

South African Jewish Involvement in the Anti-Apartheid Movement

By: David Rothenberg



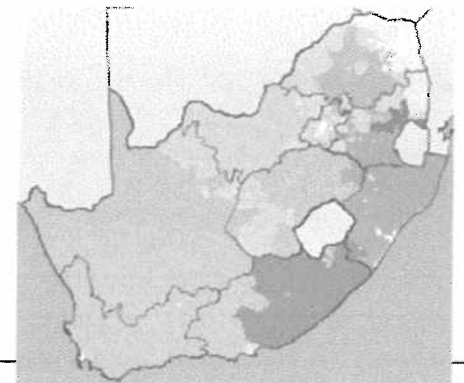
Without understanding the history of a country, it is unrealistic to expect an observer to fully comprehend a slice of that country's timeline. The most infamous era of South African history is that of Apartheid, which spanned from 1948-1994. Although the basic storyline and the emergence of Nelson Mandela as the first elected democratic Black leader of South Africa by the majority of the entire population is known to much of the world, the historical background and the involvement of different groups of society are not at the forefront of this epic story. The South African Jews, although a tiny percentage of the population, were well known by the Afrikaners during Apartheid because they were seen as a White hindrance. This work, which documents the first arrival of Whites to South Africa, seeks to illustrate how the history of White South Africa led to Apartheid and how the Jewish people, whether prominent individuals or members of my own family, played a part in the historic fight against Apartheid.

South African History

In 1498, the Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama reached India from Europe via the Cape of Good Hope (Warnsley 15). De Gama was searching for the quickest seafaring route to India, probably never realizing the effect this would have on southern Africa, an area that had been of little interest to the European empires. Even though Vasco de Gama found this route in the late Fifteenth century, major changes began occurring in southern Africa with the arrival of the Dutch East India Company under the leadership of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652 (Warnsley 15). The Dutch East India Company then established the first European settlement, creating a midway point for Dutch ships between the Netherlands and the Far East ("South Africa"). In Southern Africa, specifically the Cape of Good Hope, the Dutch ships could receive fresh supplies for their long trip ahead. During the seventeenth century, the Dutch did not plan on colonizing the area, but only using the area to grow crops as well as purchase meat from the indigenous Khoikoi

people, known as the Hottentots to the Whites (Spooner 41). However, typical of colonization by the European powers, the Dutch slowly overstepped the boundaries of their relationship with the indigenous peoples, creating a plethora of problems with the Blacks that plagued southern Africa for over three centuries.

In 1659, a Khoikoi leader named Doman attacked the ever-growing Dutch community; nevertheless, the spears of the Khoikoi were futile against the technologically advanced muskets the settlers possessed, and the colonists continued their dispersion (Warnsley 15). With the arrival of Huguenot fugitives from France in 1688, the number of settlers grew (Spooner 42). The European settlers were becoming a new people, no longer relating to their ancestral country but now known as Afrikaners. The Afrikaners, mainly of Dutch descent, were encouraged to speak the Dutch dialect of South Africa, which became Afrikaans, no matter their original language. The Afrikaners continued their expansionist agenda while conflict heated up throughout the eighteenth century.



2001 Dominant S.A. Languages.

Afrikaans	English
Ndebele	Xhosa
Zulu	Northern Sotho
Sotho	Tswana
Swazi	Venda
Tsonga	None dominant

South Africa, once a country of only Black Africans, became multiracial consisting of four main groups: Africans, Whites, Coloureds, and Indians. The Africans are by far the most numerous and considered to be the most primitive of all the groups, according to most of the Afrikaners of Apartheid South Africa (Spooner 79). They have also been the group who, throughout the past three centuries, has received the least income per family, less than half that of a Coloured or Indian, and less than a tenth that of a White (Spooner 173). Not surprisingly, they are also the group that usually performs menial tasks. The Whites are generally split into

two groups: the English speakers and the Afrikaans speakers. The English speakers include those of British heritage, as well as the Jewish people of South Africa, who emigrated from all parts of Europe. The Afrikaners are a much more heterogeneous group compared to the English speakers and dislike them for not fully embracing the Afrikaner nationalist sentiment. The group known as the Coloureds was the offspring of Whites and Hottentots, Whites and slaves, and Hottentots and slaves (Spooner 43). The slaves were, for the most part, brought to South Africa from Asia and other parts of Africa by the Dutch East India Company. The Indians, the final group, are mainly descendants of indentured servants brought to South Africa from India in the middle of the nineteenth century to work on the sugar plantations in the colony of Natal (Spooner 107). It is important to recognize the complex racial nature of South Africa in order to better understand her problems. It was not just a White vs. Black world, as many Americans believed, comparing it to the civil rights movement of the United States. Though Blacks were considered the lowest of all four groups, feuds were not solely with the Whites but also with the Coloureds and the Indians. With all the racial problems, it is amazing how peaceful the transition was to a democratic South Africa in 1994.

In 1795, after over a century of Dutch control of the Cape of Good Hope, the British temporarily took it over in order to protect it from the French (Warnsley 16). The British then relinquished the Cape to the Dutch, but after Napoleon's conquests, they incorporated it again to protect their interests; in 1815, the British monetarily compensated the Dutch so as to keep the Cape, bringing the first major group of English to the country in 1820 (Spooner 47). In 1809, under its temporary administration, the British enacted the Hottentot Code, tying the Hottentot workers to the Afrikaners' land. This was the first "pass law" that made it illegal for a Hottentot worker to leave the plantation without a "pass" from his or her owner (Warnsley 16). With

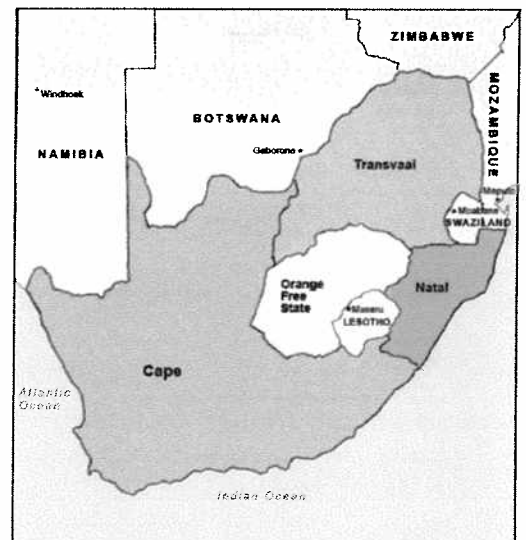
animosity growing between the Afrikaner frontiersmen and the indigenous Blacks, conflict was inevitable. Between 1817- 1828, Shaka Zulu, the leader of the Zulu tribe, fought to reclaim his kingdom in Natal. In 1820, the Xhosas were fighting the Afrikaner frontiersmen along the Eastern Cape (Warnsley 16). The British were able to drive out the Xhosas and set up military posts. In 1833, the British abolished slavery throughout their empire, which included South Africa, annulling the legislation of the 1809 pass law (Warnsley 17).



The only known drawing of Shaka Zulu standing with the long throwing assegai and the heavy shield in 1824, four years before his death

With revisions in policy in the 1830s such as the abolition of slavery, the Afrikaner colonists became increasingly agitated with the British governmental intrusions. Eighteen thirty-seven is considered a

momentous year for South African history due to the event known as the Great Trek, the migration of the Afrikaners north to the future provinces of the Orange Free State, Transvaal, and Natal (Spooner 52). The four provinces of what became Apartheid South Africa are the Cape Province, Orange Free State, Transvaal, and Natal. The Cape Province includes the western and southern coasts as well as the western half of South Africa. The Orange Free State is located in the mid-east of South Africa. The Transvaal is to the North of the Orange Free State and Natal. Natal is situated along the northeastern coast of South Africa. Due to the strong Zulu presence, as well as interference from the British, the trekkers who settled in Natal soon met up with the Transvaal trekkers. The provinces continued to grow during the nineteenth century with the British defeat of the



Zulus in Zululand in 1879, the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley, a city in the Orange Free State, in 1867, and the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand, an area in the Transvaal, in 1886 (Warnsley 18). The discovery of gold marked the richest gold find in history and created a population explosion of all groups in the city of Johannesburg.

The late nineteenth century marked the high point of the conflict for British- Afrikaner relations. From 1880-1881, the First Anglo- Boer (English- Afrikaner) War broke out, concluding with an Afrikaner victory and British recognition of the independence of the Transvaal (Warnsley 18). Paul Kruger became the first president of the Republic of South Africa in 1883, leading the country for 17 years (Warnsley 18). From 1899- 1902, the Second Anglo- Boer War occurred (Spooner 67). This time the British were victorious, conquering and annexing the Orange Free State and Transvaal. Finally, in 1910, the British and Afrikaners created the Union of South Africa, focusing their attention on the indigenous problems (Spooner 68). The Cape, Orange Free State, Transvaal, and Natal became the territories that comprised this newly found union.

After the establishment of the Union of South Africa, the White people of South Africa worked together at ascertaining their position over the non- White population. The laws that were passed between 1910- 1948 should not be confused with Apartheid. The term Apartheid, created by the Nationalist Party, did not yet exist; these laws did, however, encompass much of what the Apartheid doctrine wished to effect in South Africa, separating Whites from the other ethnic groups and placing them at the top of the hierarchal system. Legislation enacted prior to the Nationalist Party winning every election from 1948 till the end of Apartheid had three major



objectives in respect to non- Whites: separating them from Whites and limiting their movement, stopping their opportunity to ascend the vocational pyramid, and blocking their political rights.



In order to limit their movement and segregate them, the South African government enacted The Pass Law in 1910, The Native Land Act in 1913, The Immigration Act in 1913, The Native Urban Area in 1923, The Separate Amenities Act in 1936, and The Pegging Act in 1943. These laws restricted Black families from permanently living in cities, blocked Blacks from owning

farmland outside the Reserves (land set aside for Black housing), prevented Indians from moving around in the country, made urban areas for Whites only, legalized racial segregation that

ensured inequality, and restricted Indians to certain areas as

well as the Indian traders' movement in White areas,

respectively (St. Hill 10-12). In addition to the residential

segregation, the government also passed occupational

segregation legislations with The Native Labour Regulation

Act in 1911, The Mines and Works Act in 1911, The

Apprenticeship Act in 1922, The Poll Tax Act in 1925, The Wage Act in 1925, The Masters and

Servants Amendment Act in 1926, and The Native Trust and Land Act in 1936. These acts

legally subordinated Blacks' positions in the work place, gave Black miners the official status of

“unskilled workers” as opposed to White miners being “skilled workers,” prevented Blacks from

training to become skilled workers, taxed Black farm owners to force them to work for White

farm owners, paid greater amounts to those considered “civilized” which were Whites, gave

more power to the White farmers over their labor tenants, and eliminated Blacks from owning



land even on their Reserves (St. Hill 10-12). Obviously, the non-White population had a nearly non-existent voice in politics, as can be recognized from the enacted legislation. However,



increased political possibilities were removed from them with The Immigration Act in 1913 and The Political Act in 1936. These laws denied much of the minimal political rights the Indians had procured and removed Africans from the common voters roll, granting them four White representatives in parliament (St. Hill

10-12). Although legislation was passed to limit non-White political power, it should be noted that with the establishment of the Union of South Africa, non-Whites only had voting rights in the Cape and Natal but “these rights were virtually insignificant” in the first place (Spooner 70). In summary, even before the Nationalist Party took control of the government in 1948 and enacted laws that can be seen as the basis for the Apartheid doctrine, the 38 years prior to their rule already created laws that segregated Whites from non-Whites, classifying the Whites as superior in every way.

Between 1910- 1948, the Union of South Africa was controlled mainly by

Afrikaner leaders, specifically Generals Louis Botha, Jan Smuts, and James Hertzog, who were the first three prime ministers of South Africa. Botha and Smuts both belonged to the United Party while Herzog established the Nationalist Party which, prior to 1948, was in power from 1924-1939 (Spooner 71, 74, 132). The United and Nationalist parties were the two main original parties competing for the government, although there were other parties

such as the Labor party and Liberal Party; the United Party was liberal and pro-British compared to the Nationalist Party (Spooner 132). The United Party was able to



Louis Botha



James Hertzog

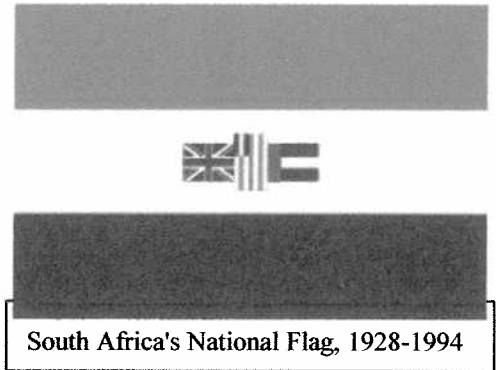


Jan Smuts

control the South African government in its early years, but with mainly Afrikaner support, the Nationalist Party ruled South Africa without a break from 1948-1994.

Apartheid

What does Apartheid mean and how did it come to define South Africa for over half a century? Clive Rothenberg, a man who spent his first 36 years in South Africa, defines the Afrikaans word as “separation” (Clive Rothenberg). It has also been defined as “setting apart or living apart” (Ali 27). The idea behind these definitions would be to segregate the Whites from



the others and have as little contact with them as possible. This notion can be observed with the creation of lands set aside for the African tribes to reside in, although those areas are usually tiny compared to the population requirements, as well as being infertile, rough terrain. A better word to describe the system that was run by the Nationalist party is *Baasskap*. The Afrikaans word *Baasskap* is defined as “hegemony” but has a much more sinister meaning behind it (Clive Rothenberg). *Baasskap* is a firmly held belief by most Afrikaners “that in everyday life the White man should never accept a situation where a non-White, however enlightened, exercises authority over a White, however depraved” (Spooner 112). This is even worse than Apartheid’s definition of separation as non-Whites should always be subservient to a White, no matter the comparable education, skills, or logic. Unfortunately, many White South Africans, specifically the Afrikaners, adhere to this fallacy of bigotry.

Under Apartheid, which became the official policy of South Africa under the Nationalist Party’s reign from 1948-1990, laws were established that created a class system based, with few exceptions, on the color of one’s skin. Trying to maintain racial purity, the government passed

the Population Registration Act in 1950 which made interracial marriage illegal and banned intimate relations between Whites and Blacks or Whites and Coloureds (St. Hill 12-13). Another segregation goal was passed in the same year with the Group Areas Act which moved entire non-White communities to different areas (Warnsley 44). One of the most notorious laws was the



Policeman checking Black Pass

Pass Laws, which required an African to possess a pass at all times or risk going to jail. These laws and its enforcement escalated with Apartheid, although they were in place beforehand. Because of the Pass Law, any White policeman could stop an African over the age of 15 at

any time and ask him for his pass to confirm that he was permitted to travel to and from his destination of work. The passes kept track of information such as identity number, personal details of holder, employment status, and fingerprints (Warnsley 44). Once someone



Pass Book

got arrested, it was impossible to keep track of the jail records because of the

Prisons Act in 1959, which “restricted reports on conditions in prisons” (St. Hill 13). Additional laws were aimed mostly at totally separating Whites from non- Whites, which included sporting facilities, schools, and universities (Warnsley 14). The only place the government wanted non-Whites to be seen was in the workforce in unskilled and underpaid positions.

South African Jews

Jewish immigration to South Africa, by and large to escape religious persecution, dropped this cultural group into a country in conflict. On both extremes, the Jewish people as a whole could have become relentless opponents of Nationalism and sided completely with equality or become undying Nationalist supporters. They generally fell somewhere in between the extremes, leaning very strongly toward the former choice. Although they became an

outspoken community, they were always a small minority of the White population. By 1911, they totaled 46,919 people (3.7% of Whites); by 1936, there were 90,645 (4.5% of Whites) Jews in South Africa and by 1946, there were only 104,156 (4.4% of Whites) (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 2). Even though they were a small minority in the country, they were a major Jewish community in terms of Jewish populations around the world, especially considering there were an estimated less than 15 million Jews in the entire world in the late nineteenth century. Most of the South African Jewish immigrants came from Eastern Europe, and those Jews rose to become the leaders of the Jewish community in South Africa.

Jewish institutions and organizations have always played important roles within Jewish communities. This was no exception in South Africa with the establishment of a South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) by 1898, and the South African Jewish board of Deputies (SAJBD), which was the “authorized spokesman for the Jewish community in its relations with the state, the government, and other ethnic and religious groups,” by 1912 (Elazar 187-188). Both these institutions, much more the latter, represented the Jewish community, and their actions came to either help or hurt the Jewish community’s standing among the South African people and government. In addition to the main organizations, there were dozens of other groups that displayed their feelings towards South African racial conditions, as well as the very important position of the Rabbi, who is not only a preacher to his congregation but also a representative of many Jews to the outside world. Although the secular and religious Jews had their own influences on the Jewish community, stories of select individuals often portray the underlying beliefs of the majority of the Jewish population’s sentiments towards the Nationalist government and its infamous Apartheid doctrine.

The Jews of South Africa faced a predicament of ethics and self-preservation that many people could come to understand. As a persecuted people, they understood better than most the pains of discrimination, but for once they were not the group that received the bulk of the mistreatment. Although they were White, they were still Jews, and the Afrikaners were known as not accepting of other people's beliefs. In addition, the Jew, according to many Afrikaners, was "more than unassimilable – he was subversive and corrupt" and therefore a threat to the dominate Afrikaner society (Shain 132). Already disliked by the Afrikaner class, Jews had to decide if they should use their "skin color advantage" to defend the "inferior" races, or to, for once, use their new found privileges to take advantage of a system that would allow them to live in wealth at the expense of others. The Jewish community of South Africa answered by generally supporting the discriminated races to the best of their abilities without outright protest that would lead to the dismantling of their Jewish organizations or expulsions from the country.

As noted above, there were already over 40,000 Jewish inhabitants by the early twentieth century, enough for anti-Semitic tensions by the Afrikaner to impact the incoming Jewish population. Not only did many Afrikaners espouse the usual medieval anti-Semitic notions, they were also critical of the Jewish competition for jobs and any condemnations they made about the discriminatory laws passed. During the Second World War, the Nationalist leaders, both Dr. Daniel Malan (first Prime Minister of Apartheid South Africa from 1948- 1954) and General Hertzog, did not want to join the British side (Allied Forces), and Malan's official opposition to the United Party "openly sided with Nazi Germany in the struggle" as the Germans were marching from one victorious battle to the next (Spooner 74). When the dust of the war settled, South Africa was lucky to have been led by the United Party, which supported the British, but the Jews were not in



Dr. Daniel Malan

a country that showed much sympathy to them. When Dr. Malan won the governmental elections of 1948, the Jewish population was fearful of their lives. By 1955 there were predictions of pogroms, and highly placed members of the Nationalist Party such as Eric Louw stated that “the anti-Semitic plank of the party was a valuable political asset (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 22). A few other prominent anti-Semitic members of the Nationalist Party included Eric Holm who broadcasted war time pro-Nazi propaganda, Johannes Strauss, who was an



“avowed anti-Semite and fascist,” and became the National Party leader in South-West Africa, and B.J. Vorster (Prime Minister from 1966-1978) who was a member of Ossewa Brandwag, the pro-German organization during World War II (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 25). These were only

but a fraction of the issues and people that provided a very unwelcoming environment to the Jews of South Africa.

Besides the fact that they were already trying to adjust and develop in a country that allowed them entrance and escape from Europe, it was not an easy task to protest the government without suffering consequences. The 1950 Suppression of Communism Act was a major inhibitor of any political disapproval. This was the most powerful legislation passed, although not the only one. Its wording was extremely vague, stating that “any doctrine or scheme... which aims at bringing about any political, industrial, or economic change... by means which include the promotion of disturbance of disorder” could be banned; this ban could be enforced on people, publications, and gatherings and could result in those people facing house arrests, banishments, or deportations (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 20). This Act interpreted racial equality as communistic, and anyone who spoke against the Apartheid doctrine trying to change the status quo would have to deal with the authorities who could use this legislation to severely punish

them. In fact, it was due to this communistic label that America did not interfere with Apartheid for some time because America was totally against communism (*Have You Heard from Johannesburg?*). Additionally, the Internal Security Act, the Sabotage Act, and Defense Act made it illegal to “embarrass the government in its foreign relations or alarm or depress members of the public” as well as the “affairs of state” – with a maximum penalty of death (Warnsley 45). One must therefore also realize how those who spoke out against inequality in South Africa were not just figuratively fighting the system but could literally be harshly punished by the authorities for doing so. However, Jews still played a big enough role to receive the unduly wanted recognition from the Nationalist government. B.J. Vorster, later Prime Minister from 1966-1978, made a remark in the early 1960’s while Minister of Justice that Jews consist of “2 to 3 per cent of the White population, nevertheless constituted 100 per cent of the White political crimes” (Tatz 122). Although this statement was obviously exaggerated, it paints a picture of how the Jewish people were often viewed by the Afrikaner. Additionally, the Jewish people were known to not vote for or support the Nationalist Party. Prior to the establishment of the other



B.J. Vorster

liberal parties, they generally voted for the United Party led by the pro-Zionist Jan Smuts, or the Labor Party, which consisted of Jews in many prominent positions (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 11). Even in the middle of Apartheid South



Hendrik Verwoerd

Africa, in 1961, the Prime Minister at that time, Hendrik Verwoerd, made remarks declaring that the “fact that during the last election so many Jews had

favoured the Progressive Party and so few the Nationalist Party, did not pass unnoticed”

(Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 50). The Jewish people definitely showed their beliefs in the polling results and this never helped their standing with the Nationalist regime.

Before the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act was enacted, there were already numerous stories of dissent by Jews. Many were imprisoned or deported and others escaped overseas shortly before being apprehended to steer clear of the authorities domestic punishment. A few of the earlier Jewish protesters include Henry Polak, Hermann Kallenbach, Sonia Schlesin, Emil Sachs, and Yeshaya Israeltam. Polak, Kallenbach, and Schlesin were all close friends of the renowned Mohandas Gandhi and created one of the first public outcries over the moral obligations Jews had over helping the racial system; Sachs lead a series of strikes to better “the appalling conditions in the garment industry,” and Israeltam was a major figure in many “radical socialist groups” aimed at ending racial discrimination (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 7- 8). Although they did not have the power to change the system, they were among the most vocal Whites to protest the direction South Africa was taking. Besides some of these prominent names, there were organizations that consisted of Jews that fought racial prejudice. Prior to most of the segregation and anti-communist laws, the International Socialist League (ISL) was formed in 1917. This “self-defined Jewish group... was the only political party that opened its ranks to Blacks” (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 9). As the years progressed, it was obvious that Jewish representation in these organizations for equality was substantial. In February 1946, the authorities received a report which showed that out of 60 active leaders in the Communist Party, 23 were Jewish, including the chairman Michael Harmel (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 9). An organization that did survive the oppressive legislation was the Union of Jewish Women, which was established in 1931. Besides its Jewish and feminist activity, this group founded welfare centers, day care programs, and soup kitchens in hospitals for Africans and Coloureds, serving as the “unofficial arm of the Board of Deputies for practical social action both within and beyond the Jewish community” (Shimoni, *Community and*

Conscience 34). The Suppression of Communism Act's goal was to silence the critics, and it is interesting to observe how disproportionately high the percentage of Jews was among those critics especially considering their percentage among Whites, let alone the entire population.

As the Nationalist Party's power ensured its control of the government, ongoing battles were always underway. Due to legislation, public protest was impossible and would lead to those protestors getting banned from speaking out or sent to jail. Most organizations, if they had any equality ideals, had to curb their language accordingly in order to stay open or else to go underground. The Jewish Board of Deputies, therefore, could not speak out against the current political situation or else risk being dismantled. With South Africans, specifically Afrikaners, realizing the anti-Apartheid notions of many Jews, the Board of Deputies took a policy of a nonpolitical involvement and responded to Nationalist accusations with the statement that the "Jewish community does not seek, nor is it able to control the political freedom of the individual Jew, but neither can it accept responsibility as a community for the action of individuals" (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 32). This obviously was not the type of response the Nationalist public wished to hear.

Only if a South African was a Member of Parliament could he or she truly express his or

her sentiments towards the government without suffering the same repercussions as regular Whites. Also in Parliament is the most prominent anti- Apartheid activist situated – Helen Suzman. Adina Rothenberg, a South African Jewish immigrant who now lives in the US, stated how Suzman would attack all the Apartheid laws in Parliament, and she was the only member of the Progressive Party in Parliament for many years (Adina



Nelson Mandela & Helen
Suzman – February 1990

Rothenberg). Harold Goodman, another South African Jewish immigrant who lived 53 years in South Africa, said how “if she said something in parliament, everyone took notice. She was very highly regarded, representing Houghton, which was a very Jewish area in Johannesburg” (Harold Goodman). The Progressive Party was created in 1959 after Helen Suzman split off from the United Party due to its weak stances against the Apartheid agenda. This South African Jewish woman “epitomized the White liberal opposition to the apartheid regime as much in the eyes of the world as in those of South Africans” (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 59). The

Progressive Party was one of the last lines of defense at this point. By 1955, the Nationalist states had repressed nearly all resistance, and “all that remained of the liberal opposition was the small, uniracially White, Progressive Party and a number of non-party political institutions” (Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism* 231). Harry Schwarz, another major personality, also started with the United Party but broke off in 1975 to found the Reform Party,



Harry Schwarz

which had the same basic goals as the Progressive Party. That same year, the Reform Party merged with the Progressive Party to create the Progressive Reform Party and soon called themselves the Progressive Federal Party (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 125). They were known as the “party for change” (Clive Rothenberg). In a survey done among the Jewish population, the statistics showed that 12.5% voted for the Nationalist Party, 35.7% voted for the

United Party, and 51.8% voted for the Progressive Party in the 1974 general election (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 126). A third major figure who rose in ranks in the later years of Apartheid is Tony Leon. Many Jews today consider him the second most recognized Jewish anti-Apartheid advocate behind



Tony Leon

Helen Suzman (Clive Rothenberg). He started out in the Progressive party and

continued to serve in the Democratic Party, which superseded the Progressive Party (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 131). Helen Suzman and Harry Schwarz are considered to be Leon's inspirations, and Schwarz was also his mentor (Clive Rothenberg). Although there were Jews that went against the Jewish norm and voted for the Nationalist Party, most Jews clearly were against the Nationalist Apartheid measures and identified themselves with Suzman, Schwarz, and Leon.

Although many Jews used their advantages of being White to express their political views in the voting polls, still many did not just sit around and believe the inner workings of the government could fix the problem. The two most famous Apartheid trials that were conducted, the Treason Trial and the Rivonia Trial, were strong efforts done by the Nationalist government to prove their relentless stance on Apartheid would not end. The Treason Trial began in December of 1956 and lasted all the way through March of 1961 (Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism* 227-228). One hundred fifty six people were arrested and charged with *Hoogverraad* (high treason) including Nelson Mandela and African National Congress (ANC) President Albert Lithuli (Russell 27). This was the Nationalist's attempt to show their country that anti-Apartheid movements would not be tolerated. Of the 156 arrested, 23 were white, and over half those



Lionel Bernstein

whites were Jewish; these Jewish names included Yetta Barenblatt, Hymie Barsel, Lionel Bernstein, Leon Levy, Norman Levy, Sydney Shall, Joe Slovo, Ruth Slovo, Sonia Bunting, Lionel Forman, Isaac Horvitch, Ben Turok, Jacqueline Arenstein, Errol Shanley, and Dorothy Shanley (Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism* 227-228). This percentage did not bode well for the Jews as the Afrikaners already knew the Jews were sympathizers of the "inferior" races. Even the leading prosecutor and defense

counsel emphasized the differences between Jewish and Afrikaner attitudes. First, eight of the

nine defense counsels, including the head defense counsel, Israel Maisels, were Jewish (Tatz 120). Israel Maisels was “a prominent leader in both the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation,” and the prosecutor was Oswald Pirow, “the extreme Afrikaner nationalist and former assertive pro- Nazi” (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 61). As the case progressed, charges were being dropped against people as the prosecutor’s case displayed weakness until all were released in March of 1961 (Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*



Israel Maisels

228). Nelson Mandela correctly noted how the “result only made the state more bitter towards us... [and] was largely as a result of a superior defense team and fair-mindedness of these particular judges” (Russell 28). A major reaction by the Afrikaner public was more animosity towards the Jews. One letter described how the “Jewish facial type is in the majority” of photographs of resistance processions, and the author of a book written about the bad conditions of South Africa would be “ten to one a Jew” (Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism* 228). The Treason Trial lingered in the minds of the nation, and when the Rivonia Trial began in 1963, the Nationalist government made sure to correct the follies of their last spectacle case.

Going into the Rivonia Trial, the Nationalist government had a much more strikingly sound case against the defendants. The *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, (“Spear of the Nation,” abbreviated



Sharpeville Massacre

MK) was a military wing of the ANC headed by Nelson Mandela and created shortly after the Sharpeville Massacre (March 21, 1960) in which police killed 69 and wounded 180 non-violent demonstrators who were protesting the pass laws (Russell 28-31). On July 11, 1963 the police ambushed the main leadership of the MK at the

house of Arthur Goldreich in Rivonia, near Johannesburg (Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism* 231).

People of all ethnic groups were accused, and of the six whites arrested, all were Jewish: Arthur Goldreich, Hilliard Festenstein, Dennis Goldberg, Bob Hepple, Harold Wolfe, and Lionel Bernstein (who had been accused in the Treason Trial). Unlike the Treason Trial, the defense counsel and prosecutor did not separate Jews and Afrikaners. Although the defense counsel had two Jews working on it, it was led by Abram Fischer, an Afrikaner and secret leader of the Communist Party while the prosecutor was Percy Yutar, a religious Jew (Tatz 121;



Arthur Goldreich

Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism* 232). When speaking about Percy Yutar among Jewish ex-South Africans, he is considered a big outsider and someone Jews do not like to talk about. ANC leader Walter Sisulu described how “he wanted to show the Nationalist government [that] as a Jew he was even more vicious than anyone else” (Tatz 121). Being a Jew required Yutar to “prove his loyalty” to the Nationalist government and their agenda. In general, most of the Jews in the Rivonia trial were



Dennis Goldberg

luckier than the non-Jews accused. Two accused Indians as well as Goldreich and Wolfe were able to escape a Johannesburg prison on August 12, 1963 and flee to Swaziland dressed as priests, and they eventually made their way out of Africa and to London (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 67). James Kantor got an early discharge, Lionel Bernstein was acquitted, and Bob Hepple was able to escape (Tatz 120). Hepple was given the opportunity of freedom for turning state witness. He pretended to join as a witness for the prosecutor but instead was smuggled, with the help of the ANC, to Botswana and finally to London (Dingle). However, many of the accused, including Dennis Goldberg, were found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment, only to be freed shortly prior to Apartheid’s end in 1985 (Joyce 101). Even with

the escape and the lack of evidence for some of the indicted, this case was a victory for the Nationalist government, especially after the fiasco of the Treason Trial only a few years earlier.

The history of Jewish liberalism and the public spectacles of the Treason Trial and Rivonia Trial had repercussions for the entire Jewish community. It was previously noted that anti-Semitism had infiltrated South African society. However, it was not just people writing letters and making public declarations about Jews; violence also played a key role. Anti-Semitic tensions were at a peak in the early 1960s. Besides the periodic swastika displays and telephone threats to blow up synagogues, there were hate filled attacks on Jewish areas: in 1961 an explosion caused damage to the Great Synagogue in Johannesburg; while the Eichmann trial was underway in Israel in 1962, a bomb damaged the Jewish cemetery in Johannesburg; in 1965 Jewish tombstones in Pretoria were desecrated, and in 1965 two synagogues were daubed with Swastikas on the anniversary of Hitler's birthday (Shimoni, *Community and Conscience* 72). Backlash against Jews fighting apartheid was often felt through hate attacks against Jewish symbols and their community, not just the individual activists.

Even though many Jews did a great deal to combat the Nationalist Party and Apartheid, many Jews did not know the extent of the persecution that Apartheid did to the non- Whites. Knowledge of the government's activities was limited to the public – there were no internet or news channels that any person could access to reveal the iniquities of Apartheid. Newspapers could be banned for criticizing the government, and the 90 day clause, which was enacted in 1963, gave police the power to arrest someone for 90 days “without the need of a warrant, without any recourse to the courts and without any other person being allowed to visit him” (Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism* 231). Due to all these protective legislative measures, the conditions and sufferings of non-Whites could be virtually unknown by an average White. Speaking to ex-

South African Jewish communities is the best way to learn more about their knowledge of Apartheid during its progression. Two areas that received a large number of South African Jewish emigrants are Atlanta, Georgia in the US and Australia. There are approximately 127,000 Jews in Georgia and 103,000 in Australia (*American Jewish Year Book*). There are estimated to be around 13,000 South African Jews in Atlanta, and according to the 2001 Australian census, there are 10,490 South African born Jewish residents in Australia (Clive Rothenberg; Tatz 53). A problem with numbers is that they are frequently inaccurate, but they also often come from a census and many people, including Jews, do not list their religious affiliation in the census. In any case, both these areas became safe havens for many Jews seeking to escape the violence and bigotry of South Africa. Having lived in Atlanta for over seventeen years and visited Australia, I have learnt a lot more about how people truly think about their world in South Africa. The most common response when discussing their days in Apartheid South Africa is “I tried to help the non-whites that I worked around, but I had no idea how horrid their conditions were until I left the country.” More news about the atrocities of Apartheid was available for those parts of the world where freedom of the press was allowed. It was not negligence that stopped many South African Jews from helping, but, frequently, the inability to learn about many of their country’s wrongdoings.

My family is a great example of how the “average Jewish South Africans” lived in South Africa. Living and meeting with numerous members of my family, I have heard frequent stories about the lives of different races in South Africa during Apartheid. My family was primarily concentrated in Johannesburg. Politically, they all voted for the Progressive Party, which they had known as the Democratic Party (Clive Rothenberg). Along with Suzman, my family knew a lot about Joe Slovo. Slovo was arrested in the Treason Trial and served in the MK (Harold

Goodman). My family also lived a comfortable lifestyle in South Africa. My father and grandfather were electrical engineers and this allowed them to enjoy many of the luxuries of South Africa. They had maids and gardeners. Maids were always trying to work for the Jews rather than the Afrikaners because they knew they would be treated much better (Adina Rothenberg).



Joe Slovo

There were regulations governing the maids and what they were allowed to do on the “white premises.” The family of a maid was never allowed to visit, but Harold, my grandfather, says how they always allowed her family to visit her but to be very discreet (Harold Goodman). Adina, my mother, also took care of her maid, Josina. When Clive and Adina Rothenberg bought their first house in Randburg in 1989 from an Afrikaner family, they expanded the maid’s quarters by building a proper bathroom, kitchenette, and improved her housing accommodations; the bathroom used to be extremely primitive with a hole in the ground for a toilet and just a showerhead, having no basin (Adina Rothenberg). They also bought Josina a dishwasher to lighten the chores (which she never used because she did not like the idea of a dishwasher replacing her). Additionally, they gave her paid days off, paid for her to see their professional doctors instead of the Black witchdoctors, and paid her more than the average maid’s salary. Furthermore, when Clive, Adina, and their children immigrated to the US, they provided her with a severance package and found her a new job (Adina Rothenberg). The Rothenberg family also had ties to people who played more active roles within a political context in the anti-Apartheid movement.

As previously cited, political protest was dangerous, so it is surprising what a great number of people took risks with their own secure lives. Clive Rothenberg remembers, even as an infant, how his mother proudly pointed out the house that Joe Slovo lived in before he fled

South Africa (Clive Rothenberg). Clive’s mother, Joy, and many of her Jewish friends worked for the Black Sash, a non-violent White women’s organization that campaigned against injustice (Joy Rothenberg). Clive’s father, Peter, also fought his own personal battle against Afrikaner racism. In 1964, Peter started a manufacturing plant making test instruments and hired Whites and Coloureds to work for him. The White Afrikaners approached Peter, stating that they would not work alongside the Coloureds; Peter told them they could either leave or continue to work, and the majority of the Whites left rather than work

alongside the Coloured workers (Clive Rothenberg). Those White workers did not expect Peter to side with the “inferior” Coloureds and decided it was better to have no job than to be on an equal position with a Coloured. This decision taken by the Afrikaners epitomized their belief in *Baaskap*. Harry Levin, Adina’s great uncle, was also one of the



African National Congress (ANC)

first people to rent space to the ANC once it became legal in 1990 – he, unfortunately, had so much faith in the ANC that he bought acres of land in downtown Johannesburg, which he



Leon Levy

thought would be a wise investment but has become worthless due to the crime and poverty that has overcome the area (Clive Rothenberg). Two of the most well-known anti-Apartheid members of my family are my Grandmother’s twin cousins, Leon and Norman Levy,



Norman Levy

nicknamed Mike and Pike. They became activists in the anti-Apartheid movement and were two of the accused in the Treason Trial (Harold Goodman). Leon Levy was also banned in 1957 and “detained for five months during the 1960 state of emergency,” while Norman Levy “was the first person to be detained for 90-days

without trial” and was jailed for five years under the Suppression of Communism Act (“Leon Levy”; “Norman Levy”). They fled South Africa, escaping, like many other anti-Apartheid fugitives, to England knowing full well that were otherwise likely to be arrested again (Harold Goodman). Harold’s father, Leonard, was also known by many Blacks around the city because he was one of the few lawyers that took pro bono work to help fight for the Blacks in court (Adina Rothenberg). Most of these stories are left out of the record books because these people did not play any major role in combating Apartheid. Even Leon and Norman Levy who were important anti-Apartheid fighters are marginal compared to other activists such as Dennis Goldberg . Although there were Jews that were pro-Apartheid and enjoyed the obvious luxuries it brought White civilization, the majority of Jews fought their own private battles to improve the lives of the non- whites around them.

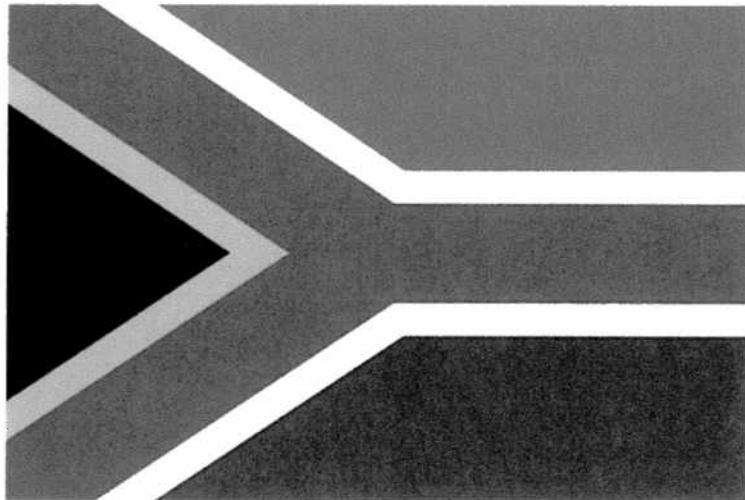
Although stereotypes are never a beneficial way to label a people, the idea that Jews do not assimilate but stay as a clustered group is an ideal way to describe them in South Africa. In fact, this was a problem that many Afrikaners identified. Rather than accept the situation and reap the benefits that White South Africa offered, too many South African Jews rose up against the Nationalist establishment, risking their lives and the lives of their family. Many of the people



Nelson Mandela

that resisted the government were punished by death, incarceration, beatings, or had to flee their homeland in order to escape the punishments. However, even those that did not play major roles in fighting the government could identify wrong from right and decided their conscience would not let them enjoy the rights that all should be entitled to. Enough turmoil by non- Whites and conscientious Whites finally toppled Apartheid, ending a politically unjust period that will

never be forgotten in world history. As Nelson Mandela said to an estimated one billion viewers at his historic inauguration ceremony; “Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long, must be born a society of which all humanity will be proud” (Russell 94).



South African National Flag 1994- Present

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