

# Israel Is Too Much Like South Africa

By MARK A. BRUZONSKY

I first encountered the charge that Zionist racism makes Israel comparable to South Africa in the early 1970s, while I was chief representative of the International Student Movement for the United Nations. I protested vehemently in a long personal letter to an assistant of the U.N. secretary-general, Kurt Waldheim. Officials of the American Zionist Youth Foundation sent copies of that letter to Jewish university students in the United States and Israel, and then commissioned me to write monthly articles on Zionism for their newsletter.

I next confronted the Israel/South Africa comparison at Princeton University while obtaining a master's degree in international affairs. Prof. Richard Falk, himself Jewish, repeatedly linked the situations of the two countries in his course, on international law. I remember sharing the outrage of my Israeli student colleagues. Once again I protested vehemently.

In my subsequent work for the American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress, and on unrelated journalistic assignments, I traveled widely in the Middle East. My perspective broadened.

I provide my own history on the issue to make it clear that for many years I aggressively challenged comparisons of South Africa and Israel. Now I have come to conclude that the similarities between the two outweigh the differences.

Tragically, Israel today has become precisely what many of its liberal founders feared—a besieged, divided, polarizing country whose methods of repression against the Palestinians parallel those of white South Africa against the blacks.

Analogies are always imperfect analytical tools. Historically and culturally, conditions in Israel and South Africa are replete with differences. I leave those to be catalogued by others, who will no doubt be eager to challenge my conclusion.

Here are what I view as the important points of similarity:

—In both cases, self-determination is

being sought by a mistreated, oppressed, abused ethnic group—the blacks of South Africa, the Palestinians in the territories occupied by Israel since the 1967 war.

—Both governments are engaged in escalating militarism, intimidation and brutality.

—Both oppressed groups have resorted to open challenge and increasing violence.

—In both cases the potential for escalating conflict is growing.

Riots and strikes are now spreading in South Africa, and there is a state of emergency. Meanwhile, the results of Israel's policies are being reaped in a degenerating economy and descent toward anti-democratic attitudes germinating amid anti-Arab sentiments. Responding to these conditions and to the continued Palestinian struggle for an independent state, the Israeli government has further stepped up a campaign against its Palestinian subjects that over the years has included deportation, imprisonment, collective punishment and, occasionally, documented torture. Emergency regulations left over from British Mandate days in what used to be called Palestine, similar to those imposed in South Africa, are enforced by Israel in the occupied territories.

Looked at historically rather than through the obscuring lens of day-to-day headlines, the white minority of South Africa and the Jewish minority in the Middle East are both coming up against their own inescapable contradictions. In an era of non-discrimination and secularism they are ideologically wedded to principles that many in the world term racist.

In the case of South Africa there is no solution in sight. The white minority seems destined to raise the level of oppression until the society boils over in rage, which it has begun to do. The time for compromise may have already come and gone.

The situation is more confused in the case of historic Palestine, a land that the world community voted to partition in 1947

between the same two nationalist movements that are in conflict today. Jewish ethnicity and chauvinism in combination with Zionist nationalism have created a mix that is discriminatory in spirit if not in actual laws.

The greatest distinction between Israel and South Africa is that Zionism is legally non-discriminatory while apartheid is legally racist. And yet, if we are to be honest, in practice the results are comparable.

The most hopeful difference between the two may be that an acceptable solution is still conceivable for Israel and the Palestinians—peaceful coexistence and mutual recognition of both peoples' national rights. However, increasing attacks of Jewish settlers on the West Bank and rising Israeli support for extremists are signs that time may also be running out in the Middle East.

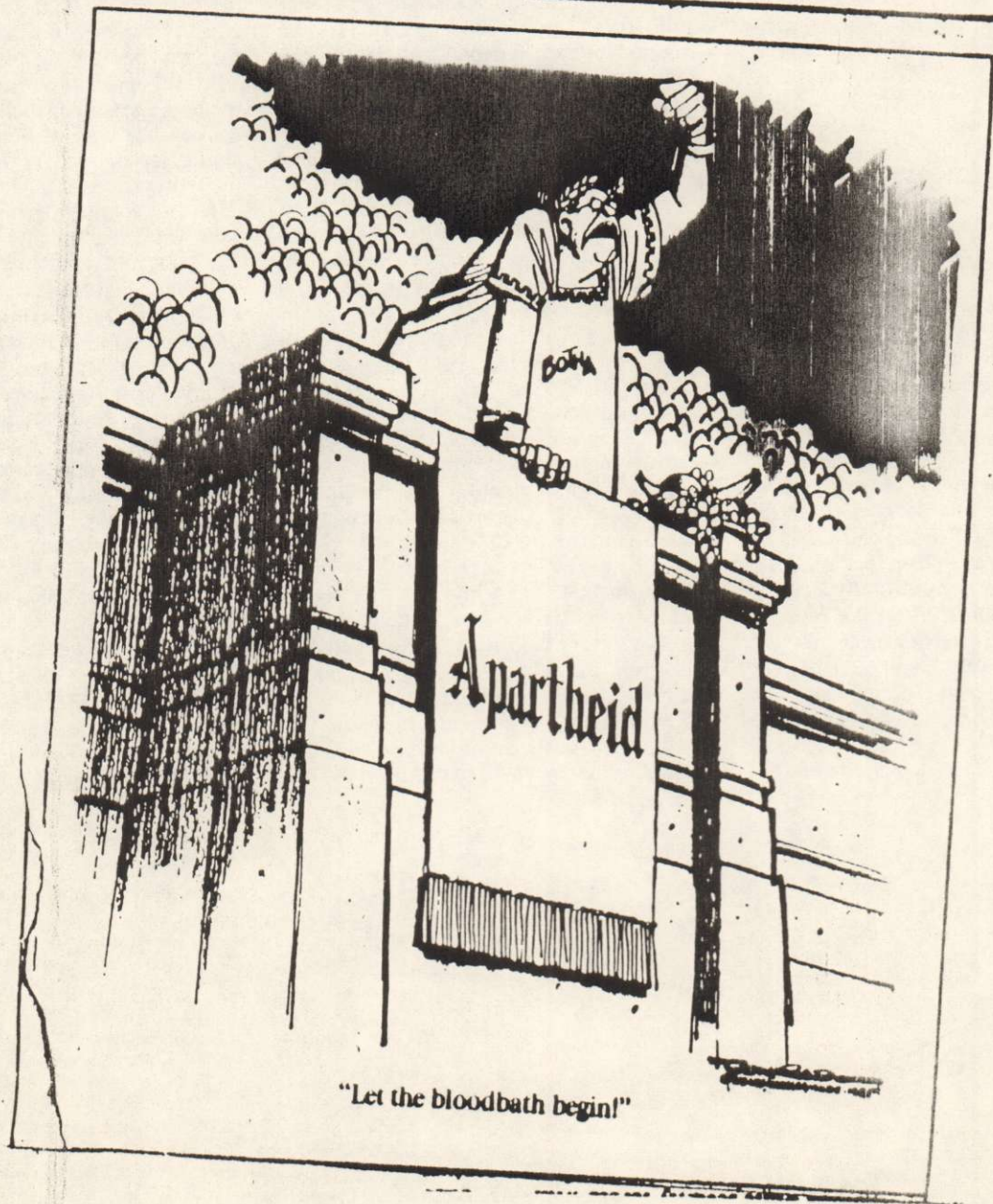
In the past few months a number of major American Jewish organizations have spoken out against South African repression. Jewish leaders have been arrested picketing the South African embassy.

More recently the Israeli government said that it "unconditionally objects to the policy of apartheid in South Africa," although it took no steps to alter the substantial trade, arms and security relationship that exists between the two countries. Prime Minister Shimon Peres condemned apartheid as "completely contrary to the very foundations on which Jewish life is based."

But around our world today people who speak in one way and act in another have little credibility. Vigorous protest of apartheid while acquiescing in Israel's continuing campaign to intimidate the Palestinian people into submission is hypocrisy.

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"Let the bloodbath begin!"