

South African Jews and the Apartheid Crisis

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THE WIDESPREAD ERUPTIONS of unrest in South Africa in the 1980s have focused attention on various aspects of that society, including its small but influential Jewish community. That community occupies a special place within South Africa itself and also on the worldwide contemporary Jewish scene. In the South African context, Jews have been very important in the economic and cultural development of the country; at the same time, they have been prominent in manifestations of resistance to the apartheid system by which the whites have dominated the society as a whole. In the Jewish context, the situation of South African Jews is highly unusual: a Jewish community that shares in the castelike status of the privileged in a society based upon a system of legalized racial discrimination.

The Distinctiveness of South African Jewry

In 1987 the estimated 115,000 Jews of South Africa constituted no more than one-half of 1 percent of the country's composite population, consisting of 19.7 million blacks, 4.9 million whites, 3.0 million coloreds (people of mixed race), and 900,000 Asians (mainly Indians). Jews belonged inherently to the dominant white minority, forming 2.3 percent of the total. As for the history of the community: it began as an incidental offshoot of British Jewry in the nineteenth century, was consolidated by a broad wave of immigration from Eastern Europe between 1880 and 1930, and was finally augmented by a small influx (numbering some 6,000) of Central European Jews fleeing from Hitler's tyranny in the 1930s.¹

Note: The author gratefully acknowledges the access granted him by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies to its extensive library and archives and the research assistance in South Africa of Jonathan Penkin.

¹According to the South African census of 1980 there were 117,963 Jews. The population figures cited here are estimates for mid-1986. They exclude the independent Transkei, Bophuthatswana, and Venda. See Sergio DellaPergola and Allie A. Dubb, "South African Jewry: A Sociodemographic Profile," in this volume. On the origins of the Jewish community, see Louis Herrman, *The History of the Jews in South Africa* (London, 1935); Israel Abrahams, *Birth of a Community* (Cape Town, 1955); Gustav Saron and Louis Hotz, eds., *The Jews in South Africa: A History* (London and Cape Town, 1955). A perceptive study of South African Jewry in the comparative context of some other New World communities is Daniel J. Elazar and

In many important respects, the Jews of South Africa were no different from those of other New World Jewish communities. South Africa offered Jewish immigrants postemancipation freedom in all essentials, as well as great economic prosperity. It also took its toll in the erosion of Jewish identity resulting from acculturation to the surrounding society. Yet a number of factors converged to confer a distinctive character upon South African Jewry.

One was the relatively homogeneous composition of the community. Although the founding generation, numbering some 4,000 by 1880, came mainly from Britain, the formative East European wave, which brought some 40,000 immigrants from 1880 to 1910 and a further 30,000 until 1948, was predominantly from Lithuania. The synthesis of Anglo-Jewish institutional forms with "Litvak," non-Hassidic religious orthodoxy and deep Zionist sentiment that characterized South African Jewry may be attributed largely to this factor. This has been aptly described as the "pouring of Litvak spirit into Anglo-Jewish bottles."² This synthesis endowed South African Jewry with a Jewish Board of Deputies modeled on the Anglo-Jewish prototype, on which were represented most synagogue congregations and communal organizations. Hence, too, the blend of the Orthodox "misnaged" tradition of the Litvaks with London's United Synagogue form of synagogue ritual, which led to a kind of "conservative traditionalism" and a normative mode of religiosity that has been described as "non-observant Orthodox."³ In contrast to the situation in Britain and the United States, the Zionist orientation that most Litvak immigrants brought with them to South Africa did not come into conflict with an established mold of Reform Judaism, with its attendant antagonism to Jewish nationalism. Indeed, Reform Judaism was only introduced into South Africa in 1933, and its founder, Rabbi Moses C. Weiler, endowed it with a moderate mode of Reform and a marked Zionist sentiment. Consequently, Zionism met with only slight resistance in South Africa, and in fact the Zionist Federation that was founded in 1898 became the first Jewish institution to achieve a countrywide organizational framework. What is more, from the outset

Peter Medding, *Jewish Communities in Frontier Societies* (New York, 1983). The most recent work on South African Jewry is Marcus Arkin, ed., *South African Jewry: A Contemporary Survey* (Cape Town, 1984), which also contains an extensive annotated bibliography by Reuben Musiker. An illuminating contribution to the economic history of the community is Mendel Kaplan, *Jewish Roots in the South African Economy* (Cape Town, 1986).

²The expression is that of the doyen of South African Jewish historiography, Gustav Saron. See Gustav Saron, "The Making of South African Jewry: An Essay in Historical Interpretation," in *South African Jewry 1965*, ed. Leon Feldberg (Johannesburg, 1965), 9-48.

³See Jocelyn Hellig, "South African Judaism: An Expression of Conservative Traditionalism," *Judaism* 35, no. 2 (Spring 1986):233-42; also Jocelyn Hellig's chapter "Religious Expression" in Arkin, *South African Jewry*, 95-116.

South African Zionism was deeply involved in local community life. It remained the preeminent ideological orientation of South African Jewry, providing an anchor for Jewish ethnicity no less important than the synagogue was for Jewish religiosity.

At least as important a factor in shaping the distinctive character of South African Jewry was the societal environment into which the immigrants entered. It was one in which an ascriptive attribute—race—was the primary determinant of people's lives. In sociological terms, South Africa was, as it remained, a pluralistic society characterized by the existence of several sociocultural segments with parallel institutional structures within the same overarching political and economic system.⁴ The traditional norms which determined this segmentation long before the term "apartheid" entered the country's political lexicon were buttressed and enforced by the apartheid laws of the state. They remained potent even as the apartheid system, having become largely dysfunctional, was in the process of disintegrating.

It is of interest to note how this mode of what may be described as a "mandatory" pluralism differed from the "laissez-faire" pluralism of American society. In the latter, the sociocultural segments maintained institutions supplementary to all-embracing ones common to the society as a whole. Moreover, the professed attitude of the state to these supplementary institutions was neutral, so that their maintenance was a wholly voluntary matter. By contrast, in the mandatory pluralism of South Africa, the state actively compelled strict separation of the segments and the maintenance of parallel, rather than merely supplementary, sets of institutions for each of them. Indeed, South Africa's pluralism could be said to be multiply segmented. Its primary segmentation was into racially defined, castelike groups, one of which—the whites—was in all respects dominant, but all of which possessed parallel, if unequal, sets of institutions. Its secondary segmentation divided even the dominant group into Afrikaners and English-speakers (in a ratio of about three to two) by compelling further institutional duplication in certain spheres, particularly language and education.

Jewish immigrants to South Africa belonged from the outset to the privileged white segment and normally lived their lives within its confines. Exempt by virtue of skin color from the discrimination suffered by all nonwhites, they enjoyed full civic rights in the parliamentary democracy of the whites. Outside of the economic sphere in which, in common with all whites, they related to the other segments of society as masters to servants

⁴For a fuller discussion see Gideon Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience (1910–1967)* (Cape Town, 1980), 1–4. Cf. Elazar and Medding, *Jewish Communities in Frontier Societies*, 211–13.

or as employers to employees, they would never normally participate in any social or cultural institutions whatsoever with nonwhites.

Since the privileged white segment was itself culturally dualistic and of inchoate national identity, the circumstances were highly conducive to the preservation of a separate Jewish group identity. The Jews certainly became acculturated to the white part of society, but it was overwhelmingly the English segment which served as their reference group. However, the most formative factor in the country's history proved to be not the English but the Afrikaners, descendants of the seventeenth-century Dutch settlers, who were marked by an organic national consciousness, Calvinist religiosity, and a sharp sense of grievance against British imperialism. Consequently, the pull of acculturation, with its attendant erosion of distinctive Jewish identity, was considerably weaker than in England itself, where English culture was indigenous and unchallenged. Nor was it as strong as in the United States, where a new all-embracing American identity exerted a powerful attraction. There was, in fact, no unhyphenated South Africanism—no agreed-upon, all-inclusive identity equivalent to that provided by the concept of being “British” or “American.” Hence, considerably more leeway remained for Jews to retain their distinctive identity, not only in the religious sense but also as far as the national element—expressed through Zionism—was concerned.

Jewish Political Orientations Prior to Enforced Apartheid

From the beginnings of a significant Jewish presence in South Africa—and this can be dated to the last quarter of the nineteenth century—the pattern of their political involvement reflected their acculturation mainly to the English-speaking segment of society. Most of the Anglo-Jews involved in politics at the municipal and parliamentary levels, both before and immediately after the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, were attached to the pro-British imperial parties.⁵ At that time, when people spoke of the “race question” they usually meant the conflict between Boer (Afrikaner) and Briton. Within that context, by the 1920s Jews tended to identify mainly with the centrist South African party led by the former Boer generals Louis Botha and Jan Christiaan Smuts. This party followed a policy of conciliation between the Afrikaners and the English and looked toward the molding of a united, bilingual (white) South Africanism. Ever since the British government's Balfour Declaration of November 1917, favoring the development of a Jewish national home in Palestine, in the making of which Jan Christiaan Smuts played a role as a member of the

⁵For the period prior to the creation of the Union of South Africa, see Saron and Hotz, *Jews in South Africa*, 179–212; also Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 61–73.

imperial war cabinet, Jews had held him in high regard. This sentiment, in turn, reinforced their support for his conciliatory, centrist political position. In a major realignment of political forces that took place in the early 1930s, the Afrikaner nationalist leader J. B. M. Hertzog combined forces with Smuts to form the United party. One segment of the nationalists, however, did not agree with this fusion and, under Daniel F. Malan, split off in 1934 to form what was called the "Gesuiwerde" (purified) National party. As minister of the interior in 1930, Malan had introduced the Quota Act, which greatly restricted further Jewish immigration to South Africa. Moreover, his new party succumbed to anti-Semitic influences largely emanating from Nazi Germany. From 1933 until well after the Second World War, pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic groups proliferated in South Africa. The "Jewish problem" became a political issue, and widespread agitation against a loophole in the Quota Act culminated in the Aliens Act of 1937, which halted the entry of Jews fleeing from Hitler's Germany. By 1938 the Afrikaner nationalist opposition headed by Dr. Malan was campaigning on a platform that demanded total prohibition of Jewish immigration and even the imposition of a quota system directed against Jews in commerce and the professions. In these circumstances, all Jewish candidates for political election and the entire Jewish public were clearly associated with Jan Smuts's wing of the United party (with the exception of a lesser number who supported the small Labor party). Furthermore, the Jewish Board of Deputies, intensely engaged in the defense of the Jewish community against anti-Semitic defamation, even departed somewhat from its traditional policy of noninvolvement in politics and lent discreet support to a liberal group centered on the personality of Smuts's political lieutenant, Jan Hofmeyr.⁶

When Hertzog and Smuts split in 1939 over the question of whether South Africa should enter the war on Britain's side against Germany, it was a foregone conclusion that Jews would lend their support overwhelmingly to the Smuts wing of the party, which conducted South Africa through the war period in alliance with Britain. Under Smuts as premier a Jew reached cabinet rank, for the first and only time to this day—Henry Gluckman, who became minister of health in 1945. In light of the Afrikaner National party's attitude toward Jews, they contemplated its victory over Smuts's party in the elections of May 1948 with great trepidation.

⁶See Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 152–55. The term "liberal" is used here and throughout this study in its customary South African sense. In Hofmeyr's time this connoted opposition to Nazi influences, the upholding of civil liberties, and the desire to uplift the underprivileged sections of the population and alleviate discrimination and the indignities that were their lot. After 1948, liberals generally meant those who were actively concerned to abolish racial discrimination and to extend equal civic rights to nonwhites within the existing parliamentary system. See Janet Robertson, *Liberalism in South Africa 1948–1963* (Oxford, 1971).

Throughout the period until 1948, very few Jews showed political concern that transcended the interests of the white group. Indeed, when there was an incidental convergence of Jewish and Indian concerns over proposed immigration legislation which, although primarily aimed at stopping Indians from coming to South Africa, would also have hampered the free flow of Jewish immigration, Jewish representatives were at pains to dissociate their case from that of the Indians.⁷ This detachment from the fate of the Indians, who in some respects suffered from disabilities similar to those that applied to Jews in the Russian Pale of Settlement under czarist rule, characterized the Jewish community's political orientation within South African society at that juncture. Preoccupied as they were with their own interests and advancement in a white societal environment not free from anti-Semitism, they showed little concern for the underprivileged racial groups, not even for the Indians whose fate occasionally touched theirs.

At the same time, however—and this too was characteristic—Jews predominated among those few whites who were dissenters and took up the cause of the underprivileged masses. This was especially marked in the struggle for the rights of Indians led by Mohandas K. Gandhi from 1906 until 1914, in which he developed his doctrine of *satyagraha*, later to be employed with empire-shaking effect in India itself. The closest of Gandhi's white associates were in fact Jews, notably Henry Polak, who had come from England, and Hermann Kallenbach, who was Lithuanian-born but had qualified as an architect in Germany. Differences of opinion over the question whether Jews had a moral imperative to support the cause of the Indians or whether Jewish interests rather dictated that they not deviate from the behavior of other whites already encapsulated the controversy, which remained substantially the same thereafter. Polak, for example, explained that he had been drawn into the Indian *satyagraha* struggle "as a Jew who has tried to remember that Judaism is a matter not only of belief but also of action." He said that after coming to South Africa and learning about the Indian problem there, he had realized that "this was the Jewish problem all over again," for there was not a single argument advanced against Indians which had not already been urged against Jews in one or another European country. He was ashamed at the failure of Jews in South Africa to champion the Indians' immigration rights, while defending their own. Drawing a parallel with discrimination against the Jews in czarist Russia, he complained that "either in ignorance or by design, Jews have lent themselves to, or at least not openly dissociated themselves from, racial

⁷This convergence of Indian and Jewish immigration problems occurred in 1902, 1911–13, and 1924. See Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 76–80, 90.

persecution." The only consolation he found as a Jew was "that those non-Indians who have taken a leading part in the effort to expose and do away with this persecution are most of them members of our faith."⁸

As for the Litvak immigrant generation in South Africa, they were generally too preoccupied with their economic integration into the country to be concerned with the problems of the social system as a whole. Gauged by the adaptiveness of Jews from Eastern Europe to the codes of behavior underlying the castelike separation of the races and the norms, legal and customary, of white domination, it is doubtful whether their own experiences of discrimination and persecution in the Russian Pale of Settlement had as ennobling an effect upon them as is sometimes imagined. Indeed, most Jewish immigrants quickly became accustomed to regarding blacks as inferiors fit solely to be servants and unskilled laborers.⁹ Yet even among these immigrants there were some early manifestations of revulsion over the indignities and exploitation to which blacks were subjected. In 1917 a Yiddish-speaking group was formed within the South African International Socialist League, the forerunner of the South African Communist party, which rejected all distinctions based on color and recognized only class differences. Moreover, an early Zionist-socialist group, Poalei Zion, formed in 1918, evinced deep sympathy for the oppressed black masses. Still another organized Jewish group which nurtured a leftist-oriented opposition to the South African societal system was the Yiddisher Arbeter Club. It existed from 1928 to 1948, and its membership overlapped somewhat with the similarly aligned Afrikaner Geserd that functioned in the 1930s.¹⁰ In the late 1930s and 1940s the Zionist Socialist party, which formed an integral part of the South African Zionist Federation, also evinced concern for the cause of the black population and participated to a degree in some left-wing alignments.¹¹

⁸See the London *Jewish Chronicle*, Sept. 5, 1913. On Gandhi's Jewish associates, see Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, trans. V. G. Desai (Stanford Academic Reprints, 1954); also Gideon Shimoni, *Gandhi, Satyagraha and the Jews* (Leonard Davis Institute of International Relations of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1977).

⁹See Leibl Feldman, *Yidden in Johannesburg* (Yiddish) (Johannesburg, 1956), 241-46; also Michael Pesah Grossman, "A Study of the Trends and Tendencies of Hebrew and Yiddish Writing in South Africa Since Their Beginnings in the Early Nineties of the Last Century to 1930" (unpublished D.Phil. diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1973), 347-49.

¹⁰See Feldman, *Yidden in Johannesburg*, and also his *Yidden in Dorem Afrika* (Yiddish) (Wilno, 1937), 102-16; also Taffy Adler, "Lithuania's Diaspora: The Johannesburg Jewish Workers' Club 1928-1948," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1979):70-92; Evangelos Mantzaris, "From the History of Bundist Activity in South Africa," *Bulletin of the Bund Archives of the Jewish Labour Movement*, no. 3/31 (Winter 1981-82):1-3.

¹¹See Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 188-92.

Political Involvement of Jews Under Apartheid

The ascent of the Afrikaner nationalists to power in 1948 was a critical turning point in the history of South Africa and also for the Jewish community. It inaugurated a new era of anxieties and moral dilemmas. The innovative aspect of Malan's new government lay not in the invention of the system of white domination and racial segregation—this long preceded Malan's ascent to power—but rather in its ideological rationalization and in the institution of far-reaching social engineering to fortify it against the winds of change in Africa. The term "apartheid" entered political usage in the mid-1940s. Although at its crudest level it signified the preservation of *baasskap*, meaning white domination in all aspects of South African society, it underwent a steady process of ideological refinement. Hendrik Verwoerd made the major contribution to the process, starting in 1950 when he first became minister of native affairs ("native" then being the term used for blacks), through his ascent to the premiership in 1958, and until an assassin took his life in 1966. At its most refined level, apartheid purported to be a regulated system of race relations that would guarantee white self-preservation while at the same time providing parallel "separate development" for all the racial groups comprising South African society.

As a program of action, apartheid meant reinforcement of white domination of the political and economic life of the country. It also meant systematization of social and residential separation between the various racial groups on the basis of racial classification of the population. At the same time, it purported to provide frameworks, institutional and territorial, for the proposed separate development of each racial group. Accordingly, measures were taken throughout the 1950s to remove residual irregularities in the political system, such as the long-standing right enjoyed by enfranchised coloreds in the Cape to vote for Parliament on a common voters' roll with whites. Similarly, segregation became more stringently enforced in public places and services, such as railways, buses, and parks. Controls over black migration to the towns were significantly tightened, and harsh measures were taken against those who broke the rules. Job reservation (disqualifying nonwhites from certain jobs) was systematized, and separate industrial conciliation machinery was instituted.

In the field of black education, control was transferred to the government, which sought to withhold from blacks such education as might fit them for positions in society which they were in any case not allowed to hold. Similarly, blacks were now denied access to those English-language universities which had previously admitted them along with whites and were directed to separate colleges that were created for the various racial groups, under strict governmental supervision. At the same time, long-term planning was instituted for the consolidation of territories historically associated

with the various black tribes into projected "homelands." All urban blacks were ultimately to hold citizenship and political rights in the respective homelands of their particular ethnic groups, rather than in the white state of South Africa. This aspect of the policy was called "grand" apartheid, in contrast to the "petty" apartheid of segregated services, pass laws, and the like.

The enormous disruption and suffering resulting from the apartheid system aroused bitter opposition. Ranged against it were an array of black, colored, and Indian political movements, supported by a number of white liberals and radicals, some struggling to reform, others to overthrow, the societal system. Under the leadership of the African National Congress, whose founding dated back to 1912, nonviolent opposition swelled to unprecedented proportions. The 1952 Defiance Campaign openly violated apartheid laws, with the protesters allowing themselves to be arrested. A second wave of protest led to a "Congress of the People" in 1955, and a third wave to the famous Sharpeville demonstration of March 1960, in which the police opened fire on the crowd, killing 69 people and wounding 180.

To this unrest the government reacted with an escalating series of repressive measures. Thousands of protesters of all racial groups were arrested, and hundreds were put on trial and charged with plotting the violent overthrow of the state. It was at this point that the African National Congress and its offshoot, the Pan-Africanist Congress, went underground and launched a campaign of violence.

Apart from the effect of these dramatic events upon the lives of Jews simply as white citizens of South Africa, they had significant consequences for South African Jewry as a community. The reason was the extraordinary prominence of Jewish individuals in the white opposition to the regime of apartheid. Throughout this period Jewish names kept appearing in every facet of the struggle: among reformist liberals; in the radical Communist opposition; in the courts, whether as defendants or as counsel for the defense; in the lists of persons banned (i.e., placed in political quarantine); and among those who fled the country to evade arrest. The prominence of Jews was particularly marked in the course of the great Treason Trial, involving 156 people of all races, which received wide media attention throughout the second half of the 1950s. Twenty-three of those who were put on trial were white, and more than half of them were Jews. Leading the defense was advocate Israel Maisels, who was also a prominent Jewish communal figure. After dragging on for five years, the trial ended in March 1961; the prosecution finally conceded defeat and all the accused were released.

As the battered opposition forces retreated into underground activities, resorting to the use of violence, the government reacted with emergency

legislation of an even more drastic nature, notably the notorious "90-day clause" enacted in 1963, which permitted 90 days' detention without either the need for a warrant or recourse to the courts. In this phase of the conflict the prominent involvement of individual Jews was even more in evidence. Most dramatic were the circumstances of the "Rivonia Arrests" of July 1963, in which leaders of the African National Congress underground were captured. Of the 17 people arrested, 5 were white, all of them Jews. The dramatic effect of this arrest was exceeded only by its sequel: in August, while awaiting trial in a Johannesburg prison cell, four of the prisoners made a spectacular escape. Two were Jews, Arthur Goldreich and Harold Wolpe; the latter settled in London, the former in Israel.

Reacting to this prominence of Jews in the opposition, the Afrikaans press bristled with editorial observations and letters to the editor charging or insinuating that Jews were unsympathetic to the Afrikaners' legitimate political aspirations and that all too many Jews were responsible for liberal trouble-mongering and Communist subversion. Nor were the critics satisfied by declarations of the Jewish Board of Deputies reiterating that the Jewish community had neither collective political allegiance nor responsibility for the political actions of individual Jewish citizens.¹²

It must be borne in mind that the involvement of Jews in the opposition to the apartheid system, notwithstanding its public salience, actually reflected the attitudes of only a very small segment of the total Jewish population. With compelling inherent socioeconomic factors reinforcing their position within the white racial group, for the most part Jews conformed to the norms of English-speaking whites. Empirical studies published in the 1970s indicated that the political preferences of Jews tended to be much the same as those of English-speaking non-Jews of the same socioeconomic status. Factors such as level of education and family income appeared to be more important determinants of political preference than the quality of their Jewishness. On the other hand, some pertinent sociological research on Jewish youth conducted earlier, in 1959, led to the conclusion that "Jews are more favourably disposed towards Natives [blacks], Coloureds and Indians than are the members of any other White group. Jews were found to be consistently more tolerant than other groups in their attitudes to non-Whites."¹³

¹²Ibid., 228-30.

¹³Henry Lever, "The Jewish Voter in South Africa," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2 (Oct. 1979). See also H. Lever and O. J. M. Wagner, "Ethnic Preferences of Jewish Youth in Johannesburg," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 9 (June 1967):34-37; and Henry Lever, *Ethnic Attitudes of Johannesburg Youth* (Johannesburg, 1968). Since these works, there has been no published research of note on Jewish political behavior. Nor has there been research on the sociology of the community since the publication of Allie Dubb's *Jewish South Africans: A Sociological View of the Johannesburg Jewish Community* (Rhodes University, Grahamstown,

One rough indicator of Jewish political behavior may be found by examining the allegiance of Jewish candidates for election. It appears that throughout the two decades following the 1948 elections the majority of candidates for Parliament, and almost all of those who gained election, belonged to the centrist United party, which followed the political tradition of Jan Smuts. In 1948, for instance, all five of the Jews elected to Parliament belonged to the United party. It should be noted that at that time there already was a further option provided by the small Liberal party, which advocated abolition of apartheid and a discrimination-free, multiracial democracy, whereas the United party, while opposed to apartheid laws, still upheld white political supremacy in all essentials. Jews were certainly prominent in the Liberal party, but gauged by the record in a number of specific constituencies known to have a high proportion of Jewish voters, most Jews still preferred the United party.¹⁴

The Liberal party did not survive long in the political climate of South Africa under Verwoerd and his successor, John Vorster. Multiracial political parties having been forbidden by law, it disbanded in 1968. However, a rather more equivocal liberal option had emerged in 1959 out of the ranks of the United party itself. This was the Progressive party, which, by stages, absorbed other fragments of the disintegrating United party to become finally the Progressive Federal party in 1977. While advocating the abolition of apartheid, in its initial stages the Progressive party spoke of a universal educational qualification for the franchise in a federally ordered, multiracial democracy. The Progressives immediately attracted a considerable segment of Jewish supporters. Two of the five United party members of Parliament who were Jews opted to become Progressives. One of these, Helen Suzman, was reelected in 1961 and remained the sole Progressive member of Parliament for the next three sessions. That the centrist United party still had Jewish support was shown by the fact that five, two, and three Jewish United party members took their seats in Parliament in 1961, 1966, and 1970, respectively. In the 1974 elections Helen Suzman was still the only successful Jewish Progressive party candidate, and there were three successful Jewish United party candidates. However, the United party disintegrated during the ensuing parliamentary session; thereafter, barring a few Jewish National party candidates who repeatedly failed to get elected, all Jewish candidates stood for the Progressives. By 1980 the Progressive Federal party was clearly the one with the greatest Jewish affiliation, and in the 1981 elections all four Jews elected were Progressives.

1977). An illuminating theoretical analysis taking inductive account of the South African case is Peter Y. Medding, "Towards a General Theory of Jewish Political Interests and Behaviour," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 19, no. 2 (Dec. 1977):115-41.

¹⁴See Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 303, 304.

Jewish Political Responses to Apartheid in Transition

By the mid-1960s the radical onslaught on the apartheid regime had virtually been suppressed, allowing the system a further lease on life. Although it was again convulsed by the Soweto outburst in 1976, another apparent respite followed, lasting until the great resurgence of resistance that began to envelop the country in 1985. Under B. J. Vorster's premiership, from 1966 to 1978, implementation of "grand" apartheid continued apace. Forced resettlement of population in the homelands, mostly under appalling conditions, encompassed as many as 3.5 million people. Three of the homelands accepted the offer of "independence," while the others remained only self-governing. In other respects, however, this was a period of transition in the apartheid policy. Signs of dissonance began to appear as increasing numbers of urbanized Afrikaners became upwardly mobile in business, manufacturing, and professional occupations.¹⁵ Pragmatic tendencies began to erode ideological dogmatism, and Afrikaner businessmen, no less than their English counterparts, began to balk at the dysfunctional aspects of apartheid in the economic sphere. These were primarily the failure to satisfy industry's hunger for more permanent and skilled black workers and the limited consumer capacity of blacks.

Against this background, a division emerged between two main ideological factions which came to be loosely labeled as *verkramptes* (narrow-minded) and *verligtes* (enlightened). In general terms, adherents of the former were characterized by rigid insistence upon Afrikaner national exclusivism and domination of the South African polity and by uncompromising resistance to modification of the apartheid system in accommodation to criticism from outside the country. *Verligtes* tended to relinquish a measure of Afrikaner exclusivism for the sake of more white unity and to adopt an open-minded attitude to modifications of apartheid which, while not substantially altering long-term goals of "separate development," would soften the hard image of apartheid. Examples of such modifications that aroused the ire of *verkramptes* were mixed sports, admission of black diplomats to the country, mixed audiences in theaters, and the general amelioration of "petty apartheid" measures that offended the dignity of nonwhites more than was necessary for implementation of basic policy.

In the late 1960s this division of opinion led to a split in the ranks of the National party, the *verkramptes* forming the Herstigste (reconstituted) National party, which became the core of the Afrikaner backlash against the *verligte* thrust of Prime Minister Vorster and even more so of his successor, P. W. Botha, who took over in September 1978. In due course an additional

¹⁵On these changes in the Afrikaner sector see Heribert Adam and Hermann Giliomee, *The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power* (Cape Town, 1979), 104-27, 217-21.

wave of right-wing reaction led to the foundation of the Conservative party (in 1982), which succeeded in becoming the main opposition party in the all-white chamber of Parliament when it gained more seats than the Progressive Federal party in the 1987 elections.

Having already undergone considerable refinement in Verwoerd's time, the rhetoric of apartheid was further transformed by *verligte* ideological ferment. Racist suppositions were disavowed, blacks were no longer spoken of pejoratively, and less emphasis was placed on the specters of miscegenation and social mixing of the races. By the mid-1970s, *verligtes* tended to exchange faith in separate development as a total ideological solution for more pragmatic considerations of economic reality and ethnic survival. They inclined not only toward removal of petty apartheid discrimination and such racist legislation as the Immorality Act (which made interracial sex a punishable offense), but even toward relinquishing job reservation for whites.

Under P. W. Botha, who served as prime minister from 1978 until 1984 and then, under the new constitution, became state president with executive powers, these tendencies gathered momentum and culminated in a series of reforms. However, with the introduction of emergency regulations to cope with the widespread black unrest that erupted in 1985, the momentum of reform flagged. The centerpiece of these reforms was the new constitution instituted in 1984. It replaced the Westminster-model system with a new tricameral parliament, with one chamber each for the whites, the coloreds, and the Indians. This ostensible step toward political power sharing was greatly flawed, however, not alone by the calculated preeminence of the white chamber but, even more importantly, by the total exclusion of the black (African) majority of South Africa's population. The channel for black political expression was relegated to the various "homelands," four of which had by then accepted independence, while the remaining six were self-governing. As for South Africa's vast population of urban blacks, little more was held out to them than local urban councils with authority limited to what the current lexicon of reformed apartheid referred to as their "own affairs."

At the same time, other specific reforms modifying the apartheid structure erected by earlier Afrikaner governments were introduced, which, in the context of Afrikaner political traditions, certainly represented far-reaching change. Thus, the South African government permitted the creation of legal black trade unions, modified job reservation practices and the pass system, and even took the odious article 16 of the Immorality Act and the Mixed Marriages Act off the statute books. The cumulative effect of these reforms signified the virtual dismantling of most of the petty apartheid dogmatically erected in the first two decades of National party rule. Yet,

in practice, it could not be said that apartheid had ceased to exist, since the hard core of apartheid legislation, namely classification of the population according to race and residential segregation, still remained intact—although less rigidly enforced than in the past.

Be that as it may, the ideological rhetoric of government policy was certainly transformed. This rhetoric, and the delicate balance between change and continuity which it veiled, may be illustrated from the National party's electoral campaign of May 1987. The party declared that it would continue the policy of reforms, but only by its own lights and not in surrender to sanctions and threats. It upheld "individual freedom without race discrimination" but predicated this on preserving "the group character" of South African society. Moreover, the National party affirmed that "separate residential areas and voters' rolls for the various groups" still remained official policy. It promised political "power sharing," but qualified this as "own decision making on own affairs and joint decision making on matters of common concern, without the domination of any group by another." The party contrasted this formula for power sharing with the policy of the Progressives, which, it declared, "amounts to a handing over of power."¹⁶

The Progressive Federal party, for its part, in 1987 advocated "an open society, free from statutory apartheid," to be shaped by a national convention comprising the acknowledged leaders of all sections of the population. This implied the inclusion of African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela, who would have to be released from prison. The party would negotiate a new federal constitution which would not exclude the blacks, as the government's constitutional changes had done, and would not divide the population on the basis of racially classified "own affairs."

On the other side of the political spectrum, the Conservative party, born of the right-wing reaction of Afrikaners to Botha's reformist policy, rejected "power sharing" out of hand, advocated partition, and demanded "the restoration of separate development in practice, especially with regard to white residential areas and public amenities." It called for the retention of all apartheid laws, including those that forbade miscegenation and mixed marriages. The Conservatives, furthermore, affirmed what they called "Christian white civilization," although at the same time claiming to "respect freedom of conscience and worship for others."

Although Jews were aware, for the most part, of the still inherent moral defects of reformed apartheid, the fact that it combined renunciation of racist premises with an appeal for the right of the whites to ensure their own survival and welfare against black majority rule struck a responsive chord

¹⁶The quotations in this and the following paragraphs are from pamphlets and brochures issued by the parties during the election campaign of May 1987.

among more and more of them, along with other English speakers. This tendency was perhaps best illustrated in the views of Israel Pinshaw, who was appointed to the State President's Council in 1984. Pinshaw was as identifying a Jew as any in the Jewish community but also an active member of the National party. It is a telling testimony to the transformation of National party political discourse that Pinshaw could depict his role in its ranks as that of a Jew inspired by Jewish values, which were solicitous of human rights irrespective of color or creed, but at the same time insistent upon ethnic-cultural particularism (one may read for this, "own affairs") as a legitimate structural basis for society. Pinshaw claimed that, as a Jew, he urged the National party leadership to move faster and more convincingly toward reforms. In the Jewish press he was reported as stating:¹⁷

I sincerely believe that the philosophy of the National party has completely changed over the years. . . . As a Jew I find bigotry and discrimination repulsive and I believe that through the efforts of the National party accommodation can be achieved amongst our various race groups . . . and as a Jew I will endeavour to see that the decisions to which I am a party will be so designed that they are equitable, just and fair.

Already in the parliamentary elections of 1977 there were indications that the National party was gaining credence in the eyes of Jews. Against a background of some opinion polls that indicated almost a doubling of English-speaking supporters since 1974, the party sponsored the candidacy of a Jew, Abe Hoppenstein, in a Johannesburg constituency (Bezuidenhout) known to have a considerable Jewish population. Hoppenstein, a lawyer by profession, was a National party member of some 20 years' standing and at the same time an identifying Jew associated, *inter alia*, with the Revisionist party of Zionism. In 1974 he was appointed South Africa's trade commissioner in Israel and shortly after that became political counselor in South Africa's Washington embassy. Fresh from that post, he entered the electoral lists to challenge an Afrikaner candidate of the Progressive Federal party, Japie Basson, who had undergone a leftward odyssey in politics after expulsion from the National party. Hoppenstein declared: "Voting for the National party is the best way to provide for our survival in the face of pressure from abroad. We are the only party that can and will bring about effective, meaningful change."¹⁸ In the end, although Basson was elected, he gained a mere 50 votes more than Hoppenstein, and it was evident that

¹⁷*Jewish Herald*, Nov. 27, 1984. Also the author's interview with I. Pinshaw, Sept. 1986. The State President's Council functioned as an advisory body under terms of the reformed constitution. It had 60 members, 41 of whom were white, 13 colored, and 6 Indian. Pinshaw was its only Jewish member until 1987, when he was joined by another Jewish appointee, S. Spilken.

¹⁸The source is newspaper clippings in South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives (hereafter BD, and in accordance with its classification system), 311.12 and 303.12.

a considerable number of Jewish votes had been cast for the latter. Although his defeat meant that there was still no Jew on the National party benches in Parliament—whereas five Jewish candidates for the Progressives took their seats in the Parliament of 1977—Hoppenstein's close miss was a sign of the times.

To be sure, it was also indicative of the political orientations of Jews that Hoppenstein's candidacy stirred quite a controversy within the Jewish community, with members of the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) declaring that support of National party policies was a travesty of Jewish ethics and deprecating what they termed Hoppenstein's "contorted rationalizations" in justifying his actions.¹⁹

The increase in the number of Jews tending to vote for the National party was evident in subsequent contests. One was a municipal election in the affluent and largely Jewish ward of Houghton, Johannesburg, an electoral district that had for many years been represented in Parliament by the Progressives' most famous personality, Helen Suzman. In March 1984 the National party ventured to challenge the Progressives, putting up Israel Pinshaw as a candidate. Although the Progressives won the election decisively, with 1,310 votes, Pinshaw managed to gain 573. It is reasonable to assume that most of these votes were cast by Jews.²⁰

In the municipal by-election in the Bellevue-Judith's Paarl ward of Johannesburg in February 1986, in a contest between two Jewish candidates—the Progressives' Tony Leon and the National party's Sam Bloomberg—the Progressives just scraped through with a margin of 39 votes. Since it was reliably estimated that some 35 percent of the eligible voters were Jews, there can be little doubt that many of them voted for the National party candidate. During the contest emotions ran high in the Jewish community: on the one hand, National party posters were defaced; on the other, ultra-Orthodox Jewish residents in the area, mostly elderly persons, were conspicuous in support of the National party's candidate.²¹

Notwithstanding these indications of growing Jewish support for the National party, the main political orientation of Jews was still toward the Progressive Federal party. This may be adduced, in part, from the prominence of Jews in that party's active membership and among its candidates for election. It should be recalled that on the eve of the May 1987 elections all four Jewish members of the white chamber of Parliament were Progressives. At the provincial and municipal levels the prominence of Jews in the

¹⁹See *S.A. Jewish Times*, Oct. 26, Nov. 9, Nov. 23, 1977. Hoppenstein returned to the South African Foreign Service. In 1979 he was appointed consul general in Washington, and in 1980 he took charge of the South African consulate in New York.

²⁰The source is newspaper clippings in BD, 199; 311.12; 100.4A; and 313.12.

²¹*Ibid.*

Progressive Federal party was even more marked. For example, in the March 1977 municipal elections, Jews accounted for 19 of the 38 Progressive candidates.²² In 1986, 16 of the Progressives' representatives on the Johannesburg City Council, as well as the mayor himself, were Jews.²³

At the parliamentary level, the name of Helen Suzman had been the very symbol of opposition to the apartheid system for more than a quarter of a century. She was the South African-born daughter of a Jewish immigrant from Lithuania who prospered in his new country. After a spell in academe teaching economics, she entered Parliament in 1952 as a United party member for the affluent Houghton district in Johannesburg, which had always had a significant Jewish voting population. In 1958 Suzman participated in the first of a series of splits from the United party that ultimately led to the formation of the Progressive Federal party in 1977. For 13 years, from 1961 to 1974, Suzman was the sole Progressive representative in Parliament. Singlehandedly, relentlessly, and with superb analytic prowess, she assailed the apartheid system from the floor of Parliament, where she also had to endure an occasional anti-Semitic taunt.

Suzman, being Jewish, willy-nilly symbolized the relatively liberal stance of South African Jews for people both in and out of South Africa. However, it is perhaps her fellow Progressive Harry Schwarz who came closer to epitomizing the normative orientation of politically aware South African Jews. For whereas Suzman had never taken particular interest in Jewish communal life, Schwarz had been actively involved and, indeed, could be regarded as one of the community's foremost leaders. Born in Cologne, Germany, in 1924, Schwarz came to South Africa in 1934. During the Second World War he served as an officer in the South African Air Force. Afterward he practiced law and engaged in business and merchant banking. After entering Parliament in 1974 as a representative of the United party, Schwarz broke away to found the Reform party, which joined the Progressives, and went on to form the Progressive Federal party in 1977. Within the South African political spectrum, Schwarz was generally identified with the conservative wing of the Progressive Federal party, at least on matters

²²At that stage the name was Progressive Reform party. The United party had not yet disbanded, and 9 out of 31 of its candidates in the municipal elections were Jews. BD, 401.6. See especially the *Jewish Herald*, Feb. 8, 1977.

²³There was a remarkable prominence of Jews in municipal politics, reflected particularly in the number of Jewish mayors. In the 31 years between 1956 and 1987, 12 Jews were elected mayor of Johannesburg; in the 19 years between 1968 and 1987, 8 were elected. (Mayors served a one-year period in office.) In Cape Town, of the 57 aldermen and councillors who held office in the city council from 1976 to 1987, 19 were Jews, and 4 of them had served as mayor in that 11-year period. In mid-1987, 12 of the 34 incumbent councillors were Jews. BD, 100.5A. See also Nathan Mendelow, "Johannesburg's Eighteen Jewish Mayors," *Jewish Affairs*, July 1966, 18-31.

of law and order and the need for military conscription. Much as Suzman was consistently returned to Parliament by the Houghton electorate, so Schwarz was repeatedly successful in the Yeoville constituency of Johannesburg, which also had a considerable Jewish population.

Beginning in the mid-seventies, Schwarz played an increasingly important role on the Jewish Board of Deputies, serving as chairman of its committee on international relations and often acting as spokesman for the board to Jewish agencies abroad. He argued that violent change could ultimately lead to a nondemocratic regime that was not compatible either with Jewish ethics or with the legitimate interests of the Jewish community. He emphasized that Jews needed not only a democratic society for all, but also "the right to follow [their] own religion and love for Israel freely." Typical of his many expressions on this matter was the following:²⁴

To be against apartheid is one thing, but what do we want in its place? What will the post-apartheid regime be like? Will it be a free world type democracy in which human rights are respected and minorities protected? Will it be a regime under which South African Jews will, like other citizens, have religious freedom and under which our communal institutions can be maintained and our love for Zion expressed?

The developing trends in Jewish political orientation were rather more clearly confirmed in the June 1987 general election to the white chamber of Parliament. It was still the Progressive Federal party that fielded the majority of Jewish candidates for election—five out of seven—and that gained most of the votes of Jews in districts known to have large Jewish concentrations.²⁵ Only three Jews gained election—Harry Schwarz and Helen Suzman for the Progressive Federal party and Sam Bloomberg for the National party, the latter thereby becoming the first Jew ever to be elected to Parliament as a representative of the National party.²⁶ As mentioned earlier, Bloomberg had been narrowly defeated when he contested a Johannesburg municipal by-election as a National party candidate in 1986. He now succeeded in the Johannesburg constituency of Bezuidenhout, whose considerable body of Jewish voters, although not predominant,

²⁴Quoted in the *Zionist Record and S.A. Jewish Chronicle*, Dec. 27, 1985, 11; Feb. 6, 1987, 5.

²⁵Four electoral districts had major concentrations of Jewish voters: Houghton, Yeoville, and Bezuidenhout in Johannesburg, and Sea Point in Cape Town (represented by Colin Eglin, the leader of the Progressive Federal party). Only in Bezuidenhout was the Progressive candidate defeated. The Jewish candidates were listed in the *Jewish Times*, May 1, 1987, and the full election results were given in the *Cape Times*, May 8, 1987.

²⁶Another Jew, Theo Aronson, had preceded Bloomberg as a member of Parliament for the National party. However, he was not an elected member. Having suffered defeat when he stood for election in 1981 as a National party candidate, he was appointed to Parliament according to the terms of the new constitution of 1982. BD, 100.4A.

certainly contributed to the 60-percent majority gained by him. His fellow party candidate in the Cape, Esme Chait, was defeated in her constituency, but entered Parliament as a member nominated, under the terms of the constitution, by the National party. The total number of Jewish members of the white chamber thus remained at four, the same as at the close of the previous parliamentary session, but the fact that this number was now equally divided between the government party and the progressive opposition was surely indicative of the trends we have noted.

Yet another noteworthy trend was evident in the 1987 elections, affecting a part of the Jewish vote. Following the example of F. van Zyl Slabbert, who, about a year earlier, had resigned both from Parliament and from the chair of the Progressive Federal party to form the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa, some of the most fervent opponents of the government's policies chose to demonstrate their conviction that the white chamber of Parliament was irrelevant to the real issues facing the country by boycotting the election altogether.

Involvement of Jews in Social Action

The suppression of the radical opposition to the apartheid regime in the 1960s left most of the Jews involved in one or another branch of that opposition either in exile or in prison or under severe banning orders that placed them in political quarantine. Jewish individuals did not, however, fall away from what might be called the liberal-reformist opposition functioning within the bounds of South African laws. To be sure, even this form of opposition was subjected to harassment under the 1986 Emergency Regulations, resulting in new arrests and banning orders. At the English-speaking universities, Jewish students were prominent as opponents of the apartheid system within the leadership of the various Students' Representative Councils and the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). Some of these were at the same time actively involved in Zionist groups off and on the campus. Others, having been awakened to social awareness in the Zionist youth movements, severed their particularistic Jewish bonds and threw themselves wholly into the struggle for a transformed South African society.

Individual Jews were prominent across the entire spectrum of organizations and political groups engaged in the struggle against the government's policies and emergency powers, and on behalf of their victims. In recent years a broad array of new organizations and groups arose, often acting as thorns in the side of the government. The names of Jews were ubiquitous in the leadership of many of these, ranging from Lawyers for Human Rights, headed by Jules Browde, to the End Conscription Campaign, which demanded changes in the law regarding compulsory military service for

whites so that individuals could choose either not to serve in the black townships or do alternative national service.

One outstanding example of activity aimed at alleviating the iniquities of the system was the Legal Resources Center established in 1979 with private funds. It provided desperately needed legal services for thousands of victims of the day-to-day operation of the apartheid system. It also trained paralegal personnel in the elementary legal skills needed to help blacks cope with the maze of apartheid laws which governed their lives. The director and moving spirit of this entire legal aid enterprise was Arthur Chaskalson, who left a brilliant practice as senior counsel at the Johannesburg bar in order to dedicate himself to it.²⁷ Other Jews involved in the founding and progress of the center were Sydney Kentridge, widely regarded as the preeminent lawyer practicing in South Africa, and Basil Wunsh, who was also active in some Jewish organizations. By 1986 the center's staff had grown to some 20 lawyers, 2 paralegal assistants, 8 fellows, and more than 20 administrators. Illustrative of the center's far-reaching achievements were judgements in the cases of two ordinary working blacks, one of which established the right of certain migrant workers to qualify for permanent urban residence, and the other, that of certain black urban dwellers to have their families live with them.

The work of Arthur Chaskalson demonstrated a form of activity which, far more than direct political involvement, characterized the endeavors of Jewish individuals in numbers quite disproportionate to the size of the Jewish population. It was the activity of people born into the privileged status of whites but whose moral conscience drove them to dedicate themselves, within the parameters of what remained legal and possible, to the alleviation of the day-to-day indignities and deprivations inflicted by the apartheid system. At the same time, their efforts formed part of the broader struggle for the reform and ultimate abolition of that system.

Another example of a Jew involved in this manner was educator Franz Auerbach. The author of an academic study of prejudice in history textbooks and syllabi of white high schools, he served from 1981 to 1983 as president of the South African Institute of Race Relations, one of the great pillars of liberal values in South African society. In addition, Auerbach organized the teachers' program of the Funda Center, which provided black teachers with supplementary training.²⁸ Born in Germany, Auerbach fled with his family from the Nazis in 1937, when he was 14 years old. Concurrently with his tireless activities in the broader societal arena, he was active

²⁷BD, biographical files containing, *inter alia*, Rex Gibson's profile in *Optima* 34, no. 1 (Mar. 1986):32-35.

²⁸BD, biographical files.

on the Jewish Board of Deputies and other Jewish communal bodies, notably the South African Yad Vashem Foundation.

Auerbach drew parallels between the Nazi regime in Germany and apartheid. He argued that there was a key parallel in "the organization of a society in which the most important attribute of human beings is their race, as assigned by the state." In defense of similar comparisons made by Archbishop Tutu, Auerbach said that forced removal of black people to "homelands" where there was little food and work was an inhuman practice, even if in the South African case there was no intention of killing them. "The persistence of legally enforced race discrimination," Auerbach said, "makes a comparison between apartheid and Nazism a perfectly valid analogy. . . . In fact I have always held that the experience of the Holocaust obliged me to oppose racial discrimination, especially where it is enforced by law."²⁹

In the business sphere the role of Jews was inherently more ambiguous. Whether big business was a factor either in buttressing apartheid or undermining it was a moot point among academic analysts as well as political activists.³⁰ Be that as it may, in recent years Jews had been in the forefront of those businessmen who, out of enlightened economic self-interest as well as social concern, advocated the dismantling of apartheid restrictions. At the same time, of course, they vigorously called upon foreign corporations not to disinvest and boycott South Africa but rather to remain "constructively engaged" and add their weight to the strategy aimed at attaining change via the economy. In this regard, two particularly important Jewish businessmen were Raymond Ackerman, head of a flourishing chain of supermarkets, and Tony Bloom, head of the mammoth Premier Milling Group. In 1985 they took the lead in drawing up a manifesto signed by 92 of the country's top businessmen, calling for an end to apartheid and for government negotiations with black leaders, not excluding those in detention. Much to the chagrin of the government Bloom also formed a delegation of business leaders who met with African National Congress representatives in Lusaka.

Mendel Kaplan, a prominent businessman who was at the same time South African Jewry's single most important Jewish communal leader, authored a book on the historical role of the Jews in the South African economy, in which he averred that the solution of South African society's

²⁹See F. E. Auerbach's article in the *Rand Daily Mail*, Feb. 24, 1971, and his letter to the editor, *Rand Daily Mail*, Jan. 15, 1985, in defense of Archbishop Tutu's comparisons between apartheid and Nazi Germany.

³⁰See, e.g., F. A. Johnstone, "White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today," *African Affairs* 69, no. 274 (1970):124-40, and Merle Lipton, *Capitalism and Apartheid: South Africa 1910-1986* (London, 1985).

problems "will be dependent on the acceptance of every South African by his fellow South African with equality, irrespective of race or religion." Kaplan concluded his study with the statement that "if Jewish businessmen, in particular, fail to give leadership in the movement to abolish all discriminatory practices, they will be betraying their heritage in the country which gave the Jewish people their freedom and opportunities."³¹

Measured against the record of the Jewish community in the past, the most innovative development was the emergence in late 1985 of groups of Jews dedicated to collective Jewish expression of opposition to the apartheid system. In Cape Town one such group initially called itself Jews Against Apartheid, but, with a view to adopting a more positive, less provocative posture, soon changed it to Jews for Justice. Among its founders were Jewish individuals associated with various groups active in resistance to government policies, such as NUSAS and area committees of the United Democratic Front, a broad alignment comprising some 60 groups. At the outset, it also included members of the Habonim-Dror Zionist youth movement. At about the same time, a group of similar composition was founded in Johannesburg under the name Jews for Social Justice. The combined enrolled membership of these groups was only a few hundred, but their public meetings attracted up to a thousand participants.

What made these groups distinctively different in the South African Jewish experience was their attempted synthesis of two foci of identification—bold public protest against the apartheid system, on the one hand, and self-affirming Jewish identification, of which Zionism formed an intrinsic part, on the other. To be sure, the attempt to organize a collective Jewish voice in opposition to apartheid was not entirely without precedent. In the 1950s a minuscule and short-lived group called the Jewish Democratic Association had been formed by Michael Szur. It was a residual manifestation of the leftist Yiddish groups that were referred to earlier in this study. Much as the Jews for Justice groups were now doing, that association invoked the memory of recent Jewish suffering in Europe and argued that if Jews "complained justifiably that the people of the world did not rally to our defense," then "as a community we cannot hide ourselves behind the false slogan of neutrality and keep silent when other peoples are in distress." Unlike the contemporary Jews for Justice, however, the Jewish Democratic Association had upheld the diminutive legacy of leftist anti-Zionism. It had accused Zionism, among other charges, of propagating the false view that

³¹Mendel Kaplan, *Jewish Roots in the South African Economy* (Cape Town, 1986), 28, 389. Kaplan was a Jewish leader of international importance; he was treasurer of the World Jewish Congress, chairman of the board of trustees of the Keren Hayesod, and in June 1987 was elected chairman of the board of governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Jews were really no more than temporary sojourners in the Diaspora, thereby lulling them into passive acquiescence in apartheid.³²

In a newsletter appealing to Jews to join its ranks, Jews for Social Justice declared that it was intended to fill the need for a “united Jewish response” to the South African situation.³³

Our history of persecution imposes a special duty on us to protest any form of discrimination against any people. Judaism is a religion of faith expressed in action; therefore its teachings about human dignity and social justice make it unacceptable for us to be guilty of the complicity of silence in an oppressive society. . . . A vast proportion of the Jewish population does desire a just society and wishes to stake its claim to a future in a democratic South Africa. It is therefore essential for a united Jewish voice to be heard in the struggle for justice. . . . South African Jews are already choosing between leaving South Africa or adapting to changes. If Jews are sincere about staying in South Africa, but are fearful of the changes which must come, it is their responsibility to play a part in these changes and thus participate in the formulation of a new South Africa.

An example of the protests made by Jews for Justice on particular issues was that against the government’s legislation of June 1986, which gave the minister of law and order unlimited power to declare an “unrest area” without possibility of challenge by any court. “Our historical experience of persecution and oppression impels us to protest in the strongest terms against this Bill,” declared Jews for Social Justice. Another example was its protest against the further curtailment of individual freedom enforced by Section 50A of the Internal Security Act, which allowed the police to increase the period of detention without trial to 180 days. In Johannesburg, members of Jews for Social Justice joined a public demonstration against this legislation in June 1986, alongside the Black Sash (a veteran women’s social-action group), the Johannesburg Democratic Action Committee (JODAC), and the End Conscription Campaign.³⁴ In April 1987 Cape Town’s group held a “freedom seder” during Passover, addressed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu—his first to a public meeting under Jewish auspices. Despite a bomb threat, a thousand people came to hear him say, *inter alia*, that although Jews had been in the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle from the outset, South Africa’s blacks currently felt a sense of disappointment with the Jewish community because of Israel’s close ties with the white regime.

In March 1987 Johannesburg’s Jews for Social Justice participated in the founding of the Five Freedoms Forum, a broad grouping of about 25 white organizations opposed to apartheid, including the Progressive Federal

³²*Jewish Opinion: A Newsletter*, July 1954. This newsletter of the Jewish Democratic Association appeared monthly from Apr. 1954 until June 1962.

³³*Newsletter of Jews for Social Justice*, Nov. 17, 1985, in BD, 303.12.

³⁴Jews for Justice leaflet calling a protest meeting for June 8, 1986, in BD, *ibid*.

party, the Black Sash, JODAC, and NUSAS. This forum was oriented toward the white elections set for May 6, 1987. Similarly, Cape Town's Jews for Justice, while declaring that "the major source of change in South Africa is to be found in the extra-Parliamentary struggle," formulated an appeal "for those who wished to oppose apartheid by voting in the 1987 election" to support only those candidates who "oppose a social system based on statutory racial classification; oppose a legal system in which detention without trial forms an integral part; support a political system in which all South Africans will enjoy the same rights irrespective of colour and in which all will be able to be represented by persons of their own choice."³⁵

Some of the anti-apartheid forces with which the Jewish groups aligned themselves fell victim to bannings under the Emergency Regulations imposed in June 1986. Indeed, of the 22 political, religious, and communal groups with which Cape Town's Jews for Justice was associated at the outset of its involvement in assisting the destitute black inhabitants of the Crossroads squatter camp, all but Jews for Justice itself and the women's Black Sash were afterward muzzled. This may well indicate the authorities' perception that the Jewish group was not really dangerous.³⁶ Also, given the antagonistic attitude toward Jews evinced by some of the Muslim groups associated with the United Democratic Front and the fact that many members of Jews for Justice concurrently had other, more compelling political affiliations, this expression of Jewish social action bore the marks of an ephemeral phenomenon much like its kindred predecessors in the history of the community.

The Policy of the Jewish Board of Deputies

Turning from an analysis of the political orientations of Jewish individuals and groups to the Jewish community as an organized entity, it is the South African Jewish Board of Deputies that must now engage our attention. The board was recognized, by convention, as the representative organ of South African Jewry. Ironically, a retrospective survey of the official statements issued by the board since 1948 reveals an inverse relation between the harshness of the apartheid system and the daring of the board in criticizing it. When crudely racist apartheid was at its zenith in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the board's stance was at its most timid. However,

³⁵*Jews for Justice Newsletter*, no. 2, Apr. 1987, 3.

³⁶Those associated with Jews for Justice who experienced detention were concurrently active in other protest groups. For example, Lisa Seftel of Johannesburg, who was an organizing secretary of JODAC, an affiliate of the United Democratic Front, and Raymond Suttner, a university law lecturer who was an executive member of the United Democratic Front in the Transvaal.

as the ideology of apartheid became more refined and less overtly racist, and as its practice began to crack and reach a stage of near disintegration, the board's statements became progressively bolder and clearer in condemnation of apartheid.

From the inception of the Board of Deputies in 1912, its purposes were perceived in narrowly particularistic terms: to "watch and take action in all matters affecting the Jews in the southern portion of the continent of Africa."³⁷ Its honorary officers, generation after generation, never considered their terms of reference to include a collective Jewish response or contribution to the shaping of South African society as a whole. The board's record is best understood as a characteristic minority-group phenomenon of self-preservation. This dictated a policy of noninvolvement in politics: "that Jews participate in South African public life as citizens of South Africa and have no collective attitude to the political issues which citizens are called upon to decide."³⁸

The explicit justification most often proffered for not formulating a collective viewpoint was that it simply did not exist; that there was "as much diversity of political viewpoint in the Jewish community as in the general population." The implicit justification, more rarely enunciated, was that even if it were possible to formulate a single viewpoint, this would be ill-advised from the point of view of the community's self-interest.

Until 1948 the context in which the board navigated this policy was the intrawhite conflict between the centrist United party, associated with the name of Jan Smuts, and the Afrikaner nationalists, who evinced pro-German and anti-Semitic tendencies after 1933. In that context, as has already been mentioned, the board did align itself, at least discreetly, in the late 1930s with the liberal forces associated with Smuts's lieutenant, Jan Hofmeyr. However, this was hardly inconsistent with the fundamental policy of political noninvolvement, since it was motivated by the wish to resist the anti-Semitic forces in the Afrikaner nationalist camp, and only by association did it implicate the board in the broader political arena.³⁹

After 1948, in the wake of the National party's electoral victory—which was repeated at every election from that time on—and its enforcement of apartheid, the context widened to include issues that transcended intrawhite politics. The crucial question became whether one condoned or opposed a societal system based on legally enforced racial discrimination. Poignant moral dilemmas concerning basic human dignity and rights descended

³⁷A Jewish Board of Deputies was founded in Johannesburg in 1903 and in Cape Town in 1904. The two bodies united to form the South African Jewish Board of Deputies in 1912. See Saron and Hotz, *Jews in South Africa*, 226–69.

³⁸*South African Jewish Board of Deputies Report, April 1958 to August 1960*, 9.

³⁹For a full discussion of this, see Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 152–55.

insistently upon the leadership of the Jewish community. The question whether, as the acknowledged representative body of the community, the Board of Deputies at least ought to say something about those fundamental moral issues which transcended formal party politics was hotly debated at every congress of the board. Some argued that it was impossible to separate moral from party political issues and that the board had no business, in the first place, making statements on any controversial public issue not directly affecting Jewish rights. Others asserted that the agreed principle of noninvolvement in politics did not preclude some statement against racial prejudice and in affirmation of fundamental human rights.

The upshot was the periodic passing of resolutions giving expression to a Jewish ethos sufficiently generalized to be politically innocuous. An example is the one passed in 1955, stating that "the welfare of all sections of the population depends on the maintenance of democratic institutions and the enjoyment of freedom and justice by all," and that "the elimination of inter-group conflict and the abatement of racial prejudice are vital for the national good." At the same time, the board repeatedly declared that "every individual Jew has the right to his own political views and actions" (adding cautiously, "of course within the framework of the law"), and urged every Jewish citizen "to make his individual contribution in accordance with the teachings and precepts of Judaism."⁴⁰

In this way, at a time when apartheid was at its worst, the board trod a precarious path between noninvolvement in the political thicket, on the one hand, and the muffled impulses of Jewish moral conscience, on the other. There can be no doubt that most of the board's executive members throughout the 1950s would have wished to speak out against apartheid but were severely constrained by their concern for the safety of the Jewish community. What intimidated them was not so much the presence of anti-Semitism but rather the very fact that the Afrikaner nationalists had consciously abandoned anti-Semitism ever since coming to power in 1948. A process of Afrikaner-Jewish rapprochement was in progress, facilitated largely by genuine Afrikaner sympathy for the new State of Israel, and the purpose uppermost in the minds of the Jewish communal leadership was to cultivate that rapprochement. In these circumstances they were anxious not to do anything that might undermine it.

The transformation of apartheid's ideological rhetoric, which was discussed earlier, had the effect of extending the boundaries of public moral criticism permitted by the white consensus. By the 1970s it became possible for the Board of Deputies to vent views that would have been regarded as

⁴⁰The seminal resolution adopted at the board's 20th congress in 1955 was reiterated at later congresses. See, e.g., *South African Jewish Board of Deputies Report, September 1962 to June 1965*, 9.

disloyal, if not treacherous, only ten years earlier. Accordingly, the board continued to uphold its traditional policy of noninvolvement in politics but formulated statements which, while clearly liberal in connotation, were sufficiently equivocal to be compatible with the rhetoric of *verligte* Afrikaners. Thus a resolution was passed at the board's congress in 1967 and reiterated in 1970 calling for "the promotion of understanding, goodwill and co-operation between the various races, peoples and groups in South Africa and toward the achievement of a peaceful and secure future for all inhabitants of the country, based on the principles of justice and dignity of the individual."⁴¹

Incrementally more outspoken, yet venturing only ever so slightly beyond the norm of *verligte* rhetoric, resolutions of the board's congresses throughout the 1970s called for the elimination of "unjust discriminations so that all, regardless of race, creed or colour, be permitted and encouraged to achieve the full potential of their capabilities and live in dignity and harmony."⁴² A somewhat less equivocal augur of the real change yet to come in the 1980s was the speech delivered by David Mann, president of the Board of Deputies, at a banquet for Prime Minister Vorster on his return from a visit to Israel in 1976. He said:⁴³

I believe that there is a wide consensus today that attitudes and practices, the heritage of the past, bearing upon the relations between our various racial groups are no longer acceptable. I believe that there is a new sense of urgency abroad in our land, a realization that we must move away as quickly and effectively as is practicable from discrimination based on race or colour, and that we must accord to every man and woman respect and human dignity and the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential. Our task is to translate into concrete patterns of living, and of relationships between man and man and group and group, the great injunction of the Bible, "Justice, justice shalt thou pursue, that thou may live and inherit the land which the Lord thy God gave thee."

In later years, as new waves of black resistance pounded against the apartheid system with unprecedented force, and as President P. W. Botha's government itself began to dismantle old-style apartheid and institute reforms calculated to preserve white supremacy in alternative ways, the Jewish Board of Deputies abandoned its noninvolvement policy, in practice if not in theory. In 1981 there were periodic statements by the board condemning evictions of blacks and pass-law arrests; in 1982, condemnation of detention without trial; in 1983, objection to a university quota system for blacks and to the treatment of squatters at the Crossroads camp near Cape

⁴¹*Report to South African Jewry, 1967-1970* (S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies, 1970), 8.

⁴²See resolution adopted at the Jewish Board of Deputies' 29th biennial congress, May 29-31, 1976, cited in *Report to South African Jewry, 1976-1978* (S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies, 1978), 10.

⁴³*Jewish Affairs*, May 1976, 12.

Town; and in 1982, representations to Parliament calling for the repeal of the racial provisions of the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Acts.⁴⁴

The culmination of this new direction of policy was the unanimous passing of a resolution at the 33rd national congress of the board in 1985, which, for the first time, explicitly rejected apartheid: "Congress records its support and commitment to justice, equal opportunity and the removal of all provisions in the laws of South Africa which discriminate on grounds of colour and race, and rejects apartheid." This was reiterated and elaborated upon at the board's April 1987 congress in a series of unequivocal resolutions, including the following:⁴⁵

Congress resolves that there is an urgent need for enhanced and accelerated dialogue, negotiation and meaningful reform in South Africa, and records its dismay at the lack of meaningful progress in this direction, whilst acknowledging the steps already taken by the Government to repeal certain laws and abolish certain discriminatory practices. Congress also expresses the hope that a climate for peace and calm will speedily be re-established including the lifting of the state of emergency, and that the rule of law will be re-established. . . . Congress endorses the efforts of the National Executive Council in seeking to maintain channels of open communication with all sections of the South African population. . . . Congress recognizes that apartheid is the principal cause of political violence in South Africa and that continued oppression under that policy exacerbates the climate of political unrest and believes that apartheid and racial prejudice are in complete contradiction to the teachings of Judaism.

The Jewish Board of Deputies also continued to concern itself with its original and primary function of monitoring anti-Semitic manifestations and taking action against them where necessary. Although such manifestations ceased to be a serious problem by the mid-1950s, they never entirely disappeared. In this respect South Africa cannot be said to differ from other Western countries. However, something of the thematic admixture endemic to the South African variety of chronic anti-Semitism may be demonstrated by the following extract from a vitriolic news sheet published by the veteran anti-Semite S. E. D. Brown. Responding to the board's resolutions calling for the abolition of apartheid laws, he wrote that these "posturing moralists" had "virtually declared open war on the White nation in South Africa!"⁴⁶

Yet it is they themselves who are the one race—racists par excellence who know just how to discriminate and do so in no uncertain terms, against everyone and

⁴⁴See *Report to South African Jewry, 1980–1983* (S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies, 1983), 17, 18; *Report to South African Jewry, 1983–1985* (S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies, 1985), 11.

⁴⁵See the resolutions adopted at the 34th national congress, Apr. 1987, in *Jewish Affairs*, Apr. 1987, 28–29.

⁴⁶*South African Observer*, Feb. 1986. The article is entitled "The Total Zionist Onslaught on South Africa."

everything that is non-Jewish. They long ago decided that they were the "chosen people" of all the peoples on earth, and the world's most enduring ethno-centrism began. Their endless and bitter campaigns against "racism" imposed with the fervour of the inquisition of the Middle Ages, are serving no other purpose than to break down the racial and national dynamism of all the peoples of the West, while at the same time building up their own fanatical racism. . . . Moreover, they openly identified themselves with world Zionism's "total onslaught" on South Africa . . . in complete phase with the "total onslaughts" of world Communism and the forces of international finance. Furthermore, the S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies and their coracialists made themselves guilty of wilfully stabbing an old friend in the back—South Africa—after all that South Africa had done, and is still doing for Israel and World Jewry.

There was also something of a resurgence of anti-Semitism emanating from a right-wing, reactionary group founded in 1981 under the name the *Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging* (resistance organization). This was a racist, neo-Nazi organization that harked back to the various "Greyshirt" movements that mushroomed in the 1930s as purveyors of Nazi and anti-Semitic views. Its leader, Eugene Terre-Blanche, stated openly that South African Jews would be deprived of political rights under an *Afrikaner* Christian people's government controlled by his organization. He said that "the Jews must decide between two things in this country—political rights or economic freedom. They cannot have both. They cannot have political rights. It is Israel, not South Africa, which they recognise as their fatherland."⁴⁷ President Botha condemned the views and activities of the *Weerstandbeweging* on a number of occasions. In late 1982 it was reported that the police had uncovered arms caches belonging to the group and that a number of arrests had been made.

Although overt anti-Semitism was not expressed in the more respectable sections of the right-wing *Afrikaner* opposition to the government party, their political character and policies also did not augur well for the Jewish community. The *Herstigte Nasionale* party (reconstituted national party), founded as far back as 1969, was committed to what it called "Christian *Afrikaner* Nationalism," a formulation evoking those ideological trends in pre-1948 *Afrikaner* nationalism that were hostile to Jews. The party's newspaper, *Die Afrikaner*, frequently carried articles emanating from so-called revisionist historians who denied the truth of the Holocaust.

The main political group to the right of the present National party was the Conservative party. Formed in 1982, it had already gained more seats than the Progressives in the 1987 elections to the white chamber of Parliament, thereby displacing them as the official opposition. Although disavowing anti-Semitism, this party too emphasized the strictly Christian basis of

⁴⁷Cited in "Anti-Semitism in South Africa," a report by the S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies, issued in Jan. 1986.

the state in ways that had disconcerting associations for Jews. Jewish concern was compounded by the formation of a new cultural organization called Die Afrikaner Volkswag (the Afrikaner people's sentinel) in May 1984. As well as harking back to the Ossewa Brandwag (ox-wagon sentinel), which agitated against participation in the Second World War and against Jews, it presaged a popular drawing together of all right-wing Afrikaners in an extraparliamentary framework conducive to the spread of Terre-Blanche's influence.

The Rabbinate's Response to Apartheid

A balanced evaluation of the record of the rabbinate on the question of apartheid in South Africa requires awareness of some basic differences between its position and that of the Christian clergy. Unlike the major Christian churches, whether Anglican, Dutch Reformed, or Roman Catholic, Judaism had no adherents outside of the white population of South Africa. Consequently, the rabbinate was never answerable to, or responsible for, a black membership suffering directly from the apartheid system; it never had to formulate theological or practical principles either justifying or denouncing discrimination among its members.

On the other hand, the rabbinate had to contend with the minority-group status of Jews within the white racial group. The non-Jewish majority did not differentiate between the statements and actions of rabbis and the position of the Jewish community. This greatly constrained those rabbis who were, over the years, genuinely perturbed by the acute moral issues peculiar to South African society but, at the same time, had a primary sense of responsibility for the safety and welfare of the Jewish community. This situation was most marked in the peak years of racist apartheid—the 1950s and early 1960s—when the leadership of the Jewish community felt intimidated by the assertive Afrikaner devotees of that apartheid ideology. The rabbis, hardly less than the lay leadership, instinctively sensed that outspoken condemnation of apartheid, and even more so public action against it, would have endangered the Jewish community.

Account must also be taken of the inherent proclivity of the Orthodox rabbinate—who served over 80 percent of synagogue-affiliated Jews—for a societal order that fostered ethnic-religious particularism. In recent years, as apartheid ideology began to shake off its racist trammels and to project an ostensibly purified rhetoric of ethnic-cultural survival as the basis for government policies, this was bound to strike a chord of ambivalence, if not actual understanding, in the Orthodox rabbinate.

Since the conventions of South African society always recognized the prerogative of the clergy to speak out on moral issues, rabbis potentially enjoyed considerably more scope in this respect than did lay bodies like the

Jewish Board of Deputies. However, the record shows that most rabbis, particularly the East European-born and the more traditionalist ones, gave but scant attention to the issue of apartheid over the years, some even speaking out in support of government policy in South Africa.⁴⁸ This does not mean, however, that they were oblivious to the glaring evils of the system. Their behavior is explicable, rather, as a function of their essentially insular outlook; their tendency to compartmentalize Jewish concerns and to dissociate them from responsibility for the society as a whole. By their lights, apartheid and its attendant evils were the doing of the non-Jewish majority of white society. Collective Jewish involvement—and the actions of rabbis inevitably would be interpreted as such—was imprudent. It would only invite hostility to the Jews and divisiveness among themselves.

In the first decade of apartheid rule, rare were the occasions when a rabbi adopted a stand of unequivocal opposition to the apartheid system, and when it did happen, the response within the Jewish community was anything but enthusiastic. A case in point is that of Andre Ungar, a young Progressive (Reform) rabbi, newly arrived from England, whose outraged protestations against apartheid led to the withdrawal of his permit of residence in 1956. Neither his own congregants, nor the Jewish Board of Deputies, nor even his rabbinical colleagues, rallied to support him.⁴⁹ Yet it is also true that the head of the Orthodox Federation of Synagogues in that period, Rabbi Louis I. Rabinowitz, chafed at the bit of communal restraints and became increasingly irrepresible in the last years of his tenure before settling in Israel in 1960. His sermons became progressively more outspoken against apartheid, and in one Yom Kippur sermon in 1959 he gave vent to his anguish and frustration in a frank outburst:⁵⁰

. . . What do we do to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bonds of oppression? . . . There are some Jews in the community who do attempt to do something . . . and when, as a result, they fall foul of the powers that be, the defence put up by the Jewish community is to prove that these are Jews only by name, that they do not belong to any synagogue. . . . Have Jewish ethics ever descended to a more shameful nadir? . . . I have practically abandoned all hope of effecting any change in this matter. The power of fear and of the possibility of our security being affected is too strong. . . . Do not think that I am proud of my record in this matter, that I do not squirm inwardly at the thought that on many occasions I have been infected with that same fear and that same cowardice

⁴⁸An example of a traditionalist rabbi who urged Jews to support government policies is a certain Rabbi Pfeuffer, who is reported to have said that helping black people to power in South Africa would be like giving guns to a kindergarten. See BD, "Press Items of Jewish Interest," no. 23, Dec. 11, 1986, citing the *Star*, Dec. 4, 1986. For the record of the period until the late 1960s, see Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 277–86.

⁴⁹Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 277–86.

⁵⁰The mimeographed text of Rabbi Rabinowitz's Yom Kippur Sermon, Oct. 1959, is in BD, biographical files.

and have failed to rise to the level which my calling demands of me. But when from time to time a blatant, glaring case of injustice occurs, and it is one in which there is a hope that my intervention may possibly have a salutary effect, then no power in the world can prevent me giving expression to what I conscientiously believe to be the authentic voice of prophetic Judaism. . . .

Another important religious leader was Rabbi Moses C. Weiler, chief rabbi of the United Progressive Jewish Congregation until he settled in Israel in 1959. Like Rabbi Rabinowitz, he occasionally joined Christian clerics in protests against particularly outrageous manifestations of apartheid. Weiler upheld the view that the appropriate collective expression for Jewish ethical concerns lay in the practical field of welfare and education for the underprivileged black population. Hence he encouraged the sisterhood of the Progressive congregation to set up such projects as an elementary school with attached health facilities in a poverty-stricken black township near Johannesburg. His successor, Rabbi Arthur Saul Super, continued his policy until he too settled in Israel in 1976. He frequently preached to his congregants against the evils of apartheid and joined Christian leaders in protests against specific iniquities of the system.

Not a few other rabbis, both Orthodox and Reform, who were quite outspoken against apartheid, left South Africa to take up pulpits elsewhere, at least in part out of the conviction that it was unconscionable to participate in such a system. They included the South African-born Orthodox rabbi Abner Weiss, a protégé of Louis Rabinowitz, who left his pulpit in Durban for the United States. Another was the Progressive rabbi Richard Lampert, also South African-born, who left Johannesburg for a pulpit in Australia. Rabbi David Rosen, born in England, is a notable example of another category of those who raised their voices against apartheid, namely, rabbis who spent only a temporary period of service in South Africa.

Over the last two decades, the majority of the Orthodox rabbinate followed the lead of Bernard Casper, chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of Johannesburg and the Federation of Synagogues. From the outset of his incumbency in 1963, he perceived his task to be limited to nurturing the religious life of the Jewish community; it did not, by his lights, extend to the reformation of the societal order as a whole. To be sure, Rabbi Casper, too, sporadically expressed, in the name of Judaism, revulsion against racism and various particular injustices manifest in South African society. On occasion, he even joined Christian clerics in peaceful demonstrations of protest against extraordinarily acute travesties of justice. However, he was at all times judiciously cautious. When, in 1986, in the wake of the campaign to end compulsory military conscription, Rabbi Casper was called upon to answer the question whether the *halakhah* permitted conscientious objection to military service, since it might involve serving in the black townships, he ruled that it did not.

Taking leave of the community on the eve of his *aliyah* to Israel in March 1987, after 25 years in South Africa, he cautioned the Jewish community to adopt a low profile:⁵¹ "In South Africa we are a small identifiable foreign body and we fool ourselves if we think otherwise, and we as a Jewish community should be careful not to act in such a way as to convey the impression that we can influence the course of events." At the same time Rabbi Casper outspokenly opposed international sanctions against South Africa, saying "I have appealed to my colleagues overseas to adopt a stand against sanctions. . . . Sanctions can only mean hunger and frustration and riots and chaos. I think that is a moral stance that all of us should be emboldened to pursue." To the youth of the community, grappling with the incompatibility between "Jewish values" and the realities of South African society, Rabbi Casper held out a Zionist message: "Go home to the land which belongs to our people, where your views will be welcomed in the society we believe in."

In recent years a few Orthodox and traditional rabbis cast caution aside and ventured to condemn the structural essence of the apartheid system, not just particularities of injustice, going beyond the boundaries of the conventional white consensus. One such rabbi was South African-born Ben Isaacson. A former protégé of Orthodox Chief Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz, Isaacson was a maverick whose checkered career included *aliyah* to Israel in the mid-1960s, return to South Africa in 1974 to serve as a Progressive (Reform) rabbi, and, after disagreements in that framework, formation in 1982 of Har-El, an independent traditional congregation (resembling American Conservative congregations) in the prosperous Houghton suburb of Johannesburg. Throughout these mutations, however, Isaacson was a consistently outspoken critic of the apartheid system.

Isaacson tongue-lashed the Jewish communal leadership and castigated Jews at large for tacitly enjoying the evil fruits of the apartheid system. He also accused Jewish leaders of distorting Bishop Tutu's statements and wilfully spreading the false notion that anti-Semitism was rampant among blacks. To Jewish youths entering military service, Isaacson did not shrink from advising that they respectfully request the authorities to refrain from using them to suppress blacks in the townships. An example of the tenor of his sermons as reported in the general press was this comment:⁵²

The Jewish establishment, taking its cue from the ruling political party, has slowly begun to jump onto the bandwagon of reform and now at least makes the right sounds—albeit spluttering and gurgling sounds. . . . As Jews we should have

⁵¹Reported in the *Zionist Record and S.A. Jewish Chronicle*, Mar. 6, 1987, 3.

⁵²*Sunday Star*, Sept. 15, 1985, 3. The heading of the report of Rabbi Isaacson's sermon is "Jews Should Know Better: Rebel Rabbi Slams Establishment for Not Speaking Out Against Apartheid Exploitation."

known better. We should have instinctively recoiled from perpetrating on others the injustices that we, more than any other people, have suffered.

Rabbi Isaacson's tempestuous style of protest was not only frowned upon by most other rabbis and Jewish communal leaders but also increasingly alienated his own congregants. Finally, in mid-1987, after a fiery lecture tour in the United States, which he made with a black clergyman from Soweto, in the course of which Isaacson was reported to have disparaged his own congregants together with South African Jews in general, the lay leaders of Har-El served him notice and disbanded the congregation.

In Cape Town, another South African-born rabbi, Selwyn Franklin, of the large Orthodox congregation of Sea Point, took a leading role in Jews for Justice. In doing so he initially exceeded the limits of propriety as understood by his congregation's board of directors. At Jews for Justice's first public meeting, he sat on the speakers' platform but refrained from speaking in deference to his board's reservations. With other members of Jews for Justice, Rabbi Franklin assisted the victims of intercommunal fighting in the Crossroads squatter camp near Cape Town and joined multiracial church and Muslim leaders in a series of interfaith services dedicated to peace and justice in South Africa. While on a visit to Israel in mid-1986, Rabbi Franklin also outspokenly criticized the conduct of Israel's relations with South Africa. At that time, notwithstanding moves toward sanctions against South Africa taken by Western countries, Israel sent a treasury delegation to South Africa to renew a trade and investment cooperation agreement. Franklin challenged the claim that such links were in the best interests of the South African Jewish community, suggesting that in the long run, it was bad policy to antagonize the blacks.

Another leading figure was American-trained Rabbi Norman M. Bernhard, who had served the important Oxford Synagogue-Center in Johannesburg for over 20 years. In 1980 his congregation launched a social-action program aimed at improving the quality of life of blacks employed in its area of Johannesburg. In late 1985 Rabbi Bernhard lent his support to the founding of Jews for Social Justice in Johannesburg. However, his cautiously measured statements criticizing the injustices of the apartheid system, and his intimate involvement in the Zionist Federation and the Jewish Board of Deputies, contrasted greatly with the style of the impetuous Rabbi Isaacson. Indeed, Bernhard took issue with the latter's excoriation of the Jewish public and commended Jews for their record as employers and as opponents of apartheid.⁵³

Distinctive to Rabbi Bernhard's stance was his repeated insistence on an

⁵³Deon Delpont, "Rabbi Raps Rabbi: You've Got It Wrong—Most Jews Are Eroding Apartheid," *Tribune*, Sept. 9, 1986, 12; in BD, biographical files.

optimistic prognosis for the future of South Africa. His inspiration for this derived from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Schneerson, whom Bernhard revered as one endowed with *ruah hakodesh*, the gift of divinely revealed insight and foresight. To his coterie of followers in South Africa, the rebbe had repeatedly expressed optimism that South Africa would ultimately provide a bright and prosperous future for all its peoples and urged Jews not to leave. Echoing the rebbe, Bernhard pointed approvingly to the reforms implemented by the South African government and averred that there still was a great reservoir of residual goodwill between all the races in the country.⁵⁴

The Progressive (Reform) rabbis, whose congregants accounted for some 18 percent of synagogue-affiliated Jews in the community, followed a somewhat more uniform approach than the Orthodox. In sermons and through projects, such as those of their sisterhood organizations, they emphasized the application of Jewish precepts to the problems of society at large and encouraged contributions to welfare work and education in black townships. Following his arrival from Israel in South Africa in 1985, Rabbi Ady Assabi, who was trained at London's Leo Baeck College, took the lead in Johannesburg. Starting close to home, he issued a pamphlet stipulating minimum requirements regarding wages and other working conditions for domestic employees. He also identified with the Jews for Social Justice group.

In sum, it may be said that the rabbis in South Africa differed in their approaches to the country's race crisis no less than the Jewish public in general.

The Impact of Israel's Relations with South Africa

The State of Israel was established in the same month and year as that in which the Afrikaner National party under Daniel Malan ascended to power in what was then the Union of South Africa. Initially, Israel's was the more eager of the two governments to establish relations. To be sure, just two days before his election defeat, Prime Minister Smuts, long an ardent sympathizer with Zionism, had been among the first to recognize Israel *de facto*. However, Malan delayed *de jure* recognition for another full year. It should be remembered that at that juncture South Africa still looked rather more to the vast Arab world for the advancement of her interests than to the weak State of Israel, and that it maintained diplomatic relations with Egypt until as late as 1961. Not until 1972 did South Africa

⁵⁴See the report on Rabbi Bernhard's views in the *Herald Times*, Oct. 10, 1986, 5.

take up reciprocal diplomatic representation in Israel. Israel, in contrast, not only wished to expand its limited diplomatic relations but was also drawn to the warm Zionist Jewish community in southern Africa, at a time when Zionist fund raising was still of weighty significance for Israel's infant economy. Consequently, Israel was willing unilaterally to open a diplomatic mission in July 1949.

It was only toward the end of her first decade of independence, when Israel launched an imaginative policy of diplomatic relations, technical assistance, and trade with the new African states, that the tables were turned. Indeed, the South African government soon felt itself to be the injured party as Israel aligned itself progressively with black Africa's attacks on apartheid in the international forum. This development reached a peak in September 1963, when Israel downgraded its level of diplomatic representation by recalling its minister plenipotentiary and leaving only a *chargé d'affaires*.

Very few Diaspora communities were as affected as that of South Africa by oscillations in the relationship between Israel and their own country. The grave dilemmas precipitated for South African Jewry have been analyzed in detail elsewhere.⁵⁵ In the present context, only a brief overview is required. Between 1961 and 1967, as Israel sided increasingly with the black states against South Africa's white regime, South African Jewry was much discomfited. Somewhat ironically, it was a former South African, Michael Comay, who was Israel's permanent representative at the United Nations in this critical period. In the press, aspersions were cast on the loyalty of Jews to South Africa, and some government ministers exerted subtle pressure on the Jewish community to influence Israel. These were resisted, by and large, by the Jewish leaders.

The deterioration of relations with Israel was compounded by the prominence of Jewish names in the radical opposition to apartheid in the same period. The acutely uncomfortable atmosphere in which Jews found themselves in relation to the surrounding white majority was reflected in a critical article by the editor of an important Afrikaans paper, in which he posed the question: "Where does the Jew stand in the white struggle for survival?"⁵⁶ Although on visits to Israel, South African Zionist leaders discussed the situation with Israeli government ministers, and certainly

⁵⁵See Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, especially 235–304. For a survey of the same subject with emphasis upon the attitude of black Americans to the relations between Israel and South Africa, see the chapter "Israel, South Africa and Black America," in Robert G. Weisbord and Richard Kazarian, Jr., *Israel in the Black American Perspective* (Connecticut, 1985), 93–119.

⁵⁶Dirk Richard, "Where Does the Jew Stand in the White Struggle for Survival?" (*Afrikaans*), *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus*, Sept. 26, 1965.

expected their situation to be taken into account, they were uncomplainingly cognizant of Israel's sovereign considerations.⁵⁷ Israel's policymakers, for their part, certainly took cognizance of South African Jewry's delicate position; however, their solicitude did not extend so far as to override the convergence of considerations, moral as well as politically self-serving, that motivated the cultivation of relations with many African states and Israel's correlative alignment with them against the white regime of South Africa.⁵⁸

At issue was not the stance of Israel in principle but rather the question whether, out of consideration for the Jewish community, finer discretion could not be shown by keeping within the parameters of anti-apartheid actions set by the major Western powers. What particularly irked the South African government was Israel's tendency to go to excess in offensively toeing the line of the black states of Africa at the United Nations, even when the Western powers abstained. In December 1961 the South African government gave vent to its resentment by disallowing the transfer of funds raised by South African Jewry for the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem. This stricture, which remained in force until mid-1967, precipitated for the Zionist movement in South Africa the most trying test of its traditional hold over the Jewish community.⁵⁹

The Six Day War of 1967 proved to be the turning point in relations between Israel and South Africa. A wave of public sympathy for Israel swept over white South Africans as the noose tightened around the neck of the Jewish state. This was followed by wonderment and admiration as news came through of Israel's dramatic preemptive strike and decisive victory in the six days of fighting that ensued. At that point Jewish community leaders made an urgent appeal to the South African government to lift the ban on transfers of funds to Israel. It was granted, presaging a return to normalcy in the relations between the two countries. Indeed, the South African government was also responsive to some emergency military needs of Israel during the war.⁶⁰

⁵⁷On one occasion only did South African leaders adopt a self-serving stance and present their objections demandingly. This was in anticipation that Israel would stop El Al flights to Johannesburg at the end of 1963. The upshot was that Israel refrained from doing so. See Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 346.

⁵⁸See *ibid.*, 320–26, and Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel* (London, 1972), 234ff.

⁵⁹It is noteworthy that although there was a decline in contributions to Zionist funds (the Israel United Appeal), because Jews knew they could not be transferred to their destination, very few Jews reacted to these events by dissociating themselves from Zionism and its fund-raising functions. See Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 350.

⁶⁰Details of this will be known only when archival records become accessible. However, the military materiel involved was probably related to the Mirage planes used both by Israel and South Africa at the time, spare parts for which were being withheld by France. Some conjectures in this regard are made in James Adams, *The Unnatural Alliance* (London, 1984), 32.

To be sure, the Six Day War did not immediately undermine the position of Israel in Africa. Apart from a breach with one country, Guinea, Israel's bilateral diplomatic relations with African states even expanded, reaching 32 missions by 1972, as did her various technical-assistance programs and trade ventures. However, in the long term, the war proved to be the beginning of a process of alienation from Israel.⁶¹ Between March 1972 and May 1973 seven African states broke off relations with Israel. South Africa, on the other hand, at last took up its option to reciprocate Israel's diplomatic representation there by opening a consulate general in Israel in 1972. On the eve of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, two more African states broke relations with Israel. Finally, the Yom Kippur War precipitated a landslide of diplomatic ruptures with Israel, with nine more African states severing relations before the fighting was over, and another ten soon after. By 1974 Israel was left with diplomatic relations with only four African states: Mauritius, Lesotho, Malawi, and Swaziland, four small countries which also maintained relations with South Africa.

Full analysis of the factors that drove Israel toward normalization, and then proliferation, of relations with South Africa, in the course of which trade burgeoned in military-related spheres, must await the time when researchers will have access to archival sources. It does seem obvious, however, that the desertion of Israel by so many African states was a key factor in driving Israel into the arms of South Africa. The latter, prudently setting aside its pique at Israel's earlier behavior, recognized its primary geopolitical interest in associating with the Jewish state and was forthcoming in matters of important strategic need to Israel. An example was the South African government's willingness to permit the use of its ports and fueling facilities by the Israeli Navy, something which no other state in Africa was prepared to grant, not even those that continued to trade with Israel after halting diplomatic relations. With the Suez Canal blocked, this was extremely helpful to Israel.

The facts of Israel's conventional trade with South Africa have always been available. Compared to that of many Western states it was always

⁶¹For the factors involved in Israel's diplomatic displacement in Africa, see Susan A. Gitelson, *Israel's African Setback in Perspective* (Jerusalem, 1974); R. Kochan et al., "Black African Voting Behavior in the U.N. on the Middle East Conflict 1967-1973," in *Israel and the Third World*, ed. M. Curtis and S. A. Gitelson (New Brunswick, N.J., 1976), 289-317. A highly critical analysis of Israel-South Africa relations, arguing that they are in every respect detrimental to Israel, is Naomi Chazan, "The Fallacies of Pragmatism: Israeli Foreign Policy Towards South Africa," *African Affairs* (Apr. 1983):169-99. On the factors influencing more recent attitudes of black states, see Arye Oded, *Africa and Israel: African Attitudes Towards Resumption of Diplomatic Relations*, Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations Policy Studies, 18 (Dec. 1986).

small, reaching, by 1985, \$174,654,000 in imports from South Africa and \$63,896,000 in exports. This accounted for less than 1 percent of the total foreign trade of both countries.⁶² Trade related to military materiel, however, was kept secret. Although it was well known that already in the 1970s Israel had sold a number of patrol boats and surface-to-surface Gabriel missiles to the South African Navy, the existence of ramified trade of a military nature was consistently denied by both countries, rumors to the contrary notwithstanding.

Whatever the motives and circumstances may have been, it is evident that Israel's post-Yom Kippur War Labor government, under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Minister of Defense Shimon Peres, embarked on a course of pragmatic self-interest in regard to South Africa, while continuing to condemn the racial discrimination practiced under apartheid. In 1974 and 1975 Israel and South Africa raised their diplomatic representation to ambassadorial level, and in April 1976 Prime Minister John Vorster visited Israel and signed a series of trade and technical cooperation agreements. On this basis Israel's ambassador, Itzhak Unna, pursued a policy that encouraged bilateral relations on all levels of mutual interest, while at the same time frankly disapproving of apartheid—at times more demonstratively than any other ambassador to South Africa.⁶³ The relationship was much enhanced under the Likud government headed by Prime Minister Menachem Begin and during Ambassador Eliahu Lankin's tenure in South Africa from 1981 to 1985.

While the full facts of Israel's arms-related trade with South Africa remained elusive, it is evident that Israel was motivated primarily by the needs of an economy based inordinately on military industries, which, in

⁶²These figures are from *Statistics of Foreign Trade* 18 (Hebrew), Central Bureau of Statistics, Jerusalem, 1986. Figures given in the International Monetary Fund's *Direction of Trade Statistics*, published in Washington, do not differ substantially. The diamond trade is not included since it is conducted through the international commodity market, but it is known that Israel cut about half of all gem diamonds sold through De Beers's central selling agency. See Marcus Arkin, "Israel and South Africa: The Economic Connection," in the supplement to *Barclays Business Brief* (Johannesburg, May 1979). The small scale of Israel's conventional trade with South Africa was evident from comparison with that of some other countries. *International Trade Statistics Yearbook* 1 (U.N. Publishing Division, New York, 1986) gives the following figures for South African trade in 1984 (in millions): with Israel—imports \$83, exports \$129; with U.S.A.—imports \$2,375, exports \$1,458; with U.K.—imports \$1,660, exports \$742; with West Germany—imports \$2,339, exports \$676.

⁶³Unna frequently declared that similarities between the geopolitical position of Israel and South Africa did not efface fundamental differences in the internal social purposes and policies of the two countries. An example of his frank criticism of apartheid was his refusal to attend a performance of the play *Golda* in a Pretoria theater on the grounds that it was not open to all races. See BD, "Press Items of Jewish Interest," no. 12, May 22, 1978; no. 13, June 7, 1978.

turn, was an inescapable function of Israel's struggle against a hostile Arab world.⁶⁴ Likewise, there can be little doubt that, at least as perceived by the South African government, its relationship with Israel was regarded as specially beneficial and cordial, particularly in periods when the Likud party held the offices of prime minister or foreign minister. Yet, outwardly, relations were kept in low profile.

Within Israel's Labor party and also among Foreign Office professionals, a measure of dissatisfaction long existed under the surface. As Western pressures against South Africa intensified after 1985, some elements agitated more insistently for a serious reassessment of Israel's relations with South Africa. The impetus which at last precipitated such a reassessment was a forthcoming U.S. State Department report on other nations' arms trade with South Africa, which carried with it a threat to cut U. S. military assistance to countries engaged in that trade. The very act of reassessment and the ensuing decisions ostensibly to phase out what had never been acknowledged to exist served to confirm that covert military-related trade on a formidable scale had been going on between the two countries. Informed estimates reported in the Israeli press ran as high as half a billion dollars worth of such trade per annum. In due course, the unclassified part of the State Department report issued to Congress confirmed that Israel, together with six Western European countries, had indeed provided considerable military assistance to South Africa.

The Israeli government's timely announcement of a reassessment, on March 18, 1987, a month before the release of the American report, helped to avert the anticipated harm to American relations with Israel. The Israeli announcement reiterated its condemnation of the policy of apartheid and went on to state that it had been decided "to continue to curtail Israel's relations with South Africa" and "to refrain from new undertakings between Israel and South Africa in the realm of defense." In September 1987 Israel's inner cabinet approved a series of sanctions conforming with those adopted by the European Common Market countries. These covered a range of industrial, commercial, scientific, and cultural activities.⁶⁵

⁶⁴An informed analysis of the connection between Israel's external relations and its arms sales (acknowledged to have approached the \$1-billion mark annually in the early 1980s) is Aaron S. Klieman, *Israel's Global Reach: Arms Sales as Diplomacy* (Washington, 1985). On Israel's relations with South Africa, see especially pp. 151-54. In addition to military-related cooperation, it is possible that there was also cooperation in nuclear development between Israel and South Africa. Far-reaching conjectures are made on this in James Adams, *The Unnatural Alliance* (London, 1984). However, no firm evidence has ever come to light confirming such conjectures. See Gerald M. Steinberg, "The Mythology of Israel-South African Nuclear Cooperation," *Middle East Review* 19, no. 3 (Spring 1987): 31-38.

⁶⁵Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Information Division, briefings, Mar. 27, 1987; Sept. 16, 1987.

Judged by the moderate response of the South African government, and in the studied absence of any indications as to the duration of existing contracts in the realm of defense, it could reasonably be inferred that some mollifying understanding on essentials had been reached between the two governments. At the same time, as was attested by the resistance which the new guard at Israel's Foreign Ministry had to overcome (notably from Minister of Industry and Trade Ariel Sharon of the Likud party), a perceptible change of course in relations with South Africa had certainly been inaugurated, one which carried within it the seeds of a possible serious breach in the future.

The process of reassessment in early 1987 temporarily thrust the question of Israel-South Africa relations to the forefront of Israeli public attention.⁶⁶ Apart from some demands voiced at small demonstrations sporadically conducted by a minuscule group of anti-apartheid activists, some of whose members were former South African Jews (notably Arthur Goldreich, who dramatically escaped from the hands of the South African security police in 1963), there was no popular call for extreme measures. Regret at the extent of Israel's involvement in arms trading with South Africa was manifest in most newspaper articles, compounded by concern for Israel's long-term relations with the blacks of southern Africa. Yet, on balance, there was acceptance of the fact that, given Israel's economic exigencies and existing arms-trade commitments, anything more than their gradual phasing out would be excessively damaging to Israel's economy. Although apartheid as such was universally condemned by political spokesmen and the press in Israel, the Israeli public was suspicious of international sanctions and all too aware of the close alignment between the most extreme proponents of sanctions, like the African National Congress, and Israel's enemies in the Middle East. Indeed, politically conservative Israelis associated with the Likud party and groups farther to the right evinced considerable sympathy with the dilemma of South African whites and were receptive to the ostensibly survivalist rationale of President Botha's white government, insofar as it disavowed racism and promised reforms.

Anguish over Israel's relations with South Africa was far more intense within the South African Jewish community than in Israel. The leadership of the organized community, whether of the Board of Deputies, the Zionist Federation, or the rabbinate, certainly favored good relations between the

⁶⁶Throughout March 1987 most of Israel's dailies carried reports and comments on Israel-South Africa relations. See especially the views of Eliahu Lankin, Israel's ambassador to Pretoria from 1981 to 1985, in the *Jerusalem Post*, Oct. 10, 1986, and Apr. 8, 1987, and the contrary views of Prof. Shlomo Avineri in the *Jerusalem Post*, Aug. 2, 1985, and in *Maariv*, Feb. 13, 1987. The parliamentary debate is in *Knesset Debates*, no. 21, session 309, Mar. 19, 1987, 2250-64.

two countries and had welcomed the comfortable atmosphere that displaced the tensions of the 1960s and prevailed until 1987. Indeed, the Zionist Federation as well as individual Jewish entrepreneurs had been instrumental in the development of trade between their country and Israel. Yet, the scale of the arms nexus between Israel and South Africa surprised even the leadership of South African Jewry. As late as September 1986, at the biennial conference of the South African Zionist Federation in Johannesburg, queries were raised, in a spirit of protest, by the large youth and student delegation concerning rumors and random bits of information about ongoing visits of Israeli military personnel and the use of Israeli weapon systems in the South African Army, which often aided the police in suppressing black unrest. The unanimous response of leaders of both the Zionist movement and the Jewish Board of Deputies was that these reports were highly exaggerated and malicious, and they cautioned the young people not to grant them credence.⁶⁷

The moral conundrum generated by Israel's arms-related trade with South Africa was most intense among the leaders of the Zionist youth movements, especially the largest of these, Habonim-Dror. (The others were Bnei Akiva, Betar, and Maginim.) *Aliyah* to Israel was the educational goal of these movements, yet they were hard put to understand Israel's policy. It seemed to run counter to their conviction that Zionism rested on values correlative with those underlying the struggle of the blacks for liberation and a just society in South Africa. This was a source of dissonance in the Jewish community, since its distinctively Zionist character had long rested upon the extraordinary importance of these Zionist youth movements. Unlike the North American scene, there had never been other than Zionist youth movements in South Africa, with their combined membership of some 6,000 encompassing about 35 percent of the eligible age group in the community in 1987. Since the entire leadership of the youth movements was made up of university students, there was a considerable overlap with the membership of the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) on the various campuses. They found themselves torn between their identification with Israel and their wish to support the cause of their fellow black students who, however, were stridently anti-Israel.

The embarrassment caused by Israel's relations with South Africa might well have inflicted serious damage on the identification of Jewish students with Israel, were it not for the grotesque, malicious slanders propagated by Muslim students on the various campuses. To the accompaniment of cries of "Death to Zionist imperialism," their propaganda fliers flooded the

⁶⁷The author personally witnessed the discussion at the S.A. Zionist Conference in Sept. 1986.

campuses at "Al-Quds Day" demonstrations with such inflammatory statements as: "These crimes by Begin and gang make Hitler look like an amateur. The illegitimate State of Israel was formed with the blood and lives of innocent men, women and children and has ever since continued its bloody legacy."⁶⁸

These crass excesses tended to galvanize Jewish students, whose total number at South African universities was estimated at over 5,000. The atmosphere contrasted sharply with the relative tranquility of the 1960s and 1970s, when Zionism and the Middle East question attracted no particular interest at South African universities. By 1987, SAUJS was more active than ever before and conducted a spirited campaign in defense of Zionism. Indeed, the provocative calls of the Muslim students for exorcising "Zionists" from the struggle against apartheid tended to vindicate the Zionist contention that Jews could be fully at home only in their own sovereign state.⁶⁹

The publications of SAUJS reflect the poignant ideological dilemma of politically aware segments of South African Jewry. Some of the debates call to mind, if on a smaller scale, the classic ideological conflicts characterizing the Jewish experience in European countries from the beginning of the period of Jewish emancipation until recent times.

On the one hand, views are aired castigating the Jews for prospering from the fruits of the apartheid system, and the organized Jewish community for "abdicating moral responsibilities in favour of ingratiating oneself with the government of the day." According to one student critic, "a twisted morality is produced when Jewish youth are taught to concern themselves with moral issues thousands of miles away from their own reality [in support of Jewish refuseniks in Russia or of issues in Israel] and remain silent on the moral issues of their immediate environment." He goes on to argue that leaving South Africa with "the skills and wealth acquired under apartheid," whether to "Kibbutz Tuval, Dallas, Texas or Adelaide" is abdication of

⁶⁸From a flier issued by the Muslim Students Association at Natal University on May 22, 1987, entitled "Liberate Palestine . . . the Stolen Land." Other typical examples of anti-Semitic motifs spawned by the Muslim Students Association are: "The link between apartheid and Zionism may be expressed in close economic and military ties but is, however, organically rooted in ideology"; "Zionism sees and recognizes itself in the death throes of the apartheid regime"; "The brutality with which this regime handles the Palestinians makes all the alleged tortures of the Nazis seem insignificant." These citations are from leaflets issued at the University of the Witwatersrand, May 22, 1987.

⁶⁹A typical statement of the Muslim Students Association is: "The oppressed in South Africa can never be liberated if we collaborate with Zionism and imperialism in any of its guises." From a newsletter issued at the University of the Witwatersrand Medical School: *Our Message*, May 22, 1987.

responsibility. "The real moral challenge," he avers, "is to fight to end apartheid and build a new South Africa."⁷⁰

On the other hand, the distinctively South African ideological matrix of Zionism is reflected in the following account of one Jewish student leader's intellectual odyssey until settling in Israel.⁷¹

I had always thought that I was a South African and my contribution should be there: to work toward the abolition of the apartheid system and all the iniquities arising out of it. My degree in social anthropology and African culture was, I felt, further testimony to my commitment to the African struggle. . . . My decision to get involved in the South African Union of Jewish Students, and later in the formation of "Jews against Apartheid" was based on the premise that the South African reality had to be taken cognizance of from a Jewish perspective. . . . A large part of the last five years has been spent attempting to reconcile my Jewishness with my South African identity. The turning point came, ironically enough, as a result of my participation in a seminar on the Holocaust at Yad Vashem in July 1985. . . . "Thou shalt not be a perpetrator; thou shalt not be a victim; and thou shalt never, ever be a bystander." The awful clarity hit me then; by returning to South Africa, I would be guilty of violating all three, whether or not I wanted to. . . . In the ultimate analysis, the bitter truth for me was that the South African diaspora had been unable to accommodate both my Jewish and African identities and, however difficult, I had to confront reality and be brutally honest with myself and finally make a choice. . . .

The circumstances of Israel's announced reassessment of policy toward South Africa alleviated but little the dilemma of the Jewish community. The real core of the problem—arms-related contracts—remained, and the South African government's response had been accordingly moderate. President P. W. Botha set the tone during an election rally in March 1987, when he said that he sympathized with Israel's position, as it had been "bullied" by the United States and intimidated by the prospect of losing billions of dollars in American aid.⁷²

The announcement of the Israeli cabinet's sanctions decision in September 1987 evoked predictable disappointment and resentment from the South African government and press, but not out of proportion to their reaction to other countries that had preceded Israel in adopting similar sanctions. For their part, both the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation had decisively declared themselves opposed to the application of

⁷⁰Tony Karon, "South African Jewry: An Alternative to Complicity," *Strike*, May 1985, 4-7.

⁷¹Barbara Meltz, "From African Culture to Jewish Identity," *Hame'orer* 5 (Journal of the Movement for Zionist Fulfillment in Israel) (Winter 1986):35.

⁷²One newspaper, the *Star*, provided the following vivid metaphor: "Israel has been handed a knife and told to stab a friend—or be stabbed instead." See BD, "Press Items of Jewish Interest," no. 6, Mar. 26, 1987; no. 17, Sept. 18, 1987. These are the sources for all the citations which follow, unless otherwise stated.

sanctions of any sort against South Africa. Moreover, between the announcement of reassessment in March 1987 and the adoption of specific measures in September, they made persistent representations to the government of Israel urging it not to embark upon a course of sanctions. The Israeli Foreign Ministry was flooded with letters from Jewish citizens of South Africa making similar appeals.

Statements issued by the Jewish Board of Deputies together with the Zionist Federation recognized that Israel, like any other sovereign state, "takes its own decisions to protect its own national interests," but added that "in this regard it is noted that Israel has been subjected to significant pressures from the United States." They declared their opposition to sanctions "on the ground that it undermines the ability to create conditions in which steps can be taken toward the achievement of an apartheid-free and just society in which all peoples can attain their legitimate aspirations." At the same time, these statements averred that the "deep-rooted religious and cultural affiliations" felt by Jews with Israel would endure. The *Zionist Record* reported the president of the Zionist Federation, Julius Weinstein, as saying: "We abhor apartheid—it is un-Jewish, inhuman and we do not accept it as Jews, but we will not participate in any threats or blackmail or sanctions that the western world or any other countries wish to impose against this country." He added: "It has to be explained to the Israelis in no uncertain terms that sanctions which they wish to impose against South Africa will in fact harm the very people that we want to help—and that they want to help."⁷³

A major factor in the considerations determining the Zionist Federation's policy was the encouragement of *aliyah*. One of the attributes of South African Zionism's preeminent strength was the emphasis it had always placed on personal *aliyah*, its record in this area being distinctly superior to that of Zionist organizations in the United States. It was estimated that in 1987, some 14,000 former South Africans were living in Israel, constituting what might be described as a daughter community about 12 percent the size of the mother community in South Africa.⁷⁴

In the atmosphere of uncertainty that prevailed after 1985, causing Jews—not unlike other middle-class whites—to contemplate emigration, there was an unprecedented intensification of efforts to encourage the choice of Israel rather than other Diaspora destinations, such as Australia, Canada, the United States, and Britain. It was of some significance both to

⁷³*Zionist Record and S.A. Jewish Chronicle*, Mar. 27, 1987.

⁷⁴For brief surveys of the history and status of Zionism in South African Jewry, see Arkin, *South African Jewry*, 79–94, and Gideon Shimoni, "Zionism in South Africa: An Historical Perspective," *Forum* 17 (Spring 1980):71–91.

South African Jewry and the State of Israel that the South African government had not hindered activity along these lines. Indeed, the trade agreements periodically renewed between the governments of Israel and South Africa had always included the latter's granting of "approved enterprise" status to certain categories of investment in Israel, among them residential housing. These were limited, however, to agreements renewable every two years and had not been in excess of some 40 million rands (approximately \$19 million) per annum. Moreover, the proceeds from the sale of such investments had to be repatriated to South Africa. Emigrants from South Africa were permitted to take only 100,000 rands (approximately \$34,000) of capital out of the country.

The range and scale of activities now developed to promote *aliyah* were unparalleled anywhere in the Western Diaspora since the establishment of Israel. They included subsidized pilot tours of Israel; group settlement projects in new towns in Israel, such as Kohav Yair; provision of subsidized, furnished apartments as an alternative to absorption centers; creation of loan funds for small businesses; a series of short visits by emissaries who were former South Africans successfully settled in various walks of life in Israel; and an organized letter-writing campaign from former South Africans settled in Israel to friends and relations urging them to "make the right move—to Israel," and "if you want to leave home, come home." In addition, South African Zionists succeeded in setting up a coordinating committee of the Israeli government's Absorption Ministry, the World Zionist Organization, and their own Israel office. One outcome of this committee's recommendations was an exemption for South African settlers from limitations on the size of apartments purchasable with subsidized government housing loans.

Despite the troubled situation in South Africa, the record of emigration was very far from presaging the disappearance of South African Jewry. It was estimated that between 1970 and 1980 about 12,000 Jews settled abroad permanently, one-third of them (4,000) in Israel. After the most recent wave of unrest in South Africa, the number of immigrants to Israel rose rather moderately from 246 in 1985 to 565 in 1986 and 737 in 1987. Moreover, it was estimated that at least 6,000 Israelis were living in South Africa in 1986.⁷⁵ (In the Jewish community rumors had long exaggerated the number to as many as 20,000.) This inflow of Israelis and, even more so, the fact that considerably more of those who emigrated from South Africa chose to settle in other Diaspora lands—mainly Australia, Canada, Britain, and the United States—was a cause of distress and soul-searching among the leaders of a community long considered among the most Zionist in the world.

⁷⁵For these estimates, see Sergio DellaPergola and Allie A. Dubb, "South African Jewry: A Sociodemographic Profile," in this volume.

Attitudes of Black Political Leaders Toward the Jews

Almost no research, historical or sociological, has been conducted into public attitudes toward the Jews outside of the white group. Indeed, the only serious study ever to address itself to this area of inquiry was a 1971 survey of attitudes of matriculation pupils resident in the black township of Soweto, near Johannesburg. Its author was Melville L. Edelstein, at the time chief welfare officer there. His findings showed that the sense of "social distance" experienced in relation to Jews was greater than toward English-speakers in general and was exceeded only by that felt toward Afrikaners.⁷⁶ The explanation for this did not fall within the scope of Edelstein's research, but, noting that his respondents had only the barest actual contact with Jews, and that there appeared to be some correlation between antipathy to Jews and membership in white-oriented churches, he suggested that the explanation possibly lay in New Testament teaching and the cultural transmission of anti-Jewish stereotypes. Edelstein himself, no less than the Jewish community's leadership, was surprised by these findings. Ironically, Edelstein, who had devoted himself to welfare work in Soweto, tragically lost his life in the 1976 Soweto riots.

Similar indications of negative stereotyping of Jews by blacks and coloreds can be culled from incidental references in other works of research. An example is a study of social groups and racial attitudes in a small South African town called Port Nolloth. Although there were very few Jews in the town, it was found that insofar as colored people distinguished between Jews and other whites, Jews were considered more tolerant; however, there was also "a stereotype of them as being avaricious and cunning."⁷⁷

A valuable new source of information was provided by two young scholars, Alan Fischer and Tzipporah Hoffman, who conducted extensive interviews with leading personalities across a broad spectrum of political and ethnic groups in South Africa.⁷⁸ The candid answers elicited by the interviewers' probing questions cast new light on the prevailing attitudes toward Jews of major political activists outside of the white group. In the main, they reflect considerable hostility. This mostly assumes the form of so-called "anti-Zionism," but the anti-Jewish undertones are recognizable.

One current of thought distorts the character of Zionism in order to

⁷⁶Melville L. Edelstein, *What Do Young Africans Think?* (Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1972); also, "The Urban African Image of the Jew," *Jewish Affairs*, Feb. 1972, 6-8.

⁷⁷Martin E. West, *Divided Community* (Cape Town, 1971), 79.

⁷⁸The interviews were to be published in late 1988 by Southern Book Publishers (Johannesburg), under the title *The Jews of South Africa: What Future?* Unless otherwise indicated, the quotations that follow are from these interviews. I am deeply indebted to the authors of this innovative work for making available to me their tapes and transcripts.

delegitimize it. This is accomplished by attributing to it (and by extension to the State of Israel) an innate "Chosen People" ethos of arrant exclusivity and discrimination against outsiders. This putative ethos is then facetly equated with apartheid, so that Israel is criticized for collaborating with the white regime of South Africa, not so much out of self-interest as out of an alleged inherent empathy. Although ostensibly directed against the State of Israel, this hostility attaches itself to the local Jewish community, whose intimate affinity with Israel is all too evident. While the interviews contain some expression of appreciation for those individual Jews who had been active in the opposition to apartheid over the years, a clear distinction is drawn between them and Jews as a community.

Another indication that criticism of the Jews ran deeper than the question of Israel's relations with South Africa was the perceived role of Jews in the South African economy. For example, Saths Cooper, a leader of the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO, a "black consciousness" movement open only to black membership), told his interviewers that the Shylock stereotype was prevalent among blacks and that it was common for the term "Jew" to be used synonymously with "exploiter," whether the reference was to white or black. He said, furthermore, that "the Jewish community, rightly or wrongly, has been seen to be based in capitalism and capitalism has meant propping up apartheid. Oppenheimer [the diamond magnate, actually a convert to Christianity] has been responsible for the greatest single exploitation in this country."

A key black figure was Desmond Tutu, archbishop of the Anglican Church in South Africa, who was recognized throughout the world as a symbol of the struggle against apartheid. Archbishop Tutu repeatedly condemned Israel's ties, military and other, with South Africa, and called upon the Jews of South Africa to oppose the apartheid system with vigor. Tutu also considered Zionism to have "very many parallels with racism," since it "excludes people on ethnic or other grounds over which they have no control." He told his interviewers, rather obscurely, that "in Israel you exclude people and treat those that are excluded as lesser humans." To recognize that Archbishop Tutu, in common with most black leaders, had imbibed the anti-Zionist stereotype was not, however, to say that he was anti-Semitic. Nor had Tutu ever denied Israel's right to exist, as had some of the more extreme detractors of the Jewish state among the black leadership. Indeed, he said that he considered it unrealistic of the Arab world to pretend that Israel did not exist, and that while sympathizing with the PLO, he did not accept its methods. Some of Archbishop Tutu's comments aroused resentment in Jewish quarters and even insidious rumors that he had made blatantly anti-Semitic remarks, but these rumors were given short shrift by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies itself.

Typical of Tutu's acerbic rhetoric is the parallel he repeatedly drew between apartheid and the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis. He said, for example, that the South African government deliberately resettled children where there was no food, thereby condemning them to starvation, adding, "You might even say that the gas chambers made for a neater death." Some Jews took exception, arguing that the evils of apartheid had never extended to systematic annihilation of the blacks and pointing out that no rabbi in Nazi Germany had been allowed the freedom to criticize the regime which Archbishop Tutu enjoyed. His response was to describe this "as a kind of Jewish arrogance." "Jews seem to think that they have cornered the market on suffering," he complained to his interviewers.⁷⁹

Another important figure in the bitter opposition to apartheid was the Reverend Allan Boesak—a colored according to apartheid race classification—who was president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and a patron of the United Democratic Front. Reverend Boesak was less vocal than Archbishop Tutu in criticism of Jews and more sensitive in his rhetoric. He told his interviewers that he rejected as "shameful prejudice" the notion that God did not hear the prayers of the Jews. Yet he too averred: "Zionism is an ideology that does not accept the values of the Jewish heritage as I understand it."

More typical than these reasonably qualified criticisms of Israel in the broad spectrum of views recorded by Fischer and Hoffman were those of Dan Habedi, a leader of AZAPO. Although in regard to the local Jewish community Habedi declared, "We do not split hairs and say the Jewish people are more to blame than other people," he brusquely denied the legitimacy of the State of Israel, stating: "That land as far as I am concerned belongs to the Palestinians." Moreover, he equated Zionism with Afrikaner Calvinism: "They believe that they are the Chosen People, like those who colonized this land believe they are the Chosen People; that they were sent here to teach black people their right ways."

Gatsha Buthelezi, president of Inkatha (the National Cultural Liberation Movement) and chief minister of the KwaZulu semiautonomous territory, was an exception to the general rule of hostility toward Israel. Although undoubtedly an important figure in the South African political constellation, Buthelezi was something of an outcast from the mainstream of the black liberation movement. His commitment to an ethnic Zulu constituency was considered dangerously divisive. He refused to toe the African National

⁷⁹On the controversy over Archbishop Tutu's allegedly anti-Semitic statements and the denials issued by the Board of Deputies, see BD, "Press Items of Jewish Interest," no. 3, Feb. 13, 1987; Feb. 26, 1987; also the *Herald Times*, Feb. 20, 1987. Tutu's comparisons with the Holocaust were reported in the *Jerusalem Post*, Mar. 11, 1987. He made much the same remarks in interviews with ABC television on Oct. 16, 1984, and Israel Radio on July 23, 1987.

Congress line on a range of matters, including advocacy of sanctions by outside countries. Moreover, defying the prevalent black taboo on Israel, Buthelezi accepted an invitation to visit there in 1985. In a revealing comment to his interviewers, Fischer and Hoffman, he explained: "I accepted the visit to Israel because I need friends too. The ANC have got Arafat and Cuba." Buthelezi refrained from aiming selective criticism at Israel compared to other countries in the world. However, he was critical of the South African Jewish community for failing "to stand up and be counted." He told his interviewers that Jews "criticize, through their liberal press, the policies of the government" but secretly pray for the retention of Afrikaner power because they feel more secure with it.

The worst manifestations of hostility toward Jews, equaled only by the anti-Semitism of the Afrikaner right-wingers, emanated from political groups in the Muslim community. (This community numbered some 353,000, of whom 176,000 were members of the colored community situated mainly in the Cape, and another 166,000 were part of the Indian population found mainly in Natal and the Transvaal.) A case in point was the political group Call of Islam, formed in 1983 and active in the framework of the United Democratic Front. Interviewed by Fischer and Hoffman, one of its founders, Farid Essak, expressed hatred for the Jews, drawing freely upon anti-Jewish stereotypes found in the Koran. Essak also espoused use of anti-Zionism as an instrument in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Ironically, it was with Call of Islam that the Jews for Justice group, to which we referred earlier, cooperated in coming to the aid of the black population at Crossroads near Cape Town. Yet Essak had no kind words for the members of Jews for Justice, seeing in them not "liberated Jews" but really Zionists in disguise, insidiously infiltrating the freedom movement in South Africa.

Similar deep-seated hostility was expressed by Sheikh Nazeem Mohammed, president of the Muslim Judicial Council in South Africa, who argued that the white press and universities, no less than the country's finances, were wholly controlled by Jews. To his interviewers the sheikh explained candidly that it was inherent to the doctrine of Zionists that they gain control of the media and the educational and financial institutions of the country: they "must have control of the brain structure of the community."

An example of crude anti-Semitism emanating from Muslim sources was a leaflet distributed anonymously in 1985. It listed the names of major business companies, some owned by Jews and others mistakenly attributed to Jewish ownership. "If you have any policies or accounts with these companies," it exhorted blacks, "please cancel them and take out with other companies. These companies are Zionist organizations and send 80 percent

of their profits to Israel . . . who buy arms to murder our Arab brothers. . . . By exploiting our black workers these companies are keeping alive the illegal regime of Israel as well as South Africa."⁸⁰

Ironically, it was the modification of the apartheid system, one aspect of which was the reentry of growing numbers of blacks, coloreds, and Indians into the English-speaking universities, that led to hostile confrontations between Jewish and Muslim students on campuses in Johannesburg and Cape Town. One such clash took place at the University of the Witwatersrand in June 1982, when Israel invaded Lebanon. The most recent clash, involving scuffles and fisticuffs, was in May 1987 at Cape Town University, after the Muslim Students Society held a meeting under the banner "Death to the Zionist Imperialists." Moulana Ebrahim Mousa, regional coordinator of the Muslim Youth Movement, declared: "We will not tolerate Zionism's attempts to infiltrate the liberation movements in South Africa," and "if Arafat is a terrorist, then so are Mandela and Tambo."⁸¹

Although the Muslim groups constituted only a small part of the forces of resistance to the apartheid regime, their influence was considerable within the United Democratic Front (UDF). Moreover, as revealed by Fischer and Hoffman's series of interviews, criticism of the Jews bore much the same marks across the entire spectrum of black groups struggling against the apartheid regime.

In the final analysis, it was probably the banned African National Congress (ANC) that would determine the future of South African Jewry, no less than that of the country as a whole. In early 1986 leaders of NUSAS, defying progovernment white public opinion, met with ANC leaders outside of South Africa, in Harare, Zimbabwe, to ascertain their views on a variety of subjects. One of the questions raised concerned Zionism and the PLO. The students reported back that "the ANC distinguishes between the religious manifestation, with which it has no problems, and the political manifestations of Zionism, which they argue, has denied the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people to independence." They said the ANC supported the PLO out of recognition of "the right of oppressed people to struggle," and condemned Israel for acting, especially in the military sphere, "as a third party for the imperialist powers in supporting the South African government and other repressive states." At the same time, the

⁸⁰Leaflet entitled "Urgent Appeal!! Boycott," in the author's possession.

⁸¹See BD, "Press Items of Jewish Interest," no. 10, May 27, 1987, and also the exchange of letters from readers in the *Cape Times*, May 23, 1987. Characteristic of the delegitimization of Zionism is one letter calling upon Jews to acknowledge "the distinction between true Judaism and racist Zionism imperialism. We call on all South African Jews . . . to declare Zionism a heresy, as Christians declare apartheid heretical and as Muslims are continuously denouncing Malayism, Indianism and corrupt Saudi Arab states as heresies."

ANC claimed that it was "opposed to anti-Semitism and any form of racism and was not antagonistic to the Jewish community in South Africa," which, it noted, "had offered up many white democrats who actively opposed apartheid."⁸²

Amplification of this attitude may be drawn from an interview with Neo Mnumzama, an ANC spokesperson stationed at the United Nations.⁸³ Recognizing the "different political colours" of South African Jews, he said that the ANC regarded "in a positive light" those Jews who belonged to the broad struggle against apartheid and, above all, "those active in the ANC itself." (The most prominent of these was Joe Slovo, a Communist of long standing and one of the ANC's foremost leaders.) However, it disapproved of those members of the community who had Zionist affiliations. Claiming that there was a distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, Mnumzama averred that "the people of South Africa . . . see parallels of apartheid in Zionism"; that "a major obstacle to Jewish participation in the struggle against apartheid has by and large been Zionism"; and that "Zionism as an ally of apartheid is certainly an accomplice in the perpetuation of the crimes that Pretoria commits against the South African people." Asked to define Zionism as perceived by the ANC, Mnumzama answered that Zionism was "an exclusive organization to which only Jews can belong," "a segregationist movement" on religious and ethnic lines that carried a strong reminder "of the reality of apartheid under which we have to live." He said that Israel, like South Africa, was based on the uprooting and dispossession of the indigenous majority population, and that the exclusion of blacks from the South African national experience as constituted by apartheid was paralleled by the exclusion of anyone who was not in the first place Jewish from "entry into the total experience of Zionist-Israel." Hence "you cannot struggle against apartheid and still adhere to Zionist positions."

Mnumzama also criticized Jews for wilfully refraining from translation of their "dominant role in the South African economy" into political power against apartheid. Moreover, he scoffed somewhat at recent statements of the Jewish Board of Deputies calling for the abolition of apartheid. He said that the situation was too far gone for mere statements of condemnation; "people must translate verbal denunciations into active struggle." Asked what was in store for South Africa's Jews after the attainment of the ANC's objectives, and whether Jews would one day be punished, Mnumzama considered that while a free South Africa would "not tolerate a Zionist

⁸²*NUSAS Talks to the ANC*, report on meeting between the National Union of South African Students and the African National Congress, held from Sunday, 31 March to Tuesday, 2 April, 1986, in Harare, Zimbabwe, 28.

⁸³One of the series of interviews recorded by Fischer and Hoffman.

presence in our country," Jews, like all people, would "have a choice to either abandon segregation as practice and join with the rest . . . in building a free, united, non-racial and democratic South Africa or, to exercise their freedom to leave the country and go to those climates which would be more conducive to Zionism."

In light of both the black perceptions of Israel surveyed here and the closely related record of Israel-South Africa relations discussed earlier, it was hardly surprising that neither Israel itself nor the organized Jewish community of South Africa had meaningful communication with black leaders. The conspicuous exception was Gatsha Buthelezi, himself in an ambiguous situation within the politics of black liberation. Beginning in 1980, the Jewish Board of Deputies' executives in the various provinces of South Africa initiated some "outreach" forums and invited various black leaders to address them.⁸⁴ These included, for example, Nathan Motlana, a prominent civic leader in Soweto, persons in the trade union and labor relations field, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who addressed a committee meeting of the board in June 1986. Given the gravity of the situation in South Africa and the issues at stake, these activities appeared rather perfunctory and futile. Indeed, the Jewish Board of Deputies' invitations to some black bodies met with blunt refusals, and Harry Schwarz candidly commented that addresses by those who have agreed "have been masochistic experiences for the audiences and have probably achieved very little."⁸⁵

As for the State of Israel, the only ray of light penetrating the dark cloud of relations emanated from the Histadrut labor confederation. Its Afro-Asian Institute in Tel Aviv and its Na'amat women's organization sustained some ties with various black civic organizations and trade unions.⁸⁶ By late 1987, a series of groups, numbering in all about 80 black men and women, had attended three- to four-week courses in organizational and leadership training at the institute, which exposed them to Israel's rich experience in these fields. In fact, one of the Israeli government's decisions regarding South Africa, announced in September 1987, was that steps would be taken to create a fund for the expansion of such training programs. Within the Labor party and the Histadrut and in the Foreign Ministry, the advocates of a serious change of course in relations with South Africa were hopeful

⁸⁴On these contacts with blacks see *Report to South African Jewry, 1985-1987* (S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies), 11, 64; *Report to South African Jewry, 1980-1983* (S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies, 1983), 17. For Buthelezi's comments in Israel, see the *Jerusalem Post*, Aug. 16, 1985, 5.

⁸⁵Arkin, *South African Jewry*, 142.

⁸⁶The Los Angeles-based Center for Foreign Policy Options, whose research director was Steven Spiegel, was involved in the genesis of this activity. Its field director in Israel was Shimshon Zelniker, a lecturer on African politics at Labor's Beit Berl College. See the article by Tom Tugend in the *Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 18, 1986, 8.

that this modest channel of contact with blacks might one day open wider prospects.

Conclusion

South Africa was a society in transition, the ultimate outcome of which could not be predicted. Whether as dictated by the unilateral reforming policies of the National party government, or as generated by the agitation of revolutionary forces at work in the black population, a transformation was taking place. Relative to changes of political attitudes within the white segment of the population, especially among Afrikaners, over the previous quarter of a century, attitude change in the small Jewish component of that population had only been slight. After all, the political orientation of South Africa's Jews had always placed them, normatively speaking, somewhat to the left of center in the conventional white political spectrum. Concurrently, there had always been an extraordinary prominence of Jewish individuals in the nonconventional political groups seeking to transform the society as a whole on the minimum basis of one-man one-vote. Both of these phenomena had long characterized the Jewish experience in South Africa.

What did change for Jews was less their own political orientation than the gradual political moderation of the dominant Afrikaner group, on the one hand, and the dramatic political awakening and radicalization of the black majority, on the other. By 1987, the National party was situated at the center of the white political spectrum. On its right it was assailed by the reactionary backlash of Afrikaner parties, ranging from the Conservative party through to the neo-Nazi Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging. On its left were the Progressives and some of its own people who chose to become independents in the 1987 elections. Beyond the white parliamentary spectrum was a complex array of radical forces, political and trade unionist, overt and covert. To the extent that these frameworks were still open to whites, or at least to alignment with like-minded white groups, Jewish individuals were disproportionately prominent—almost as much as in the first decade and a half of apartheid rule.

The gap between the National party and the Progressives had narrowed. Notwithstanding the fundamental difference between the Progressives' advocacy of genuine multilateral negotiations for a new polity and the government party's essentially unilateral reordering of the existing polity, the two approaches were far closer to each other in 1987 than they had been 25 years earlier. Both catered, if with different intensity, to the whites' fear of revolutionary chaos and an ensuing nondemocratic regime; both opposed international sanctions, arguing that they were misguided and counterproductive as a strategy for effecting change in South Africa.

Already in the early 1960s it was quipped that most Jews spoke like

Progressives, voted for the United party, and hoped that the National party would stay in power. By the mid-1980s it could be said that most Jews both spoke as Progressives and felt most at ease with their consciences voting for the Progressives, but still relied on the National party to keep control of the situation. Moreover, increasing numbers of Jews were no longer constrained by a sense of moral unease from actually voting for the National party.

Something of a paradox was evident. On the one hand, much of the Jewish communal leadership was gripped by a sense of crisis. Many young Jews were leaving the country and many more, old and young, were talking of leaving, but probably never would. There was also a disheartening sense of failure at the fact that so many of those who left chose destinations other than Israel. South African Jewry had never been rich in intellectual resources rooted in Judaism itself, and now there was a brain drain of scholars, rabbis, and teachers. Yet, on the other hand, the Jewish leadership was ideologically more at ease than before because the boundaries of liberal opinion permitted by the white consensus had broadened. The Jewish Board of Deputies was now able to say what it had always felt at heart but was constrained from saying, and Jews were able to articulate a collective Jewish voice through groups such as Jews for Justice, without embarrassing the Board of Deputies. Even the South African Union of Jewish Students no longer felt at odds with the board.

The nature of Israel's relations with South Africa, however, aroused some dissonance among Jews. Whereas it embarrassed those who identified strongly with the forces of opposition to the apartheid system, whether in its pristine or reformed shape, the relationship was gratifying for the communal leadership and probably for the average Jew. In this regard the announcement during 1987 of Israel's reassessment of policy and sanctions measures, moderate as they might have been, appeared like a cloud on the horizon, threatening to discomfort them in a manner reminiscent of their experience in the 1960s. Much depended on how far Israel would go against the white regime of South Africa in the future. The Jewish communal leadership, for its part, had made its opposition to sanctions crystal clear.

It was difficult to escape the impression that South African Jewry found itself in a highly deterministic situation, with very little room for maneuver. Jews were inextricably embedded in the white segment of South African society and shared with all whites in the anxieties of the present crisis. Yet an additional dimension peculiar to the Jewish situation compounded their anxiety, as they viewed the growing right-wing Afrikaner reaction and its attendant anti-Semitism with mingled repugnance and fear. Nor did they contemplate with pleasure the prospects on the left. As well as sharing with all whites the fear of socioeconomic upheaval, revolutionary violence, and chaos, they contemplated with growing trepidation the hostility toward

Israel prevalent in black political groups and its attendant anti-Semitic undertones.

Jews could have no more than the most peripheral influence on the determination of South Africa's future. In a sense characteristic of the Jewish minority experience in many past climes and times, South African Jewry was held in a vise. Actions of Israel calculated to gratify black political leaders were likely to raise the level of hostility toward Jews in the ranks of the reactionary white political groups and could even awaken old animosities in the government party itself. At the same time, so-called anti-Zionism and hostility to Israel were already so prevalent among black leaders that it was difficult to imagine how they could be eradicated by any but the most improbably extreme actions of Israel against the South African government. This fostered a despairing frame of mind in the community concerning the chance that a future black regime would tolerate the Jews' natural bonds with Israel. One consequence was the inclination of many Jews to throw in their lot with the present South African government's policies. Another was the example set by Jews for Justice groups and progressive political figures like Harry Schwarz, who worked for the transformation of South African society but who, as Jews, would settle for nothing less than full and free expression of Jewish identity.