and will use them to establish new schools that will serve as models for existing schools.

11. VH cannot alter its goals as set out in the first clause.

12. An affiliated institution wishing to withdraw from VH will announce its intention six months in advance and will continue to participate in VH up to the time of its withdrawal.

### **BYLAWS Adopted by VH in March-April 1939**

Minutes of VH, 27.3.39, p. 236; 20.4.39, pp. 235-234; 8.5.39, pp. 234-232.

1. The goal of Va'ad HaHinuch in the Hevra Kadisha is to promote and enhance traditional national education in the city of Buenos Aires and its environs.

2. VH will consist of [representatives from] the HK, the Zionist Federation, Shul Kult and Agudat Hamorim. Organizations of secular Yiddish schools with a nationalist orientation may also join the Central Organization, providing the schools devote enough time to the study of Hebrew and subjects connected to Eretz Israel and providing their character and activities conform to the agreed-upon principles of respecting Jewish tradition (resting on the Sabbath, celebrating historical Jewish holidays, and so on).

3. The plenum of VH will consist of representatives from organizations and parties that hold a positive view of national education and are willing to accept the basic principles outlined in Clauses 1 and 2.

4. Until such time as other groups are added, the plenum of VH will consist of representatives of the HK, the schools and Talmud Torah association, the Zionist Federation, the Ze'irei-Zion Party, Shul Kult and Agudat Hamorim. The plenum will be made up in the following way: HK — 6 delegates, school and Talmud Torah association — 7 delegates, the remaining component organizations — up to 3 delegates each.

5. VH will strive to improve the morale and the financial position of the Jewish teacher.

6. VH will prepare, by means of a Pedagogic Committee, detailed curricula for the affiliated schools, taking into account their surroundings and the special circumstances affecting Jewish children and bearing in mind the various orientations of the affiliated schools.

7. VH will operate out of the offices of the HK, which will provide the administrative manpower needed for its purposes.

8. The affiliated institutions will appoint delegates without predetermining specific roles, which will be decided by the VH plenum in annual elections. The positions of chairman and treasurer will be reserved for the HK, which will have to arrive at an understanding with the VH beforehand.

9. The positions in the plenum of VH will be: chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, vice-secretary, and treasurer; the remainder will be voting members. The plenum will be divided into committees and sub-committees, as needed. The Executive will consist of the chairman and vice-chairman, secretary and vice-secretary, treasurer, and a representative from each committee.

10. Delegates of the various institutions will continue in their roles until recalled by the Boards they represent. The seven delegates from the schools and Talmud Torahs will be chosen once a year at a general meeting of representatives of all schools and Talmud Torahs, to take place every February.

11. The plenum may take on new members it believes will be of use to the VH if two-thirds of its members are in favor. The added member will serve for one year and may be re-elected by the plenum at its first meeting in February or March.

12. The VH budget will be based on subsidies from the HK, together with any additional money contributed for educational purposes.

### **BYLAWS of the VH, Prepared in 1943 or 1944 YIVO Buenos Aires. Meiern Lazer Papers**

1. The purpose of VH of the Jewish Organization of Argentina for Mutual Assistance (formerly the HK) is to promote and enhance Jewish education in the city of Buenos Aires and its environs, wherever there are Jewish residents who are members of the HK.

2. In addition to dealing with the problems of existing schools, VH must seek to establish Jewish schools and central, special model schools in areas with large Jewish populations. VH will also deal with the unification of the small schools in these areas and will create, whenever possible, large, improved schools so as to enrich the educational system.

3. VH will carry out its pedagogic and organizational activities in every affiliated school and Talmud Torah according to a basic program. VH will take into account the various outlooks of the existing schools, providing there is no opposition to Jewish tradition: resting on the Sabbath, celebrating the historical and traditional holidays.

4. The affiliated schools will be in constant contact with VH concerning organizational and pedagogic affairs; they will take no steps that affect the overall educational system without the agreement of the VH.

5. VH holds as fundamental the equal importance of both national languages, Yiddish and Hebrew. All affiliated schools that teach Yiddish will guarantee a minimum of instruction in Hebrew, and vice versa. Every school will reserve a special place for teaching about Eretz Israel, as befits the modern movement for the national rebirth of the Jewish people.

6. VH will endeavor to improve the status and financial position of the teacher, who is a major component of the educational system.

7. VH will be led by its plenum and Executive. The plenum will consist of: six delegates from the HK, to be elected from the HK Executive, and three delegates to be elected outside the Executive; nine delegates from the affiliated schools, and three delegates from the Histadrut Hamorim (the teachers' association). When the Organization for the Support of the Teachers' Seminary is established, it will be represented on VH via the HK Executive.

8. The bodies represented on VH will send their delegates without predetermined positions, apart from the roles of chairman and treasurer, which will be appointed directly by the HK from among its Executive.

9. Positions in the plenum will be: chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, vice-secretary, treasurer, and members of the plenum. The plenum will appoint committees as needed. The Executive will consist of the chairman and vice-chairman, secretary and vice-secretary, treasurer, and one representative from each committee.

10. Delegates from the various institutions will continue to serve until recalled by the Boards of their institutions. The nine delegates from the schools and Talmud Torahs will be chosen once a year at a general meeting of representatives of all schools and Talmud Torahs, to take place every February.