South Africa

Domestic Affairs

The arrest in France and subsequent extradition to South Africa of Eschel Rhoodie, the discredited former secretary of the now defunct department of information, brought to a head the scandal which had shocked the nation and led to the resignation of leading members of the government and civil service—including Cornelius Mulder, the cabinet minister responsible for the affairs of the department and head of the National party in the Transvaal. Mulder resigned as head of the Transvaal executive of the party and was later forced to resign from the party itself. He was succeeded by Andries Treurnicht, a leading member of the party’s right wing.

The special commission which had been appointed to investigate the affairs of the department, found that Balthazar John Vorster, the state president, who was prime minister at the time of the scandal, had to share blame with Rhoodie and Mulder for the irregular activities. The report also indicted General Gert van der Bergh, former head of the defunct bureau for state security. Rhoodie had threatened to publish various secret documents abroad, and had accused Vorster of involvement in the affairs of the department. In an unprecedented move, Vorster publicly denied these accusations, whereupon the English language press and the opposition called for his resignation for unseemly conduct. Upon publication of the special commission report, Vorster resigned as state president; Marais Viljoen was elected in his place. At his trial, Rhoodie was found guilty on five counts of theft and fraud, and was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment. He was released on bail pending an appeal.

Prime Minister Pieter W. Botha effected one of the largest cabinet reshuffles in the country’s history. The major changes were the appointment of the former minister of justice and police Jan Kruger as speaker of the house, and the splitting of the ministry into two separate ministries. Botha spoke increasingly of changing the political and social dispensation in South Africa, declaring his support for a statement made by Minister of Plural Development Piet Koornhof, while on a visit to the United States, that apartheid was dead in South Africa. Koornhof’s statement had elicited a denial by Treurnicht, and the prime minister’s public support of Koornhof was widely regarded as a repudiation of the right-wing faction of the National party. In his first major policy speech, Botha expressed the hope that a
constellation of mutually interdependent southern African states would bring harmony and peace to the whole of the sub-continent. This view received much warm praise from numerous quarters, including, most especially, the business leaders of the country.

The increasing commitment of the Botha government to the idea of removing all forms of racial discrimination in South Africa was evidenced in the acceptance of the reports of two important commissions—one dealing with labor legislation and the other with legislation affecting the utilization of manpower. Subsequent legislation passed by parliament, stemming directly from the two reports, was variously applauded and condemned. On the one hand, the removal of various racially discriminatory practices was hailed as a great step forward in the promotion of a new society in South Africa. On the other hand, it was widely felt that the legislation represented a watering down of the far reaching proposals of the commissions, and that the net result was little more than cosmetic in effect. Koornhof's subsequent actions with regard to implementing the legislation again gave rise to mixed reaction. In the main, however, the country tended to receive the new legislation favorably, although somewhat cautiously.

There were other significant developments in the area of race relations. Thus, the Afrikaans student body in the country, took a stand against apartheid. A large gathering of churchmen, representing all shades of opinion in South Africa, held under the auspices of the South African Christian Leadership Assembly, heard speeches by Koornhof and Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, chief executive minister of Kwazulu and leader of the Inkhata movement, which represented the views of many millions of urban and rural blacks. This was a unique event in the history of race relations in South Africa.

The visit by the prime minister and the minister for plural relations to the various black homelands; open discussions with black leaders, including those critical of the government; the removal of various forms of race discrimination, called "petty apartheid"; the prime minister's unequivocal endorsement of the removal of all forms of discrimination in SWA-Namibia; the decision to provide alternative housing for the squatters at Crossroads instead of merely bulldozing the shanties; integrated participation in various sport activities; the attempts to improve labor relations and to close the wage gap—all these were signs of the changed attitudes of the new prime minister and his government. Most remarkable of all was the speed with which all this occurred.

Evidence that the new attitude of the government did not enjoy universal approval was clear in the results of various by-elections. The Nationalist majorities were substantially reduced at the polls, with the major beneficiary being the extreme right-wing Herstigte Nationale party (HNP). Notwithstanding the gains of HNP, however, the party was still not represented in parliament. A change of a very different kind was the victory of the Progressive Federal party (PFP) in the Edenvale by-election.
The country was shocked by a number of terrorist attacks in urban areas; an attack by two right-wingers on the home of PFP leader Colin Eglin; a raid on a police station in Soweto by three men, in which a policeman died and five others, including three civilians, were injured; another raid on a Soweto police station resulting in the killing of two policemen and the wounding of two others; and the takeover of a bank building in Pretoria by three Angola-trained members of the African National Congress, during which two hostages died and 20 others were wounded.

South Africa benefitted greatly from the dramatic rise in the price of gold and other precious metals. By year's end the price was over 800 U.S. dollars an ounce. In light of the dramatically improved financial situation, the minister of finance announced changes in foreign exchange regulations whereby emigrants would be able to take substantially more of their capital with them when they left the country. Large-scale building projects were announced by the government, particularly in areas of black housing. Plans were also announced for the electrification of Soweto.

Colin Eglin, leader of PFP, was attacked in parliament for his telephone contact with Donald McHenry, who, at the time, was special U.S. representative on the South West Africa (Namibia) negotiating team. The accusations levelled at Eglin by the prime minister were evidence of deteriorating relations with the United States. These relations took a further turn for the worse when the prime minister appeared on national television to accuse three staff members of the U.S. embassy of using an ostensibly private aircraft for spying purposes; the three left South Africa immediately. Eglin later announced his resignation as leader of PFP, and Frederik van Zyl Slabbert was elected to succeed him. Van Zyl Slabbert became the youngest leader of the opposition in the country's history.

Developments in SWA-Namibia were dramatic, as an impasse was reached with the United Nations negotiating team, particularly regarding the request of the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) for bases inside the territory. South Africa was denied the right to address the general assembly of the United Nations, which approved a report rejecting South Africa's credentials. The South African delegation walked out of the assembly, in whose deliberations the country had not participated since 1974.

Dirk Mudge, leader of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, announced the formation of the South West Africa national assembly in May. The South African government indicated its support for the assembly in light of the failure of the Western powers to support South African endeavors to ensure a democratic independence for the territory. By year's end consideration was being given to re-entering negotiations on the future of the territory. Guerrilla activity continued in SWA-Namibia; a terrorist attack on a grandmother and two children was a particularly horrifying atrocity. During March it was announced that the South African air force had crossed the border into Angola and destroyed SWAPO guerrilla bases.

Developments in Rhodesia continued to concern the country. Some 700 Rhodesians came to South Africa each month. The government of Bishop Abel
Muzorewa maintained formal relations with South Africa; the relationship between Zimbabwe-Rhodesia and South Africa was not significantly different from what it had been under Ian Smith's regime. By year's end the Rhodesian settlement agreement reached in Britain was being implemented, and South Africa was preparing to make such adjustments as might be required in its relations with the new government of Zimbabwe.

Relations with Israel

The relationship between Israel and South Africa continued to develop favorably. The signing of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt was hailed as a major development in international relations, and the hope was expressed that it would serve as an example to other countries caught up in similarly explosive situations.

After the visit in February of Simcha Ehrlich, Israel's finance minister, trade between Israel and South Africa expanded greatly; it was expected to exceed R85 million in 1979. Israel was reported to be South Africa's second fastest-growing foreign market after Switzerland. Over 250 South African firms were members of the South Africa-Israel Chamber of Economic Relations, which estimated that by 1980 total South African sales to Israel would exceed one billion rands, especially after the commencement of large coal shipments. Indicative of the growing trade between the two countries were contracts signed for the provision by South Africa to Israel of such goods as boneless kosher beef amounting to some 1,000 tons and valued at about R2 million and prefabricated houses expected to cost some R35 million.

During February Neil Webster, director-general of resources of the South African army, was the guest of the world assembly of Jewish war veterans in Jerusalem. Remarks he made at the assembly elicited widespread comment in South Africa. Of particular interest was his statement that South Africa and Israel faced a common enemy—the various forces loyal to Marxist ideology. Events in Iran were also seen as having a similar negative effect on Israel and South Africa.

Despite her desire for friendship, Israel was not prepared to condone the injustices which blighted race relations in South Africa. This being clear, there was understanding of Israel's stand regarding the international decisions to impose an arms embargo against South Africa, and to refuse to allow South Africa to participate in sport activities. Such actions as were taken by Israel in these matters were recognized as occupying their own specific place within the overall framework of the positive relations between the two countries.

Remarks made by outgoing Israel ambassador Itzhak Unna at Stellenbosch University, about how he had been deeply affected by incidents he had witnessed in the implementation of the pass laws in South Africa, received front page coverage in all the country's major newspapers. Many editorials noted that Unna's well known attitude of friendship toward South Africa made it especially important that his comments be taken seriously. The announcement of the end of Unna's tour of duty
as Israel's ambassador to South Africa, during which time he had become the doyen of the diplomatic corps, was greeted with much sadness, and a large number of farewell functions were held in his honor. Joseph Harmelin was appointed Unna's successor.

It was reported that the number of Israelis who had applied for tourist visas to South Africa had increased by 35 per cent in the first half of 1979. It was further reported that many of the applicants intended to settle in South Africa, and were seeking employment in the diamond cutting industry. Some 20 to 30 per cent of the applicants were European (mainly Russian and Rumanian) Jews who had come to Israel as immigrants. The main reason given by these people for coming to South Africa was their inability to cope with conditions in Israel, particularly the overwhelming bureaucracy. There were estimated to be about 20,000 Israelis living in South Africa, many illegally.

The president of the National Council of Women, Sheila MacKenzie, attended the international conference of women leaders held under the auspices of the Council of Women's Organizations in Israel. The University of Stellenbosch Choir and the Drakensberg Boys Choir participated in the 11th Israel choir festival. A delegation of South African medical researchers under the leadership of Professor A.J. Brink visited Israel in March; this was the first of a proposed series of annual visits. A joint scientific research program was launched by the University of Pretoria and the Ben Gurion University.

**Antisemitism**

Various antisemitic groups continued to propagate theories about Jewish conspiracies aimed at world domination. Slanderous attacks on Jews and Judaism were published in the *SA Observer*, edited by S.E.D. Brown; some issues were banned. The emergence in some centers of *Odal*, a Nazi-style youth movement, and its illegal distribution of racist propaganda at state schools, drew public condemnation, official proscription, and strong protest from the Jewish community. The allegation that Jews had falsified history in regard to the Nazi attempt at genocide continued to be made in a number of right-wing extremist magazines. The same charge appeared in *Muslim News*, which also published ugly attacks on Israel, Zionism, and the Jewish religion. An article by Bill Chalmers, head of English language religious programs of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, which was published under the auspices of a right-wing publishing house, drew angry protest from the Jewish community.

Condemnation of overt antisemitism was widespread; through the agency of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) protests about serious antisemitic incidents were lodged whenever they occurred. To counter increased campus activity by anti-Zionist elements on both the right and the left, seminars were organized by the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS).
Communal Activities

The high rate of emigration among white South Africans appeared to be declining, but its impact was still felt in the Jewish community, which was relatively small. There was a dearth of personnel to man communal institutions as posts became vacant. Fewer rabbis from abroad were ready to accept appointments in South Africa; this was particularly true in the smaller centers. To deal with this situation, efforts were made to coordinate communal activities, particularly in the cultural sphere.

SAJBD continued its policy of intergroup contacts through meetings with leaders of various sectors of South African society. The organization consistently expressed its commitment to the principle of racial non-discrimination.

The publication in Jewish Affairs of a demographic survey of the Jewish community, conducted by Dr. Allie Dubb under the auspices of SAJBD, received broad coverage in the general press. Of particular interest was the finding that a very large proportion of Jews supported the major communal institutions, considering them necessary, and seeing them as fulfilling their functions competently.

SAJBD became fully affiliated with the World Jewish Congress; previously it had enjoyed associate status.

Zionism

The aliya department of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) continued to be quite active, although the rate of emigration to Israel declined. It was noted, in fact, that some South Africans were returning from Israel. SAZF continued to support youth work, sponsoring a number of well-attended seminars and summer camps. The organization also supported projects held under the auspices of SAUJS.

During March the Israel United Appeal (IUA) conducted its biennial campaign. Julius Weinstein was national president of the campaign and Mendel Kaplan was national chairman. Distinguished Israeli participants in IUA's effort included ambassadors Simcha Dinitz, Itzhak Keenan, and Moshe Gilboa, Rabbi Mordechai Kirshblum, Meron Medzini, and Harry Rosen.

The South African Jewish community accepted responsibility for the restoration of Jerusalem's Bucharan quarter as its contribution to Project Renewal. General Aharon Doron came to South Africa to launch the project.

At its 23rd biennial congress, the Women's Zionist Council of South Africa dealt with the areas of fund-raising and aliya. The congress was opened by Professor Ruth Lapidoth of the Hebrew University.
Jewish Education

Funds for Jewish education, provided in the main by the United Communal Fund, were inadequate, and various arrangements were entered into with the Jewish Agency for the support of ten day schools and numerous afternoon schools. Difficulties continued to be experienced in the recruitment of suitable personnel to serve as Hebrew and Jewish studies teachers in the various schools; some teachers were successfully recruited from Israel on short-term contracts. Matters of school administration, recruitment of staff, and curriculum planning were discussed at the Jewish Headmasters Association conference, held in July.

Religion

Conflict between the Orthodox and Reform sectors of the community surfaced on a number of occasions, and received dramatic coverage in the Jewish and general press. There was discontent among the leadership of the United Progressive Jewish Congregations, representing the Reform movement, about the distribution of communal funds to day schools which did not cater to Reform children. Moreover, the claim was made that children from Reform homes were not provided for in the community-funded religious study program offered as an alternative to religious instruction in state schools.

The growth of the Lubavitcher movement, particularly in Johannesburg, added an important new dimension to Jewish religious life. The Lubavitch Foundation of South Africa, headed by Rabbi Mendel Lipskar, sponsored a highly successful seminar on the family; the featured speaker was Judah Landes of the United States.

Jewish Culture

Lectures and seminars by visiting and local personalities continued to be organized under the auspices of the leading communal bodies. Aside from SAJBD and SAZF, the Union of Jewish Women of South Africa (UJW) and the Women's Zionist Council of South Africa (WZC) were very active in this area. Projects of specific interest to their own members were organized by the Hebrew Order of David (which celebrated its 75th anniversary and invited Judge Felix Landau of Israel to be its guest of honor) and B'nai B'rith. SAUJS conducted programs which enjoyed wide support among students.

SAJBD's Harry and Friedel Abt Museum organized a number of prestigious exhibitions and cultural events which were praised in the general press.

The University of Cape Town was the recipient of a large grant from the Kaplan-Kushlik Foundation, made on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the family business. The grant made possible the establishment of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Center of Jewish Studies and Research. The Foundation also established a chair in Egypt-Israel relations at Tel Aviv University. The publication
of a book chronicling the history of the Kaplan family, *From Shtetl to Steel-making*, was announced.

After assisting in the launching of the Women's United Communal Fund campaign, under the auspices of UJW, Chaim Bermant, the British author and journalist, delivered lectures throughout the country. Other prominent visitors who gave lectures were Professor Shlomo Breznitz, at the invitation of the Haifa University Cultural Exchange Society; Professor Israel Knox, Professor Harold Fisch, and Herman Wouk, at the invitation of SAJBD; Bernard Cherrick, vice president of the Hebrew University, at the invitation of the South African Friends of the Hebrew University; Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, president of Bar-Ilan University, at the invitation of SAZF; General Amos Hovev, at the invitation of the Haifa Technion Society; and Rabbi L.I. Rabinowitz, at the invitation of the World Bible Society of South Africa.

**Personalia**

Professor M.Z. Kadar was appointed head of the department of Hebrew at the University of the Witwatersrand. Lionel Conyer became president of the United Progressive Jewish Congregation of South Africa. Leslie Frankel accepted the chair of the Israel Bonds campaign. Freda Kapelus was elected president of UJW. Julius Weinstein became a member of the Jewish Agency's board of governors. Ronald Misheiker retired from his post as secretary of the Board of Jewish Education upon his *aliyah* to Israel, and was succeeded by Maish Zimmerman. Mark Cohen, previously headmaster of Yeshiva College in Johannesburg, succeeded Denis Diamond as executive director of SAJBD; the latter went on *aliyah*. Stephen Pincus was elected chairman of SAZF's youth council. Rabbi E.J. Steinhorn succeeded Rabbi David Rosen as spiritual leader of the Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation. David Lazarus was made an associate life member of the Cape Society of Chartered Accountants. Hyman Moross, who died in April, was posthumously awarded an honorary doctorate of law by the University of the Witwatersrand. Professor Margaretha Isaacson was appointed head of the department of pathology at the University of the Witwatersrand. Morris Nestadt was granted a fellowship by the Rotary Foundation of South Africa. Harold Levy was appointed an acting judge. Walter Arenson was elected chairman of the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa. Jeanne Rudolph was awarded an honorary doctorate of music by the University of Pretoria. Louis Kreiner became mayor of Cape Town. Julius Gelb assumed the post of mayor of Milnerton. Professor Philip Tobias was appointed dean of the faculty of medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand. The same university presented its alumni award to Helen Suzman.

Among prominent Jews who died during the year were Nathan Rosenfeld, who had been active in the Federation of Synagogues, in April; Solomon Alufovitz, prominent in civic and Jewish affairs in Griqualand West, in April; Lionel Magid, leader of Natal Jewry and one-time chairman of the Council of Natal Jewry, in
April; Dr. Hyman Moross, medical superintendent of Tara Hospital, in April; Dr. Hodda F. Maisel, Durban medical officer, in April; Leon Feldberg, writer, editor, and founder of the *SA Jewish Times*, in April; Adam Leslie, prominent theatrical personality, in May; Neville Brodie, leader of Port Elizabeth Jewry, in May; Esther Oleska, secretary of the country communities committee of SAJBD and editor of *Hayenu*, in June; Arnold Gewer, a leading member of the SA Board of Jewish Education, in June; Jessie Karpas, former mayor of Parow, in June; Miriam Solomans, chairman of the National Council of Women, in June; Rabbi Arthur Saul Super, former chief minister of the United Progressive Jewish Congregations of South Africa and former editor of the *SA Zionist Record*, in Israel, in July; Chayele Rosenthal, theatrical personality, in July; Saville Dorfman, former chief traffic officer of Johannesburg, in September; Israel Geshen, prominent businessman and leader of Natal Jewry, in October; Sallie Kussel, active in UJW, SAJBD, and the International Council of Women, in October; Dr. Jack Abelson, prominent medical figure and Jewish leader, in November; and Israel Alter, former cantor of the Great Synagogue of Johannesburg, in November.

DENIS DIAMOND