Union of South Africa

THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA faced political tensions and economic problems at home and abroad during the period under review (July 1, 1955 through June 30, 1956). Within its own communal orbit, South African Jewry had to contend with financial problems which imposed a severe strain on its major institutions, as well as with personnel shortages in the religious field and in youth work.

Political Background

In the limited scope of this review, it is possible only to barely indicate the year’s political background. Premier Johannes Gerhardus Strijdom’s Nationalist government pressed ahead with its apartheid (segregation) program, in the face of attacks by the opposition. The clash between government and opposition, however, was not over the principle of segregation between the Union’s 2,500,000 Europeans (Whites) and its 10,000,000 non-Europeans (Negroes, Asians, mulattoes), but over the government’s particular measures for its implementation. All the main opposition groups—the United Party (former governing party and chief opposition force), the Labor Party, the Federal Party, and the Conservative Party—subscribed to the general segregation policies which successive Union governments had followed; only the fractional Liberal Party and the now proscribed Communists assumed an antisegregation stand.

The opposition attacked the government’s increasingly rigid application of segregation and its withdrawal of certain domiciliary privileges and legal rights hitherto held by non-Europeans. Jews, as an integral part of the European population, shared the prevailing white attitude, generally supporting either the government or opposition interpretation of segregation, though a few Jews supported the antisegregation camp.

At the time of writing (August 1956), new tension seemed imminent over the government’s decision, under the Group Areas Act (see AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, 1951 [Vol. 52], p. 263), to ban Indians from certain parts of Johannesburg where they had long lived, traded, and acquired property; to compel sale of their property to Europeans; and to order their removal to Lenasia, a new township for Asiatics miles away from the city.

In September 1955 the Union government withdrew its delegation from the then current session of the United Nations (UN), on the ground that the UN appointment of the Santa Cruz committee, to report on South African government policy and legislation concerning non-Europeans, constituted interference in the Union’s domestic affairs. The government’s decision met with qualified sympathy in the opposition press, which argued, however, that
the Union would have gained more by recording its protest but not withdrawing. Most South African newspapers (opposition as well as pro-Government) expressed concern at the course of the UN in relation to South Africa.

The chief political issues of the period under review were the enlargement and reconstitution of the Senate in September 1955, in terms of the government's new Senate Act (see AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, 1956 [Vol. 57], p. 476-77); the South Africa Act Amendment Bill; the Separate Representation of Voters Amendment Bill; and the Tomlinson Report on the socio-economic development of the Bantu (Negro) Areas within the Union of South Africa.

The Senate changes gave the government sufficient votes in the upper house to pass the South Africa Act Amendment Bill by 174 votes to 68 at a joint sitting of both houses of parliament on February 27, 1956, thus securing the two-thirds majority required for such amendment by Sections 35 and 152 of the original South Africa Act (the act establishing the Union). The original act entrenched the equal language rights of English- and Afrikaans-speaking citizens, and the franchise rights of colored (mulatto) voters in the Cape Province, by providing that each could only be varied by a two-thirds majority of both houses of parliament, sitting together. The government's amending legislation reaffirmed entrenchment of the language rights, but withdrew the entrenchment of the franchise rights of colored voters.

**Colored Franchise**

Passage of the Separate Representation of Voters Amendment Bill by 73 votes to 39 in the House of Assembly on April 27, 1956, secured the variation of the franchise rights of colored voters (by removing them from the common roll to a separate communal roll) which the government had hitherto unsuccessfully tried to impose (see AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, 1953 [Vol. 54], p. 396-99; 1955 [Vol. 56], p. 457; 1956 [Vol. 57], p. 477). The United Party appealed to the courts on the grounds that the alteration and enlargement of the Senate to provide the two-thirds majority necessary to amend the South Africa Act was in fact an evasion of the requirements of the South Africa Act, and that the amending legislation was invalid in consequence. The case was heard by the full bench of the Cape division of the Supreme Court, consisting of Mr. Justice de Villiers (Judge-President), Mr. Justice Newton-Thompson, and Mr. Justice van Winsen. Their verdict in May 1956 unanimously held both the act enlarging the Senate and the act amending the South Africa Act to be valid in law. An appeal was to come before the appellate division of the Union's Supreme Court later in 1956.1

**Tomlinson Report**

The Tomlinson Report, debated in Parliament during May 1956, was held by the government to confirm its apartheid policy, and by the opposition to show the impossibility of apartheid. The report held that development of the Bantu areas to serve the goal of apartheid would cost £104,000,000 ($291,200,000) over the next ten years, and would involve the incorporation into the Union of the British-held protectorates of Bechuanaland, Basutoland, 

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1 On November 9, 1956, the appellate division of the Union Supreme Court in Bloemfontein dismissed the appeal, declaring the affected legislation valid by a majority of 10 to 1.
and Swaziland. The government allocated £3,500,000 ($9,800,000) as a first installment towards implementation of some of the report’s proposals.

At the Conference of British Commonwealth Premiers held in London at the end of June 1956, Prime Minister Strijdom and External Affairs Minister Eric Louw asked for the transfer of the protectorates. The British government refused, reiterating its position as trustee of the territories.

During the debate on the South Africa Act Amendment Bill, Henry Gluckman, United Party member of Parliament for Yeoville, Johannesburg, called the prime minister’s attention to certain implications that might flow from the government’s amendment of the South Africa Act. Speaking in Parliament on February 21, 1956, Gluckman said that an eminent legal authority had stated that while the entrenched clauses of the original act protected voters from being removed from the common roll on grounds of race or color, save by a two-thirds majority of both Houses of Parliament, once the entrenchment was removed it would be possible to disfranchise any racial group in the Union by a bare majority. He asked for a clarification from the prime minister on the position of Jewish citizens. He said he did not raise the question from any propaganda motive, but rather so as to place the matter in its proper perspective. “I would be wrong in making any criticism of the Government vis-a-vis the general position of the Jewish people in this country,” he said. “I think it is only fair to say that there has been no cause for criticism.”

On February 23, 1956, the prime minister, replying, regretted that the question had been raised. He said it could equally affect Greeks, Hollanders, Italians, Germans, or any other section of the electorate. He affirmed that when the entrenched clauses were drafted, they were confined to two matters exclusively: the question of language rights, and the non-European franchise.

He reaffirmed this position on February 27, 1956, in reply to J. G. N. Strauss, the leader of the opposition, adding: “Section 35 was never placed on the statute book in order to protect the franchise of Afrikanders, Englishmen, Greeks, Germans, Italians, or Jews, but was only inserted in the constitution in connection with the non-European franchise.”

Shechita

The question of ritual slaughter came up in Parliament during the year, when the government introduced a Slaughter of Animals Amendment Bill, to close certain loopholes in the original act. Gluckman asked for an assurance that Shechita (ritual slaughter) would not be affected. Minister of Health Tom Naude assured the House that the new bill would not interfere with ritual slaughter for religious purposes.

A private member’s bill on the question of humane slaughter of animals was introduced by V. L. Shearer, of Durban. A deputation from the Council of Natal Jewry obtained an assurance from him that no interference with Shechita was contemplated. The debate on Shearer’s bill, however, left certain doubts still to be cleared up. The measure, left over during the 1956 session, was to be examined further in 1957.
Union of South Africa

Jewish Population

It was estimated that the Jewish population had not changed appreciably since the 1951 census revealed 108,496 Jews out of a European (white) population of 2,588,933, and a total population (all races) of 12,437,277. In 1951 Jews constituted 4.18 per cent of the European population, as compared with 4.4 per cent in the 1946 census.

Civil and Political Status

Jews continued to enjoy equal rights and opportunities with other sections of the European (white) population. As in previous years, several Jews were appointed or elected to high public office.

Jews were elected mayors of several towns. These included: Morris S. Neustadt (Benoni); Louis Dubb (Port Elizabeth); C. Hurwitz (Mafeking); M. Paul (Queenstown); J. Jowell (Springbok); R. Silverman (Saldanha Bay); M. Alperstein (Fort Beaufort); Dr. S. Goldberg (Viljoenskroon); H. Ostro (Heidelberg). Max Goodman was elected deputy mayor of Johannesburg. S. R. Back was reelected president of the Cape Chamber of Industries.

Anti-Semitism

The decline in anti-Semitism that characterized the last few years continued during 1955–56. What limited anti-Jewish propaganda there was came from the same sources as in the previous year—Ray K. Rudman and his Aryan Bookshop in Natal; Johann Schoeman of Broederstroom; and several other apologists of the late Adolf Hitler. Much anti-Semitic material came from overseas. This included copies of Williams Intelligence Summary, published by Robert H. Williams, of Santa Ana, Calif., and some pamphlets emanating from Einar Aberg, of Sweden. Some anti-Israel and anti-Zionist pamphlets were circulated by the Egyptian legation in South Africa. Some anti-Jewish comment figured in a Cape Town monthly, The South African Observer, which supported the National Party. Nationalist leaders, however, disclaimed any connection with the Observer, or any sympathy with its anti-Jewish comments.

The government published a consolidated list of banned publications which proscribed, among 2,300 sexually questionable, Communist, and racialist books and pamphlets, a number of anti-Semitic publications. These included The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Henry Ford’s The International Jew, and various publications of the Britons’ Publishing Society in England, such as The World’s Enemies, and Kol Nidre, Jewish Immoral Prayer.

Communal Organization

Board of Jewish Education, which demanded a considerably increased allocation from the United Communal Fund (UCF). Some of the Board of Education's representatives threatened to secede from the Fund. The deadlock at the congress was later resolved by a compromise increase.

**Fund Raising**

The UCF found difficulty in raising its target figure to meet the budgets of its member organizations. These were the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the South African Board of Jewish Education, the Cape Board of Jewish Education, the South African Council for Progressive Jewish Education, the Federation of Synagogues of the Transvaal and Free State, the Union of Jewish Women, the Country Communities Fund, the Yiddish Cultural Federation, the Histadruth Ivrit, the South African Organization for Rehabilitation and Training-Oeuvre de Secour aux Enfants Israélites (ORT-OSE), the Bnei Akivah Yeshivah, the Jewish Ministers' Association, and the Pension Fund for Hebrew Teachers. Starting its fourth biennial campaign in October 1955, the UCF suspended its campaign the following month to enable the South African Zionist Federation to launch an emergency appeal for Israel, in response to the Middle East crisis. Zionist leaders expressed appreciation of this cooperation; they called upon Zionists to support the UCF when the emergency appeal terminated in February 1956 and the UCF campaign was resumed. But by then other difficulties had manifested themselves. Certain unauthorized appeals had been launched in the interim, for overseas yeshivot and other causes, and these interfered with the campaign for the UCF. The Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation felt compelled to issue a joint call to the community not to support any appeals which did not have their authorization.

By the end of March 1956, the UCF campaign was still so far behind its target that the national UCF chairman Abel Shaban called a conference of affiliated organizations to consider immediate imposition of a drastic cut in allocations. The cut was held in abeyance, pending new plans for an intensification of the campaign, and the launching by the religious authorities of a special Yom Kippur Appeal for the UCF. The community was warned that if the crisis was not surmounted, several UCF beneficiaries, notably the South African Board of Jewish Education, would confront a crisis that might well endanger their existence.

The eighth national conference of the Union of Jewish Women, meeting in Johannesburg at the end of April 1956, recorded substantial progress in women's communal work.

**Vocational Education**

The South African ORT-OSE continued its vocational guidance and training activities, and its assistance to ORT and OSE abroad. As of December 31, 1955, there were three manual training schools, one hachsharah training farm preparing emigrants for Israel, and a vocational guidance bureau, which had placed 129 apprentices during the calendar year 1954. Abel Shaban, chairman of the World OSE Council, attended the Pan-American conference of the ORT-OSE in Mexico City in July 1956.
Jewish Education

Work in the field of Jewish education suffered from the financial troubles already mentioned. This led to difficulties and differences within the South African Board of Jewish Education. Despite these difficulties, the educational work of the Board went on uninterruptedly. In the eleven years since the establishment of its Rabbi Judah Leib Zlotnik Seminary, it had produced seventy-four Hebrew teachers, the majority of them South African born. The Board's King David Hebrew Day School in Johannesburg had a substantial waiting list; its Herber House Hostel recorded seventy school-going children in residence, with a waiting list of further applications.

In the Cape there was a similar story of educational progress and financial difficulty. The building of Cape Town's new Herzlia Day School, for 423 pupils, was begun. Other schools run by the United Hebrew Schools of Cape Town also recorded progress. But the annual meeting in November 1955 revealed that in the previous two years, the United Hebrew Schools had suffered a deficit of £12,000 ($33,600). In May 1956, the Cape Jewish Orphanage granted the United Hebrew Schools a loan of £15,000 ($42,000) from accumulated funds, to help them over financial difficulties.

In Natal, Durban registered a general advance in educational work, with increasing numbers of pupils.

Youth Services

Jewish youth services did not record the same advance as Jewish education. The Board of Deputies, in its efforts to implement the decisions of its 1955 biennial congress to establish a youth department, invited applications for a youth officer to head it, but up to the time of writing (August 1956) no appointment had been made. Nor had any progress been achieved in implementing the recommendations of the Milgrom Report (see American Jewish Year Book, 1955 [Vol. 56], p. 463).

In Cape Town, the record of failure was even more disappointing. There, the Hillel House project begun so hopefully during Rabbi Louis Milgrom's visit to South Africa in 1953 was forced to close down in November 1955 when a lost of £5,600 ($15,680) on the past year's work, and conflict on the administration of the project, led the Cape Council of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the Cape Board of Jewish Education to withdraw from the scheme, pending a more satisfactory understanding on administration and control.

Religious Life

Religious activities were hampered by a serious shortage of personnel. At the time of writing (August 1956) large congregations still searching for a rabbi included the Pretoria Hebrew Congregation, the Oxford Hebrew Congregation (Johannesburg), the Berea Hebrew Congregation (Johannesburg), the Vredehoek Hebrew Congregation (Cape Town), the New Hebrew Congregation (Cape Town), and the Germiston Hebrew Congregation. Cape Town's Sea Point Hebrew Congregation, one of the largest in the country,
was also to be without a spiritual leader when its minister, Rabbi Abraham T. Shrock went to the Durban Hebrew Congregation. (He succeeded Rabbi Harris Swift, who resigned during the year in order to go to America.) Financial problems also burdened many Hebrew congregations and tended to restrict their activities.

The year saw the opening of a large new synagogue in Sydenham-Highlands North (Johannesburg), and the initiation of projects for new synagogues in Emmarentia (Johannesburg) and Arcadia (Pretoria). The Kempston Park Hebrew Congregation's new communal center was consecrated by Chief Rabbi Louis Isaac Rabinowitz on October 30, 1955.

The Reform movement, under the leadership of Rabbi Moses C. Weiler, registered further progress and established new congregations in East London (Cape) and Bulawayo (Rhodesia). With the establishment of the Rhodesian congregation, the movement changed its name to the Southern African Union for Progressive Judaism. The Reform movement now had twelve constituent congregations in South Africa. Progress in Johannesburg included plans for the building of a new temple and of school premises. Reform had three central and nine suburban schools in Johannesburg, with a total enrollment of over 1,000 pupils.

**Zionist Activities and Relations with Israel**

Relations of close friendship between South Africa and Israel continued through 1955–56. Prime Minister Strijdom personally proposed the toast to the Jewish state at the diplomatic reception held by the Israel Minister to South Africa on Israel Independence Day in April 1956. Other cabinet ministers were also present.

The government kept a vigilant eye on the developing crisis in the Middle East. Defense Minister F. C. Erasmus told Parliament in January 1956 that the situation was one in which South Africa was necessarily interested, and that increased Soviet influence in North Africa closely affected the Union. Pro-government and opposition newspapers alike took the view that South Africa should join the western powers in extending aid to Israel should the crisis erupt into an Israel-Arab war. Some criticism was voiced at the fact that Israel voted against South Africa on the South-West African issue at the United Nations in November 1955. The opinion was expressed, by many Jews as well as by non-Jews, that Israel should have abstained from the vote, in view of the ties of friendship and common interest between the two states.

The first organized tour of Israel by a representative group of South African businessmen, in October 1955, led to an increase in trade between the two countries.

Israel again exhibited at the Rand Easter Show (South Africa's main trade fair) in April 1956, and the mayor of Johannesburg, Councillor L. V. Hurd, paid tribute to the close relations between the two countries when he formally opened the Israel pavilion. The government was represented at the opening by the undersecretary for commerce and industries.

Zionist work was conducted at a sustained tempo throughout 1955–56. Israel Dunsky, chairman of the South African Zionist Federation, and Joseph Daleski, vice chairman, attended the Zionist Actions Committee meeting in
Jerusalem in September 1955 and undertook special obligations, on behalf of South African Jewry, in respect to the Middle East crisis and aid for Moroccan Jewry. This led to the launching of the Israel Emergency Appeal already noted. The appeal reached its target in three months and was praised at the World Zionist Congress in April 1956 as an object lesson in Zionist campaigning. Twelve delegates from South Africa attended the World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem in April 1956.

Social Services

Important work was done in the field of social services. Progress was made on the new Witwatersrand Jewish Aged Home and Chronic Sick Hospital project at Sandringham, Johannesburg, intended to provide accommodation for 500 inmates. Our Parents Home, doing similar work on a smaller scale, reported 140 inmates at the end of 1955.

Difficult economic conditions confronted welfare institutions with increasing calls for assistance. The Johannesburg Chevra Kadisha paid out £56,944 ($159,443) in assistance grants and rehabilitation during its financial year, and the Joseph Miller Benevolent Association granted the record sum of £63,498 ($177,794) in loans. The Witwatersrand Gmilus Chasodim granted loans totaling £54,590 ($152,852). All these were interest-free loans, designed to tide recipients over periods of economic hardship.

The Jewish Women's Benevolent and Welfare Society honored its welfare officer, Frieda Sichel, by opening its Frieda Sichel Occupational Therapy Center in Johannesburg in June 1956.

The problem of juvenile delinquency in the Jewish community occupied the attention of the Witwatersrand Jewish Welfare Council. Expert reports pinpointed the growth of this problem as part of the general problem of juvenile delinquency in South Africa.

Cultural Activities

Cultural activities during 1955-56 included the lecture programs and educational work of the Yiddish Cultural Federation, the Histadruth Ivrite, and the People's College. An important cultural innovation was the establishment in Johannesburg by the Board of Deputies of a Jewish Museum (opened December 1955).

Publications by South African Jewish writers during the period under review included: The Jews in South Africa: A History, edited by Gustav Saron and Lewis Hotz; The Birth of a Community, by Chief Rabbi Israel Abrahams (history); Yiden in Johannesburg, by Leibl Feldman (history); Thomas Bowler of the Cape of Good Hope, by Edna and Frank Bradlow (biography); Sparks from the Anvil, by Chief Rabbi Louis I. Rabinowitz (sermons); Shire Yisroel, by Chief Cantor I. Alter (cantorial); Ibn Gabirol, the Man and Poet, by A. Moar (literary criticism); The Teaching of the Hebrew Language in the Elementary and Secondary School in Israel, by A. Moar (education); Six Feet of the Country, by Nadine Gordimer (short stories); Kop of Gold, by Lewis Sowden (novel); A Dance in the Sun, by Dan Jacobson (novel); The Utmost Sail, by Bernard Sachs (novel); Coleurs des promenades, and Il n'y a
pas de crépuscule, by Adolphe Shedrow (French poems); Solution for South Africa: A Jewish View, by Henry Katzew (politics); Dankere, by H. Ehrlich (sketches); My Greatest Match, by Arthur Goldman (sport).

Personalia

South African Jewry suffered the loss of several prominent personalities during the year. They included: H. Sonnabend, mayor of Ashkelon; Felix C. Hollander, former Durban mayor, senator, and communal leader; Max Sonnenberg, former Cape Town member of parliament and communal leader; Bernard Kaumheimer, industrialist and communal leader; S. L. Sive, Rand Jewish pioneer and congregational leader; J. M. Weinreich, Cape Town Zionist leader; Joseph Coplans, Cape Town sculptor; Samuel Schneier, Johannesburg financier and communal worker; and Leopold Snider, honorary president of the South African ORT-OSE.

EDGAR BERNSTEIN