South Africa

JEISH COMMUNITY

SOUTH AFRICAN JEWS shared with their fellow-citizens in the steady improvement of economic conditions through 1972. Rising costs, however, brought the need to meet increased communal budgets. Politically the position remained stable, despite problems endemic to black-white race relations in the republic and the subcontinent.

Population

At the 27th biennial congress of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, central representative organization of the community, held in Johannesburg in May, Mervyn Cohen, lecturer in statistics at the Witwatersrand University, analyzed Jewish population figures extracted from the 1970 national census (AJYB, 1972 [Vol. 73], p. 580). The census figure of 117,990 Jews represented 3.2 per cent of the European (white) population of 3,750,716, in a total population of 21,447,250. This was a decline in ratio from 1960, when the Jewish community then numbering 114,501 represented 3.7 per cent of the European population, and again from 1951 when the Jewish community of 108,497 was 4.1 per cent of the European population. The proportional drop, said Mr. Cohen, was the result of a declining birthrate, high-age structure, and absence of immigration.

The birthrate in the Jewish community was lower than that of the rest of the European population (15.6 against 20.7 per cent). Among the aged, there were more Jews than non-Jews in the 60-69 age group (11.4 against 6.5 per cent) and in the over-70 age group (6.7 against 4.1 per cent). If present trends continued, the disparity would be still more pronounced by 1975.

Civic and Political Status

Jews continued to participate as equal citizens in all branches of South African life. In Parliament, four Jews were members of the House of
Assembly and one Jew was a member of the Senate. Richard Friedlander was reelected mayor of Cape Town, David Lazarus mayor of East London, and Solly Rubin mayor of Port Elizabeth. Jews were also mayors or deputy mayors in several other towns. Seven Jews sat on the South African Supreme Court.

There was much debate during the year on whether Jewish organizations should continue their traditional policy of declining to take a communal stand on apartheid. At the biennial Board of Deputies congress Leonard Fein, professor of politics and social policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, delivered the keynote address on "Creative Jewish Survival: The Challenges Which Face Jewry." *Inter alia,* he referred to the "moral costs" which, he felt, must be involved in the South African experience, and he suggested that it was important to know how the community assessed and met them.

The Board's president Maurice Porter and chairman David Mann said that the moral challenge faced Jewish as much as non-Jewish citizens; that it was for individuals to take what course they chose. Jewish opinion on political and racial issues in South Africa showed the same diversity as non-Jewish opinion. The Board of Deputies could not adopt a collective attitude because it was a nonpolitical body which did not enter the political arena except on matters specifically affecting the Jewish community.

Introducing the public-relations debate, Arthur Suzman, Q.C., chairman of the Board's public relations committee, indicated that, while the Board's policy that "neither the Jewish community as a group nor the Board as its representative organization should enter the political arena" was correct and must continue, this did not mean that Jews must remain silent on moral issues. The community could take no corporate action; but it was the duty of the individual to make his contribution in terms of Jewish teaching. In the ensuing debate student delegates differed sharply from the Board's policy, but senior delegates reaffirmed it. The consensus was expressed in a resolution which, after reaffirming the loyalty of the Jewish citizens to South Africa, declared:

Whilst recognising that, in regard to the racial and political problems of the Republic, there is a diversity of outlook in the Jewish community as among our fellow South Africans, we share with all those who dwell in our country the great challenge and opportunity involved in establishing, on ethical foundations, a just, stable, and peaceful relationship between all races and groups in South Africa, which acknowledges the right of all to live in dignity and security, to maintain their group identity and distinctive culture, and to exercise the opportunity to advance in all spheres. Congress therefore calls upon every Jew to make his contribution to the promotion of these ends, in accordance with the precepts and teachings of Judaism, in his personal attitudes and dealings, and in the particular sphere of life and activity in which he is engaged.

The debate was revived in October by what became known as "the students' letter." Twenty-three Jewish students of Witwatersrand University
published in the press an "open letter" to Chief Rabbi Bernard Casper of the Federation of Synagogues of South Africa (headlined by one paper: "Ashamed of South African Jewry"). They accused him of closing his eyes to racial injustice in South Africa and criticized him for saying in a Rosh Ha-shanah message to the press that South African Jews were grateful for the hospitality they enjoyed in the Republic. The students declared they were "ashamed" of South African Jewish spiritual and communal leaders for "betraying" the ethical injunctions of Judaism by their failure to take a stand against apartheid. Such was the shame they felt that they now had "little or nothing to do with the Jewry into which we were born."

In a reply, also published in the press, Rabbi Casper reminded the students that it was a Jewish principle to "separate not thyself from the community"; that their duty therefore should have been to discuss their complaints with the leaders they criticized rather than rush into the press and disown their community. It was also a Jewish principle to express thanks for living in peace as citizens of a country which accorded Jews "every freedom to practise and teach our religion, to develop our own educational system, to organize our representative institutions, to express ourselves politically—in fact to live as full citizens while showing our concern for our brethren in every part of the world." He contrasted this position with that of the Jews in Russia, Arab lands, and parts of Central and Eastern Europe. As for South Africa's racial and political problems, he continued, it was not realistic to expect "the small Jewish minority group, itself largely composed of comparatively recent immigrants," to embark upon "a crusade" for their solution. "As citizens it is your right, and perhaps your duty, to be involved in these matters. But you have not the right to speak as though this is the special burden and responsibility of the Jewish community and its leaders." The Jewish community, Rabbi Casper added, did what it could to live up to Jewish teachings of justice and charity, the dignity of man and the care to be shown to the weak and underprivileged; only those who were divorced from Jewish life could feel "ashamed" of the Jewish record.

In the press controversy that followed some of the students who had signed the letter recanted; others, who had not signed the letter, repudiated the letter-writers as representing only themselves.

Commenting on the issue at a Board of Deputies meeting in October, David Mann said that, while it was gratifying to find students concerned with moral issues, the signatories to the letter had been at fault in their demarche to the press and in their ignorance of the facts: "The Jewish community in this country does as much as—if not more than—any other section to help uplift the depressed, whether white or non-white, and whether it be through public work or through charity. Certainly we have no reason to be ashamed of our record." He invited the dissident students to enter into dialogue with Jewish communal leaders.

African views on South Africa's racial problems were presented to a Jewish
audience in August when Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, chief minister of the Zulu Homeland Authority, addressed the Durban Jewish Club. He said that black people in South Africa identified their situation with that of the Israelites in biblical Egypt and derived inspiration from the Jewish advance to freedom. He appealed to them, as he appealed to other white South Africans, to help his nation "stand on our own feet."

**Scripture Lessons in State Schools**

The Jewish community continued to be concerned about the new regulations requiring Scripture lessons in state schools to be "Christo-centric" and directed, *inter alia*, "to prepare the pupil, through his knowledge of the Bible, to accept Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour..." (AJYB, 1972 [Vol. 73], p. 582). The issue was discussed at the May congress of the Board. Delegates from the Cape Province reported that the majority of Jewish parents had acted upon the urging of the Board's Cape Council that they exercise their legal right and ask that their children be withdrawn from such lessons. The delegates advocated that their approach be adopted by the Jewish community on a countrywide basis. The congress asked the newly-elected executive council to give the matter urgent attention. The council appointed a committee to study the position, with special reference to variations in some schools and attempts to meet the difficulties of Jewish students. At the time of writing, an approach to the minister of education was under consideration.

**Antisemitism**

Relations between Jews and non-Jews continued to be cordial, despite anti-Jewish propaganda by fringe groups. The link of some of the agitators to an international antisemitic network was suggested by the fact that much of the locally distributed material was identical to that used in the United States, England, Scandinavia, and Australia.

Some newspapers made much of the fact that some defaulters in financial crashes during the year had fled to Israel. Israel Consul General Itzhak Unna pointed out that there was an extradition treaty between Israel and South Africa, which made it possible for local authorities to secure the return of any such defaulters.

When Harry Schwarz was elected Transvaal leader of the opposition United party during the year, he became the butt of anti-Jewish remarks at some political meetings. National party press organs (*Die Vaderland*, *Die Transvaler*, and *Die Oosterlig*) condemned such tactics and said that antisemitism would not be tolerated in the ranks of the governing party. An editorial in *Die Vaderland* declared: "Afrikaner, Jew, German and English-speaking are all citizens of white South Africa. All have a
contribution to make to the country. To try to cast suspicion on a person on grounds of his origin or religion is a kind of racialism which will never be allowed in the National Party. However much we differ from Mr. Schwarz politically, we condemn this unfortunate incident with the strongest possible feelings.'

A report in the London Jewish Chronicle of October 13 said that Prime Minister Balthazar Johannes Vorster, in criticizing Schwarz for an attack on the Afrikaner Broederbond, had brought in his Jewish background and referred to the Jewish Board of Deputies as a secret society. The report was rebutted by Board of Deputies General Secretary Gustav Saron who, in a letter to the editor of the Chronicle (October 27), said in part:

Mr. Vorster made no attack whatever upon the Board of Deputies. Indeed, from a careful reading of what he actually said, it is clear that his intention, in mentioning the board, was not to attack or criticize it, but to defend the Broederbond. Rebutting criticisms levelled at the Broederbond by Mr. H. Schwarz, Transvaal leader of the United Party, Mr. Vorster claimed in essence that the Broederbond was an Afrikaner organisation which “promoted the interests” of the Afrikaans-speaking community, just as the Board of Deputies and the Hellenic organisation promoted the interests of their respective communities.

In Cape Town, the police charged Desmond Helmuth Welthagen with illegal possession of explosives and complicity in Scorpio, an organization that had sent slanderous and threatening pamphlets to certain Christian and Jewish clergymen, and to other individuals. On December 20 Welthagen was found guilty on six counts of criminal libel and sentenced to a fine of R300 and six months’ imprisonment (the latter suspended). He was found not guilty of the explosives charge.

There also had been a few incidents of swastika-daubing.

Communal Organization

Problems of communal organization were examined at the Board’s 27th biennial congress, which was attended by delegates from all parts of the country. Leonard Fine, professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, discussed aspects of the American experience in communal organization and handling current problems. Board leaders and delegates stressed the need for closer communal coordination, long-range planning in terms of the community’s resources and expectations, and more purposive efforts to bridge the “generation gap” with youth. The congress feted the 30th anniversary of the Board’s monthly magazine, Jewish Affairs, and welcomed its new Afrikaans-language quarterly Buurman (“Neighbor”), which had been well received by the Afrikaans community. Attention was given to the Board’s cultural work and its plans to erect in Johannesburg a
South African Jewish Cultural Center which would also house the Board’s headquarters, national Jewish library, archives, and museum. The gathering reelected Maurice Porter president, and the new executive council reelected David Mann chairman.

Shortly before the Board of Deputies congress, the Union of Jewish Women of South Africa held its 16th national conference in Johannesburg. It was attended by delegates from its 58 branches representing 10,000 members throughout the country. The Union provided a varied program of involvement, from adult education to community services; from Israel-oriented programs to projects catering to the needy and underprivileged in South Africa. The conference elected Mrs. Leah Rosettenstein to succeed Mrs. Jeanette Cohen as national president.

Cultural projects during the period under review included a tour by Dr. Simon Herman, associate professor of psychology at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, who conducted seminars on Jewish identification in the main cities of South Africa in August, under the joint auspices of the South African Zionist Federation and the Jewish Board of Deputies. Several other notable visitors came to South Africa during the year. Simon Wiesenthal of the Jewish Documentation Center in Vienna addressed the South African Yad Vashem. Professor William Haber, central board president of the World ORT Union, spoke at meetings of the South African ORT. Dr. Alexander Rosenfeld, head of the Brit Ivrit Olamit, addressed the South African Histadrut Ivrit Conference. Professor Samuel Rozhansky of Buenos Aires attended a celebration organized by the South African Yiddish Cultural Federation on the occasion of the publication, in an encyclopaedic anthology of Yiddish literature which he is editing, of a volume devoted to South African Yiddish writing.

The annual Day of Remembrance meetings for martyred European Jewry, organized by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, were well attended. Special synagogue services were held in September to mourn the Israeli athletes killed by Arab terrorists during the Munich Olympic Games; the Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation issued a joint statement.

Fund Raising

At the request of the South African Treasury, the Zionist Federation, with the participation of the Board of Deputies, instituted a special Overseas Funds Committee to process applications to the Treasury for foreign currency to cover South African contributions to Israeli institutions. At a press conference in August, Zionist Federation chairman Solly Liebgott said that, in the nine months of the committee’s operation thus far, everything had worked satisfactorily, and the Treasury had accepted its recommendations. Before
engaging in any fund raising for Israeli institutions, approval must first be obtained from the Overseas Funds Committee for both the timing of the proposed campaign and transfer facilities. To clarify the procedure, the following advertisement was inserted in leading Israeli newspapers:

All Israeli institutions which contemplate fund-raising activities in South Africa are warned that there are strict government laws and regulations relating both to the raising of funds and to the transfer of monies abroad. It is therefore in their own interest to obtain more detailed information from the Tel Aviv office of the South African Zionist Federation.

Fund raising in 1972 was devoted mainly to the United Communal Fund for South African Jewry’s national domestic institutions and to the education funds which finance the community’s Jewish day schools. Campaign leaders reported that, due to the improving economic conditions, contributions were higher than in previous drives.

In the Cape, moves towards united fund raising (AJYB, 1972 [Vol.73], p. 583) had to be suspended when some of the institutions concerned refused to participate.

The South African Jewish Trust, a new financial instrument for raising substantial funds for the endowment of communal projects (religious, philanthropic, and cultural), made progress during the year. Sponsored by the Board of Deputies, and incorporated under South African legislation for tax exemption, it directed special efforts to acquaint lawyers and trustees with the facilities it could provide for testators. Some substantial benefactions were received.

**Religion**

Intermittent sniping at Reform by a group of Orthodox extremists threatened to spill over into a communal clash in October, when the *Federation Chronicle*, official organ of the Federation of Synagogues of South Africa, published a slashing editorial attack on Reform. It was blown up by the general press in sensational reports of a “split” in the Jewish community. At one stage, attack and counter-attack became such that chairman Mann of the Board of Deputies appealed to congregational leaders to help cool the atmosphere. The Board, he said, had always worked for peace and harmony in the spirit of *Klal Yisroel*, the total Jewish community, and had encouraged all sections to play their part in Jewish communal life. On the Board’s councils, as on those of other Jewish communal bodies, members of different sections had learned to work together and respect each other. And that was as it should be, he continued, for both Orthodoxy and Reform had a legitimate place in Jewish communal life.
Following this appeal, Orthodox Chief Rabbi Casper and Reform Chief Minister Rabbi Arthur Super kept aloof from the conflict, and the controversy receded.

A number of Orthodox congregations celebrated jubilees, and a new synagogue was consecrated in Vereeniging. A new Reform temple was consecrated in Morningside, Johannesburg.

**Education**

Progress in the field of Jewish education was highlighted at the 16th national education conference convened in Johannesburg during July by the South African Board of Jewish Education. It was reported at the meeting that there now were in South Africa 18 Jewish day schools with a total enrollment of 6,328 pupils and 385 teachers. A similar number of children received Jewish instruction at part-time schools (mostly *hedorim*) throughout the country. The conference paid tribute to chairman Louis Sachs for his leadership contribution to this achievement. Sachs relinquished the chair to become president of the Board; Ivan Greenstein was elected the new chairman.

A Jewish Agency survey of Jewish education in South Africa, cited by Sachs in his address to the conference, showed that 11,900 out of an estimated 23,000 Jewish children in South Africa were receiving some form of Jewish education—a higher percentage than in most other diaspora communities.

Chaim Finkelstein, head of the Jewish Agency Department of Education and Culture in the Diaspora, was guest speaker at the Cape Board of Jewish Education conference held in Cape Town in November. The conference decided on a major financial appeal to raise needed funds for education.

**Youth**

Bnei Akiva protested admission to the South African Zionist Youth Council in July of Maginim, the Reform Jewish youth movement. When the Council refused to reverse its decision to admit the group, Bnei Akiva walked out. Intervention by Zionist leaders effected conciliation, and they returned to the Council in August.

As before, the various Zionist youth movements played the major role in organized youth work; their end-of-year summer camps attracted large numbers and included programs of Jewish studies.

The youth department of the Board of Deputies again sent a group, under youth director Joseph Amiel, on a leadership-training course to Israel. Student delegates attended conferences overseas, and went on study tours of Israel.
Social Services

South Africa’s Minister of Social Welfare Dr. C. P. Mulder lauded Jewish social welfare work in the country when he opened Benevolent House, the new headquarters of the Jewish Women’s Benevolent and Welfare Society, in Johannesburg in May. He said the society had the distinction of being the oldest women’s organization in Johannesburg, having been established in 1893 when the city was only seven years old. The mayor of Johannesburg, Brigadier J.C. Lemmer, thanked the society for the contribution it had made to the city.

Specialized services provided by various Jewish institutions to the aged, the handicapped, the orphaned, and those in need of financial assistance and rehabilitation continued along routine lines.

Cultural Activities

The South African Yiddish Cultural Federation celebrated its silver jubilee in August at a musical and literary evening addressed by visiting American Yiddish poetess Bracha Kopstein and visiting Labor Zionist leader Berl Frymer. Its cultural programs and monthly journal, Dorem Afrike, have been features of Jewish cultural life in South Africa.

Adult education programs conducted by the Zionist Federation, the Board of Deputies, the Union of Jewish Women, and various congregations continued to provide cultural pabulum.

Books by South African Jewish writers, published during the year, included: The Fordsburg-Mayfair Hebrew Congregation, 1893-1964, by Bernard Sachs (history); Livingstone’s Companions, by Nadine Gordimer (short stories); In licht fun ovent, by Michael Ben Moshe (Yiddish poems); Negentien Gedigte, by Olga Kirsch (Afrikaans poems); Shadow in the Sun, by Chaim Lewis (poems); Tales, by Sinclair Beiles (poems); Behind the Windows, by Michael Pam (poems); Unrest, by Edgar Bernstein (poems); Walk in the Shadows, by Pete Reichman (novel); Today and Yesterday, by David Shrand (sketches and essays).

Zionism and Relations With Israel

Relations between South Africa and Israel became closer with the opening of a South African consulate general in Tel Aviv in May. The event had been long in coming, in view of the fact that Israel had set up a diplomatic mission in South Africa soon after the inception of the Jewish state. There were factors on both sides, relating to votes at the United Nations and Israel’s policies in
Africa (see AJYB, 1963 [Vol.64], and succeeding volumes), which delayed reciprocal South African diplomatic representation in Israel. But since the 1967 six-day war, when South Africa facilitated very considerable assistance to Israel from the South African Jewish community, reciprocal understanding increased. It was further fostered by the diplomatic services rendered by Itzhak Unna, Israel consul general in South Africa for the past three years, and Ambassador Michael Michael, who came as chargé d’affaires of the Israel legation. Unna, speaking Afrikaans as well as English, established rapport especially with newspaper editors, was frank in his comments on events, never sought to hide differences. It was significant that when his tour of duty came to an end in November, editors of the leading papers, both English and Afrikaans, gathered at a farewell press party in his honor.

South Africa appointed a senior diplomat, Dr. Charles Fincham, as its consul general in Israel, and A.E. van Niekerk as consul.

In June South African Minister for Water Affairs S.P. Botha visited Israel to study what was being done in water research and utilization. In interviews on his return he said he had been deeply impressed and pointed to the similarity of problems confronting Israel and South Africa.

The composition of delegates to the 32nd South African Zionist Conference, held in Johannesburg at the beginning of September, reflected the 1971 Zionist elections (AJYB, 1972 [Vol.73], p. 588), with the Revisionists for the first time having the largest representation. This composition was duly reflected in the personnel of the new executive council. Julius Weinstein (Revisionist) was elected chairman; Joseph Dalessi (Revisionist) became honorary president, and Edel Horwitz (United Zionist Association) was elected president of the South African Zionist Federation.

Guests of honor at the conference were General Ezer Weizman and Prof. Michael Zand, who came from Israel for the occasion. Zand described the struggle of Soviet Jews to emigrate to Israel, and Weizman reviewed Israel’s position vis-à-vis the Arabs. He also told the gathering that, “Per capita, the contributions of South African Jews, as combatants, in Aliyah and in money, have, I think, been the highest of all Diaspora communities.”

Youth delegates, attending in larger numbers than at previous conferences, participated in heated debates on Zionist commitment. A resolution they proposed, urging that the chairmen of the Federation’s main committees commit themselves to aliyah, was adopted. Outgoing chairman Solly Liebgott, who left on aliyah to Israel a few months after the conference, was feted in the spirit of this resolution.

Earlier in the year, the Women’s Zionist campaign was successfully launched by visiting leaders of Israeli women’s groups, Raya Jaglom, Esther Herlitz, and Yedida Lahav. During the year, the 40th anniversary of the South African Women’s Zionist Council was celebrated.

The various other Zionist organizations continued their routine activities.
Personalia

South African Jewry suffered many losses during the year. Mrs. Rae Gradner, former mayor of Cape Town and a veteran communal worker, died in Cape Town in January, at the age of 86; Gus Osrin, secretary of the South African Jewish Appeal, died in Johannesburg in February, at the age of 76; Professor Velve Schrire, famous cardiologist and member of Prof. Christian Barnard's cardiac team, died in Cape Town in February, at the age of 55; Col. D. H. Levinkind, veteran communal worker, died in Cape Town in April, at the age of 76; Moss Freed, veteran communal leader, died in Durban in May, at the age of 91; Silas Shalom Perry, scholar, philanthropist and benefactor of the Hebrew University, died in Johannesburg in June, at the age of 81; Claude Leon, eminent South African industrialist and philanthropist, died in Johannesburg in October, at the age of 88; Mrs. Jane Comaroff, a leader of the women Zionists, died in Cape Town in October, at the age of 53; Harry Cohen, Zionist leader and communal worker, died in Johannesburg in November, at the age of 65; Walter Seehoff, leading Jewish welfare worker, died in Johannesburg in December at the age of 69; Maurice Block, Hebrew scholar, one-time head of the Hebrew department at Orange Free State University and leading Zionist and communal worker, died in Bloemfontein in December, at the age of 82.

EDGAR BERNSTEIN