

Cry the beloved countries

South African Jewry has developed an impressive educational network. But the graduates of its day schools and youth movements are defecting from the Zionist mainstream at an alarming rate.

HIRSH GOODMAN, just returned from a campus tour in the country of his birth, reports.

THERE ARE MANY faces to South Africa. Almost all of them sad. There is no sparkle of hope in the eyes of the country's inhabitants — black or white, Indian or coloured, or whatever other category they have been classed under.

South Africa is a country blessed with everything but hope that some solution will ever be found for all its people. The polarization is growing, the repression deepening. The stench of discontent permeates even the most apathetic corners of this fools' paradise.

It is a complicated country, and has suffered from much simplistic analysis. Devoid of even the most basic democratic principles, it is alive with political opinions, and drifting in a sea of political undercurrents. The rock to which the white minority has anchored itself is an increasing dependence on the gun to protect its interests from within and without, bolstered by a never-ending stream of repressive legislation.

It is a country of tremendous physical beauty, with untold treasure — gold and coal, uranium and platinum — lying buried beneath its surface riches of forests and water, cattle and grain. Yet, it is a country of unimaginable poverty. Its cities boast some of the most beautiful and opulent homes in the world, splendid civic centres and magnificently-equipped hospitals, its villages mud huts with no lights, running water or sanitation. Basic medicine and education have yet to reach the major part of South Africa's population, and despite the fact that countless tons of food are dumped into the sea each year, malnutrition is endemic in great areas of the country.

Of South Africa's 30-million-odd people, just over four million are white. The white population is divided into many categories of its own (as are the blacks and coloureds) about half being of Afrikaner stock, who will have no haven to flee to when (not if) the revolution comes. The rest are immigrants who have arrived steadily over the past 50 years, primarily to take advantage of the wealth the country can offer. Most of the right colour, thanks to its natural resources and exploited labour force.

These "newcomers" include a considerable number of Israelis. Almost 30,000 of them, or one of every five Jews in South Africa. Technically, they cannot be lumped together as immigrants, for while many have been here for years, some of them are only in the country on short-term contracts. All of those I spoke to admitted that they are making hay while the sun shines, and do not need to concern themselves with the political realities of South Africa. A convenient attitude, and not dissimilar to that of most other immigrants, who declare openly that they will leave when things get tough. There is no idealism, nor any commitment to South Africa, in their staying; only expediency.

The Afrikaners and the other in-



Holocaust memorial at Westpark Cemetery, Johannesburg. (Upper right) The Jewish Club at Durban.

igenous peoples of South Africa know these attitudes, and the metaphor of rats deserting a sinking ship is heard often in private conversations with blacks and whites who are striving for what they consider a just South Africa. The conception of justice of the two groups differs, of course, but there is a unifying bond in that both consider South Africa their country and perceive the battle for dominance by either group as legitimate. There is a mutuality of respect, no matter how deep the hatred — a respect which does not extend to those who have come to exploit the situation, who do not see their future in the republic, and who spend as much time finding ways of shipping their money out of the country as they do making it.

THE JEWS of South Africa are a complex assortment. Some are in the forefront of the liberation struggle; others own huge farms where human exploitation for pecuniary gain is neo-feudal. Many are nine-to-five liberals, paying their domestic servants more than average wages for work in homes built on cheap black sweat.

The community is primarily Orthodox, with strong Zionist ties, but both Orthodoxy and Zionism are in a state of developing crisis. Its members are the children and grandchildren of a generation that brought a wealth of *Yiddishkeit* with it from Lithuania and Latvia at the turn of the century, but that culture is evaporating into the vacuum of the Diaspora, with no real alternative taking its place.

It is a community that can pride itself on having established some of the finest Jewish day schools in the world, but the products of those schools are confused, and many who join one of the vibrant Zionist youth movements leave discouraged, having failed to find a satisfactory path.

There is perhaps no other Jewish community in the free world where children are brought up as schizophrenic as in South Africa. They benefit from an excellent Jewish education, which purports to impart morality and ethics, and they graduate from youth movements which educate towards egalitarianism and social justice — in a society where these values do not exist, and where one is bound to

become a political radical if movement towards them is advocated. They become cynical, because their role models — teachers, rabbis, *madrachim* — do not, indeed cannot, practise what they preach. For any deviation from the narrow limits of acceptable political or social action as laid down by the government is dealt with ruthlessly. Imprisonment without trial, suspension of civil liberties, banning orders, are all commonplace. Freedom of expression and speech has been transformed into nervous whispers, and there is an omnipresent suspicion that unfriendly ears are listening in.

IT IS IN THIS atmosphere that the young Jews of South Africa find themselves, and because of the pressures, the complexity of the problems, the lack of clear direction, three prototypes have emerged: those who hear nothing and see nothing, and devote themselves to their businesses while paying lip-service to the Jewish organizations and making respectable contributions; those who have decided that there is no long-term future in South Africa and are making plans to leave — with a minority

opting for Israel; and those who have decided to dedicate themselves to forging a more just society in South Africa, often at heavy personal cost.

Intertwined with these major groups are a core of ardent Zionists who continue to flow into Israel with dedication and zeal, each bringing with him or her the ideology of the particular youth movement they identified with: Betar, Bnei Akiva, Hahonim and, more recently, Migdim, and the Reform youth arm.

But, as I said earlier, Zionism is in a state of crisis. One would have assumed that in a society like South Africa, where there is profound Jewish and Zionist education on the one hand, and a cloudy future on the other, *aliya* would be self-generating. But the reverse has happened — and the reasons are difficult to determine.

PERHAPS THE MOST striking paradox is the situation on the South African campuses, seven of which I visited on a recent lecture tour. The campus is, to all intents and purposes, the greenhouse of South African social consciousness. The student representative councils are more than mere forums for advancing student rights. The National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) is a highly political organization whose leadership is consistently at odds with the government.

It is into this environment that the young Jewish graduate of a school and a youth movement is thrown, imbued with the values inculcated by his earlier education and now forced to make a basic choice. He can be apathetic or he can become involved. But whichever avenue he chooses, it is within the South African context, with Israel and Zionism only a tangential issue. But tangential though they may be, both are under fierce attack at present, and often from the most unexpected quarters.

TO PUT IT mildly, Zionism has become a dirty word with the Jewish student left, particularly those who grew up in the Zionist youth movements and have had to reject their own Zionism because they feel it their duty to fight for what they consider to be justice in South Africa.

This rejection process is often built on the simplistic equation of Zionism with racism. The reasoning is along these lines: I am against racism in South Africa; Israel is an exclusivist society built on the ruins of Palestine and based on a discriminatory Law of Return, where Arabs are treated as second-class citizens, and where the policies of the incumbent government are anti-socialist, colonialist and dedicated to the suppression and denial of a determination of the Palestinian inhabitants.

Moreover, they claim, Israel is known today to be a major supplier of arms, advisers and support to the South African government, thus giving *de facto* recognition to the legitimacy of one of the most