

THE JEWISH  
LABOR MOVEMENT IN  
THE UNITED STATES

By WILL HERBERG

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**F**OR AN understanding of the history of the Jewish labor movement in the United States, the early 1930's may profitably be taken as constituting in some sense a watershed or turning point in the development of that movement. These years marked the end of one epoch and the beginning of another, not only for Jewish labor but for the nation as a whole.

The early 1930's proved so crucial for a number of interrelated reasons:

1. During these years the effects of the stoppage of foreign immigration, resulting from World War I and the passage of a series of restrictive laws in the 1920's, began to be felt in the profound changes of composition and structure which the American Jewish community was undergoing.

2. By the early 1930's the Communist bid for power which had shaken the Jewish labor movement to its foundations had been definitely defeated. But the decade of bitter civil war had left permanent marks which contributed to the making of the new period.

3. The economic, social, and labor world into which the Jewish unions emerged out of the 1920's was in many ways a new world. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was in the White House and the New Deal, with incredible speed, was remaking American social policy and transforming the lives and outlook of millions of Americans, particularly those composing the working classes of the nation.

4. The labor movement, after a decade of decline and crisis, was staging a spectacular come-back. It was a time of vast change, of far-reaching transformation in tradition, ideas, and purposes, for the Jewish labor movement as for American labor and the American people generally.

5. If the New Deal is taken as one pole of the new era, the upsurge of Nazism and anti-Semitism in Europe must be taken as the other. Both of these developments profoundly affected the character and outlook of Jewish labor in America.

Cumulatively, these factors contributed to remake the Jewish labor movement almost beyond recognition. It is the purpose of this study to look backward and forward from the vantage point of the early 1930's and to indicate what the Jewish labor movement once was, what

it came to be under the new conditions, and what its prospects are for the future. In this way, we may hope to assess its significance in the general context of American life.

## THE "OLD" JEWISH LABOR MOVEMENT

### *The Formative Period*

The Jewish labor movement in the United States was a product of the "new" immigration that deposited millions of East European Jews on American shores within the space of a few decades after 1870. Jews had, of course, reached the New World long before, and in the early part of the nineteenth century they had begun to arrive in considerable numbers. This earlier immigration, except for a small Sephardic element, was largely Western, predominantly Central European. The early immigrants—some two or three hundred thousand in all—soon found their way into business or the professions; they left few traces on the labor movement and contributed almost nothing to the emergence of a Jewish proletariat in the United States. That was reserved for the East Europeans who came in vast numbers during the last three decades of the nineteenth and the first two or three decades of the twentieth century.

It has been noted that "the curve of Jewish immigration to the United States runs remarkably parallel to that of general immigration to America," a fact which tends to suggest that "the decisive forces were the general ones common to the whole movement."<sup>1</sup> The social composition of the Jewish immigrants was, however, markedly different. The non-Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were very largely peasants; the Jewish immigrants, on the other hand, were town dwellers, a large proportion being employed as artisans or laborers.

Hence, more than 64 per cent of the gainfully employed Jewish immigrants during 1900–25, government reports indicate, were "skilled workers," as compared with 8.5 per cent and 7.2 per cent of the non-Jewish immigrants from Russia and Poland, respectively. During the same period, domestic servants formed 13.7 per cent of the Jewish immigration, unskilled workers 11.2 per cent, merchants 6.2 per cent, and professionals 2.0 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Of course, very few of the "skilled workers" were factory workers in modern industry; almost all were artisans who frequently combined petty business with their crafts. Nevertheless, these figures are enough to indicate that the usual picture of the East European Jewish immigrant as a *luftmensch* without occupation is by no means true. There were many *luftmenshn* among them, no doubt, but the largest part of the East European immigrants of those days seem to have been artisans or artisan-merchants, a smaller part laborers, and still smaller parts professionals or intellec-

tuals. In any case, once they had arrived in the United States, almost all the Jewish immigrants turned to manual labor.

#### EARLY OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN

The occupational pattern that emerged among the Jewish immigrant workers in the last decades of the nineteenth century was the product of many factors, economic, social, and ethnic, which have not yet been sufficiently explored. Most of the Jewish newcomers landed at the port of New York and a very large part either remained there or moved on to other large urban centers near by. Before the last third of the century they apparently turned for work to a wide variety of trades, including even heavy industry. But this wide range soon began to narrow down. Some of the immigrants left industry altogether and went into petty trade; the great majority tended to gravitate toward occupations involved in the production of consumers' goods and services. The natural impulse to seek work in fields where friends and *lantslayt* (countrymen) were already employed contributed to this tendency. In any case, as the preponderant majority of Jews in America became wageworkers, a number of "Jewish trades" in which the great mass of workers and most of the employers were Jewish began to emerge.

These trades were of two types. The first type consisted of those which from their very nature were necessarily open only to Jews, such as Jewish slaughtering, baking, printing, acting, etc. Here the characteristic structure and way of life of the Jewish community conditioned the occupational pattern. But there were also some trades, particularly the needle and building trades, to which the immigrant Jews flocked perhaps partly by reason of their previous training and handicraft skills. It was the "Jewish trades" of the second type that became so significant in the emergence of a Jewish labor movement toward the end of the nineteenth century and in the development of this movement through later decades.

#### EARLY ORGANIZATION

The Jewish immigrant worker did not take to trade unionism easily. Indeed, the "individualism" and "unorganizability" of the Jewish worker were familiar complaints until relatively recent times. In 1901, the distinguished labor economist, John R. Commons, in his report for the United States Industrial Commission, went to some length to explain why unionism was such a failure among Jewish workers. Whatever the validity of his arguments, he did point to an undeniable fact: the newly proletarianized Jewish worker was quick to strike, enthusiastic, and determined in struggle, but "when once the strike is settled, either in favor of or against the cause . . . that ends the

union.”<sup>3</sup> The Jewish worker apparently did not possess the tenacity or discipline necessary for enduring labor organization.

As a matter of fact, the first stirrings of what was to become the Jewish labor movement were rather in the political and ideological fields than in the field of trade unionism. In this as in other respects, the pattern and direction of the Jewish labor movement were originally the *reverse* of what was normative in American trade unionism; it followed far more closely the Continental than the native American model. The American labor movement, like the British, emerged and remained typically a *trade-union* movement; moreover, it developed *from the bottom up*, from the self-organization of groups of workers in their trades. Jewish trade unionism in the United States, on the other hand, was built *from the top down*, largely under the tutelage of ideological radicals who undertook the hard task of organizing Jewish workers as part of their revolutionary program. The increasing adaptation of the Jewish labor movement to the general American pattern in later decades should not blind us to this very great difference in its origins and beginnings.<sup>4</sup>

The early Jewish immigrants were, by and large, not radicals; there was among them, however, a tiny but very aggressive minority of intellectuals and intellectually minded workers who had received some radical indoctrination in the revolutionary movements of Eastern Europe. These radicals included Socialists of different degrees of extremism; anarchists, “philosophical” and violent; Comtean positivists; land reformers; ethical culturists; and doctrinaires of almost every other school. Though engaged in continuous and bitter conflict among themselves, with few exceptions all these radical groups agreed on the necessity of reaching the masses with the gospel of “education and organization.”

Early in the “new” immigration, at the beginning of the 1880’s, an attempt had been made by a Socialist-nationalist group, Am Olam (Eternal People), to found Jewish agricultural and industrial communes in the New World. The attempt soon failed, though the memory lingered on. Thereafter, the radicals were concerned primarily with revolutionizing the consciousness of the Jewish working masses and organizing them for the class struggle.

They succeeded in becoming the leaders of the Jewish masses, although the outcome of their work was not such as would have commended itself to them in their early days. Their quick success was due, in part at least, to the fact that they came with a new “faith” to fill the impossible spiritual void produced by the shattering impact of American life upon the traditional pattern of existence brought by the immigrant from the Old World. There, even through the nineteenth century, life had been ruled by religious law and had

been organized around the synagogue. *Halakah* and synagogue afforded the Jew a strong measure of spiritual security amidst the miseries of the world; they provided him with an accepted system of standards and a context of meaning for life. In the United States, under drastically different social and economic conditions, the old ways were no longer tenable, not even for the most tradition-bound. The age-old continuities of life were disrupted; long-accepted standards and values were challenged by the demands of the new life as well as by the entire spiritual climate of the New World. There was little chance for slow organic transition. Spiritual confusion, insecurity, and normlessness were the result. It was the dreadful anomy of early immigrant life that gave the fervent young radicals the opportunity to establish a predominant influence among the Jewish workers in the formative period of the Jewish labor movement in the United States.

#### JEWISH WORKERS UNION

The first organizations of Jewish radicals in the United States were educational and propaganda societies, such as the Propaganda Union (1882), the Russian (i.e., Russian Jewish) Labor Union (1884), the Russian Labor Lyceum (1884), etc. (Most of the Russian Jewish radicals at this time, it should be noted, considered themselves primarily Russians and only turned to Yiddish in order to spread their propaganda.) At first the radicals rather looked down on the idea of organizing the Jewish workers into unions, although they passionately warned the inexperienced immigrants against scabbing and strike-breaking. But by 1885 a Yidisher Arbeter Farayn (Jewish Workers Union) was in existence which definitely set about the task of organizing the masses of Jewish workers. The older German Socialists played an important part in gathering together and orienting their Jewish comrades.

The Jewish Workers Union, though not itself a trade union, included in its ranks hundreds of workers—garment workers, capmakers, barbers, clerks. It was very active in New York City in the Henry George mayoralty campaign of 1886, which most Jewish radicals supported, but it did not survive the next year. The Jewish Workers Union was followed by what may properly be regarded as the parent institution of the Jewish labor movement in America—the United Hebrew Trades (Faraynikte Yidishe Geverkschaftn).

#### UNITED HEBREW TRADES

The United Hebrew Trades (UHT) came into being in October, 1888, under the leadership of Bernard Weinstein, Jacob Magidoff, Morris Hillquit, and Henry Miller, and with the direct assistance of Samuel Gompers. Its model was the United German Trades, one

of a number of "national," foreign-language labor federations that had sprung up in the United States in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. The new Jewish group took as its main purpose the organization of the Jewish workers into unions. The UHT had only three affiliates at the time of its formation: the Jewish compositors, the Jewish actors, and the Jewish choral singers. But it grew rapidly and within four years had twenty-eight trade-union affiliates, most of them organized through UHT efforts. The UHT covered the Greater New York area, where the vast majority of working-class Jews were then and still are to be found. Similar federations were set up in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, and an attempt was even made to launch a national Jewish labor federation; however, these latter efforts proved short-lived, while the New York organization still exists, though its role has changed very considerably with the passage of time.<sup>5</sup>

The establishment of the United Hebrew Trades brought to the fore a problem that gave some concern to American labor leaders, Jewish and non-Jewish alike—the problem of the propriety of organizing "separate" Jewish unions. Samuel Gompers had his qualms about the UHT because he did not believe in organizing workers along "religious" lines; but he wisely saw that "to organize Hebrew trade unions was the first step in getting those immigrants into the American labor movement." It was not, of course, a matter of religion, but of language, culture, community ties, and the characteristic structure of the Jewish trades. In 1892, the Jewish Socialists discussed the question of "Jewish" or "mixed" unions; principle was all on the side of the latter, the pressure of reality on the side of the former, and so they decided to leave the choice to local option. History made its own decision, considerably aided by the hostility that Jewish workers encountered when they tried to join some of the established unions. Jewish unions were formed. In the long run, Gompers was right: the Jewish unions were the first step in bringing the Jewish workers into the American labor movement.

#### WORKING CONDITIONS

There would be little point in summarizing here the familiar facts about the miserable conditions under which the garment workers toiled in these early days. The industry was rapidly expanding and, following the Irish and other earlier immigrants, Jews were being absorbed into it in large numbers. Their entry was facilitated by the fact that some Jews were already active in the clothing industry as manufacturers. By 1890, over 13,000 Jews were employed in the garment trades on the East Side of New York alone, and their numbers increased by leaps and bounds in the course of the next two decades.

Low wages, long hours, protracted slack seasons, home work, contracting and sub-contracting, absence of even the most elementary safeguards of health and decency made the garment trades notorious as a "sweated" industry. The workers were restless, shop strikes were frequent, and conflicts on a larger scale were not unusual. In 1885, the entire cloak trade in New York came to a stop, and a Cloak and Dressmakers Union constituted itself an assembly of the Knights of Labor. The year before, in the fall of 1884, the men's clothing workers in New York had successfully struck and set up the Progressive Tailors Union No. 1, also a part of the Knights. These unions split, disappeared, rose again, and merged with other groups; but in a very real sense they initiated the movement that culminated in the formation of the great garment unions of today. The connection with the Knights of Labor did not last very long.

Other strikes and other unions followed in rapid succession, not only in New York but in other cities as well. In the spring of 1886, a great cloakmakers' strike broke out in Chicago, out of which a union was born. During the next two or three years, cloakmakers' unions were launched in Philadelphia and Boston. But New York remained the main scene of the rising movement.

Capmakers' organizations go back to the 1870's. Some of the workers in those years were German Jews; Russian Jews and Italians began entering the trade a decade later. The Russian Jews found it especially difficult to secure entry into the existing unions, and so separate "Hebrew" unions were formed which were not absorbed into the larger organizations until the end of the 1890's. The UHT was largely instrumental in bringing about this unification.

The last two decades of the nineteenth century also witnessed the organization, mainly upon the initiative or with the help of the UHT, of Jewish bakery workers, tinsmiths, barbers, shoe workers, bookbinders, textile workers, theater employees, and the workers of the many other crafts and trades that year by year were added to the roster of the UHT. It was a difficult period, one of confusion and frequent defeat, yet a period in which the ground was broken and the foundations laid for what was to come.

#### INDUSTRIAL UNIONS

It is perhaps worth noting as a very fortunate circumstance in the early development of the Jewish labor movement that the fateful cleavage between the skilled and the unskilled, which so deeply affected American unionism generally, was hardly felt in the Jewish unions. This was primarily due to the structure of the industries in which these unions operated—some degree of skill was required of practically all workers in the garment and associated trades—but also



in part perhaps to the Socialist ideology of the builders of the movement. In any case, the Jewish unions, especially in the needle trades, developed from the very beginning as semi-industrial organizations, the special interests of the various crafts remaining subordinate. This proved an important source of strength to the unions, and also tended to define the direction of their influence in the American labor movement as a whole.

#### NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

In many cases, the Jewish unions formed upon the initiative or with the help of the UHT were local or regional bodies that had to be affiliated with an existing national organization. This was sometimes quite difficult, for only too often the Jewish workers were not received into the older unions. Such was the case, for example, in the building trades. Jewish workers penetrated virtually every branch of these trades in New York, as did Jewish builders and contractors. However, the building trades unions not only would not admit Jewish workers into their ranks, but actually took measures to exclude them from the more desirable occupations and employments. Barred from the existing unions, the Jewish building trades workers formed their own organizations, under the guidance of the UHT; it required considerable effort, including the intervention of top leaders of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), to prevail upon the national unions in the building trades to admit them. Indeed, not until well into the twentieth century were the bars really let down.

But in many of the Jewish trades, typically in the needle trades, the task was even more difficult, for there were no national unions in the field and they had to be created in the process of union building. In the men's clothing trade, this step was taken in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In 1889, the UHT helped form the United Tailors Brotherhood, which led a successful strike the same year. In the full flush of victory, this union called a national conference for June 13, 1890, in New York City, to set up a nation-wide body in the industry. The International Tailors and Cutters Union was formed, but it died within the year. In 1891 another attempt was made, again at the initiative of the UHT. At a convention held in New York on April 12, attended by delegates from that city, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Baltimore, and from a few smaller centers, the United Garment Workers was formed. It was at bottom a coalition of men's tailors, largely radical-minded immigrant Jews and Italians, on the one hand, and conservative American overall and work-clothes makers, on the other. The coalition could not last, and when the break-up came, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers emerged.

The women's garment workers had to wait another decade for a

national organization. This finally came in 1900. A call for a nationwide conference was issued by the New York cloakmakers. Eleven delegates, representing seven local unions with about 2,000 members in New York and the vicinity, were present when the convention opened on June 3 in New York. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) was formed and, like the United Garment Workers, it affiliated with the AFL.

The beginnings of the ILGWU were promising. By 1903, it already had nearly 10,000 members, about a third of whom were women. More than half its membership in that year was outside of New York. The onset of a business depression toward the end of 1903, however, brought an abrupt halt to this forward development, and the ILGWU entered a critical period from which it did not really emerge until the stormy days of 1909-10.

The formation of the UGW helped very little in improving the state or organization of the men's garment workers. The membership, as already indicated, consisted of two diverse elements, differing in ethnic origin, background, and outlook. The overall makers relied largely on the union label, which was of little use to the tailors. The tailors, for their part, complained of the lack of sympathy and understanding shown by their leaders and of the dubious practices carried on under the protection of headquarters. They drifted away from the UGW. In the industry unrest was rife, and in 1901, 1902, and again in 1904, general strikes broke out in New York under the leadership of the United Brotherhood of Tailors, an affiliate of the UGW. These strikes had repercussions outside of New York, in St. Louis, Baltimore, and other cities. Very little was achieved, either by way of standards or organization. Then came the depression. Prospects in 1905 seemed no brighter for the men's tailors than for the women's garment workers.

The capmakers' union showed signs of greater stability. Conflict in the Socialist movement had split the capmakers' local in New York, but by 1900 some unity was restored and thoughts began to turn to a national organization. The New York local changed its name to United Cloth Hat and Capmakers Union of North America, and sent out a call for a convention. On December 27, 1901, the convention assembled in New York. There were 21 delegates, representing 1,200 workers in New York, Chicago, Boston, Detroit, and Baltimore. In order to avoid conflict in its own ranks, which included a number of strong DeLeonites, the national organization launched at the conference did not affiliate with the AFL until the following year. The organization made steady progress until the recession of 1904. In that year the workers were forced into a costly general strike.

Jewish workers began to enter the fur industry in the 1890's. The

UHT formed a Jewish furriers' union in 1892, and a successful general strike for the eight-hour day was launched shortly thereafter. Both the union and the fruits of the strike disappeared next year. It required another decade for the UHT to re-establish a furriers' union in New York; this was done in 1904. In 1906, an attempt was made to set up a national organization, but this failed. A stable nation-wide organization was not established until 1913.

#### POLITICAL ACTIVITY

This laying of the foundations of the Jewish trade union movement can from our vantage point be seen to have been the most important work of those early decades.<sup>6</sup> But it hardly seemed so to the men of those days. To them, the Jewish labor movement meant primarily the *Socialist* movement, of which the trade unions were to be a kind of auxiliary or "arm." And indeed, political-ideological activity was at first much more exciting and immediately rewarding than the slow, ungrateful work of organizing "individualistic" and "unorganizable" workers. Until the second decade of the twentieth century, it was Socialist politics that absorbed the interest of the most gifted leaders of the Jewish workers.

Jewish radical clubs were already in existence in New York in the 1870's. Vigorous ideological battles were fought between the anarchists and the Socialists throughout the next two decades. Slowly, the Socialists established their predominance. Jewish Socialists took active part in the Henry George campaign for the mayoralty of New York on the United Labor Ticket in 1886. The next year, partly as a result of contacts established during the campaign, a group of Jewish Socialists asked the Socialist Labor party (SLP) to set them up as a Jewish branch, and Branch 8 was formed. Not all Jewish Socialists, however, wanted to belong to a Jewish organization, since they felt themselves to be really Russian. As a consequence, another SLP group, Russian Branch 17, was chartered, including among its members the celebrated American Socialist leader of later years, Morris Hillquit.

Hardly had the Jewish Socialists begun their party work when a split divided the party, one of the many that marked the few years of the SLP's significant life. It was over the attitude to be taken to unions. The New York Socialists favored working in the existing unions; the national leaders insisted on building separate radical unions. The New York position, which had the support of almost all Jewish Socialists, easily prevailed.

Within five years, however, the party was caught in an even worse crisis, in which the new Jewish unions were seriously involved. Daniel DeLeon, the new leader of the SLP, was determined to establish the hegemony of the party over the trade union movement. At first, he

tried to bore from within the AFL; but the results were not encouraging, so DeLeon set up a dual New York central body and launched an all-out attack on Gompers and his federation. Under orders from the party, the Jewish Socialists detached their unions from the AFL and affiliated them with the new SLP center. DeLeon now developed his strategy; he decided to make the declining Knights of Labor the base of his campaign to capture the labor movement. He easily took over District Assembly 49, a mixed group of intellectuals and radical workers of which he was a member, and then proceeded to take over the Knights. But in this he was balked; so in 1895 DeLeon finally left the Knights of Labor and set up a new dual trade union federation under strict party control, the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance. Orders went out to all SLP members and Socialist-controlled unions to join the Alliance.

It is not difficult to imagine the confusion in the ranks of the Jewish Socialists and trade unionists. A good number of them, under the leadership of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, refused to go along with DeLeon, and together with other recalcitrant party members prepared for another split. The leaders of the UHT, however, proved loyal to DeLeon and took that organization into the Alliance, although many of the UHT affiliates remained in the AFL. The United German Trades refused to join, but permitted its affiliates to do so if they wished. District Assembly 49 of the K of L was shattered. To counteract the shift of the UHT, the Socialists of the *Forward* set up a Federated Hebrew Trades loyal to the AFL. All the while, the anarchists were following their own line.

It is impossible to describe in brief space the tortuous complications of the disastrous struggle in the SLP. Suffice it to say that in 1896 a series of splits began which culminated in 1900 in the defection of a large part of the membership of the SLP from the party, and the fusion of this dissident element with other Socialist forces to form the Socialist party of America in 1901.<sup>7</sup> Under the leadership of the *Forward*, which finally broke away from the SLP in 1899, the overwhelming majority of the Jewish Socialists went into the new organization. The unions that had followed DeLeon, including the UHT, re-affiliated with the AFL. The Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance, which never had more than 20,000 members, lingered on until it was merged by DeLeon into the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1905.

#### LABOR PRESS

One of the most important aspects of the political-ideological struggle in the Jewish radical movement was the development of a labor press. Two private journals of a labor cast had been established in

New York in 1886, but they did not last very long. The first Yiddish Socialist paper was the *Arbeter Tsaytung* ("Workers Paper"), a weekly established in 1890. It soon achieved a circulation of about 7,000. Two years later, the monthly *Zukunft* ("Future") appeared, and finally in 1892 the daily *Abendblatt* ("Evening Paper"), with a circulation of perhaps 10,000. All were issued by a publishing association under SLP (DeLeonite) control. Against the Socialist press, the anarchists had the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme* ("Free Workers Voice"), a weekly set up in 1890 on an allegedly non-partisan basis.

As the crisis in the SLP sharpened, discontent with the DeLeonite control of the press grew by leaps and bounds. Abraham Cahan and Louis Miller made themselves the expression of this resentment. The conflict over the trade unions added fuel to the fire. A bewildering series of resolutions, negotiations, and conferences followed; the upshot was that on April 22, 1897, there appeared the first issue of the *Jewish Daily Forward* (*Forverts*), destined to be the single most influential force in the making of the Jewish labor movement. Abraham Cahan was elected editor, a position he held, aside from the years 1898-1902, to the day of his death (August 31, 1951).

The role of the *Forward* in the Jewish labor movement, especially during the early days, emphasizes the very important fact that for the Jewish workers of four or five decades ago, Socialism was not so much a social ideology or political creed as a *moral cement* that joined them together into a cohesive force and made collective action possible. The Jewish trader or artisan came to the United States burdened with the divisive, individualistic habits born out of the desperate competition that had dominated his precarious life in the old country. He had little of the "social" spirit, of the solidarity so essential to unionism, and it is no wonder that he was given up as hopeless from the trade union standpoint. Yet within a decade or two, he was to become a stalwart and responsible trade unionist, accustomed to discipline and collective action. More than anything else it was Socialism, preached and propagated with all the fervor of a religious creed, that effected this moral revolution. Above and beyond the interminable factional conflict and ideological hairsplitting was a glowing ideal of brotherhood and solidarity; it was this "moral" Socialism that overcame the centrifugal forces of background and habituation and engendered the atmosphere of "decency" in which trade unionism could arise and sustain itself.<sup>8</sup>

#### WORKMEN'S CIRCLE

The third "wing" of the Jewish labor movement—alongside of trade unions and political Socialism—was the great Jewish fraternal society, Arbeter Ring (Workmen's Circle). The Workmen's Circle (WC) was

established in 1892, upon the initiative of two cloakmakers. It was a genuine rank-and-file enterprise and proved able to maintain its autonomous character through the decades. The purposes of the WC, as formulated at the foundation meeting, were to provide "mutual assistance to members in time of need and trouble," to stimulate the "education of the members," and to promote the "organization of co-operative business enterprises." The last aim was soon dropped; the only co-operative enterprise that the WC was able to launch was a barber shop, and that lasted only two years. But the other two purposes—mutual aid and education—remained the foundation of the order and developed beyond the dreams of its founders.

The society was reorganized in 1900, and the journalist, B. Feigenbaum, became its general secretary. At its second convention in 1901, the membership stood at 650, and at the third in 1902, at more than 1,200. After some difficulty, involving the readjustment of its statutes and practices, it was awarded a charter under the New York State Insurance Department in 1905. In that year the WC already had 6,700 members. Despite difficulties, conflicts, and crises, its progress was solid and substantial. Other workers' fraternal societies appeared, but the Workmen's Circle remained the outstanding Jewish labor fraternal order.<sup>9</sup>

Thus Jewish labor emerged from its formative period, which may be held to have closed somewhere between 1905 to 1908, with a weak but definitely established trade union movement, a relatively strong political Socialist movement and press, and a promising fraternal order. A great period of upsurge, growth, and consolidation lay ahead.

### *Growth and Consolidation*

The new period of consolidation and growth was ushered in by two events that set their mark on the Jewish labor movement: the economic recovery that followed the crisis of 1905, and the new wave of Jewish immigration that came in the wake of the Kishinev massacre (1903). The latter event was the more decisive factor. Not only was there a sudden and sustained rise in immigration—from 76,000 in 1903 to 106,000 in 1904 and 149,000 in 1906<sup>10</sup>—but the Jewish immigrants entering at this time were notably different from the earlier immigrants. The new immigrants were younger, more radical, more modern, more involved in the progressive causes and movements of the day. They were also much more culturally Yiddishist than the intellectuals among the immigrants of earlier times, who only with difficulty came to realize the vitality and indispensability of Yiddish in the life of the immigrant Jews. For the new arrivals, Yiddish

was not only the natural medium of communication but was also and above all an instrument of group solidarity and a vehicle of cultural expression. From this point on, the Jewish labor movement became Yiddishist in a very conscious way.

Every variety of radical came with the new wave of immigration. The most significant group among the immigrants was made up of members and adherents of the Bund (General Jewish Workers Union), an organization of Jewish Socialists that was winning a name for itself in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. The Bundists made an immediate impression on American Jewish Socialist circles. With the Socialists came the anarchists and the first substantial groups of Poale (Labor) Zionists. But beyond the groups and their sectarian programs was the undifferentiated radicalism that expressed itself in a general ferment of idealism, in a yearning for the "finer things of life." A new spirit began to infuse the Jewish labor community of the United States, a spirit of intellectual alertness, social activism, and cultural striving. The young men and women of the newer immigration were deeply concerned with many things beyond merely earning a living. They were concerned with "ideas," with "causes," with literature, society, and the welfare of humanity. Social radicalism and cultural self-improvement were the marks of the new consciousness.

This new spirit and the economic upturn co-operated to bring about a revival of the trade union movement in 1907. In the men's clothing industry the Brotherhood of Tailors, a UGW affiliate, led a number of significant local strikes. But this only exacerbated its relations with the parent organization, which frowned upon such militancy as a threat to its union label system. A peace was patched up, but it was clear that the situation in the UGW was heading for an explosion.

The same year, 1907, witnessed a bitter strike by the Boston cloak-makers for union recognition and the fifty-hour week. Here too the strike was called against the express orders of the national officers, especially the secretary, John Dyche, who was an exponent of cautious piecemeal progress. Of wider significance was the strike of the reefermakers in New York in the same year. On March 22, 1907, 12,000 workers came out, stopping the entire trade. The battle was bitterly fought, and to a successful conclusion. In April, all of the major demands—recognition, the fifty-five-hour week, abolition of inside subcontracting among pressers, and the free supply of all "materials, tools and appliances" (including sewing machines)—were granted.

In other trades too, there were signs of an upswing. But the optimism engendered by these advances was suddenly quenched by the onset of another sharp depression toward the end of 1907. Within a few months, all gains were wiped out. Widespread unemployment overwhelmed the weak trade unions. Despair mounted. At the 1908

convention of the ILGWU, a resolution was introduced to return the union's charter to the AFL and merge with the UGW. But a few hardy spirits refused to surrender. In one way or another the unions survived the hard days, and by 1909 signs of revival were in the air.

The economic recovery of 1909 set off the greatest upsurge of trade unionism that Jewish labor in America was to experience until the New Deal. The five years from 1909 to 1914 worked a tremendous transformation in the power and status of the Jewish labor movement in the United States.

#### UPRISING OF THE TWENTY THOUSAND

In the women's garment industry, which was now employing scores of thousands of Jewish workers and an increasing number of Italians and members of other ethnic groups, the first explosion came among the shirtwaist makers in New York. This branch of women's apparel was relatively new and was enjoying a boom. Perhaps as many as 30,000 workers were employed in the trade in New York, about 65 per cent of whom were Jews, 25 per cent Italians. A very large part of the workers were young women, eager, energetic, idealistic. Conditions were miserable, the union was weak and ineffectual, tension and rebellion were in the air. Upon the initiative of the UHT, a conference was called to see what could be done to meet the situation. Preparations for a general strike were decided upon, but nothing definite was contemplated until the historic meeting in Cooper Union on November 22, 1909. There the girls took things into their own hands. Rising to the appeal made by one of them, Clara Lemlich, the workers voted an immediate general strike. The response was immense and incredible. Nearly 20,000 girls came out in answer to the call. What this meant can be gathered from the fact that at the time the total membership of the ILGWU was scarcely 2,000. The entire labor movement, the public generally, was deeply stirred. The girls took over the everyday conduct of the strike, on the picket line, in the strike halls, on the various strike committees. The strike became their life. Public opinion rallied to their support. Through the help of the Women's Trade Union League, a bond was forged between the "girls" and the "ladies" that was to become a significant force in the development of unionism in the women's trades. Nothing could daunt the girls, neither the threats of the employers, nor the brutality of the police, nor the heartless harangues of the magistrates. In December, 1909, negotiations began, and at about the same time the strike spread to Philadelphia. The Philadelphia strike ended in failure and was called off in February, 1910. The New York strike, however, had another and more fortunate outcome. On February 10, 1910, a settlement was agreed upon. The manufacturers' association itself refused



to recognize the union, but 339 of the 353 members of the association signed up with the ILGWU. The workers won a fifty-two hour week, four paid legal holidays, and improvements in working conditions and methods of settling wages. Local 25, the union of the shirtwaist and dress makers, emerged with a membership of over 10,000. All in all, the "Uprising of the Twenty Thousand" was an epoch-making event.

#### THE GREAT REVOLT

Hard on the heels of the "uprising" of the waistmakers came the "Great Revolt" of the New York cloakmakers. This strike was a very different affair from the spontaneous rebellion of the girls. It was carefully prepared in advance. The industry was older; the workers were mostly men; the union tradition was much stronger and had far deeper roots. Jews predominated, but Italians already formed a growing proportion of the working force. Preparations for the strike began as far back as the middle of 1908. All branches of the labor movement, including the WC, united in a conference arranged by the New York Cloak Joint Board in support of the movement. The membership of the Joint Board at the time was about 2,000.

The union issued the strike call for July 7, 1910. The strike was an immediate success. The entire cloak, suit, skirt, and reefer industry was at a standstill. Together with the several thousand raincoat makers and ladies' tailors who also took part, close to 60,000 workers were on strike. The struggle was well led and hard-fought. The employers refused to negotiate, and it was only through the personal intervention of A. Lincoln Filene, the Boston merchant, who came to New York with his attorney, Louis D. Brandeis, that the stalemate was broken. Negotiations began in July, and it was soon clear that the main difficulty was the union shop, which the strikers felt to be essential to union security. No agreement could be reached on this crucial matter; conferences broke off, and the employers tried to crush the strike with an injunction. Again there was outside intervention, this time on the part of a group of wealthy New York Jews headed by Louis Marshall and Jacob H. Schiff, who felt that the good name of the Jewish community was being imperilled by the conflict, particularly since public opinion was overwhelmingly on the side of the workers. Negotiations were resumed, and finally Brandeis' "invention"—the preferential union shop—was accepted. It was the union shop in substance if not in name, or so at least it turned out.

#### PROTOCOL OF PEACE

The settlement that followed granted most of the particular demands of the workers, including the fifty-hour week, minimum wage

rates, abolition of subcontracting, etc. It also laid down the main outlines of the system of industrial relations that was thenceforth to govern the garment trades. The Protocol of Peace, despite its many deficiencies and its short life in its original form, marked an immense and pioneering achievement in the institutional history of union-management relations in American industry. It provided for a Board of Grievances, consisting of representatives of both sides, to deal with disputes arising between workers and employers. All differences that could not be settled by the parties themselves through this Board of Grievances were to be referred to a higher Board of Arbitration, in which impartial representatives of the public were the deciding factor. Unless abrogated by one or the other party, the Protocol was to run indefinitely; it had no time limit such as the more orthodox collective agreements had. Brandeis' expectation clearly was that the procedure of *conciliation* in the two-party Board of Grievances would be sufficient to deal with most of the conflicts and controversies arising in the industry; the Board of Arbitration was to be only a court of last resort. Actually, it worked out the other way: conciliation very soon proved inadequate and rapidly shrank in importance; *arbitration*, adjudication by an impartial representative of the public, became the chief instrumentality in industrial relations. Thus was born the celebrated institution of the "impartial chairman," which came to permeate all branches of the needle trades and, in one form or another, much of American unionized industry as well.

The settlement also provided for the setting up of a bi-party Joint Board of Sanitary Control, charged with wiping out the sweatshop and maintaining decent conditions of hygiene and safety in the shops. Out of this grew the vast structure of health and medical care that now prevails in the garment trades.

The jubilation of the cloakmakers and of the entire Jewish labor movement over the victory was immense. Difficulties, conflicts, and troubles soon appeared, and before long the Protocol itself was scrapped. But it was an historical achievement of the first order.

This remarkable achievement in collective bargaining was to a great extent facilitated by certain imponderable factors, chief among which was the common social and cultural background of the opposing parties. Employers and employees were in large majority Jewish, and predominantly of East European origin. They had behind them an age-old tradition of arbitration, of settling their often bitter disputes within the Jewish community without appealing to "outside" authorities. They shared too, as a heritage of centuries of self-enclosed minority existence, a marked concern for the good reputation of the Jewish community with the outside world. New World conditions undermined and confused these traditional standards, but did not

entirely destroy them. Workers and employers spoke a common language, and thought in more or less the same terms. Both were amenable to having outstanding community leaders called in to compose their differences. In reading the documents of the time, one cannot but be struck with the uneasiness displayed by many of the employers and their representatives at what the "Gentiles" would think of the deplorable conditions in their shops. The union leaders, for their part, were also careful not to bring their people and their movement into disrepute. These imponderables—the sensitivity to public opinion, the strong tradition of arbitration, and the common ethnic, cultural, and religious background—probably contributed very considerably to the achievement of the Protocol of Peace and to the development of industrial relations in the major Jewish unions for some time thereafter.

The impetus of the two great strikes in New York carried over into other trades and centers as well. Powerful organizing drives were launched among the cloakmakers in Cleveland and Chicago in 1911, but without success. Chicago had to wait until 1915 and Cleveland until 1918 before the efforts of the ILGWU proved effective. In the other women's garment trades in New York, however, among the white-goods workers, wrapper and kimono makers, and children's dressmakers, progress was more marked. These were mostly trades in which girls worked, and the "uprising" of 1909 was repeated on a smaller scale. Agreements modeled on the Protocol of Peace were signed. The same was true of the waist- and dressmakers of Boston. Early in January, 1913, 40,000 waist- and dressmakers in New York went out on a short, prearranged strike. Settlement followed in ten days, with full recognition.

Despite its extension, the Protocol was not destined to live long. Its clumsiness of operation was a great handicap, and widespread unemployment in the New York cloak trade in 1913-14 reduced the power of the union and made the employers eager for another trial of strength. In May, 1915, the cloak manufacturers abrogated the Protocol. A general strike was for the time being averted by conciliation, but the conflict broke out in April, 1916, when the employers' association locked out 25,000 workers. The union answered with a strike, which lasted for fourteen weeks. The settlement abandoned many of the features of the Protocol, but preserved the "impartial chairman" system. In the course of the year the Protocols in Boston and Philadelphia were also replaced, and in 1917 the same development occurred in the New York waist and dress industry. By the end of the decade, very little was left of the earlier Protocol movement, yet the face of unionism in the garment trades had been changed.

Next in order during these eventful years were the furriers. The

small union set up in 1904, which had struggled along through the years, took heart from the example of the women's garment workers and in 1912, jointly with the UHT, issued a call for a general strike. Over 9,000 workers, 7,000 of whom were Jewish, answered the call. The strike ended in virtually complete victory for the workers. In 1913, a national organization, the International Fur Workers Union, was launched at a convention in Washington. The new union joined the AFL. The next year the agreement in New York was renewed and a system of arbitration along "impartial chairman" lines was set up.

In the millinery industry too, unionism was making headway. Earlier efforts of the capmakers to organize this branch of the headgear industry had proved abortive. In 1910, the first step was taken as the result of a spontaneous strike in Brooklyn. Local 24 was set up by the United Cloth Hat and Capmakers Union. Two years later, Local 42 was organized among the blockers, and at the end of 1915 the union signed its first collective agreement in the millinery field. The agreement included impartial arbitration machinery.

As epoch-making as the two great strikes of the women's garment workers in 1909-10 was the history of the men's clothing workers during the years that followed. Here things were complicated by the irrepressible conflict between the tailors on the one side, and the leaders of the United Garment Workers, to which they belonged, on the other. The differences between these groups were many and far-reaching, differences in background, outlook, ideology, policy, and trade orientation. The UGW leaders were conservative and extremely reluctant to get involved in a struggle. The tailors, on the other hand, resembled the apparel workers much more closely than they did the other elements of their own union; they were mostly immigrants (largely Jews, but increasingly Italians and Slavs as well), militant, with great confidence in the organized power of the strike. They regarded their national leaders in the UGW as utterly incapable of understanding their problems and concerned primarily with suppressing their militancy. As events showed, they were right in their suspicions.

#### AMALGAMATED CLOTHING WORKERS

On September 22, 1910, just three weeks after the settlement of the great cloak strike in New York, seventeen girls employed in one of the pants shops of Hart, Schaffner, and Marx in Chicago were given another wage cut. This proved a spark in the heavily charged atmosphere. A spontaneous strike movement was set off. Within three weeks all workers in the industry, about 38,000, were out, without leadership or demands. Public opinion was aroused and was overwhelmingly on the side of the insurgent workers. The leadership of the

UGW, however, was hardly adequate to the demands of the situation. After some weeks, President Thomas Rickert of the UGW, who had frowned on the whole movement from the beginning, announced that he had signed an agreement with Hart, Schaffner, and Marx calling for the return to work of the strikers, but barring recognition of the union and perpetuating the open shop. The workers were infuriated; they repudiated the agreement and called upon the Chicago Federation of Labor to take over direction of the strike. Finally, on January 14, 1911, a new settlement was achieved, providing for the return to work of the strikers, no discrimination against union members, and an arbitration committee of three to adjust all other grievances. For the 6,000 employees of Hart, Schaffner, and Marx, this was a considerable victory, and although the rest of the strikers could show no comparable gain, the Chicago strike movement of 1910 had a generally invigorating effect. Especially significant was the arbitration committee, which soon developed into an "impartial chairman" system. Thus both major branches of the garment trades produced this basic innovation in industrial relations almost simultaneously and to a large extent independently, although of course the Protocol of Peace must be presumed to have had some influence on the thinking of the Chicago leaders.

Resentment against the UGW leadership was rife among the men's tailors throughout the country. Giving up hope of obtaining leadership or support from the UGW, the New York Brotherhood of Tailors called a conference in New York, which was attended by delegates from that city, Newark, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, and Chicago. The conference set up a council and called for a general strike in New York in 1912. The UGW national leaders at first refused to have anything to do with the strike, but later were persuaded by the UHT to give their passive consent. Energetic preparations were initiated and thousands of members were enrolled in the union. On December 30, 1912, the general strike was launched. Over 60,000 workers responded. The entire Jewish labor movement, and many other labor and liberal organizations, rallied to their support. By the end of February, more than half of the strikers had returned to work in shops which had agreed to settlements. Behind the backs of the workers and even of many of the strike leaders, the UGW officials now tried to bring the strike to an end with an agreement that enraged the strikers because it ignored the question of recognition and other essential demands. Despite the partial approval given by the *Forward* and some of the spokesmen of the UHT, the Brotherhood of Tailors rejected this settlement, and the strike went on for another three weeks. The settlement, when it finally came, provided for the fifty-three hour week to become fifty-two hours after the first year, an increase in wages,

improved conditions, and virtual though not official recognition. It was an important achievement. The workers felt victorious and the union grew.

This strike was important for still another reason. The tailors remembered with resentment the dubious settlement which the leaders of the UGW had tried to put over with the support of the *Forward* and some spokesmen of the United Hebrew Trades. This resentment helped encourage an incipient anti-*Forward* sentiment among certain sections of the men's clothing workers of New York. It is significant that immediately after the strike, the Brotherhood of Tailors invited Joseph Schlossberg to become its secretary-treasurer. Schlossberg was a man completely outside the *Forward* circle; in fact, at the time he was still a member of DeLeon's SLP. His affiliation made little difference, but the appointment was symbolic. The "independent" position of the men's tailors was to be strengthened by the circumstances under which the Amalgamated Clothing Workers was formed and, in part at least, by Sidney Hillman's deliberate policy.

In the UGW, conflict was now out in the open. The tailors represented a majority of the membership, but control of the national organization rested in the hands of conservative leaders, who had lost the confidence of the decisive section of their membership. When the convention met at Nashville, Tenn., in October, 1914, each party was prepared for a showdown. President Rickert's hand-picked committee refused to seat 105 delegates, representing locals with a majority of the membership. The campaign against the "Jewish anarchists" from New York dominated the convention. A split was inevitable. The few tailors' delegates, mostly from Chicago, who had been admitted, led a bolt from the union and, joining with the excluded delegates, declared themselves to be the legitimate United Garment Workers. They chose Sidney Hillman of Chicago and Joseph Schlossberg of New York as their president and general secretary respectively. But, of course, they could not make good their claim to being the "real" UGW before the AFL; so, in December, 1914, they met in special convention in New York and formed the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America as an independent union. The AFL branded the Amalgamated a dual union, but the other Jewish unions, for all their loyalty to the AFL, recognized it as a *bona fide* organization. For a time at least, the UHT had to bow to an AFL edict and exclude Amalgamated locals, but this was a mere formality. In or out of the AFL, independent or in the CIO, the Amalgamated has always been an integral element of the Jewish labor movement.

The new organization was soon confronted with a series of strikes: in New York, Boston, and Baltimore in 1915; in St. Louis and Philadelphia in 1916. The AFL proved bitterly hostile and the Amalga-

mated suffered serious setbacks. But these reverses were only temporary. Before long, it had established itself as a significant force in every large center where men's clothing was being produced in the United States and Canada.

#### GROWTH OF UNIONS, 1909-16

The years from 1909 to 1916 were decisive ones in the history of the Jewish labor movement. When the year 1909 opened, the needle trades unions were weak, unstable, without an assured prospect or much influence on the conditions of the workers in their industries. In the course of less than a decade, these unions, especially the ILGWU and the Amalgamated, had become significant and seasoned organizations, with an impressive record of militancy and constructive achievement to their credit. At the same time, they had already taken the first steps towards launching the "extra-curricular" activities in education, recreation, and membership welfare that were to gain them such renown in coming years. They were, in fact, established institutions within the labor movement and within the American community generally. And what was true of these two great unions was true, to some degree at least, of the smaller organizations as well. By 1917, well over 150,000 workers were affiliated with the UHT in New York.

The entire character of the Jewish labor movement underwent a significant change during the second decade of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the decade, or just before, *circa* 1908, the Jewish labor movement in the United States was a structure erected along European lines, a politico-cultural Socialist movement with rather weak trade union offshoots. Within ten years, the entire picture had changed, although the full meaning of the transformation had not yet become evident to contemporary observers. The Jewish labor movement now consisted very largely, even primarily, of trade unions, and it was the trade unions which now served as the foundation and source of strength for the other branches—political, cultural, and fraternal—of the movement. In other words, the transformation of the Jewish labor movement from the European to the American model had already begun. Later developments were to extend and complete the process, but the change itself was, in large part at least, essentially the fruit of the great wave of strikes and organization drives that began with the Uprising of the Twenty Thousand in 1909.

#### INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

We cannot close our account of this period without a word about an episode that loomed large in its time but which is now almost forgotten—the rise and decline of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The IWW emerged in 1905 out of a coalition of western semi-

proletarian radicals, the Socialist advocates of industrial unionism, and the remnants of DeLeon's Alliance. Its official program was to organize the unorganized along industrial lines, but it promptly set to work raiding the existing unions in order to establish "revolutionary" dual organizations. The Jewish labor movement suffered particularly from IWW incursions, and benefited not at all, as did some groups of textile workers, from its militancy. The IWW established dual unions in several branches of the women's garment trades in New York and elsewhere, among the capmakers, among the bakery workers, and in two or three other fields. Within a few years, however, the "invasion" was over. Some of the IWW militants remained within the main stream of the labor movement and played a significant role in after years; perhaps the best known among them was Morris Sigman.

#### POLITICAL PROGRESS

Quite as impressive as the upbuilding of the trade unions, at least in the eyes of most contemporaries, was the great progress Jewish labor was making on the political and cultural fronts. The advance of the Socialist movement was sensational. From a membership of less than 25,000 in 1905, the Socialist party (SP) grew rapidly to 41,000 in 1908, 58,000 in 1910, and 118,000 in 1912, the high point in its history. There was some falling off thereafter, but in 1917, the year of America's entry into World War I, membership was still above 80,000. Within the general movement, the Jewish Socialists made corresponding gains in membership and influence. The access of Bundist militants to the Jewish Socialist movement possessed a significance beyond their numbers. In 1912, through the exertion of the Bundists, a Jewish Socialist Federation uniting the Jewish branches throughout the country was set up within the SP. There had been a Central Jewish Agitation Bureau in existence since 1907, but it had been merely a translation and propaganda agency. The new Federation, on the other hand, was an autonomous body, virtually a Jewish Socialist party within the SP. It soon became a real force among the more radical Jewish workers in America.

Not all Jewish members of the party belonged to the Federation or approved of it. For one thing, it was politically more to the left than the *Forward* and the UHT or, for that matter, than the party as a whole. But it was in Jewish affairs that the greatest conflict was felt. The vigorous Yiddishism and cultural nationalism of the Bundist intellectuals were in large part foreign to the "old guard," which shared the traditional cosmopolitanism of Socialist ideology. In a sense, the Federation and the Forward Association became rival centers of leadership and influence in the Jewish labor movement. But they co-



operated in the WC, in party work, and in the manifold activities of the movement.

Along with the orthodox Marxist Socialists of the Federation and the *Forward*, the Zionist Socialists of the Poale Zion movement began to make their voice heard. Scattered elements were to be found in America in earlier years, but it was not until 1904 that the first Poale Zion group was set up in New York. Two years later, *Der Yiddisher Kempfer* ("The Jewish Fighter") was launched in Chicago as a Poale Zion weekly. Within a decade (1912), a Labor-Zionist fraternal order, the Natsionaler Yidisher Arbeter Farband (Jewish National Workers' Alliance of America), was launched. Sharp differences relating rather to the Zionist than to the Socialist concerns of the movement agitated its ranks in the early years, but Labor Zionism succeeded in winning an assured place for itself in the American Jewish labor community.

#### CRISIS IN THE WORKMEN'S CIRCLE

The Workmen's Circle (WC), the "third arm" of the Jewish labor movement, underwent in this period a significant crisis of growth. Its numerical advance was spectacular. From 6,700 in 1905, the WC grew to 31,000 in 1909, 49,000 in 1913, and over 60,000 in 1918. By that time it had stabilized its functioning on a recognized system of actuarial rates, and was becoming one of the most important fraternal societies in the United States. It was, of course, entirely Socialist in character, and the same differences in orientation that were being felt among Jewish Socialists generally now broke out in accentuated form within the WC. A prolonged struggle set in between the "old" and the "young." These labels designated not so much age groups as philosophies and outlooks. The "young," prompted by the Bundists, demanded a "broadening" of WC activities, particularly in the direction of education and culture along Yiddishist lines. They urged the establishment of Yiddish schools for children, the large-scale publication of books and pamphlets, the initiation of workers' choruses, and similar cultural ventures. The "old" desired to hew to the line along which the society had been founded. The battle raged for eight years. When, in 1917, peace was re-established, the old guard was still in possession of the leadership, but the rebels had won the main points of their platform. Education and culture became central to WC activity, and the spirit of the new program was the Yiddishist cultural nationalism of the "young." It is interesting to note that this conflict cut across party lines. Socialists, anarchists, Poale Zionists, were to be found in both factions, and the Socialist party, which enjoyed ideological leadership, made no attempt to dictate policy or lay down a line.

## CULTURAL RENAISSANCE

In a way almost without parallel, Jewish labor in America nourished and promoted a rich cultural renaissance that spread far beyond the narrow bounds of the labor movement. Closest to the unions was, of course, the press. Throughout this period the *Forward* grew in circulation and influence. Its circulation in 1905 was 52,000, somewhat less than the 55,000 of the conservative *Morgen Zhurnal* (*Jewish [Morning] Journal and Daily News*). But in 1911, its circulation had already risen to 123,000, while in 1916, the figure stood at just under 200,000, almost double that of its nearest competitor. The *Forward* became not merely the guide, mentor, and organizer of the Jewish trade unions, not only a Socialist educational agency of first importance, but also, and perhaps pre-eminently, a powerful cultural and spiritual force among all sections of the Jewish community in New York and near-by centers. And the *Forward* at this time, as throughout most of its long history, was Abraham Cahan.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the *Forward* there were dozens of other periodicals: some—like *Naye Velt* ("New World"), the organ of the Jewish Socialist Federation, the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*, the anarchist weekly, and the *Zukunft*, the Socialist monthly—serious general journals of politics and culture; others, like the growing number of trade union organs, devoted largely to their institutional affairs but never forgetting their responsibilities as instruments of education. Even the general Jewish press—and New York had as many as five Yiddish dailies in 1916 and Chicago three—was deeply affected by the ideas that emanated from the labor publications.

A remarkable upsurge of literary creativity in Yiddish was the most important aspect of the new cultural revival, and it expressed itself in poetry, novels, theatrical writing, and journalism of a high order. Most of these younger writers found their audience and vehicles in the radical and labor movement, and however far they strayed in later years their early sentiments and attitudes could never be entirely eradicated. It was the Jewish labor community that sustained them, inspired them, and indeed gave them their living context.<sup>12</sup> Particularly influential in developing mature and responsible literary standards was the *Freie Arbeiter Stimme* and its long-time editor, S. Yanofsky.

Institutionally, the most important aspect of the cultural revival was the establishment of secular Yiddish schools for the children of the immigrants. The movement was a reflection both of the new spirit of cultural nationalism, and of the consternation of the older generation of immigrant parents at the growing alienation of their American-born or bred children. Such schools were first established on a

very small scale in 1912. The WC launched a school program in 1918, and the Poale Zionists somewhat earlier. (In later years, the Communists set up a Jewish school system of their own.) These schools differed considerably in ideology and orientation, but they were all secular and Yiddishist. It was this that constituted the foundation of the movement.

The cultural renaissance that began with the post-1904 immigration lasted well into the 1920's. It was an integral part, and, in a way, the most colorful aspect of the "old" Jewish labor movement.

#### BASIC TRENDS

The immense progress made by the Jewish labor movement in the decade and a half after 1905 helped obscure certain underlying trends that were already beginning to outline the shape of things to come. From the very beginning a tendency toward *de-proletarianization* was noted by perceptive observers. The Jewish factory workers, it was a common saying, were "neither the sons nor the fathers of workers." While the first part of this saying may not have been entirely true, the second part was becoming ever more true. Many of the Jewish workers themselves left the factory to go into business or even into the professions, despite the immense difficulties that had to be overcome. The "studying mania" among the intellectuals-turned-workers was noted in the columns of the labor press as early as the opening years of the twentieth century. Many of the most fervent Socialist agitators soon became doctors, lawyers, and teachers. But as a rule, they did not sever their connections with the radical or labor movement out of which they had come. On the contrary, these "men with diplomas" became the aristocracy within the movement, and their influence can be traced to the present day.

But it was quite otherwise with the children of the immigrants. Of these, only a relatively small proportion followed their parents into the shops. No sacrifice was too great for the immigrant parents to make in order to send their sons to college and their daughters through high school. Business, office work, or a profession was their goal for their children; above all, the children must be kept out of the shop. The *de-proletarianization* of the Jewish labor community was therefore quite rapid. It was more than a mere change of economic status. To the great majority of the American children of immigrant parents, if contemporary accounts are to be trusted, the Jewish labor movement was something alien, even offensive; it was part of the immigrant background that had to be sloughed off as fast as possible. A chasm, spiritual and cultural, developed between the generations, one that all the Yiddish-labor schools in the world could not hope to overcome.

This growing chasm between the immigrant parents and the first American generation affected all sections and classes of the Jewish community, and of course other immigrant groups. But among the Jewish workers, cultural alienation was reinforced by another factor. The American daughter would often work in the same shop with her Italian mother, just as the American son would frequently follow his Slav father into the mines; in this way, a certain community was maintained, despite all cultural differences. But it was not so among the Jews; there the rift was both cultural and social, both economic and ideological, and it was only the obscure, little-understood forces of Jewish family solidarity that staved off complete chaos. In any case, most of the remedies that the perturbed older generation tried to apply proved futile, for they were all predicated on somehow perpetuating the immigrant status. It was not until after World War I that the meaning of the changing situation was fully defined.

#### EXTERNAL RELATIONS

It might be well at this point to survey the Jewish labor movement, as it stood on the eve of the United States' entry into World War I, in its triple relation—to the American Jewish community, to the American labor movement, and to American national life generally.

The position of Jewish labor in the American Jewish community was strange and hard to define. In New York particularly, it was a very important part of the community and yet was, in a way, alien to it; in the "provinces" (outside of New York), this alienation was even more marked. Jewish labor was an important part of the community because, in the larger centers, it constituted a major section of the Jewish population and set its mark on the emerging American Yiddish culture. But the radicalism of the Jewish labor movement, especially its secularist, antireligious bias, actually made it a schismatic element in American Jewish life, very much as it had been in earlier days in Eastern Europe. Speaking of the situation of the WC in the "middle-sized and smaller towns" of America, Epstein notes: "Relations between [the WC branch] and the rest of [the Jewish population of] the town were none too friendly. The former, not participating in the congregational life of the community, were looked upon as outsiders."<sup>13</sup> In practice, Jewish labor recognized and took for granted its schismatic position within the Jewish community, for it turned all its energies to building up a completely autonomous institutional structure that would make it possible for the Jewish worker to satisfy all his needs and meet all his problems within the framework of the labor movement. It was, in effect, a process of building up a self-enclosed Jewish labor community within, or rather side by side with, the general Jewish community. Not until the middle of the 1930's

did the schismatic walls of the Jewish labor movement begin to crumble under the impact of new times and new forces.

The emergence of a self-enclosed Jewish labor community, reflecting though it did a schism in the traditional community organization, also in a way foreshadowed the transformation of Jewish life under American conditions. The Jewish Socialists and unionists were conscious that their institutions and institutional loyalties took them outside the Jewish community, as that had been understood in Europe; but they were also, in large part, conscious of themselves as Jews and of their institutions as Jewish institutions. In the United States, apparently, it was possible to build a Jewish community life that was not part of "the" Jewish community in the European sense. Jewish labor institutions thus marked a phase of the transition from the traditional Jewish community along East European lines to the American Jewish community of today, with its decentralized, pluralistic structure.

The historical process, however, was slow, and Jewish labor remained for a long time somewhat outside of general Jewish community life. But this was not the case in relation to the American labor movement. The Jewish unions very soon found their place in the AFL, and that place was never seriously questioned. Samuel Gompers well understood that the idiosyncracies of the Jewish unions, their quasi-separatist organization, their radical ideology and Socialist alliances, were merely temporary phenomena, phenomena of transition and acculturation. Basically, the Jewish unions, for all their "European" rhetoric, were *bona fide* trade union institutions of the American type, committed to the responsible conduct of industrial relations under capitalism. In this respect, for all their foreignness, they were more authentically American than such native-born movements as the IWW. The Jewish unions long constituted an element of Socialist, radical, or "progressive" dissidence within the family of American labor, but their full citizenship and legitimate status were never challenged.

#### AMERICANIZATION

The part played by the labor movement in the Americanization of the Jewish immigrant will be examined at greater length below. All that needs to be pointed out here is that almost from the very beginning, the orientation of the immigrant workers and especially of their leaders was toward the United States. The United States was the new home, and to win an assured place in American life was their goal. The eagerness of the immigrants to learn about America and American ways was proverbial. None of the Socialist gibes at "American democracy," none of the bitter immigrant disillusionment with the

unfulfilled promises of the "golden land," not even an intensely self-conscious Yiddishist cultural nationalism, could change or even blur this basic orientation. The Jewish worker was in the United States to stay, and American institutions and American values soon became the framework of his social existence. In time, he acquired citizenship and entered politics, usually under the Socialist banner. In 1906, he just barely failed to send Morris Hillquit to Congress, and in 1914 he succeeded in electing Meyer London Socialist Congressman from the 12th district in New York's East Side. If the Jewish worker did not become identical with the New England Yankee or the Midwestern Hoosier, he did develop into a recognized urban type, as authentically American as any other.

The Jewish immigrant worker accepted the United States and accepted it essentially without reservation. But did the United States accept him? In time it did, but it took a long time. It came hard for the older Americans to realize that the strange creature from Eastern Europe was to become—was in fact becoming—an integral part of the American national community. The great mass strikes that ushered in and marked the course of the second decade of the twentieth century contributed a great deal to this eventual recognition. The splendid spirit and idealism of the young men and women who were rebelling against economic degradation won the admiration of the best sections of American public opinion and made valuable friends in influential circles. But perhaps the most important factor was the unification of Jew and non-Jew, immigrant and native American, that, despite all hesitations and shortcomings, was affected through the American labor movement. Trade unionism helped very materially to obtain acceptance for the immigrant Jewish worker in the United States, for it was trade unionism, along with the public school, that constituted for the mass of immigrant Jews their first real initiation into American institutional life. As a trade unionist, the immigrant Jew began to speak a "language" that Americans could understand, whether they liked it or not; as a trade unionist, he was behaving in a familiar way, behaving like an American: it was the visible sign of his Americanization, as authentic as speaking English. Even the newspapers and public figures who denounced him for striking, made it the burden of their charge that he was too quick to learn the "bad ways" of the American trade unionist.

### *World War I*

World War I exerted a political effect on the Jewish labor movement in America second only in significance to that of the New Deal

a decade and a half later. To the American labor movement as a whole, the United States' participation in the war brought not merely definite advances in organization and standards, but also a new role in national life and a new concern for the national interest, a new feeling of "belonging" to the national community. The War Labor Board, created early in 1918, gave organized labor a recognized though by no means clearly defined status in the institutional structure of the "American way of life." The membership of the AFL rose rapidly to a high point of over 4,000,000 in 1920, and labor leaders came closer to the centers of national power and prestige than ever before in American history, nearer in fact than they were again to come until 1933.<sup>14</sup>

For the Jewish labor movement, however, the situation seemed much more ambiguous. The Jewish unions benefited at least proportionately from the favorable conditions, but their position as radical and Socialist organizations was by no means an easy one. For the Jewish unions as well as for the other sections of the Jewish labor movement, this was a critical time; despite surface appearances, the outcome was a fundamental *de-radicalization* and a preparation for the thoroughgoing integration into the nation which was to take place under the New Deal.

The American Socialist movement was predominantly non-interventionist and antiwar, although some pro-Allied sentiment made itself felt. (The somewhat stronger pro-German sentiment did not express itself independently, but tended rather to strengthen the official non-interventionism.) Socialists had opposed Wilson's preparedness drive, and after the United States' entry into the war the Socialist party's special convention at St. Louis (April, 1917) officially reaffirmed its antiwar stand.<sup>15</sup> This vague, highly emotional sentiment pervaded the ranks of Jewish labor and was reinforced by a traditional detestation of Tsarist Russia, one of the Allies.

Samuel Gompers repudiated his earlier pacifism some time in 1915, and within a few months he was working vigorously for the Wilson program of military preparedness. In October, 1916, he was named a member of the Advisory Commission to the newly created Council of National Defense. Early in 1917, he took steps to call together in Washington a nation-wide conference of AFL affiliates in order to proclaim officially the patriotic, pro-preparedness stand of the American labor movement. This conference met on March 12, 1917. It was attended by the executive council of the AFL and by the officers of seventy-nine international unions, including the railway brotherhoods. Four important international unions were absent: the Western Federation of Miners, the Journeymen Barbers, the Typographical Union, and the biggest of the Jewish unions, the ILGWU.<sup>16</sup> The Amalga-

mated Clothing Workers, being outside the ranks of the AFL, was not expected to attend, but there can be little doubt that its attitude fell in with the abstentionism of the ILGWU. The United States' entry into the war did not materially change the situation. In fact, the Russian Revolution and the withdrawal from the war of the new Russian regime, with which in those early days so many of the Jewish workers sympathized, only intensified the antiwar feeling and deepened the cleavage.

It is hard today to appreciate how deep the cleavage really was. Gompers and the AFL leaders were greatly disturbed at the influence which the Socialist unions, primarily Jewish, were exerting in New York, and particularly disturbed at their attempt to "capture" the New York Central Federated Union for their "peace" program. The executive council of the AFL even decided to initiate a campaign to "Americanize" the labor movement in New York City and the metropolitan area; in this enterprise the Committee on Public Information, a government agency headed by George Creel, eagerly co-operated. To counteract the antiwar sentiment encouraged by the Socialists was also one of the purposes of the American Alliance for Labor and Democracy, formed at about this time by a number of prominent labor leaders and pro-war Socialists.

The suddenly emerging cleavage between the Jewish labor movement and the national community, including the great body of American labor, was serious while it lasted, but fortunately it was short-lived. It was, in fact, the last real spasm of radical non-conformism on the part of Jewish labor. Within the Socialist movement generally, a reversal of sentiment was beginning to make itself felt. Using the German attack on the new Soviet government as well as Wilson's Fourteen Points as arguments, a number of influential Socialists came out for at least partial support of the United States in the war. By the middle of 1918, decisive sections of the Socialist party were no longer opposed to the war, and the Socialist unions in the needle trades had begun quite openly, if not very enthusiastically, to favor it.<sup>17</sup> The General Executive Board of the ILGWU bought \$100,000 in Liberty Bonds, and the Amalgamated also made heavy purchases. By and large, the reversal of sentiment was stronger in the Jewish unions than in the Socialist political movement. The difficult position in which the Jewish unions found themselves during the early preparedness and war years made many of the union leaders rather uneasy about Socialist political tutelage, and thus facilitated the formal breaking-away of their unions from the Socialist movement in later years.



## ECONOMIC ADVANCES

On the economic front, the Jewish labor movement made notable advances during the war years, especially in the garment trades. After a brief flurry of unemployment, boom conditions set in. The federal agencies (Board of Control, Administrator of Labor Standards) in charge of government work used their influence, by and large, to protect the workers' right of self-organization and collective bargaining. Headway was made by the Amalgamated and ILGWU in almost every important center in the country. The unions gained significantly in numbers and power.

The shortening of hours was, next to organization, the primary objective of the needle trades unions in this period. The Amalgamated reduced the work week to forty-four hours in Toronto, New York, Chicago, Rochester, and Philadelphia during 1917-19. The ILGWU won the forty-four hour week in 1919; the capmakers and furriers, in the same year. These gains proved enduring.

The advance of the labor movement continued through 1919 and into 1920. Late in 1920, the situation suddenly changed. A depression set in and the employers launched a general offensive with the purpose of re-establishing open-shop conditions and destroying the gains of the war and immediate post-war period. In New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, the cloak manufacturers moved against the union, but the attacks were beaten back. The ILGWU, however, suffered losses in the waist and dress industry and in some of the smaller cloak centers.

The most important development in the women's garment field during the early post-war years took place in Cleveland. This was one of the most difficult anti-union markets in the industry, but the war experience had made some influential manufacturers in the area, particularly Morris A. Black, ready to accept trade unionism under certain conditions. In December, 1919, an agreement was signed in the Cleveland cloak trade providing for the formulation of production standards on the basis of time studies. Two years later, a provision was included guaranteeing each regular worker under the plan forty-one weeks of work a year, with the payment of two-thirds of the minimum wage for each week of unemployment beyond eleven. Although the "Cleveland experiment" was eventually dropped, it represented a pioneering venture into an area that was later to become of real significance.

The Amalgamated during this period fought spirited contests in its various markets—Rochester, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Cincinnati—with results that were variable, but on the whole favorable. The events in Cincinnati were particularly important, for they

led to the lasting unionization of "Golden Rule" Nash's large concern, one of the leading non-union firms in the industry. It was at this time that New York lost its old pre-eminence in the men's clothing trade.

Both branches of the headgear industry were involved in struggles in the immediate post-war years. The Hat and Capmakers suffered a setback in 1919, and in the same year a general strike of the millinery workers in New York City resulted in a partial victory. Internal administrative changes of importance also took place during these years. The headgear workers' long-standing jurisdictional conflict with the United Hatters of North America was finally settled in 1924, on the basis of a division of the field. In recognition of the growing prominence of the millinery workers, the name of the organization was changed to Cloth Hat, Cap, and Millinery Workers International Union. The union now rejoined the AFL, in which it came to play a role far out of proportion to its limited size.

The furriers' union also made advances during the war, but the loss of a thirty-week strike in 1920 seriously weakened the organization. Internal conditions became increasingly bad as demoralization and dissatisfaction spread among the ranks of the workers.

The needle trades unions had always felt themselves to be closely akin industrially and ideologically. During and after the war, efforts were made to establish some kind of organizational unity among them. At the 1917 convention of the AFL, the ILGWU proposed that a needle trades department be established within the AFL, but this came to nothing. The following year, the headgear workers' union called for the formation of a needle trades federation, and such a body was actually launched in December, 1920, under the name of Needle Trades Workers Alliance. The Alliance, however, remained a paper organization, and it finally disintegrated.

On the whole, despite difficulties and setbacks, the war and the immediate post-war years constituted a period of considerable advance for the Jewish labor movement, both organizationally and ideologically. The "time of troubles," however, was just ahead.

### *Inner Disruption and Economic Depression*

The period immediately following World War I was one of continuing prosperity and the American labor movement kept growing through 1920. A brief recession then set in, but before the middle of the decade the "Coolidge boom" was well under way. Strangely enough, however, the labor movement did not benefit from this economic advance. A sharp decline in labor organization set in during

1921-22, and this decline continued, with slight variations, until well into the next decade; it was not until 1933 that the trend was reversed. This anomalous development—for hitherto business prosperity had generally meant progress in labor organization—has puzzled students of the labor movement. Of the fact itself, however, there can be no doubt.

The Jewish labor movement, as part of the totality of organized labor in America, reflected this anomalous development. It, too, made little headway during the years of "New Era" prosperity. In fact, it was precisely during these years that it went through what may well be regarded as the most difficult period of its entire history. But in the case of the Jewish labor movement, the economic, social, and political influences that affected the course of organized labor as a whole were much aggravated by a factor that soon threw everything else into the background—the Communist drive for power.

#### COMMUNIST DRIVE FOR POWER

Through the 1920's, the Jewish unions and such allied organizations as the WC were the scene of the best-planned and most nearly victorious drive for control that American labor history has to record. The Jewish labor organizations were, in the end, able to beat back the Communist offensive and save themselves from succumbing to Communist control, but only after a long and bitter struggle that left them shattered and at the brink of ruin. Had not the New Deal with all that it meant for the labor movement supervened, it is by no means certain what the status of unionism in the garment trades might have become.

The Communist drive for power in the Jewish unions—and for our purposes that means primarily in the needle trades, although other unions too were affected—was part of a more comprehensive program launched by the Communist International in 1921 to capture the "reactionary" unions in Western Europe and America. In the needle trades, the Communist campaign developed against the background of an earlier, essentially non-political, tradition of insurgency. As far back as 1917, a group of radical members of Waist and Dressmakers Local 25 of the ILGWU had formed a Current Events Committee, to bring, as they put it, "a bit of fresh air into the stagnant life of the union." Similar signs of restlessness could be detected in other unions as well. The Russian Revolution, when it came that year, had a terrific impact on the Jewish workers of the United States, an impact felt far beyond the confines of the incipient Communist movement. For a brief period, the Jewish masses in and out of the unions were indeed radicalized and thrown into a ferment of insurgency and expectation. Within the unions, leagues, clubs, and groups of all sorts

sprang up. A shop delegates' movement, modeled after the then celebrated British shop steward system, spread through the needle trades; most characteristic of the time, perhaps, were such organizations as the Workers' Council group and the Welfare and Propaganda League, which managed to combine in the same program demands for the democratization of the unions and slogans that recalled the manifestoes of the new Soviet state.

This strange combination was indeed characteristic of the insurgent movement in its earliest stages. There was much in the unions—ancient abuses, narrow-visioned, over-cautious policies, undemocratic structures and practices—against which “idealistic” members might revolt; it was not unnatural, considering the times, that this revolt should have been linked with the upsurge of radical sentiment associated with the Russian Revolution. Yet until 1921, the explicit Communist aspect of this insurgency was largely peripheral.

#### TRADE UNION EDUCATIONAL LEAGUE

The chief instrument of the Communist drive for power in the Jewish unions, and indeed in the American labor movement as a whole, was the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL). This organization had been formed in 1920 by William Z. Foster to promote a policy of “boring from within” the American labor movement. In 1921, Foster joined the Communist party and the TUEL became a key agency of the party. It was officially recognized as the American affiliate of the newly formed Red International of Labor Unions (RILU) in Moscow.

The TUEL almost literally took over the earlier radical insurgency in the Jewish unions and used it as so much raw material to be manipulated and fashioned by the top Communist leaders. A “left wing” movement arose in which Communists and non-Communist insurgents co-operated, obviously under the leadership of the former. On the periphery of the “left wing” movement were the so-called “center” or “non-partisan” elements, who for one reason or another pretended to an independent position which, not unexpectedly, usually ended up as support of the Communists. Before very long, a complicated machinery was developed to implement the Communist drive for control: At the center were the party leaders in charge of “trade union work”; then came the party “fraction” (cell), made up of the party members in the particular union; at a still further remove was the TUEL group, including the Communists and their sympathizers and followers; and finally, a “progressive” movement in which the “center” elements were also included. The picture was rendered even more complicated by the very important fact that the party leaders, who of course had the last word, only too often did not see eye to

eye with the leading Communists in the unions; the "trade union comrades" were after all in daily contact with the life of their unions, while the party leaders always decided and issued orders in terms of the current "party line." Not infrequently during this decade, a decision concerning the fate of scores of thousands of workers was made by a factional vote in some party headquarters or secret hotel room and had to be carried out by Communist leaders in the unions who were bitterly hostile to the line handed down to them.

Opposed to the growing "left-wing" movement was the so-called "right-wing." The core of the "right-wing" was composed of the older leadership of the unions and of the masses of the more stable, more trade-union-minded workers. The leadership of the "right-wing" came from the old-line Socialists, grouped primarily around the *Forward*, and from the remnants of the once powerful anarchist tendency. The struggle in the Jewish unions thus took on, in part at least, the aspect of a phase of the struggle between Socialists and Communists that raged with such fury in the decade after the founding of the Communist International in 1919.

In the American Socialist movement generally, the Russian Revolution brought a wave of intense excitement and enthusiasm which few could resist and amidst which no critical voice could be heard. In the course of the years that followed (1918-21), the lines began to form and a violent conflict broke out in the Jewish Socialist Federation. The Federation was finally split when the Communists captured control of it in 1921; soon thereafter they converted it into the Jewish section of the Workers Party, which served as the "overground" of the Communist party formed in December of the same year. The Socialist elements, supported by what was almost certainly a majority of the membership, formed the Jewish Socialist Farband. The Farband retained control of the important federation institutions and press. Above all, it was closely associated with the *Forward*, which achieved a circulation of 205,000 in 1924-25 and which was by all odds the single most effective force in defeating the Communist drive for power in the Jewish labor movement.<sup>18</sup>

#### ILGWU AND THE COMMUNISTS

The main battleground in the conflict with the Communists was the ILGWU. Several factors made the ILGWU the chief theater in the civil war. Economic conditions, resulting from the decline of the cloak trade and the demoralizing effects of the jobber-contractor system, were particularly difficult during the first post-war decade, and naturally gave rise to serious grievances among the membership which the Communists were quick to exploit. Equally valuable from the Communist standpoint was the background of hostility between the

ILGWU international office and the larger locals in New York. Opposition movements, too, had a long tradition among the New York women's garment workers, a tradition which the Communists knew how to exploit. For these and other reasons, the ILGWU became the primary target in the Communist offensive.

By the end of 1921, the TUEL was already established in New York and other centers of the ILGWU, and soon the "left-wing" scored important election victories in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. By 1923 this conflict was raging throughout the union. In that year, Local 22 (a newly chartered offshoot of Local 25, consisting of dressmakers) was captured by the Communists; however, the "left-wing" members of the administration were removed from office by the General Executive Board (GEB). Similar action was taken against "left wingers" in Chicago and Philadelphia. In August, 1923, the GEB illegalized the TUEL and other intra-union groups. Despite the fact that all candidates were required to disavow membership in the outlawed groups, the chief cloakmakers' and dressmakers' locals in New York were captured by the "left-wing" in 1924-25. The Communist officers were removed and suspended. Thereupon they formed the Joint Action Committee, through which they functioned virtually as an independent union, issuing membership cards, collecting dues, and controlling shops by their own authority. Yet a final split was, for the moment, averted through a compromise that constituted a substantial victory for the "left-wing." The "left-wing" officers were reinstated, new elections were held, and the Communists and their allies returned to power.

The "peace" did not last long. The eighteen-day convention held in Philadelphia during November and December, 1925, was a continuous battle between the two factions. The "left wing" probably represented a majority of the membership; the ILGWU administration, however, controlled a majority of the convention votes. This convention, at which the "left wing" was defeated by a vote of approximately three to two, was the prelude to the most violent and, as it turned out, decisive battle in the long-drawn-out conflict. This was the Communist-conducted general strike in the New York cloak industry in 1926.

The strike broke out when the "left-wing" leaders, under direct instructions of the Communist party, rejected proposals of the Governor's Advisory Commission, despite the fact that the ILGWU leadership urged their acceptance. The "left wing" took over complete and exclusive control of the general strike machinery. The strike was bitterly fought from the beginning, but there were several moments when it might have been settled to some advantage. Indeed, there is good evidence that the leading Communist trade unionists,

had they been left to themselves, would have settled much sooner and under better conditions; they were, however, forced to protract the strike by peremptory orders from party headquarters. Finally, after the situation had become utterly chaotic and it was disclosed that the "left-wing" leadership had misused \$800,000 of employers' securities deposited with the union, the ILGWU's General Executive Board took over the strike and brought it to a quick conclusion. It had lasted twenty-six weeks and involved the expenditure of \$3,500,000, never fully accounted for; the workers, furthermore, had lost an entire season. Yet the terms upon which the union was forced to settle were less favorable than the original proposals of the Governor's Commission which the "left-wing" leaders had so violently rejected. The strike was a disastrous defeat and the very existence of the union was imperilled.

The ILGWU was done with compromises. The "left-wing" organizations were dissolved and a new registration of all workers was ordered; locals were reorganized with new charters. The Communist leaders refused to recognize the measure and called upon their sympathizers not to register, but the great mass of the workers went back to the ILGWU. In Chicago and other out-of-town centers, the struggle took a very similar course, though one by no means so acute. All in all, it may be said that by the end of 1926 the Communist bid for power had been defeated. But the union was shattered: the membership was depleted, the treasury empty, huge debts overwhelmed the organization, control over industrial conditions was virtually gone. There were many who despaired of the union.

#### COMMUNISTS AND THE FUR INDUSTRY

The conflict in the fur industry was almost as violent as in the women's garment trades; the opposing forces were largely the same, though the final outcome was very different. Organized opposition in the fur workers' union was already marked in 1919; for a time, it expressed itself through the same shop stewards' movement that was the vehicle of "left-wing" discontent in other branches of the needle trades. A disastrous strike in 1920 spurred on the insurgent movement, which made sufficient headway to win control of the New York Joint Board in 1921. Defeated in the elections the following year, the "left-wing" formally organized a section of the TUEL and prepared for a bitter-end struggle. The administration answered with suspensions. A crucial stage was reached in 1925. The Communists, operating through the TUEL, formed a "united front" with some "non-partisan" elements on a program of democracy and reform. In the elections of that year, the Communists again gained control of New York, and promptly used their office to aid the "left-wing" Joint Action Com-

mittee in the ILGWU. A special convention, meeting in November, settled nothing, because the "non-partisans," who held the balance of power, prevented any decisive action. The conflict flared up again with full fury the next year (1926), in the course of a general strike in New York conducted by the "left-wing" Joint Board. The strike lasted seventeen weeks and culminated in a partial victory. The furriers won the forty-hour week and a wage increase. Though (as the "right-wing" leaders charged) the same terms might have been obtained considerably earlier in the strike, the settlement was a victory and helped very considerably in raising the prestige of the Communist leadership.

Immediately after the strike, on the basis of a prior agreement, the AFL appointed a committee headed by Matthew Woll to investigate the entire internal situation of the fur workers' union. The report of the committee revealed a "shocking state of affairs," financial and organizational, in the conduct of the union by the "left wingers." The Communist-controlled Joint Board was dissolved and replaced by a "right-wing" Joint Council, with which the workers were called upon to register. But only a small minority apparently did so, and, unlike the situation in the ILGWU after the 1926 cloak strike, the "left wing" continued to enjoy the support of the bulk of the membership in New York. Enjoying such strength, the Communists were able to stimulate dissension in the Joint Council and heighten the demoralization in "right-wing" ranks.

#### DUAL UNIONISM

In both the women's garment and the fur industries, the "left-wing" rapidly moved toward dual unionism. Early in 1928 the Communist authorities in Moscow ordered a change of line in the direction of extreme revolutionism; this new "third-period" turn seemed to offer the bankrupt Communist strategists a way out. For the United States, the Moscow directives meant the abandonment of "boring from within" in favor of a policy of setting up dual "Red" unions. The Trade Union Educational League was transformed into the Trade Union *Unity* League (TUUL), which began to operate as an independent trade union center. Wherever the Communists could muster any strength, they set up their own Communist-controlled unions affiliated with the TUUL. The "Red" union in the garment trades, the Needle Trade Workers Industrial Union, was formed toward the end of 1928. Its main sections consisted of a strong contingent of furriers and the remnants of the left wing of the ILGWU. It was De-Leon's Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance all over again; but this time the initiative had come from Moscow, whose policy of dual unionism was in fact bitterly, though unsuccessfully, opposed by the



American Communists. Indeed, it was primarily as a result of this resistance to the new Moscow line that a split developed in American Communist ranks which was to prove of considerable importance in the subsequent history of the Jewish labor movement.

#### THE AMALGAMATED AND THE COMMUNISTS

In the Amalgamated Clothing Workers the course of events was rather different; the struggle in this organization never reached the acuteness of the civil war that was fought in the fur or the women's garment unions. For one thing, Communist strength did not have the same weight in the Amalgamated as in the other unions. For in the men's clothing industry out-of-town centers, such as Chicago and Rochester, played a very important role, while in the fur union and the ILGWU, New York embraced the bulk of the membership. Moreover, the national officers of the Amalgamated, particularly Sidney Hillman, were not identified with the *Forward* and right-wing Socialists, and so could for some time play at being non-partisans. For their part, the Communists refrained from attacking the national administration of the Amalgamated because of its pro-Soviet attitude. In 1922, the Amalgamated endorsed Hillman's plan for a joint Amalgamated-Soviet men's clothing enterprise in Russia (the Russian-American Industrial Corporation), and in 1924 Robert Minor, a national Communist leader, delivered a laudatory address at the Amalgamated convention held that year. Meanwhile, skirmishing had begun in New York and other centers. Late in 1924, the breach was widened because of a falling-out between the Communist party and the Amalgamated over the presidential campaign, the former putting up William Z. Foster and the latter supporting Robert La Follette. By the end of the year the Communist drive in the Amalgamated had assumed the same ferocity as it had in the other needle trades unions. A TUEL section was set up and Local 5, the coat operators' union in New York, was made the base of operations. The Communist fight was conducted under the direction of an Amalgamated Joint Action Committee, which was immediately branded a dual union by the national office. The prestige of the national leadership among the members was raised considerably by the successful outcome of some important strikes, and in 1926 the showdown came. The General Executive Board outlawed the TUEL and proceeded to reorganize the New York organization. "Left-wing" resistance proved futile. In Chicago, Rochester, and other centers, the defeat of the "left-wing," after a period of initial advance, was even more pronounced. By the time of the 1926 convention, it was obvious that the Communist drive had utterly failed. The "right-wing" victory came much more easily than in the ILGWU and did not leave the union in so ruinous a state.

## THE CAP AND MILLINERY WORKERS AND THE COMMUNISTS

Least affected among the important Jewish unions was the Cap and Millinery Workers Union. True to its tradition of "tolerating" various political factions, this union for some years tried to "get along" with the Communists. There were also, at the time, fewer issues dividing the cap and millinery workers than divided the workers in the other needle trades. The Communist-directed "left-wing" went ahead slowly building up its strength, making considerable headway in New York and other centers. The struggle became intense after the 1923 convention, and by 1925 it had reached a crucial point. Here, as elsewhere, the TUEL began to function as a dual union, sending out organizers, holding conferences, and imposing discipline. The 1927 convention was dominated entirely by a struggle in which the "left-wing" received a smashing defeat. In Chicago, St. Paul, and Boston, too, the "left-wing" was routed. To all intents and purposes, the war was over by the end of 1928. The remnants of the "left-wing," in both the Amalgamated and in the Cap and Millinery Union, soon joined the dual Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union.

## COMMUNIST DRIVE IN OTHER UNIONS

The needle trade unions were the main target of the Communists in their drive for control, but the other unions in the Jewish labor movement were not spared. Under various circumstances and on a scale reflecting the degree of "left-wing" strength, the same sort of internal disruption was precipitated in the bakery and food unions, in branches of the building trades (painters, carpenters), among the upholstery workers, the pocketbook workers, the suitcase and bag makers, and other unions associated with the Jewish labor movement. In virtually all cases, the Communists were ultimately beaten back, but in all cases the unions suffered seriously from the effects of the inner conflict.

## THE COMMUNISTS AND WORKMEN'S CIRCLE

Beginnings of the "left-right" struggle in the WC were already visible in 1920; within the next few years the conflict flared up with increasing violence. The big issue, sometimes relegated to the background, sometimes pushed to the fore, was Communism and the Soviet government. This issue found expression in 1921 in the refusal of the WC convention to endorse the "left-wing" (i.e., Communist) press, but perhaps it was most clearly reflected in the resolution adopted by the 1922 convention: to "join in the request of the Socialist movement of the world that the Soviet government grant full freedom to all Socialist political prisoners who, throughout their ideological op-

position, did not make common cause with the counter-revolutionary elements against the Soviet government." The issue of Soviet political prisoners became central in the conflict.

The Communists, in the WC as elsewhere, soon established a left-wing machine for winning control of the organization. The Communist-directed left wing immediately came into conflict with the national leadership of the organization, closely associated with the *Forward* and the Jewish Socialist Farband. Years of internal warfare followed, involving severe disciplinary measures, reorganizations, and suspensions. Throughout, the national leadership had the support of the overwhelming majority of the WC. Thus, at the 1925 convention, a resolution to vest the National Executive Committee with adequate power to deal with Communist disruption was carried by a vote of 834 to 171.

Toward the end of the decade, the internal struggle in the WC approached its last phase. The Communists now turned to the Independent Workmen's Circle—a small group that had been formed in 1909 because of some legal difficulties which the WC encountered in Massachusetts—and decided to make it the base of their operations. They seized the Independent WC convention in 1929, only to be repudiated in a subsequent referendum. Meanwhile, the Communist-controlled National Conference of Left and Progressive Branches of the Workmen's Circle was mobilized to carry through a split in the WC, in line with the new "third-period" turn of Communist tactics. In October, 1929, a call for a split was issued. The response was disappointing, and the Communists broadened their line. A new fraternal order was formed in March, 1930, under the name of International Workers Order (IWO). Into this organization went not only the Jewish groups drawn from the WC and the Independent WC, but also whatever organizations or split-off sections the Communists could mobilize in other "foreign-language" fields. The Jewish section assumed the name of the Jewish People's Fraternal Order. The WC easily overcame the Communist split; later developments in the organization will be commented upon below.

#### UHT, FORWARD, AND THE COMMUNISTS

Although the big unions had already thrown off its tutelage, the UHT played a large role in the struggle to beat back the Communist offensive. It was unwearying in its assistance to the smaller unions and in its efforts to co-ordinate the activities of the anti-Communist forces on the various fronts. But the most formidable power with which the Communists had to contend in the Jewish labor movement was the *Forward*. From the very beginning, they recognized the *Forward* as their main enemy and conducted the entire struggle as

one against the "*Forward* clique." In this long and bitter conflict the *Forward* was organizer, mobilizer, co-ordinator, agitator, and morale-builder, all in one.

#### CONSEQUENCES OF THE COMMUNIST DRIVE

The events of this period had an important effect in bringing the Jewish unions closer to the AFL. AFL assistance was often desperately needed and usually freely given in these troubled years, and the Jewish workers, particularly the union leaders, came to lose most of their Socialist and immigrant prejudices against the "backward" American labor movement. The Americanization of the Jewish labor movement was thus considerably speeded up as a result of the close bonds of co-operation that developed in the common struggle against the Communists.

It is still hard to assess the over-all consequences of this period of civil war that raged through the 1920's. With the exception of the furriers' union, the Jewish labor organizations were saved from Communist control and hence from destruction as legitimate labor organizations. But they were left fearfully depleted in numbers, power, and industrial control; above all, they were left in a state of utter demoralization. As a consequence of the prolonged emergency situation, in which administrative actions such as suspensions, expulsions, and reorganizations were the order of the day, the traditional habits and concepts of trade union democracy were considerably weakened. The very legitimacy of opposition movements in the unions was called into question, since opposition came more and more to be identified with Communism. The effects of this change in the intra-union atmosphere are still to be felt. Still to be felt, too, are the effects of what may ultimately turn out to be the most important aspect of the entire conflict. This was the partial frustration of the natural process of development of a new generation of leadership in the unions. A sizeable number of younger leaders were cut off from positions of authority because of their identification with the Communist cause; although, as we shall see, many of the most active Communists later returned to, and were freely admitted by, the unions against which they had fought, the damage could not be fully repaired. Nor was the tense, suspicious atmosphere prevailing in the unions after the costly victory had been won, an atmosphere particularly conducive to the development of the independence, self-reliance, and mass appeal that effective leadership in the labor movement requires. The acute problem of developing new leaders, which confronts so many of the unions today, may be traced, at least in part, to the delayed effects of the civil war.

## ECONOMIC DEPRESSION

Very little opportunity was given the unions to recover the ground they had lost as a result of the internal conflict precipitated by the Communist offensive. Hardly had the Communists been beaten off than the United States was plunged into the greatest economic depression in its history. The Amalgamated, first of the unions to emerge from the chaos of civil war, was able to launch an effective drive in 1928, which brought the open-shop Philadelphia market into the union camp. Early the next year, the ILGWU made an earnest effort at recovery, with some success. But by the end of the year, the "New Era" prosperity had collapsed and the country was gripped in an ever deepening crisis. Even the strongest unions were seriously affected; for the needle trades, weak, demoralized and impoverished as they were, the depression proved disastrous. The hard-won gains of decades were wiped out, union control was virtually eliminated, and the sweatshop conditions of an earlier generation were again widely prevalent. Bitter strikes, in desperate resistance to wage-cutting and union-smashing, could not halt the catastrophic downward trend. The ILGWU was reduced to a skeleton organization of 40,000, and the other unions in the Jewish labor movement were in little better state. To make matters worse, gangsterism and racketeering, which had arisen in these industries in the early 1920's, now managed to gain a hold that threatened to prevent responsible industrial relations. Despite their weakness, the unions fought back, but it was not until after 1933 that the tide of battle turned against the racketeers.

Thus, half a century after its hopeful beginnings, after decades of achievement and progress, the Jewish labor movement, concentrated largely in the needle trades, stood at the brink of ruin. Disorganized and enfeebled from within, beset from without, it faced a threatening future with no resources and with almost no hope. A few hardier spirits, a handful of leaders and rank-and-filers, kept the organizations going, waiting and working for the return of better times. It was their loyalty, their courage, and their vision that enabled the Jewish labor movement to take full advantage of the sudden turn initiated by the New Deal in 1933 and stage a spectacular comeback almost without precedent in our labor history. But when the Jewish labor movement re-emerged in the first hectic months of the New Deal, it was something very different from what it had been a decade and a half earlier, at the close of World War I.

## THE "NEW" JEWISH LABOR MOVEMENT

*The "Rebirth" of Unionism*

Efforts to regain the ground lost during the decade of civil war followed by depression did not wait until the New Deal. By 1932, the ILGWU, the Amalgamated, and the Hatters felt themselves in a position to hit back. Particularly impressive was the successful strike conducted by the ILGWU in the Philadelphia dress market in the spring of 1933, some months before the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). This achievement had an invigorating effect on the entire union, and on the other needle trades organizations as well.

Much of the renewed vigor of the needle trades unions in this period can undoubtedly be traced to the return of a considerable number of former Communists. The American Communist party had passed through a profound crisis in 1929-30, in the course of which hundreds of members were expelled for refusing to go along fully with the new union-splitting line decreed by Moscow. These dissidents (known as "Lovestoneites" after their leader, Jay Lovestone) included many active trade unionists, particularly in the apparel industries. Perhaps the most outstanding among them was Charles S. Zimmerman, today a vice-president of the ILGWU. The "Lovestoneites" did not take long to effect a thorough reorientation in their trade union policy and basic political line. Inside the unions once more, they became loyal and indefatigable union builders and very soon regained positions of leadership. Other defections from Communist ranks followed in later years and today some of the most important and highly placed executives in the needle trade unions, as well as some of the most active workers at all levels, are former Communists who broke with the party and returned in good faith to their unions. They are, incidentally, among the most vigorous and effective opponents of Communism in the trade union movement.<sup>19</sup>

In a sense, therefore, the unions were prepared for the magnificent opportunity that the inauguration of the New Deal and the passage of the NIRA with its Section 7a (guaranteeing the right of self-organization and collective bargaining) presented to the entire labor movement. All unions in the country profited by this opportunity, but it is a matter of record that the Jewish unions, particularly the two large garment workers' organizations, made the most spectacular gains. Brilliant planning and vigorous action, manifested in a series of whirlwind strikes, raised the membership of the ILGWU from less than 50,000 in the spring of 1933 to 200,000 one year later, brought a substantial measure of organization to every field of the industry

and almost complete unionization to the cloak and silk dress trades, cut the working week to thirty-five hours, and made notable improvements in wages and working standards. Almost equal progress was made by the Amalgamated and the headgear union. Only the Fur Workers Union, still beset by dual unionism, lagged behind.

The phenomenal success of the unions in expanding organization and industrial control in the early days of the New Deal was reflected in the codes approved by the National Recovery Administration (NRA) for their fields. Coming to the code hearings as representatives of large masses of workers, these unions were able to have their gains enacted into the codes as provisions governing labor standards. Where unions had not managed to take advantage of the opportunity and establish themselves prior to code hearings, the results were obviously not so favorable. On the whole, however, it may be said that the labor provisions of the codes in the women's cloak and dress trades and the men's garment industry were among the best that the NRA had to show. The degree and effectiveness of enforcement also depended in great measure upon the power and alertness of the union operating in the field. Policing the codes became an important part of union activity.

Union progress, which began even before the enactment of the NIRA, continued uninterruptedly after this central New Deal measure was voided by the Supreme Court in May, 1935. The entire structure of code provisions and enforcement was wiped out at one stroke. The unions reacted promptly and succeeded in retaining in their collective agreements all the gains that had been guaranteed under the NRA codes. Here, again, there was a striking contrast between the strongly organized fields and those in which unionism was weak or non-existent; in the latter, conditions rapidly deteriorated to pre-NRA levels. No such retrogression was permitted by the ILGWU, the Amalgamated, and the headgear workers in the areas under their control. Indeed, not only were standards and membership maintained; it even proved possible to continue many of the functions of the old code authorities through new non-governmental bodies. In 1935, the employers and the union set up a National Coat and Suit Industrial Recovery Board to enforce fair labor standards and fair trade practices in all cloak markets of the country; a little over a year later, a very similar body, the Millinery Stabilization Commission, was set up jointly by the employers and the union in that field. The stability of the leading Jewish unions was proven by the very satisfactory way in which they weathered the crisis precipitated by the voiding of the NIRA.

## UNIFICATION OF LABOR

The "rebirth" of the labor movement with the advent of the New Deal naturally tended to stimulate the unification of labor. Close relations between Sidney Hillman, president of the Amalgamated, and the leaders of the AFL in the top economic recovery bodies helped bring about a settlement of the long-standing jurisdictional conflict between the Amalgamated and the UGW. In the fall of 1933, the Amalgamated, which had been independent since its formation in 1914, affiliated with the AFL. A few months later, early in 1934, the Cloth Hat, Cap, and Millinery Workers International Union finally merged with the United Hatters, each of the unions becoming an autonomous department in the new organization. The departments were abolished and the merger completed two years later.

Less substantial and lasting was the unity achieved among the fur workers. With the dissolution of the Communist-controlled TUUL late in 1934, the "Red" fur workers' union was left free to try to return to the AFL. Negotiations with the AFL organization in the field, in the course of which the Communists were again able to make a deal with the "non-partisans," led to a merger which put the Communists in so advantageous a position that before three years were over, they were in control of the national organization, as well as of the New York Joint Council. A number of splits took place, as a result of which the AFL chartered federal locals of furriers in Toronto, Seattle, and New York.

## INDUSTRIAL UNION MOVEMENT

Hardly had the Amalgamated rejoined the ranks of the AFL than it left again to become one of the founders of the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO). All three of the major Jewish unions—the ILGWU, the Amalgamated, and the Hat, Cap, and Millinery Workers—participated in the launching of this new industrial union movement at the 1935 convention of the AFL. Dubinsky, Hillman, and Zaritsky were members of the original CIO, Zaritsky representing not his entire union but the cap and millinery department of the combined union. (The furriers, too, later joined the CIO.) But it would be wrong to think that the women's garment and the headgear unions abandoned their loyalty to the AFL. They were not intent on building a rival or dual movement; what they wanted was to break through the craft inhibitions of American unionism and to force it to go out and organize the mass production workers along industrial lines at the moment when such organization was both possible and mandatory. Because the leaders of the AFL refused to do so, action had to be taken against their will and outside the official bounds of



the AFL. But the division was to be only temporary; ultimate re-unification was the goal envisaged from the very beginning. Such, at least, were the views of Dubinsky and Zaritsky when they went into the CIO; Hillman's attitude was not quite so unequivocal, since, after all, the Amalgamated could not be expected to be greatly attached to the AFL. In September, 1936, the ILGWU and the Amalgamated were suspended from the AFL because of their refusal to leave the CIO. No action was taken against Zaritsky's union because it was not affiliated as an international with the CIO, though the cap and millinery department was. Even this partial affiliation came to an end in October, 1936, when departments were abolished in the united organization.

From the very beginning, Zaritsky and Dubinsky were advocates of peace and re-unification. When it became clear, toward the end of 1938, that the CIO was determined to establish itself on a permanent basis as the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the ILGWU left that body and for the next year and a half remained independent. It returned to the AFL in 1940, after some of the conditions it had made were partially met. The Amalgamated, on the other hand, went along with the CIO, but had no easy time of it there: first, because of the break of John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers, with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom Hillman ardently supported, and second, because of the increasingly obvious Communist influence in the newer CIO unions. In the end, it was Lewis and his miners, not Hillman and his men's clothing workers, who left the CIO.

Thus did the fortunes of trade union politics bring it about that of the two largest Jewish unions, one was an important affiliate of the AFL and the other of the CIO. Apart from the Communist-controlled fur workers' organization, all of the remaining unions associated with the Jewish labor movement were to be found in the AFL.

#### EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The tremendous expansion of the early years of the New Deal brought into the ranks of the ILGWU, the Amalgamated, and other unions hundreds of thousands of new members with little background or experience in the labor movement. These "NRA babies" had to be trained and assimilated if the unions were to survive as great mass organizations in their fields. Much of this training was, of course, achieved through the everyday routine of work and struggle in the shops and on the picket line, but more planned and systematic education was early felt to be necessary. Hence, most of the unions quickly expanded to very considerable proportions the vestigial educational machinery that had survived the hard times. Both the ILGWU and the Amalgamated launched impressive programs of education, cul-

ture, and recreation for their members which easily placed them at the head of the American labor movement in these respects. Just what these educational activities contributed to the result cannot easily be determined; it is a fact, however, that scores and hundreds of thousands of "NRA babies" soon matured into loyal and seasoned unionists, a tower of strength for their organizations.

#### JEWISH LABOR UNIONS IN NEW DEAL POLITICS

With the New Deal, the unions also went into politics in a way which, for the Jewish labor movement at least, represented a very considerable break with past traditions. In the spring of 1933, American labor, almost in a body, turned to Roosevelt and became part of the New Deal political machine. In 1936, the CIO leaders launched Labor's Non-Partisan League to mobilize labor's forces in the campaign to re-elect Roosevelt. In New York, an independent party, the American Labor Party (ALP), was set up as the state branch of Labor's Non-Partisan League. Most Jewish unions, AFL and CIO alike, affiliated with the ALP, which soon became a considerable force in local politics. Before long, however, the ALP was torn apart by an internal conflict with the Communists, who, with the help of some union leaders, had succeeded in getting a grip upon the organization. Ultimately (1944), a split took place, the ALP remaining in the hands of the Communists, and the *bona fide* trade unionists and liberals forming the Liberal party as its successor. In other parts of the country, too, the unions began to go into politics in support of the New Deal. On this front the Jewish labor leaders were everywhere most active, operating through the AFL's Labor's League for Political Action, the CIO's Political Action Committee (headed by Jack Kroll of the Amalgamated), as well as through such special organizations as the Liberal party of New York.

It is hard to appreciate what a rupture with tradition this new venture into politics represented for the Jewish workers under Socialist influence. For decades, it had been a cardinal principle of their faith that the two "old" parties were corrupt, "capitalistic outfits," with little difference between them, and that the only hope of the workers lay in building up an independent Socialist party. To vote for "old party" candidates was felt to be an act akin to treason to labor's cause. Now, Jewish unions with long Socialist records behind them were openly calling upon their members to vote for "capitalist" candidates in state and nation. The Jewish Socialist workers responded with enthusiasm. That this drastic turnabout could be accomplished so quickly without any serious protest or defection suggests that much of the Socialism of the Jewish Socialist unions had, by 1933, become largely formal, a mere sentimental vestige. By 1933, in fact, Socialism

had long since fulfilled its original function of creating a spirit of solidarity and co-operation among the Jewish workers, and it no longer bore any real relation to the actualities of the labor movement. It is noteworthy that not merely the Jewish unions but the Jewish Socialist organizations and press—in fact, all branches of the Jewish labor movement—were involved in this break with tradition. Here and there some of the old Socialist terminology was retained, but it was obviously merely vestigial, oddly out of place in the new situation. In this way, as in so many others, the New Deal “revolution” speeded the process of the Americanization of the Jewish labor movement.

### *Reaction to Nazism*

Another new departure of the Jewish labor movement in the early years of the New Deal came in reaction to the dreadful events that were beginning to unfold in Europe. The rise of Hitler to power induced in Jewish labor circles in the United States not merely a strong sentiment of solidarity with the imperilled Socialist and trade union movements in Germany, but also a growing concern for the fate of the Jews and Jewish life in Europe. As an expression of both of these concerns, the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC) was founded in 1933 by a group of Jewish unionists and Socialists headed by B. Charney Vladeck. The JLC's first tasks were naturally to mobilize all possible resources to support the developing anti-Nazi labor underground in Europe, and to relieve the sufferings of the victims of the Hitler terror. Rescue work, too, became a central activity. But before very long the JLC began to think of itself, however vaguely, as the representative of the specifically Jewish interests of the American Jewish workers in community and national affairs. About 1941 the JLC began to initiate activities in the domestic field. The most significant of these enterprises was a sustained and well-organized campaign against anti-Semitism and other forms of racial, religious, and ethnic intolerance in the United States.<sup>20</sup> This concern with things Jewish beyond the narrow bounds of class was one of the most significant aspects of the new orientation that was developing in the Jewish labor movement.

### *Inner Transformation*

The Jewish labor movement as it was “reborn” under the New Deal was something very different from what it had been a decade or two before; a profound inner transformation in composition, outlook, and interests had taken place which prompted observers to speak of it as the “new” Jewish labor movement. And yet this transformation, precisely because it was so profound and far-reaching, was not the work

of a year or even of a decade; it was really the culmination of trends and tendencies that had been operating almost since the very inception of the movement. Sensational events of the new times—the Roosevelt “revolution” on the one side and the Hitler terror on the other—helped to bring out some of the hidden implications of these tendencies, but it would be a mistake to regard them as entirely the work of the 1930's.

What was the Jewish labor movement in its older form? Basically, it was a fairly compact and thriving group of unions of Jewish membership and leadership, using Yiddish as a means of communication. These unions were concentrated in New York and its environs, where they were federated into the UHT. They were strongly Socialist in outlook and were closely linked with the Jewish section of the SP and the WC. They commanded a large and influential Yiddish press and were a force to be reckoned with in the Jewish community. Their Jewish interests, however, were, by present standards, very narrow and peripheral.

Clearly, this is not the Jewish labor movement of 1951. Let us glance briefly at some of the aspects of the transformation.<sup>21</sup>

#### CHANGE IN COMPOSITION AND CONCERNS

Almost from the beginning, observers had noted that the Jewish worker in America was typically a man of one generation: he was “neither the son nor the father” of a proletarian. In the “old country,” his father, or he himself, had most probably been a petty merchant or artisan; in this country, he had become a factory worker; his son and daughter, however, were not following him into the factory or trade, but were going into business, office work, or the professions.<sup>22</sup> This occupational “escalator” reflected the progress of many immigrant groups in the United States, but of none so clearly as of the Jews. Socialists had noted and bemoaned this tendency as far back as the first decade of the century; but until World War I the annual inflow of Jewish immigrants was so immense that it more than compensated for the relatively slight depletion through de-proletarianization. The number of Jewish workers grew quickly, but the growth was in large part due to replenishment from the outside. When Jewish immigration was brought to an abrupt halt by the outbreak of war in 1914, and later greatly reduced by the quota legislation of the early 1920's, the trend emerged quite clearly. The Jewish unions were becoming less and less Jewish in composition; the number of Jewish workers was beginning to decline absolutely as well as in proportion to the total Jewish population; and the average age of the Jewish segment in the once Jewish unions was constantly rising,

since the Jewish worker was getting older and ever fewer younger workers were entering the factories or trades.

Before the second decade of the century was over, many of the big Jewish unions already had a considerable non-Jewish membership, primarily of Italians and Slavs. Before the end of the next decade, large numbers of Negroes and Latin Americans had begun to find their way into the unions. This movement has continued almost without interruption. Thus, in 1909 and 1910, the waistmakers and cloakmakers who went out in the great strikes of those years were very largely Jewish, most of them recent immigrants. Over 80 per cent of the men's clothing workers in 1913 were Jewish. But in 1950 less than 30 per cent of the members of the ILGWU and about 25 per cent of the members of the Amalgamated were Jewish.<sup>23</sup> Yiddish-speaking locals, once the rule, grew quite rare. There was still a Yiddish trade union press and "labor sections" in the New York Yiddish dailies, but their influence was limited to a declining number of "old-timers." Apart from a few small organizations, such as those of Jewish butchers, actors, writers, etc., there were no longer any Jewish unions in the older sense of the term.

Many factors contributed to this change. The geographical decentralization of the garment trades—i.e., the emergence of new production centers in sections of the United States where there are almost no Jews—was one important element. Another was the increasing division of labor ("section work") in the various branches of the needle trades, making possible the utilization of labor with little skill or training. But the main factor, combined with the virtual cessation of the stream of immigration in the 1920's, was unquestionably the deep-seated reluctance of Jewish workers to have their children follow them into manual occupations instead of rising in the social scale to professional or white-collar status. This naturally led to a continuous and accelerating shrinkage, both absolute and relative, of the Jewish sector in the most important of the formerly Jewish unions. Viewed simply in terms of composition, there was no longer a Jewish labor movement in this country.

And yet, in another sense, the Jewish labor movement became more Jewish than it had ever been. For although in earlier days the Jewish labor movement was Jewish in the obvious sense of composition and culture, its "Jewish" outlook was very ambiguous. Largely under radical "internationalist" influence, the Jewish labor leaders not only took a hostile attitude to Jewish religion, which they denounced as "reactionary benightedness and a prop of capitalism"; they virtually repudiated any Jewish interest that transcended class lines. Their Jewish concern was limited to Yiddish secular culture and to those areas into which labor solidarity or sentimental ties with the "old country"

might bring them. They were, of course, bitterly anti-Zionist, nor, aside from one or two notable exceptions, would they admit of any real Jewish interests, political, social, or philanthropic, that went beyond proletarian bounds. Strong assimilatory trends also made themselves felt, though they never became dominant, perhaps because of the recency of the immigration. By and large, the "Jewishness" of the Jewish labor movement, or rather of the Jewish labor leaders who set the tone for the movement, was a matter of immigrant associations and the use of the Yiddish language as a cultural vehicle. Their attitude to anything Jewish that went beyond this was essentially negative, if not actually hostile.

Strangely enough, as the Jewish labor movement became less Jewish in composition, it grew more Jewish in breadth and intensity of concern. This paradox is to be accounted for on two closely related grounds. In the first place, however the membership might have changed, the leadership of the formerly Jewish unions still remained predominantly Jewish, and this was generally the more true the higher the rank of leadership. (This disproportion was perfectly natural and, in a sense, quite unavoidable, since the higher levels of leadership had necessarily to include a greater percentage of veteran union executives, who were so very largely Jewish.) But the high proportion of Jews in the leadership of the formerly Jewish unions might have proved of no particular importance had the old negative attitude to things Jewish continued among them or among the rank and file of Jewish workers. But precisely at the point in the early 1930's when the unions were ceasing to be Jewish in composition, their Jewish leaders began to acquire a new and far broader interest in Jewish affairs, and a much deeper concern for the fate and welfare of the Jewish people throughout the world. The collapse of the old dogmatic radical-"internationalist" outlook which forbade any all-Jewish concern transcending class or labor lines came just at the time when the demonic fury of anti-Semitism in Europe was bringing to even the most minimal Jew a consciousness of his Jewishness and a new sense of identification with the Jewish people of all classes and nations. The effects of this new consciousness among Jewish unionists were vast and sweeping. For one thing, the ancient, deeply rooted hostility to Zionism in Jewish labor circles was all but wiped out.

#### RELATIONS WITH HISTADRUT

It was the Histadrut, the Labor Federation of Israel, which served as the bond between the predominantly anti-Zionist Jewish labor movement in the United States and the Yishuv ("Settlement") in Palestine, and greatly facilitated a rapprochement between the two. As a labor organization, the Histadrut could make its appeal and gain

support even among those who were hostile to the Zionist ideology and program. In 1923-24, under Poale Zionist auspices, the National Labor Committee for Palestine (Gevevkschaftn Campaign) was launched, with the formal approval of all sections of Jewish labor opinion, as an agency for mobilizing aid for the Histadrut. The campaign did not really begin to take hold, however, until the 1930's, when in reaction to events in Europe, American Jewish sentiment began to undergo a notable shift. The historical events that led to the emergence of the state of Israel and the courageous struggle of the new state to maintain itself completed the process. A large part of the Jewish labor movement, both leaders and members, became explicitly Zionist, and even those who still remained non-Zionist were generally eager and enthusiastic in their support of the new state. Labor leaders entered prominently into all pro-Israel activities, initiating a number of enterprises of considerable economic importance in the development of Israel (*e.g.*, the Amun-Israeli Housing Corporation, launched by a group of American unionists and civic leaders headed by Charles S. Zimmerman).

The new Jewish concern of American Jewish labor was not limited to, though it tended to center around, the state of Israel. All aspects of Jewish existence in the United States, in Europe, and in Palestine were felt to be to some degree relevant. Even a more positive attitude to Jewish faith and religious tradition began to creep into the thinking and public expression of the notoriously secular-minded Jewish labor leaders. These factors tended to account for the persistence of the Jewish labor movement at a time when its "material" base—the "Jewish trades" with their unions of predominantly Jewish membership—had virtually disappeared. The truth is that, although the development was continuous, the term "Jewish labor movement" meant something very different in the 1930's from what it once had. Once it had meant a compact bloc of labor organizations—trade union, political, fraternal—making use of Yiddish as their vehicle of communication. Now, insofar as it was not merely a historical reminiscence, the term referred to a kind of semi-organized grouping of Jewish labor leaders combined for the purpose of promoting relevant Jewish interests in this country and throughout the world. To advance these interests, the Jewish labor leaders not only mobilized their own organizations, they also set up bodies (such as the JLC) to co-ordinate their efforts and to represent their organizations and their Jewish concerns in the general labor and national communities. Jewish labor participation in general Jewish communal and philanthropic efforts was also becoming increasingly common. It was primarily in this sense—in the sense of an interest group of which the Jewish labor leaders were the

authorized representatives—that one could speak of a Jewish labor movement in the new period.

#### NEW POLITICAL INTERESTS

Quite as striking as the transformation in the “Jewish” character of the Jewish labor movement was the change in its political orientation. The Jewish labor movement, as we have seen, was Socialist from its inception and remained so officially until the election of Roosevelt in 1932.<sup>24</sup> Then a startling shift took place. The Jewish labor movement in all its branches almost in a body joined the New Deal-Democratic coalition in support of the new administration. Many of the labor leaders had already dropped out of the Socialist Party during or immediately after the internal crisis of 1931, but even those who remained in the Social-Democratic Federation and the Jewish Socialist Farband entered the New Deal camp. Some, in their enthusiasm, insisted that Roosevelt had become a Socialist; others, somewhat more soberly, pointed to the new situation and called for a revision of the “rigid political purism” of old-line Socialist politics. But the result was the same: the Jewish labor movement, for all its “Socialist soul,” was openly abandoning the cardinal principle of the Socialist faith.

But again, paradoxically, as the Jewish labor movement dropped its traditional Socialism it became more and more involved in the nation’s political life. For, apart from a brief period just before and during the early years of World War I, Socialist politics in this country was largely peripheral, exhausting itself in radical propaganda and rarely touching the actualities of the political power conflict. When the Jewish labor movement joined the New Deal coalition, it found itself at the center of contemporary American politics. Jewish labor leaders, such as Sidney Hillman, David Dubinsky, and Alex Rose, emerged as political personalities of major importance with influence on policy and with considerable power to make or mar the political fortunes of aspirants for office on the major party tickets, especially in New York State. Other leaders of lesser prominence, trade unionists and former Socialists, obtained judicial or administrative positions of some significance. The great masses of members in the unions were periodically mobilized in election campaigns not, as in the past, simply to make Socialist propaganda, but to turn out the vote that would mean victory or defeat for some Democratic (or, less frequently, Republican) candidate. The Jewish labor movement, in the Roosevelt era, became centrally involved in politics because, with its new orientation, it soon emerged in New York and in one or two other places as a real force in the actual political struggle. Whether the Jewish labor movement utilized its power to best advantage has



been much discussed, but its new importance in politics can hardly be questioned.

#### AMERICANIZATION

The various tendencies to which we have called attention amounted in fact to the total Americanization of the Jewish labor movement. Obviously, the turn away from traditional Socialism to New Deal politics brought Jewish labor much closer to the general body of American trade unionism, virtually obliterating any significant distinctions in practical political activity, which in this period began to figure very prominently in total labor strategy. No less obviously, the transformation in the composition and character of the Jewish labor movement contributed toward its Americanization. The "old" Jewish labor movement was essentially an immigrant enclave in American life; the "new" Jewish labor movement was spiritually and culturally very much a part of American labor. Even its growing "Jewish" concern, whether directed toward problems at home or abroad, fell in with the general tendency, for this concern was something that American labor, from its own past, could well understand. By becoming more Jewish in its concerns, Jewish labor in America paradoxically became more American.

#### *The Last Decade: 1941-50*

Through the midcentury decade (1941-50), the advance of the unions included in the Jewish labor movement was steady and impressive. During the years of American involvement in war during the earlier part of this period, these organizations participated vigorously and effectively in the war effort as well as in all forms of war relief, in contrast to the suspicious, even hostile attitude displayed by the Jewish unions a quarter of a century earlier during the first world conflict. This wholehearted participation in a common national enterprise of such importance helped considerably to remove any barriers, traditional or ideological, still separating Jewish labor from American labor and the American nation as a whole. In this way the experience of the war completed the process that the New Deal had already carried so far.

The war economy, by shutting off the supply of "hard goods" for civilian consumption, as well as in other ways, greatly favored the garment industries and thus spurred the advance of the major Jewish unions in membership, industrial power, and the improvement of standards. Nor did the immediate post-war situation, for all its diffi-

culties, bring this progress to a halt. The forward movement that began so spectacularly in 1933 continued without much abatement.

#### THE "BIG THREE"

By the end of the decade, half a century after its formation, the ILGWU (AFL) had a membership of over 400,000, of whom about 200,000 were to be found in New York. Almost 30 per cent of the national membership and perhaps 35 per cent of the New York membership were Jewish. David Dubinsky, who had become president in 1932, remained head of the organization. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers (CIO) stood second in size. It had about 375,000 members throughout the country (25 per cent Jewish), of whom 100,000 were in New York (30-40 per cent Jewish). Jacob Potofsky was president, having succeeded the founder and first president, Sidney Hillman, upon the latter's death in 1946. The membership of the United Cloth Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers Union (AFL) stood at 45,000, of whom nearly 45 per cent were Jewish. Most of the Jewish membership was to be found in New York, in the millinery division of the union. In 1950, Alex Rose became president, upon the retirement of Max Zaritsky. These were the "big three" in the Jewish labor movement. With them were associated many smaller organizations, some still retaining a predominantly Jewish membership.

These unions, especially the "big three," progressed not only in respect to membership, which in most cases reached an all-time high, but also in range and effectiveness of union activities. It was during this period that the big needle trades organizations either initiated or immensely developed their health, welfare, and security systems, their programs of industrial co-operation and stabilization, their research and publicity agencies, their educational, cultural, and co-operative enterprises. It was during this decade particularly that political activity assumed the scope and importance it possesses today in the life of these unions.

#### SMALLER UNIONS

The progress registered by the bigger unions was not always equalled by the smaller groups forming part of the Jewish labor movement. With the passing of the older Yiddish-speaking immigrant Jewish community, many of the earlier "Jewish trades" had shrunk to very small proportions or had disappeared entirely. Other Jewish unions (*e.g.*, in the building trades) were adversely affected by the economic difficulties under which their industries labored. Yet on the whole, the last midcentury decade was a favorable one even for these smaller organizations.

## FUR WORKERS

We have still to mention the fur workers. This organization, as already indicated, early fell under Communist control and never succeeded in emancipating itself. In 1938, the fur union joined the CIO, and two years later it merged with the National Leather Workers Association to form the International Fur and Leather Workers' Union, with Ben Gold as president. Its position in the CIO was not an easy one; in 1950, along with other Communist-controlled groups, it was expelled from that federation. At that time the IFLW claimed a membership of 40,000 in the fur division. Owing in part to difficulties in the industry, but in part also to the exigencies of the Communist "party line," the fur union did not make progress comparable to that which the other needle trades unions were able to achieve in the period we are considering. Because of its Communist leadership, it was to all intents and purposes outside the American and Jewish labor movements and did not figure in any of their corporate enterprises.

## UNITED HEBREW TRADES

A summary view of the trade union basis of the Jewish labor movement, as it stood at the midcentury mark, may be gained by examining the roster of affiliates of the UHT in 1950. In addition to locals of the ILGWU, Amalgamated, and the Cap and Millinery Workers, the following were listed: food employees; shoe workers; musicians; theatrical managers, agents, and workers; bakery and pastry workers; confectionery workers; bartenders; teamsters and truck drivers; sales clerks; brushmakers; building service employees; butcher workers; cafeteria, restaurant, and delicatessen employees; funeral chauffeurs; motion picture operators; bath workers; seltzer and soft drink workers; sheet metal workers; suitcase, bag, and pocketbook makers; window trimmers; painters and decorators; button makers; kosher butchers and slaughterers; Jewish writers; printers; actors and radio performers. (This listing indicates the areas covered, not the individual unions; frequently several unions fall under a single designation.) The total membership of the affiliates of the UHT in 1950 was estimated at between 400,000 and 500,000.

## FRATERNAL GROUPS

The period was one of consolidation rather than growth for the WC, since that organization was necessarily almost entirely Jewish in composition and predominantly Yiddish in culture and language.

The WC emerged from the internal struggle against the Communists largely unimpaired. At the end of the decade, it had a total membership of about 70,000, some 10,000 of whom were in English-speaking branches. The order also possessed a youth movement (Young Circle League), which was entirely English-speaking. The Poale Zionist Jewish National Workers Alliance escaped much of the brunt of the Communist attack and gained considerably from the pro-Zionist sentiment in Jewish circles. In 1950, it had a membership of some 30,000.

In these fraternal organizations the structural change in the American Jewish labor community, to which reference has been made, manifested itself most clearly. Originally almost entirely proletarian in composition, they became with the years increasingly middle class, reflecting the de-proletarianization of the Jewish workers. The age level also rose steadily; "from 28.7 in 1909, the average age of the WC membership rose to 36.5 in 1924 and 50.0 in 1946.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the shift from Socialism to New Deal democracy and, in the case of the WC, from old-line "internationalism" to Jewish "nationalist" concern, drastically changed the ideological character of the fraternal wing of the Jewish labor movement.

As noted above, the Communists had their Jewish fraternal organization too. It was the Jewish People's Fraternal Order, a division of the International Workers Order (IWO). Accurate membership figures could not be ascertained, but something like 35,000 would probably be near the mark. In 1950, the IWO was being investigated by state insurance agencies in New York and other states as a Communist organization. Its dissolution seemed probable.

As might be expected from an examination of the basic tendencies to which attention has been called, the Jewish Socialist political organizations were in decline during this decade. The turn away from Socialism in the Jewish labor movement, and the rapid linguistic assimilation which made Yiddish increasingly obsolescent, restricted the scope and influence of the Jewish Socialist Farband to a narrowing circle of "old-timers," still important in their organizations, but obviously the last of their kind. The same declining trend was to be noted in the Yiddish press, both trade union and general, and in the various Yiddish cultural and educational enterprises with which the Jewish labor movement had been so closely associated throughout the 1920's.

#### STATISTICAL SUMMARY

To conclude this brief sketch of the present (1951) standing of the Jewish labor movement, a statistical summary, based on the best available data supplemented by estimates, is offered:

TABLE 1

MEMBERSHIP IN JEWISH UNIONS, 1951<sup>a</sup>

<i>Union</i>	<i>Total Membership</i>	<i>Jewish Membership</i>
ILGWU.....	400,000	120,000
Amalgamated.....	375,000	95,000
Cap and millinery.....	45,000	25,000
Furriers.....	40,000	25,000
Other Jewish unions.....	60,000	40,000
Fraternal orders <sup>b</sup> .....	70,000	70,000
Miscellaneous <sup>c</sup> .....	10,000	10,000
TOTAL.....	1,000,000	385,000

<sup>a</sup> This estimate is made on the basis of official statistics, critically examined and supplemented by data obtained through personal inquiry.

<sup>b</sup> The total membership of the fraternal societies is about 145,000. But a good part of the membership also belongs to the Jewish unions and is therefore already included in the compilation. The above estimate is of the *non-overlapping* membership, which consists of Jewish businessmen, professionals, and the like, as well as of Jewish workers not in Jewish unions.

<sup>c</sup> The "miscellaneous" category refers to cultural societies, Socialist political groups, etc., insofar as the membership is non-overlapping. No accuracy is claimed for this figure.

On the whole, it may therefore be said that the Jewish labor movement, in its newer sense, is a loose coalition of organizations with a membership of about a million, of whom less than 40 per cent are Jewish. The most all-inclusive organization is probably the Jewish Labor Committee, with an affiliated Jewish membership of 280,000; but even this group does not include the Communists at one end and the Poale Zionists at the other.

The approximately 385,000 Jews here estimated as belonging to the Jewish labor movement do not by any means constitute the total number of Jews in trade unions. The latter figure, though quite impossible to estimate, would naturally be considerably higher. Jews belonging to the teachers, newspaper, and public workers unions, for example, cannot be counted in the Jewish labor movement, since these unions never did and do not now constitute part of the entity so designated. They do not, by and large, through their organizations, play any specifically Jewish role or exert any specifically Jewish influence on labor or national affairs. And ultimately, it is in terms of such historical and functional categories that the Jewish labor movement must be defined.

#### ROLE IN GENERAL LABOR MOVEMENT

What role did the Jewish unions and the "new" Jewish labor movement which they constituted play, *as a Jewish entity*, in the general labor movement of this country during the past decade?

Of all Jewish labor groups, the ILGWU was probably the union most consistently concerned with Jewish affairs and most active in promoting them in the labor movement. The Cap and Millinery Workers, under its former president, Max Zaritsky, himself a Zionist,

also became a significant factor, especially in AFL circles. The leaders of the New York organization of the Amalgamated, the only Jewish union in the CIO, and Joseph Schlossberg, retired general secretary-treasurer, a Labor Zionist, helped to make that union an important Jewish force in the labor movement. The smaller Jewish unions, all in the AFL, generally followed the "big three."

Insofar as there existed a Jewish labor movement within the larger body of American labor, it was as a loose coalition for the promotion of Jewish causes and interests. The existence of a Jewish labor grouping in this sense was recognized in responsible AFL and CIO circles and its legitimacy never questioned. The leaders of the general labor movement expected prominent Jewish labor leaders who identified themselves as such to represent Jewish interests within the labor movement, and to raise in labor councils questions and issues of vital importance to the Jewish people. They acknowledged the propriety of the Jewish labor leaders forming a kind of pressure group on these matters—within the framework, of course, of the general commitments of the labor movement. Since there was no problem of anti-Jewish discrimination within organized labor (as there was, for example, one of anti-Negro discrimination), the Jewish interests with which the Jewish labor leaders were expected to be concerned were primarily anti-Semitism at home and displaced persons and Palestine (later Israel) abroad. In these and related fields, joint action by Jewish labor leaders was sanctioned and approved by the public opinion of the labor movement.

What would not have been tolerated within the labor movement would have been the formation of a Jewish bloc along ethnic ("national," "racial") lines with the aim of corporate self-aggrandizement, i.e., with the aim of obtaining a greater share of positions and power "for the Jews." But there was never the slightest question of such a power bloc. Not only was there no basis for it in the labor movement, but it was an idea that every responsible Jewish labor leader would have rejected with repugnance had it ever been suggested.

The influence of Jewish labor was thus primarily the influence exerted by the Jewish unions and their leaders in the general labor movement, which was ready to give a sympathetic hearing to their appeals. It was not an influence created by special organizations and agencies; on the contrary, the influence that such agencies enjoyed in the labor movement was directly derived from the prestige and standing of the unions of which they were composed.

#### JEWISH LABOR IN THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

In the American Jewish community, Jewish labor was almost from the beginning a factor of considerable weight, far more so, prior to

the New Deal, than organized labor was in American life generally. The biggest and most important Jewish daily in the country, the *Forward*, was a labor paper; many of the most vital Jewish social and cultural institutions were in one way or another associated with the labor movement. Jewish labor was often at war with the spokesmen of Jewish community affairs and in many ways regarded itself as a kind of separate Jewish community, independent and self-sufficient, but its influence on American Jewish life could not be denied.

With the changing occupational-class structure of American Jewry and the passing of the older immigrant Yiddish culture, labor gradually lost its importance in Jewish community life. But as the "new" Jewish labor movement began to emerge through the transition period, it came to achieve a new though very different position in community affairs. The Jewish trade unions were now no longer impoverished radical groups battling against the established order. They were powerful, wealthy, and respected institutions, with fast-growing influence in public affairs. They could enter Jewish community life not as the representatives of a submerged group but as the dispensers of considerable funds and influence. Particularly striking was the new role of such unions as the ILGWU and the Amalgamated in the field of Jewish philanthropy. The ILGWU's contribution of \$250,000 to the United Jewish Appeal in 1950-51 was said to have been the largest single donation to that cause then on record. The same union had two years earlier (June, 1948) lent \$1,000,000 to the state of Israel, after having made outright donations totalling \$220,000 to Jewish institutions in Palestine. Progressive unions had long been accustomed to give financial support to "outside causes," but hitherto these contributions had been largely limited to labor and radical purposes. Now, however, non-labor, non-radical causes of general community concern began to acquire an equal if not superior claim. This not only reflected a drastic change of attitude in Jewish labor circles but also forecast the increasing significance of labor unions in institutional philanthropy.

In view of the diverse ethnic composition of the Jewish unions, in which the Jewish segment was often a minority, it might perhaps be thought that such large donations to Jewish causes would have been likely to arouse considerable opposition. But such was not the case. The Jewish contributions were more than matched by those reflecting the concerns of other sections of the membership, or arising out of general American needs and interests (American Red Cross, United Services Organizations [USO], etc.). Organizations like the ILGWU or Amalgamated could no longer be regarded as merely Jewish unions; they were also in a very real sense "Italian" unions, playing an important part in Italian American community life and contribut-

ing heavily to Italian institutions in the United States and abroad.<sup>26</sup> As for the membership of the unions, they readily approved of these philanthropic expenditures. The intense concerns of the war and post-war years made them unusually accessible to humanitarian appeals, not only for their own particular causes, but also for those in which their fellow-workers might be interested. This "balance" system of philanthropy soon became institutionalized, and a number of leading unions established special funds for large-scale contributions. The likelihood was that the importance of labor unions in this field would continue to grow.

## SPECIAL ASPECTS OF THE JEWISH LABOR MOVEMENT

### *Jewish Labor as a Factor in Americanization*

The Jewish labor and Socialist movements played an enormous role in the acculturation of the Jewish immigrant worker to his new American environment. That the Jewish immigrants did not fall into a state of demoralization in face of the disappointments and difficulties of life in the sweatshop and tenement at the end of the century, that they indeed soon came to appreciate the fundamental values of American democracy, was very largely the work of the Jewish labor movement. It lifted the immigrants out of their material misery and slowly improved the conditions of their life and work. But even more important, the Jewish labor movement brought the immigrants a sense of status and belonging. Through the UHT, the immigrant workers were brought into contact with American laboring men whom—for all their strangeness—they felt they could trust and even understand. Through the Jewish labor movement they became part of the United States.

The Jewish Socialist movement, with which the unions were of course closely linked, also served another important function: it introduced the immigrant worker to American politics. The excited election campaigns in the big Jewish centers, the great political rallies addressed by Jewish and non-Jewish Socialist spellbinders, did more to integrate the Jewish worker into American political life than any number of civics classes or formal Americanization programs could possibly have done.

The unions, the WC, and the Socialist Party were also a laboratory and training ground in the practice of collective self-government through the democratic process. Union meetings, debates, conventions, and elections taught the politically inexperienced Jewish immigrants how public affairs could be run by free discussion, the ballot, and mutual tolerance.



The Yiddish press, too, particularly the *Forward*, which from the first occupied a commanding position in the field, was a primary agency of acculturation for the immigrant in his new environment.<sup>27</sup> Abraham Cahan and his colleagues understood the spiritual plight of the immigrant worker as few others did, and they addressed themselves with indefatigable energy to the task of interpreting the United States to him and of integrating him into American life. The earlier generations of Jewish workers learned most of what they knew about the United States, American history, and the American way of life from the columns of the *Forward*.

The Jewish unions showed an early and persistent interest in workers' education, under which head were included courses in the English language, as well as classes in and lectures on American social, economic, and political problems. Education began almost as soon as the union got under way; indeed, sometimes even before, since some of the unions had their beginning in "educational societies." The ILGWU and later the Amalgamated Clothing Workers were pioneers in workers' education, and other Jewish unions followed their lead. Unions that could not conduct programs of their own sent their members to such central institutions in New York City as Labor Temple, Cooper Union, and the Socialist Party's Rand School. Nor should one fail to mention the extensive educational activity carried on by the WC for its members and their families. All of these programs, which were followed to the best of their ability by Jewish unions and Socialist groups outside of New York, were consciously oriented toward bringing a knowledge and appreciation of the United States, however critical, to the immigrant Jewish workers.<sup>28</sup>

In retrospect, it may well be said that, next to the public school, the Jewish labor movement was the most sustained and effective institutional force making for the Americanization of the Jewish immigrant.

### *Jewish Labor as a Pioneer in Industrial Relations*

The extension of the processes of democratic control and self-government to economic life is perhaps the fundamental problem of contemporary democracy. To the solution of this problem under American conditions the Jewish labor movement made a contribution of basic significance. In the realization of industrial democracy, the Jewish labor movement was the pioneer for almost half a century.

Coming relatively late upon the American labor scene, the Jewish unions of course found a tradition of collective bargaining already in existence. But they did not merely follow in the wake of that tradi-

tion. They immediately began to make labor history and they have continued to do so to the present day.

Unionism in the women's garment industry, it will be remembered, was established by two great strikes conducted by the ILGWU—the strike of the waistmakers in 1909, and that of the cloakmakers in 1910, both in New York. The “Protocol of Peace,” the collective agreement in which the latter culminated, was recognized at the time as a great “social invention” of profound significance for the future of industrial relations. This is still the verdict today.

“Protocolism” soon became dominant as a principle of industrial relations in the organized sector of both the women's and men's garment industries. Before long, a body of industrial usage and custom arose which “like English common law, grew into a codified system,” a path of constitutionalism in the jungle of American industrial relations.<sup>29</sup> The “impartial chairman” idea sooner or later spread to other industries and trades and permanently affected the course of industrial relations in this country.

The ILGWU, the Amalgamated, and the Cap and Millinery Workers' Union continued to serve as trail blazers for the labor movement. The first important program of union-management co-operation for more efficient production was initiated by the ILGWU in Cleveland in 1919, and within five years it became the policy of the Amalgamated as well.<sup>30</sup> The first step in making the health and welfare of the workers a concern of the industry and a matter for collective bargaining, was taken by the ILGWU as far back as 1910 in the establishment of the Joint Board of Sanitary Control. Out of this grew the vast and complex system of union welfare funds, in the development of which the ILGWU and the Amalgamated again took the lead.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps the best publicized and certainly one of the most interesting examples of pioneering in industrial relations was the program of industry planning and modernization advanced in 1941 by Julius Hochman for the New York Dressmakers Joint Board of the ILGWU. Here, for the first time, a militant union with an extremely “class-conscious” background came forward and demanded, for the sake of the workers, the public, and the industry alike, that the latter establish minimum standards of managerial efficiency and devise a program of concerted action in sales promotion and planning. The union itself presented such a program in outline form.<sup>32</sup> Under union pressure, provisions for plant efficiency and promotion were incorporated in the collective agreement. The reaction of the press throughout the country and abroad indicated that the full significance of this development was appreciated: a “new concept of unionism” had been brought into being, a concept that represented the farthest reach

and highest level of collective bargaining yet achieved in this country. At about the same time, the ILGWU general office established a management engineering department to serve as information center for manufacturers, union officials, government agencies, and industrial engineers, and to provide practical assistance in solving technological and managerial problems that might arise in any branch of the industry.

Industrial stabilization was the concern of the Amalgamated from its very inception, and its famous "stabilization program" made history in its time. The National Coat and Suit Recovery Board of the ILGWU and the Millinery Stabilization Commission were set up in the wake of the NRA to adapt the same idea to their respective trades.

By and large, collective bargaining proved most stable and enduring and achieved the greatest measure of security in the unions that grew out of the old-line Jewish labor movement and that are still led and directed by Jewish labor leaders.<sup>33</sup> A wide variety of factors contributed to this stability. But there can be no doubt that what the Jewish unions did for the consolidation and extension of collective bargaining and union-management co-operation represents a great and enduring contribution to American democracy.

### *Jewish Labor in the Struggle Against Communism*

The attitude of the Jewish labor movement in America toward Communism in the days immediately after the Russian Revolution followed in many ways the attitude of the Jewish labor and Socialist organizations in the Russo-Polish areas from which so many of American Jews came. Contrary to the usual impression, Jewish labor and political groups in Russia and Poland were almost uniformly hostile to the Bolshevik adventure; indeed, the Bolsheviks never made any headway among the Jewish proletariat<sup>34</sup> until after they had taken power. In the American Socialist movement generally, the Russian Revolution at first called forth a wave of intense excitement and support. Among the first critical voices to be raised were those of the Jewish Socialists associated with the *Forward*. The "right-wing" Jewish Socialists, in fact, proved the most conscious and persistent opponents of Communism in the United States.

The story of the Communist offensive against the Jewish trade unions in the 1920's and of the successful stand of these unions has already been told. The Communists made the Jewish unions their special target, but except for the furriers, it was in these unions that they met their most disastrous defeat. In the ILGWU particularly, where once they were so near to taking power, their rout has been complete.

In the 1947 general elections, for example, the Communists were unable to get more than 14,711 votes out of a total of 126,960 cast in the city of New York; not one of their candidates for any policy-making or executive position was elected. In the rest of the country, their showing was even more insignificant. It is noteworthy that the elimination of Communist influence in the ILGWU and other garment unions was achieved not primarily by administrative measures, but by the effective mobilization of the masses of the membership operating through democratic channels.<sup>35</sup>

But Jewish labor was not content with eliminating Communist influence within its own ranks; it took the initiative in fighting Communism on many fronts at home and abroad. The JLC made the struggle against totalitarianism the central part of its original program, and that meant not only Nazi but also Communist totalitarianism. The ILGWU was the backbone of the resistance to Communist infiltration in the American Labor Party, and after the split became the mainstay of the Liberal Party. ILGWU leaders, especially David Dubinsky, proved most influential in helping to mold the international policy of the AFL in the direction of closer co-operation with the democratic elements of the Continental labor movements. The revival of democratic unionism in France and Italy after World War II and the decline of Communist influence in the labor movements of these countries, may in good part be traced to the help given by American labor under the stimulus of the ILGWU. The ILGWU, and David Dubinsky personally, also played a significant part in bringing about the formation of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in 1949, as the rallying center for democratic, anti-Communist unionism throughout the world.<sup>36</sup>

### *Conclusion: Prospects*

A survey of its development through seven decades leads to the conclusion that the Jewish labor movement in the United States has always been, in a sense, a transitory phenomenon in American social life. Even in its most flourishing period, it was never really a permanent institution, as the American labor movement is a permanent part of the social structure of the United States. For almost from its inception, the Jewish labor movement in this country has been in process of dissolution through de-proletarianization. It was essentially a one-generation phenomenon whose function was to bring the immigrant Jew-turned-proletarian into the stream of American labor and American life generally. When this function became obsolescent, it was replaced by another, that of representing Jewish interests in

labor and national life. Some new agencies, such as the JLC, were added, but by and large the old institutional framework was preserved and turned to new purposes. The transition was made possible because large numbers of Jewish workers of immigrant background still remained in the unions and the other branches of the Jewish labor movement. But obviously even in its new form, the Jewish labor movement was essentially impermanent, representing perhaps a last stage of dissolution.

The ultimate disappearance of the Jewish labor movement in any form that we can think of it today seems to be conditioned upon the two factors above noted. These factors will presumably continue to operate in the foreseeable future, and as long as they continue to operate—as long as the children of Jewish workers do not follow their parents into the shops and as long as there is no large-scale immigration to make up their loss—the base of the Jewish labor movement in any form will continue to shrink.

The actual trend is fairly clear, despite the paucity of statistical data. In the once Jewish unions, which are necessarily all-proletarian in composition, the proportion of *Jews*, both immigrant and non-immigrant, is declining; in institutions such as the WC, which are all-Jewish in composition, it is the proportion of *workers* that is in decline. In both cases, the number and proportion of *Jewish workers* are becoming steadily smaller with the years. This trend is pretty certain to continue, though at varying rates, depending on location, trade, and type of institution. Hundreds of thousands of Jewish workers will, of course, be found in the trade unions in coming years, but rarely will they be such as to constitute a "Jewish element," and almost never will they be in sufficient concentration to make their organizations Jewish unions in the familiar sense. The day of the old-time Jewish labor movement, everything seems to indicate, is over.

For the immediate future, the Jewish labor movement in the newer sense—in the sense of a loosely organized grouping of Jewish labor leaders combined for the purpose of promoting appropriate Jewish concerns—seems likely to continue with considerable vigor. The two conditioning factors here involved are, first, the persistence of Jewish leadership at various levels in organizations that have long ceased to be predominantly Jewish in membership; and secondly, the maintenance of the Jewish self-consciousness that has emerged in recent years. The first factor will, of course, decline, since the "old-timers" are bound to be gradually replaced by newer leaders, increasingly non-Jewish. As to the intensity of Jewish self-consciousness, it is hard to be certain, but it seems safe to suggest that it is not likely to diminish measurably in the next decade at least. On the whole, therefore, we would appear justified in saying that in the sense in which we can

speak of a Jewish labor movement today, it will continue to exist and function in the coming period. But almost as probably—barring wholly unexpected and unpredictable developments—the long-term prospect is one of decline and ultimate dissolution.

Yet when that day comes, and if it comes, the Jewish labor movement will not have disappeared without a trace. It will have left an enduring contribution to our national labor and Jewish life in the United States. It is a contribution which is still being made in the everyday activity of the hundreds of thousands of men and women, leaders and rank-and-filers, who constitute the Jewish labor movement in the United States.

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- E. Tcherikower, ed., *Geshikhte fun der yidisher arbeter-bavegung in di Farainikte Shtatn*, Vol. II, chap. X; B. Weinstein, *Di yidishe yunions in America*, pp. 143-49; H. Lang and M. Feinstein, eds., *Geveerkshaftn: Zamelbukh tsu fuftsik yor leben fun di Farainikte Yidishe Geveerkshaftn*.
- Among the more important studies in English of Jewish unions in this and later periods are: [general] Epstein, *op. cit.*, and Joel Seidman, *The Needle Trades*; [women's garment workers] Louis Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers*, and

- Benjamin Stolberg, *Tailor's Progress*; [men's clothing workers] Chas. E. Zaretz, *The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America*, and Earl D. Strong, *The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America*; [hat, cap, and millinery workers] D. B. Robinson, *Spotlight on a Union*. Two books written from the Communist standpoint are: Jack Hardy, *The Needle Trades*, and Philip Foner, *History of the Fur and Leather Workers*.
7. Nathan Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States*, chaps. vi, vii.
  8. I owe this insight as well as many others in this paper to the suggestions of Professor Selig Perlman.
  9. M. Hurwitz, *The Workmen's Circle*.
  10. Samuel Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881 to 1910*, p. 93.
  11. See the articles in the jubilee issue of the *Forward*, May 25, 1947, especially J. C. Rich, "The Role of the Jewish Daily *Forward* in the Trade Union Movement." See also Harry Lang, "Di geverkshaftn un Ab. Cahan," in *Geverkshaftn*, ed. by H. Lang and M. Feinstone.
  12. Epstein, *op. cit.*, chap. 16.
  13. *Ibid.*, p. 311.
  14. Lewis L. Lorwin, *The American Federation of Labor*, chap. vii; Selig Perlman and Philip Taft, *History of Labor in the United States*, Vol. IV, pp. 403-11.
  15. Fine, *op. cit.*, chap. x.
  16. Lorwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-45.
  17. Fine, *op. cit.*, p. 322.
  18. For the early work of the Farband, see *Tsen Yor Sotsialistishe Arbet*, a publication of the Farband.
  19. David Dubinsky has spoken of them as "the most effective fighters against Communist influence" (*The New York Times Magazine*, May 11, 1947).
  20. For the work of the Jewish Labor Committee, see *The Jewish Labor Committee in Action; The Time is Now: Report of Activities, Anti-Discrimination Department*, and other publications of the JLC.
  21. For a study of certain aspects of this transformation, see Weinryb, *op. cit.*
  22. According to N. Goldberg ("Occupational Patterns of American Jews," *The Jewish Review*, Vol. III [1945], pp. 265, 274-75), the shift in the occupational structure of the Russian Jews in the United States during the past three and a half decades is reflected in the following figures:

Occupation	1900	1934
Manufacturing	59.6%	13.7%
Trade	20.6	51.1
Professions	2.6	13.1
Other	17.2	22.1

These figures are for the country as a whole; of course, the proportion of Jews in manufacturing is considerably higher in the big cities, but the trend is the same. Goldberg also points out another basic trend: "No less significant is the fact that the proportion of Jewish factory workers to manufacturers has decreased. 96.5 per cent of the Jews from Russia in manufacturing were in 1900 employees and approximately only 63 per cent in the 1930's" (pp. 275-76).

23. For data on the ethnic groups in the needle trades, see Seidman, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-39, 43-49. A closer view of the shift in membership composition of a large and important needle trades union is afforded by the following figures showing the composition of new members (applicants accepted) from 1934 to 1948:

Year	Jewish	Non-Jewish
1934	65.5%	34.5%
1940	61.9	38.1
1945	33.2	66.8
1946	24.5	75.5
1948	24.2	75.8

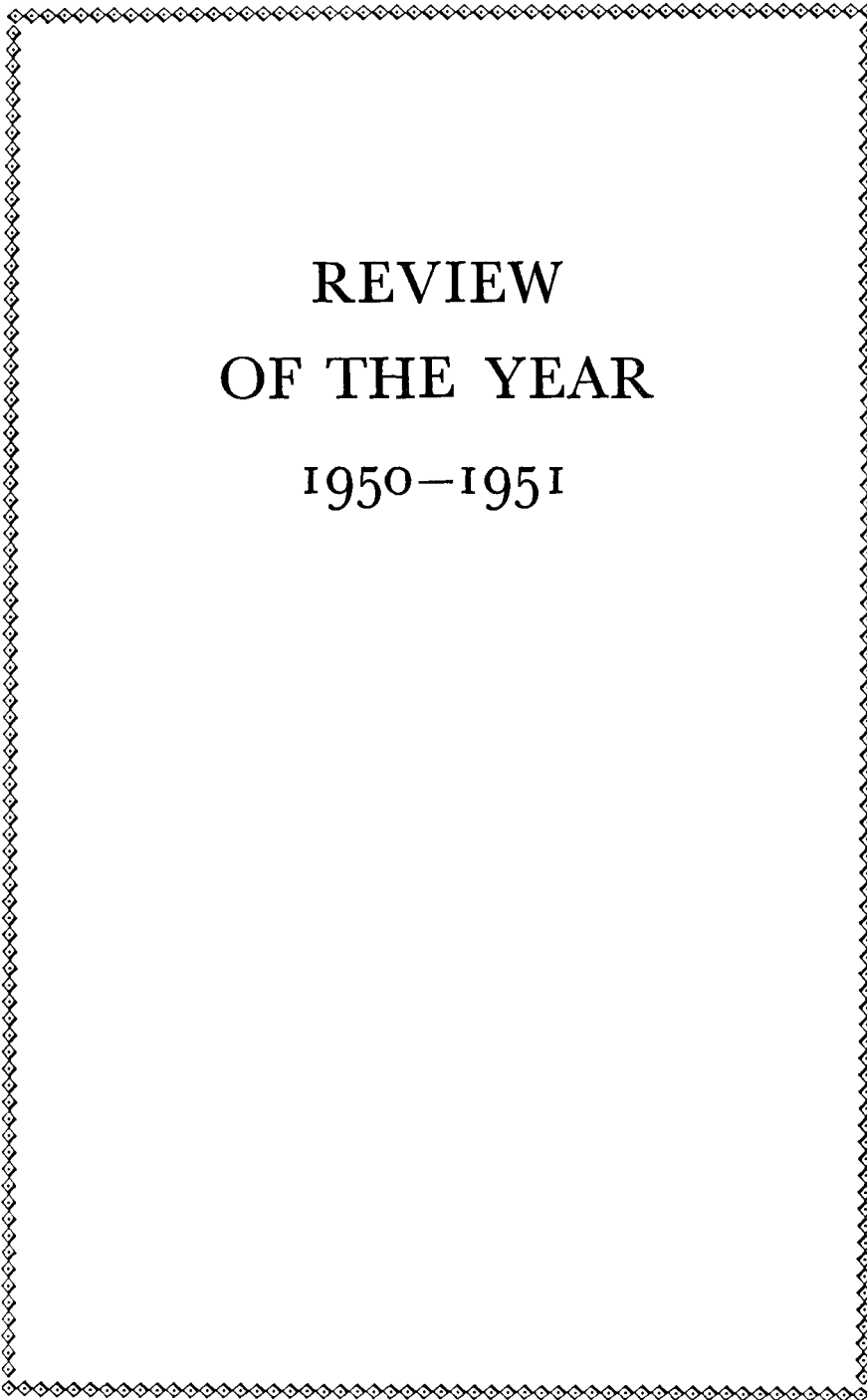


As a result, the composition of the *total membership* of this union has changed during the period 1934-48 as follows:

Year	Jewish	Non-Jewish
1934	70.5%	29.5%
1948	53.9	46.1

Accurate data are not obtainable for this organization before 1934, but it is known that a generation ago the membership was almost entirely Jewish and the language used in union affairs was Yiddish.

24. In 1912, there had been some sentiment among a limited group of Jewish Socialist intellectuals to support Woodrow Wilson on the platform of the "New Freedom." It found no response, however, in Socialist and Jewish labor ranks. That was the year of Eugene V. Debs' sensational campaign, in which he received over 900,000 votes.
25. Weinryb, *op. cit.*, p. 238.
26. Thus, corresponding to the Jewish Labor Committee, though with very different functions, there was the Italian-American Labor Council, headed by Luigi Antonini, first vice-president of the ILGWU, and composed of labor organizations with large Italian membership.
27. See Mordecai Soltes, *The Yiddish Press: an Americanizing Agency* (1924).
28. For the educational activities of the ILGWU, see Levine, *op. cit.*, chap. xxxvi; Stolberg, *op. cit.*, chap. xi, esp. pp. 281-84. For the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, see Strong, *op. cit.*, chap. ix; Seidman, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-86. For the WC, see Hurwitz, *op. cit.*, chap. xiv, xv.
29. E. D. Howard, "Cooperation in the Clothing Industry," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Political Science*, Vol. IX, pp. 607-10.
30. S. H. Slichter, *Union Policies and Industrial Management*, chaps. xiv, xvii; Levine, *op. cit.*, chap. xxxi; Strong, *op. cit.*, chap. v, also chaps. xi, xii, xiv. For similar developments among the Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers, see Robinson, *op. cit.*, chap. xiv.
31. N. M. Minkoff, *Union Health and Welfare Plans* (Bulletin No. 900, U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).
32. Julius Hochman, *Industry Planning Through Collective Bargaining* (1941).
33. "As in other parts of our economy, business depressions subjected the bridge between labor and management to serious trials of load. While cooperative systems in other industries collapsed, union-management cooperation in the clothing industry by and large withstood the pressure. . . . Collective bargaining in the clothing industry has become more and more peaceful. . . . Clothing manufacturers and unions cooperate with a strikingly sober and circumspect note." (Kurt Braun, *Union-Management Cooperation: Experience in the Clothing Industry*, pp. 52, 56, 57). The reference is primarily to the ILGWU and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers.
34. "In the first period of the October Revolution," a Russian Communist party memorandum of 1919 declared, "the Jewish workers were but little affected by it; they remained indifferent to the slogans of the revolution" (*Lenin über die Judenfrage*, p. 70). "The Jewish Socialist groups carried on a theoretical struggle against Bolshevism. . . . The Jewish workers resisted the Bolsheviks with armed force, particularly in the Ukraine" (*Communist International*, April, 1920). "Fully 90 per cent of all Jewish votes cast in the last free election in Russia in 1917 had gone to the nationalist, principally Zionist, candidates" (S. Baron, *Modern Nationalism and Religion*, p. 239).
35. See J. C. Rich, "How the Garment Workers Licked the Communists," *Saturday Evening Post*, August 7, 1947.
36. See David Dubinsky, "Rift and Realignment in World Labor," *Foreign Affairs*, January, 1949.



REVIEW  
OF THE YEAR  
1950—1951

