

**The TUC and the Histadrut, 1945-1982: a problematic  
relationship**

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Ronnie Fraser hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# **The TUC and the Histadrut, 1945-1982: a problematic relationship**

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## **Abstract**

The main purpose of this study is to explore and explain the attitude of the British trade union movement towards Zionism and Israel and how and why it has changed over the years. There have been several studies that concentrate on the attitude of the British Labour Party towards Israel but none that focus on the relationship between the British trade union movement and its Israeli counterpart. Although the unions and the Labour Party had a close relationship, their policies were not always the same with regard to Israel.

The relationship between the TUC and the Histadrut, rooted in the 1920s and 1930s, changed fundamentally after the creation of Israel in 1948. This research analyses how that relationship developed and why. Key factors included the attitude of the TUC General Secretaries, the TUC's relationship with the Foreign Office, the context of the international trade union movement, Cold War politics, Britain's post-war role in the Middle East, and the (sometimes surprising) approach of individual trades union leaders such as Jack Jones. The four wars between Israel and the Arabs between 1948-82 also played a part. One constant throughout most of this study is the pro-Zionist stance of the Parliamentary Labour Party compared with the much more ambivalent TUC-Histadrut relations.

The thesis investigates how the TUC's indifference towards Israel during the 1950s changed into a decade of positive engagement with the Histadrut, the only period of real friendship between the two labour organisations. It charts the rise of the Left, during the 1970s and the consequent trend towards increasing criticism of Israel and the Histadrut within the TUC which eventually led to the 1982 TUC Congress condemning Israel's invasion of Lebanon and recognition of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

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## Glossary

ACTT	Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians
AFL	American Federation of Labour (USA)
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ASLEF	Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
ASTMS	Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs
AUCCTU	All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (Russia)
AUEW	Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers.
AUT	Association of University Teachers
BOD	Board of Deputies of British Jews
CAABU	Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CGT-FO	Confédération Générale du travail - Force Ouvrière (France)
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organisations (USA)
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CTAL	Confederación Inter-Americana de Trabajadores ( Mexico)
DEP	Department of Employment and Productivity
DGB	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (Germany)
EB	Executive Bureau of the ICFTU
EETPU	Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union
EFL	Egyptian Federation of Labour
ETU	Electrical Trades Union
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
FAU	Federation of Arab Trade Unions
FBU	Fire Brigades Union
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FO	Foreign Office
FPTU	Federation of Petroleum Trade Unions (Lebanon)

GFPTU	General Federation of Palestinian Trade Unions
GMWU	General and Municipal Workers union
GMB	Successor to the GMWU
HISTADRUT	Federation of Hebrew Workers in the Land of Israel
ICATU	International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
IDF	Israel Defence Force
IFTU	International Federation of Trade Unions
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IRGUN	Jewish Defence Organisation (Irgun Zvai Leumi)
ISTC	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation
ITS	International Transport Secretariat
LEHI	Fighters for the Freedom of Israel
LFI	Labour Friends of Israel
LMEC	Labour Middle East Council
LP	British Labour Party
MAPAI	Israel Labour Party
MAPAM	Mifleget ha-Po'alim ha-Me'uhe det-The United Workers' Party (Israel)
MOL	Ministry of Labour
NALGO	National Association of Local Government Officers
NCL	National Council of Labour
NUGMW	National Union of General and Municipal Workers
NUM	National Union of Miners
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NUT	National Union of Teachers
NVV	Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen (Holland)
OLCC	Overseas Labour Consultative Committee
PAWS	Palestine Arab Workers Society
PLL	Palestine Labour League

PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PLPC	Palestine Labour Political Committee
PSI	Public Services International
PTUF	Palestine Trade Unions Federation
TASS	Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Section
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
TUFI	Trade Union Friends of Israel
TUFP	Trade Union Friends of Palestine
UAR	United Arab Republic
UGTT	Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (Tunisia)
UKPC	UK Palestine Coordination
UN	United Nations
UNSCOP	UN Special Committee on Palestine
USDAW	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions



## Introduction

In December 1917 a special conference of the British Labour movement approved the Labour Party's war aims memorandum which stated;

“The British Labour movement demands for all the Jews in all countries the same elementary rights of tolerance, freedom of residence and trade, and equal citizenship that ought to be extended to all the inhabitants of every nation. It furthermore expresses the opinion that Palestine should be set free from the harsh and oppressive government of the Turk, in order that this country may form a free state, under international guarantee, to which such of the Jewish people as desired to do so may return, and may work out their salvation free from interference by those of alien race or religion.”<sup>1</sup>

This statement was the first official Labour Party declaration relating to the rights of the Jews and a Jewish homeland in Palestine. However the links between British Socialists and Jewish Labour go back to the 1880s when many British Labour and trade union leaders condemned the anti-Jewish pogroms of Tsarist Russia. Their action formed the basis of a special relationship between the British and Israeli Labour and trade union movements which has continued in one form or another to the present day.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC), the umbrella body for the British trade union movement which has been in existence since 1868 has always appeared to the outside world to be a substantial and imposing organisation playing an important role in international union affairs.<sup>2</sup> Since the creation of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1919, the TUC has played an influential role encouraging, training and supporting the establishment of trade unions throughout the British Empire and establishing a presence in the wider world beyond Britain.

The Jewish labour movement in Palestine formed its own trade union body in 1920, the General Federation of Jewish Workers in Palestine, known in Hebrew as the Histadrut, to look after the interests of Jewish workers initially in the agricultural settlements and

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<sup>1</sup> This statement, which was also adopted by the London conference of the Socialist and Labour parties of the Allied countries. Schneier Levenberg, *The Jews and Palestine: a Study in Labour Zionism*, (London: Poale Zion, 1945), pp.204-5.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, *The TUC from the General Strike to New Unionism*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp.15-16.

co-operatives.<sup>3</sup> The Histadrut was much more than an ordinary trade union in the accepted European sense and was established as the alternative to existing bourgeois society.

Before the First World War, Palestine was a backward agricultural economy with little industrial activity. The Histadrut was formed by Jews who emigrated to Palestine from Eastern Europe who were committed to socialist ideology and the need to organise the workforce. Extensive post-war immigration led to the rapid growth of Jewish industry in Palestine. The lack of an established Jewish middle class with few big industrialists made it relatively easy for the Histadrut to become established in all sectors of the Jewish economy. By contrast the Arab population in Palestine was a feudal society with patriarchal employer/employee relations which affected the development of trade unions and the organisation of Arab workers. There were Arab trade unions in Palestine during this period but they were not as well organised nor did they have the support that the Histadrut enjoyed.<sup>4</sup>

The Histadrut's long relationship with the TUC began during this period. Once Britain's mandate was in place the TUC became involved with labour issues in Palestine. As part of their strategy to create an independent Jewish state, throughout the 1930s and 1940s contact between the Labour Party, the TUC and the Histadrut was maintained by means of regular visits to London by David Ben Gurion<sup>5</sup> and by the permanent British based representatives of the Labour Party in Palestine (Mapai) and the Histadrut.<sup>6</sup> During this period several Labour Party and TUC leaders went to Palestine and were impressed with the work of the socialist Kibbutz movement.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The General Federation of Jewish Workers in Palestine did not officially adopt the name Histadrut until after the Second World War. For continuity in this dissertation, The General Federation of Jewish Workers in Palestine will be referred to throughout as the Histadrut.

<sup>4</sup> For information on the growth of the Jewish economy in Palestine see Abraham Revusky, *Jews in Palestine*, (New York: Vanguard, Press 1945), pp.55-156. For the history of the Histadrut and the Arab trade unions in Palestine see: Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies Arab and Jewish workers in Palestine 1906-1948*, (London: University of California, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> David Ben-Gurion was the first General Secretary of the Histadrut; he played a central role in the formation of the Mapai Party which became the most important faction in the Zionist movement. Ben Gurion was appointed Chairman of the Jewish Agency in 1935 which along with the Histadrut controlled the development of the Jewish community in Palestine. Upon independence he became the first Prime Minister of the State of Israel.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, (London: Frank Cass, 1983).p.25.

<sup>7</sup> TUC Congress proceedings 1936, The TUC Library Collection at the London Metropolitan University, pp.393-96, (Hereafter cited as LMU).

The main purpose of this study is to explore and explain the attitude of the British trade union movement towards Israel and how and why it has changed over the years. This question is important because from the 1960s onwards Israel/Palestine has become an increasingly contentious and divisive issue. It is often assumed that it was always so, however this study will show otherwise.

There is a vast array of literature available on Britain's involvement in the Middle East<sup>8</sup> and Palestine in particular, the majority of which concentrates on either the foreign policy of the Attlee Labour government<sup>9</sup> or the Suez crisis,<sup>10</sup> none of which focuses on the attitude of the trade unions and the TUC towards Israel.

The British position of predominance in the Middle East after the First World War in Egypt, Palestine, the Sudan and Iraq has been described as its "informal empire." Its' authority in the region was not based on formal rule or visible coercion but rather on political influence and military hegemony. The five essential functions of the "informal empire" were to: preserve Britain's prestige and status in the world, secure its privileged position with regard to the

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<sup>8</sup> Examples include: Michael Dockrill, and John Young, eds, *British Foreign Policy 1945-56*, (London: Macmillan, 1989), Joseph Frankel, *British Foreign Policy 1945-73*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), Michael, Gordon, *Conflict and Consensus in Britain's Foreign Policy 1914-65*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement 1914-64*, (London: Macmillan, 1975), Frank Heinlein, *British government policy and decolonisation 1945-63*, (London: Frank Cass, 2002), Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British politics*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918-1968*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> The literature can be divided into two groups, the discussion of the foreign policy of the Labour government and other works including political memoirs. Works from the first group include; Ritchie Ovendale, *Britain, the United States and the end of the Palestine Mandate, Governments*, (Woodbridge: The Royal Historical Society, 1989), Ritchie Ovendale, *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments 1945-51*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1961), Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in power: 1945-1951*, (Oxford: OUP, 1984), and Henry Pelling, *The Labour Governments 1945-51*, (London: Macmillan, 1984). Works from the second group include; Alan Bullock, *The life and times of Ernest Bevin vol.3 Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951*, (London: Heinemann, 1983), Richard Crossman, *Palestine Mission*, (London: Harper, 1947), Hugh Dalton, *Fateful Years*, (London: Muller, 1957), Francis Williams, *Ernest Bevin*, (London: Hutchinson, 1952) and Clement Attlee, *As it Happened*, (London: Heinemann, 1954).

<sup>10</sup> The literature can be divided into biographies and memoirs and discussion of the Suez campaign. Biographies and memoirs include Anthony Howard, *RAB: the life of R A Butler*, (London: Cape, 1987), Selwyn Lloyd, *Suez 1956*, (London: Cape, 1978), Harold Macmillan, *Riding the Storm, 1956-59*, (London: Macmillan, 1971), Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez, Diaries 1951-56*, (London: Weidenfeld, 1986), Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan vol.2, 1945-1960*, (London: Davis -Poynter, 1973), Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson; the story of Suez*, (London: Constable, 1967) and Philip M. Williams, *Hugh Gaitskell* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979). Works which discuss the actions of the British government include David Carlton, *Britain and the Suez Crisis*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), Saul Kelly, ed., *Whitehall and the Suez Crisis*, (London: Frank Cass, 2000), Keith Kyle, *Suez*, (London: Weidenfeld, 1991) and Richard Lamb, *The failure of the Eden government*, (London: Sedgwick and Jackson, 1987).

USA, contain the spread of communism and protect British assets and provide stability for sterling.<sup>11</sup>

In 1945 the Labour Government was swept to power. Michael Gordon has written that from the outset the new Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin recognised that although Britain needed to reduce her commitments and adjust her responsibilities to meet her diminished resources. This had to be accomplished without creating power vacuums caused any British withdrawal. The Middle East was “an area of prime importance impinging decisively on British defence, communications, investments and sources of petroleum, which the government weighed with extreme care all choices concerning possible reductions in the British presence.”<sup>12</sup>

Labour’s Palestine policy, according to Ronald Hyam, was evolved by Bevin and Attlee and was determined by two main considerations which were conflicting and not complementary. The first was the need for good Anglo-American relations to which the government attached great importance. This pointed to a pro-Jewish solution in Palestine as the American government was thought to be pro-Zionist. The second consideration revolved around the safeguarding of Britain's interests in the Middle East especially her oil supplies from the region which, in 1947, accounted for 60% of her needs. The protection of her supplies with if necessary, a base in the Middle East, pointed to a pro-Arab solution. Bevin was persuaded by the Foreign Office of the vital importance of Middle East oil. A report from the Chiefs of Staff in July 1946 emphasised that Britain's existing sources of oil were vulnerable and maintaining Arab friendship was essential. In January 1947, Bevin told his Cabinet colleagues that an Arab uprising in Palestine would "jeopardise the security of our interests in the increasingly important oil production in the Middle East." His attempts to work with the Americans had only made matters worse as President Truman demanded that 100,000 refugees be admitted to Palestine, which was turned down. Once Labour had exhausted all possibilities of obtaining a just settlement acceptable to both the Arabs and the Jews they returned the mandate to the UN.<sup>13</sup> The priority then was to look for the best solution for British strategic interests and a pro-Arab policy took preference. It was then held that British interests would be best served by pursuing Arab friendship as they feared that antagonising the Arabs would allow Russia into the region. The British did not try to facilitate the

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<sup>11</sup> Heinlein, *British government policy and decolonisation 1945-63*, p.1 and pp.291-294.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon, *Conflict and Consensus in Britain's Foreign Policy 1914-65*, p.133.

<sup>13</sup> Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918-1968*, p.123-4.

emergence of a Jewish state since it could not provide a base for British troops as it would be surrounded by hostile Arab states.<sup>14</sup>

The authors Joseph Frankel and Michael Gordon both recognise that the experience which Attlee and Bevin had gained in the wartime coalition government when they faced the realities of foreign policy and security meant that when Labour came to power they put aside the socialist foreign policy advocated by various factions in the Party.<sup>15</sup> Gordon states that neither attempted to re-educate the Party concerning the realities as they expected discipline and loyalty to both the Party and the leadership.<sup>16</sup> Although Bevin's realism had betrayed socialist principles, the result was that the Conservatives supported Labour's foreign policy.<sup>17</sup> Frankel believes that the strength of Bevin's personality and views also influenced Britain's foreign policy. His forcefulness enabled Britain to preserve her independence in pursuing her own interests in the Middle East. Massive support from the trade unions also enabled Bevin to stand up to his Left wing critics who believed that the leadership had adopted many of the traditional British foreign policy assumptions.<sup>18</sup>

Rhiannon Vickers in her study of the Labour Party and its foreign policy identifies two main approaches that have been used in the extensive literature on the 1945 and 1951 Labour Governments.<sup>19</sup> The first covers the work of Bullock, Morgan, Ovendale and Pelling who take what she calls a "fairly uncritical approach to what was seen as a surprising degree of realism demonstrated by Labour ministers and praise for Bevin in particular in his role in involving the USA in a defensive role against the USSR." To this list I would add William Roger Louis excellent study *The British Empire in the Middle East* which chronicles Bevin's attempts to maintain Britain's pre-war Imperial position in the Middle East.

Vickers's second group are "highly critical of the Attlee government as it dashed the hopes of those on the left for a new more internationalist and socialist approach to foreign policy in terms of a missed opportunity and even a betrayal of the Left." This approach is demonstrated

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.129.

<sup>15</sup> Frankel, *British Foreign Policy 1945-73*, p.185.

<sup>16</sup> Gordon, *Conflict and Consensus in Britain's Foreign Policy 1914-65*, p.93.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.117.

<sup>18</sup> Frankel, *British Foreign Policy 1945-73*, p.186.

<sup>19</sup> Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the world Vol.1 The evolution of Labour's foreign policy, 1900-51*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.161.

in the work of Saville, Schneer and Weiler.<sup>20</sup> The Labour Left believed that Britain's "historic role" was to become the leader of a third force in world affairs, capable of mediating between America and Russia. However the reality was that given Britain's decline only America could counterbalance the Russian threat. Stephen Howe, in his study, *Anticolonialism in British politics* comments that there has been no other international issue on which British socialists have been more deeply divided than the question of Palestine. Attitudes to the contending claims of Jews and Arabs cut across most of the conventional distinctions of Left and Right, with most British socialists hoping for the coming together of the Arab and Jewish working class movements.<sup>21</sup>

The majority of the literature available on the foreign policy of the Attlee Labour government either ignores the trade union movement completely or only mentions it with reference to Bevin. This is because the policies of both the Labour Party and the TUC during the period of this study frequently shared common ground especially on Palestine. Bevin's interest in Foreign affairs began in the early 1930s, long before he became Foreign Secretary. As the leading trade unionist of his generation his opposition to dictatorships whether they were fascist or communist ensured that the trade union movement influenced on Labour's foreign policy. Once Bevin became chairman of the TUC General Council in 1936, he along with Hugh Dalton, the Chairman of the National Executive of the Labour Party, took control of the National Council of Labour (NCL)<sup>22</sup> in order to revise Labour's views on foreign policy and defence in the build up to the Second World War.<sup>23</sup> His influence and stature within the movement, along with the support of three of the six largest unions<sup>24</sup> ensured that it was not

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Weiler, 'British Labour and the Cold War: foreign policy of the Labour Government 1945-51', *Journal British Studies*, Vol.26, No.1 (1987), pp.54-82, Jonathan Schneer, 'Hopes Deferred or Shattered: The British Labour Left and the Third Force Movement, 1945-49', *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol.56, No.2 (June, 1984), pp.198-226, John Saville, *The Politics of Continuity: British Foreign Policy and the Labour Government, 1945-46*, (London:Verso,1993).

<sup>21</sup> Howe, *Anticolonialism in British politics*, pp.146-153.

<sup>22</sup> The National Council of Labour, which was established in the 1930s, attempted to coordinate the policies and actions of the TUC and Labour party. It consisted of representatives from the TUC's General Council and the Executive Committees of the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Labour Party. In the 1930s the TUC used the NCL to influence Labour party foreign policy. As time went on it became less effective and by the 1960s the NCL had become moribund. For more information see, Jerry Brookshire, 'The National Council of Labour, 1921-1946', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol.18, No.1 (Spring,1986), pp.43-69.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Bullock, *The life and times of Ernest Bevin 1881-1940*, (London: Heinemann, 1983), pp.590-4.

<sup>24</sup> Bevin could count on support from three of the big six unions, the Transport workers, the General and Municipal and the Miners. The Railwaymen and the Shop workers often voted with Bevin's critics. Harrison, *Trade Unions and the Labour Party since 1945*, pp.108-94.

necessary for the unions to use their majority of voting power at the Labour Party conferences in order to change Labour's foreign policy.<sup>25</sup> In 1937, under his tenure as TUC President, the TUC formed its own Colonial Advisory committee to lobby government, in order to prevent colonies falling under influence of communism.<sup>26</sup>

Bevin first became acquainted with Zionism at the time of the 1930 Whitechapel by-election through Dov Hoz, the Poale Zion representative in London. To ensure Labour won, Bevin successfully intervened with the Government on behalf of the Jewish voters of Whitechapel to reassure them that the Government had no intention of altering the terms of the Palestine mandate or stopping Jewish immigration. Bevin liked and admired Hoz<sup>27</sup> which resulted in him understanding the efforts of the Yishuv and on more than one occasion he expressed his admiration of their achievements in Palestine.<sup>28</sup> As a result of his willingness to intervene with the Government on the Zionists' behalf Bevin was considered by the Yishuv to be a powerful political friend<sup>29</sup>. It was only in 1942 after he became aware of the complexities of the Palestine issue that his attitude towards the Yishuv began to change.<sup>30</sup>

Once the Left had accepted that the Attlee Labour government would not follow a socialist foreign policy, the biggest political issue within the trade union movement which related to foreign affairs was the influence of communists within the unions and British-Soviet relations. Palestine was not seen as a big issue for the trade union movement and their involvement almost entirely fails to get any mention in the literature. Even though Bevin had

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Harrison, *Trade Unions and the Labour Party since 1945*, (London: George Allen, 1960), p.158, and Bernard Hennessy, 'Trade Unions and the British Labor Party' in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol.49, No.4 (December 1955), p.1050-66.

<sup>26</sup> Vickers, *The Labour Party and the world Vol.1 The evolution of Labour's foreign policy, 1900-51*, p.148.

<sup>27</sup> Bevin's friendship for Hoz is illustrated by him speaking at a farewell gathering in London in 1931 for Dov Hoz prior to his return to Palestine, "Mr. Dov Hos Returns to Palestine" *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, 20 June 1931 and that he sent a message to the memorial meeting for Dov Hoz organised by the Poale Zion and the Zionist Federation held in London on 14 January 1941. 'Memorial for Dov Hoz in London', *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, 14 January 1941.

<sup>28</sup> For examples of Bevin's support and concern for the Yishuv see his Presidential address to the 1937 TUC Congress, MRC 1937 TUC Congress proceedings, p.75 and his comments made at a reception for an American trade union delegation who had visited Palestine, "Reception to American Workers Delegation which has visited Palestine", *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 February 1937.

<sup>29</sup> Bevin intervened with the Colonial Secretary and the Prime Minister over the establishment of Jewish fighting units. Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, p.171.

<sup>30</sup> Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, p.171-2.

included the TUC in his plans to stop the spread of communism the Labour movement's involvement with foreign affairs only appear to start in the early 1950s with German rearmament, the Hungarian revolution, and the Suez crisis. Again, within the extensive literature on these issues the trade union view barely merits a mention.

Avi Shlaim notes that by mid-1949 a distinct change had taken place in British policy which led to an improvement in Anglo-Israeli relations. Firstly, the risk of military hostilities with Israel due to the Anglo-Jordanian treaty resulted in British support for peace talks. Secondly, as Britain was now free from the Balfour promise she was anxious to consolidate her position in the Arab world. Thirdly, Israel had emerged as the strongest military power in Middle East and Britain needed her cooperation to contain Soviet advances in the region. As a result Britain's relations with Israel improved but relations with Egypt deteriorated.<sup>31</sup>

The Churchill Conservative government which succeeded the Labour administration in 1951 and Churchill's successor Anthony Eden pursued three objectives in the Middle East: conciliation with Egypt by withdrawing from the Suez Canal bases, the replacement of bilateral treaties with countries like Iraq and Jordan by multilateral defence pacts backed by USA and the quest for an Arab-Israeli settlement.<sup>32</sup> This policy suffered a series of setbacks in 1955 including Egypt's arms deal with Czechoslovakia which heightened British fears of increased Russian influence in the Middle East. Egypt perceived Britain's promotion of the Baghdad pact as a threat to its leadership of the Arab world and increased its hostility towards Israel.

The reasons for Britain's invasion of Egypt in 1956, and her collusion with France and Israel, have been the subject of extensive analysis especially since the release of official papers in January 1987. Israel, however, had her own reasons for wanting to neutralise Egypt's growing military and political influence. The post-mortems that immediately followed Suez greatly exaggerated its effects. Britain it was said had been reduced "from a first class to a third class power." However it did not adversely affect Britain's influence in the region as she

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<sup>31</sup> This new policy was explained by Bevin in letter to British representatives in Arab capitals. "Our general objective must be to have cordial and intimate relations with all the states of the Middle East including the Arab states and Israel, to see them formally joined to the western group of states opposed to Soviet aggression and infiltration and cooperating among themselves as to promote stability and prosperity of the ME as a whole." Avi Shlaim, 'Britain and the Arab Israeli war of 1948', Michael Dockrill and John Young eds, *British Foreign Policy 1945-56*, (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.96.

<sup>32</sup> Anthony Adamthwaite, 'Suez Revisited', *International Affairs*, Vol.64, No.3 (Summer, 1988), p.450.



was able to intervene in Jordan in 1958 and Kuwait in 1961.<sup>33</sup> Hyam adds that the effect of Egypt's defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War and the demise of Nasser made Britain's withdrawal from the Far East easier by creating a more favourable climate; "we would never had the chance of making an orderly withdrawal if Nasser had not been defeated"<sup>34</sup>

Suez divided Britain more deeply than any other event since Munich. The initial drive for Labour to organise an anti-Suez campaign had come from the anti-colonialist Left. Suez briefly united the Labour Party behind Gaitskell who "spoke for England" against aggression.<sup>35</sup> Labour's "law, not war" campaign jointly organised with the TUC included demonstrations and meetings but not strikes.<sup>36</sup> The Parliamentary Labour Party may have been divided over the invasion plans but the activists were vehemently opposed to it.<sup>37</sup> This contrasted with the TUC President, Charles Geddes, who after meeting with Eden, persuaded the TUC International committee to support the government but the committee was dissuaded from publically saying so by the younger members on the General Council who ensured that the TUC Congress at the beginning of September adopted a resolution calling on the government to refer the dispute to the UN. Many trade unionists, however, supported the invasion as a result of having served in Egypt during the war.<sup>38</sup>

The Eden government's review of its Middle Eastern commitments in June 1956 concluded that in order to prevent the region coming under the control of a hostile power, British influence should be political not military. The review decided that as Britain no longer wanted to be associated with an informal empire rooted in colonialism and imperialism, relations with all Middle East countries should be visibly based on independence and mutual respect.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Anthony Adamthwaite, 'Suez Revisited', Michael Dockrill and John Young eds, *British Foreign Policy 1945-56*, (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.225.

<sup>34</sup> Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918-1968*, p.396.

<sup>35</sup> Howe, *Anticolonialism in British politics*, pp.268-273.

<sup>36</sup> Leon Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez crisis*, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1964), p.140.

<sup>37</sup> Howe, *Anticolonialism in British politics*, pp.268-73.

<sup>38</sup> Many activists despised the Egyptians because they them remembered as opportunistic and backward. Philip Williams, p.428.

<sup>39</sup> Heinlein, *British government policy and decolonisation 1945-63*, p.174 and pp.291-4.

Wrigley observes that the major problem in assessing Labour's foreign policy between 1964 and 1970 was to disentangle style from substance. Foreign affairs provided Prime Minister Harold Wilson with the opportunity of deflecting attention away from serious domestic problems as well as giving the impression that Britain retained influence in world affairs. His government's foreign policy followed the Bevinite tradition based on good Anglo-American relations and completed Attlee's foreign policy plans which included the withdrawal from the Empire whilst maintaining links with the Commonwealth.<sup>40</sup>

This survey has shown that the majority of the extensive literature on Britain's role in the Middle East and her involvement with Israel has concentrated on the foreign policy of successive governments and the role of the Foreign Office. The TUC's international role envisaged by Attlee's Labour government to combat the spread of communism has been totally ignored as has its involvement with the international labour movement. The TUC's efforts when it was at its most effective may have been appreciated by Bevin but had been overlooked by subsequent British governments and historians.

The relationship between the TUC and the Histadrut changed fundamentally after Israel's independence in 1948 and the main focus of this research is to look at how it has developed up to 1982. Factors that affected their relationship include the attitude of the TUC General Secretaries, the TUC's relationship with the Foreign Office and the international trade union movement, international politics involving Russia and America, and Britain's post-war role and her standing in the Middle East. The four wars between Israel and the Arabs between 1948-82 have also played a part.

During the immediate post-war period the TUC was a powerful political body both at home and abroad which worked closely with the Labour government. The TUC was also at the forefront of the battle to contain the spread of communism throughout the trade union world initially at the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and then after 1949, the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU). The study will consider the TUC's relationship with the ICFTU and its role in the Israel- Arab conflict.

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<sup>40</sup> Wilson's decision to withdraw from the Far East in 1967 was not the result of a radical review but due to a deteriorating economy and changed international political circumstances. Chris Wrigley, 'Now you see it now you don't: Wilson's foreign policy' in *The Wilson Governments*, ed. by Coopey, Fielding and Tiratsoo, (London: Pinter, 1993), p.122.

The TUC's attitude towards Israel will be explored in depth and how the relationship changed over time. It will also consider if the opinions of the TUC were important to Israel. Other issues that will be addressed include, the question whether the TUC's attitude to Israel was always the same as that of the Labour Party or whether there were differences, particularly when the Labour Party was in government?

Because this thesis focuses on changes in policy and attitudes over time the study is based mainly on original sources including both published documents and unpublished material in archives in both Israel and the UK. Material has been reviewed at the TUC archives at Warwick University, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, the National Archives, Kew, the ICFTU files at the Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, the Histadrut archives, Tel Aviv, the Moshe Sharett Labor Party Archives, Beit Berl, the Israel State archives and Central Zionist archives, Jerusalem, Israel. The material in the Israeli archives frequently provided the only record of the views of the TUC on the Arab -Israeli conflict as well as offering an insight into personal relationships between politicians and trade unionists. However there are many challenges connected with this type of research; particularly as it depends on locating information which may be limited by document availability as some documents are still withheld and others are filed in unexpected locations.

Both the UK and Israeli governments have a thirty year rule in place which has meant there is no access to documents created after 1982. Some relevant documents which may have a bearing on this study have still not been released due to their sensitivity. The period from 1945-55 revealed more relevant documents than for any other period because at that time trade unions were at the height of their power and influence both in Israel and Britain.

The TUC archives in general have been very disappointing as there are very few documents available which throw any light on the TUC's views and position apart from bland International committee and General Council minutes, which only rarely give the reader any indication of attitudes and discussions. This lack of information has been compounded by the fact that none of the TUC General Secretaries left any documents or diaries that might have provided an insight into TUC thinking and discussions. These difficulties have been compounded by the deaths of many of the participants and the questionable reliability of the memories of known actors still available for oral history interviews.

This study is divided into four Chapters plus a conclusion. The first Chapter covers the years 1948-55, the second 1956-66, the third 1967-72 and the fourth 1973-82. Each Chapter will

look at changes in attitude due to Israel's wars with its neighbours, the war of independence 1948-49, the 1956 Sinai campaign, the 1967 Six-Day War, the 1973 Yom Kippur war and the 1982 Lebanon war. In addition this study will also try to explain the TUC's relationship with the Foreign Office throughout the period.

Chapter 1 starts with short review of the background to TUC and Histadrut relations from 1920 until the outbreak of war in 1939. The evaluation of this period will briefly include: the Labour Party war aims declaration of 1917, a review of the TUC's attitude and links to Palestine and the Jewish refugee crisis, and Nazism in the 1930s. Since this research reveals that both the TUC and the British Government took more than a passing interest in the position of the Arab workers in Palestine and Israel, this chapter will review the Arab trade union movement in Palestine and how the situation changed after 1948. This is followed by an analysis of relations during the Second World War, the handing back of the British mandate to the United Nations, and the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. During the war period relations between the Histadrut and the TUC took on two different personas. The first dealt purely with trade union matters, the second with the political relationship between them as the Histadrut lobbied the British labour movement for support for a Jewish State in Palestine.

The building of bridges between Britain and the new Jewish state was slow. Britain only gave de facto recognition to Israel in 1949, even though both America and Russia had recognised Israel a year earlier. The Labour Left were critical of Bevin until Britain formally recognised Israel which it thought had been delayed by the Foreign office "out of pique".<sup>41</sup> The British government, who initially saw Israel as a potential ally of Russia, were concerned by the Histadrut's continued membership of the WFTU after the establishment of the ICFTU, especially as the Histadrut was part of the Mapai led Israeli government. The importance attached to the international labour movement by both the British and Israeli governments resulted in the appointment of a labour attaché to the British Legation in Israel in 1949 and London being chosen by the Israeli Government as their first embassy to have its own labour attaché.<sup>42</sup> This Chapter asks whether TUC-Histadrut relations changed after independence, the effect of the Histadrut remaining a member of the WFTU, the reaction to the joint TUC

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<sup>41</sup> W. K. Pattison "The delayed British recognition of Israel", *Middle East Journal*, 37:3, (1983) quoted in Paul Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism History of a Divorce*, (Manchester: Manchester University, 2012), p.124.

<sup>42</sup> Histadrut to the TUC, 4 December 1952, The TUC archives at the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, MSS.292/956.9/5. (Hereafter cited as MRC).

and Labour Party visit to Israel in 1950 and the return visit to the UK by the Histadrut. It will also discuss whether the Israelis were successful in cultivating new contacts within the British trade union movement. The Chapter finishes just before the Suez crisis of 1956. During this period the Conservatives came to power in Britain and relations with Israel improved. It will discuss the Foreign Office's relationship with the TUC and their priority in building links with Arab trade unionists. The TUC's reaction, when the Histadrut eventually joined the ICFTU in 1953 will also be examined as well as arms sales to Israel, which were a key issue at this time, and if this was reflected in the TUC's international policy.

Chapter two starts with the Suez crisis and ends in 1966. The 1956 TUC Congress debate on the Suez crisis reflects the opposition to events by the unions, although their primary concern was the threat to British shipping and oil supplies; Israel hardly merited a mention. At a pre-Suez crisis meeting between the TUC General Secretary, and the Foreign Secretary, the TUC was described as “badly informed.”<sup>43</sup> Yet the Labour Party was the most pro-Israel of all the political parties and its leadership had a close rapport with Israel, with the majority of frontbench members of the Labour Party taking a pro-Israel view. A constant throughout most of this study is the pro-Zionist stance of the Parliamentary Labour Party compared with TUC-Histadrut relations which only rarely reached that level. This Chapter will also investigate whether the TUC was more concerned with contemporaneous events in Hungary than in the Middle East. After Suez, Israel's relationship with Britain changed as the Histadrut built new international relationships especially in Africa. The TUC's reaction to the Histadrut's new role will be examined as well as its effect on TUC-Histadrut relations. It will also consider what effect, if any, the Left had when it started to question Labour's traditional support for Israel.

The Six-Day War and its aftermath are covered in Chapter 3. The Labour government's priority in its foreign policy was the maintenance of British interests rather than being pro-Israel or pro-Arab. In practice this meant maintaining a balance of arms supplies to both sides whilst encouraging peace negotiations. Opposition from within the Party changed from a few individuals in 1956 to a more organised small vocal group by the time of the Six-Day War. This Chapter will look at the TUC's reaction to the war and why it differed from European trade unionists who were more open in their support of Israel. Because the TUC felt it had a

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<sup>43</sup> The minutes of a meeting with Sir Vincent Tewson at the Foreign Office, 20 August 1956, The National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO), FO371/119112. (Hereafter cited as TNA:PRO).

role to play in trying to find a peaceful settlement of the conflict immediately after the war, it sent fact finding missions to Israel, Jordan and Egypt. This Chapter will investigate if these missions were successful. It will also examine what effect the relocation of the Histadrut's European office from London to Brussels had on TUC-Histadrut relations.

In order to rebuild its reputation after the Six-Day War the Wilson government evolved a policy which would improve Britain's relationship with the Arab world, whilst at the same time, promoting a general settlement of the conflict. Once the euphoria of Israel's stunning victory and the reluctance of the Arabs to recognise and talk peace with Israel had passed, there was a re-evaluation of attitudes within the Labour movement towards Arab-Israeli relations. This Chapter will investigate the rise of the Left in the party and the unions who questioned Labour's support for Israel and its effect on TUC policy.

The first part of Chapter 4 covers the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Israeli Labour Party's final years in government and the UN's "Zionism is racism" resolution. It was during this period that Labour's attitude to Israel started to change. The Labour Left, with their support for anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism policies, which identified Israel with Britain's colonial past, began to support the Palestinians and the PLO during the 1960s. The decline in support for Israel within the labour movement was due to the era of "third world" independence movements, the rise of the Left and the retirement of the generation of MPs and activists for whom the establishment of the State of Israel and the plight of the Jews at the time of the Second World War had been important. Their replacements, mainly from the Left, saw support for the Palestinians as more important than Labour's historical support of Israel. In addition, the establishment of links between Labour and Arab political groups, including the PLO, resulted by the end of the decade with the PLO being recognised by several European Socialist governments as the official representatives of the Palestinian people. This Chapter will ask what effect this had on the TUC and its relationship with the Histadrut. The Israeli general election of March 1977 proved to be a landmark in Israel's history. The Labour Party, which could trace its lineage back to the founding of the Histadrut in 1920 was soundly defeated by Menachim Begin's Likud Party after 29 years in power. It will investigate what effect this monumental change had on TUC-Histadrut relations. A feature of the 1970s was the success of the campaign for Soviet Jews to be allowed to leave the USSR, which eventually enabled large numbers of Russian Jews to immigrate to Israel. The TUC's involvement in this campaign will be discussed.

By 1980 supporters of the Palestinians realised that in order to gain Labour Party support they first needed to secure the support of the major trade unions because of their power to make Labour Party policy. As a result they formed the Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFP) which by 1982 had garnered enough support for the TUC Congress to adopt a resolution which condemned Israel's invasion of Lebanon and recognised the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and their own state.<sup>44</sup> Although relations were often lukewarm for long stretches of time, the vote by Congress marked the end of over 60 years of often unquestioned for TUC support for the Jews of Palestine and then Israel. This was the turning point for the British trade union movement in its relations with Israel and the Palestinians.

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<sup>44</sup> TUC International Committee meeting minutes, 4 October 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/901/23.

## Chapter 1

## 1945-1955

"The Histadrut, served as a loyal partner of the State and its diplomatic role was to aid it to the extent of its power and relations, strengthen the State's position, as well as to support the state in its struggles and to make friends, sympathisers and supporters amongst the workers movements of the world. It does not do parallel work; nor act for its own satisfaction and ambitions, whatever it does, it does not close co-operation and loyal co-ordination with the state's approval.

In the labour field the Histadrut's mission in its diplomatic action is to nurture one of the main obligations of any workers movement, the obligation of international workers' solidarity. In this field the Histadrut's mission is to encourage co-operation for the promotion of the peace and freedom in the world, for the rising of the standard of living of the masses." - Reuven Barkatt <sup>45</sup>

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The international labour movement was at its most influential in world politics during the ten years following the Second World War and no more so than in Britain and in Israel. Both the British and Israeli labour movements, the TUC and the Histadrut, were dedicated supporters of their respective Socialist Governments who unashamedly used them to promote national interests. Before the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the Jewish community in Palestine (Yishuv) was managed by the Jewish Agency which looked after political affairs and the Histadrut which was responsible for its defence, economic and social development. After 1945 the Histadrut supported the campaign for a Jewish homeland in Palestine and after independence, the promotion of Israeli interests as well as the rebuilding of links with the British labour movement. This Chapter will consider whether TUC-Histadrut relations changed after independence, and how successful the Israelis were in rebuilding links the British trade union movement.

The task of the TUC in international affairs was shaped by the decision of the government in May 1940 to give the TUC the role as the sole channel of communication between the trade

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<sup>45</sup> Reuven Barkatt as Head of the Histadrut's International Department presented a review of the last 10 years of Histadrut international activity to the Histadrut Executive Committee, Histadrut Executive Committee meeting minutes, fourth meeting, 4 March 1958, (Hebrew original) pp.161-74. His original surname was Burstein and changed it in 1950 to the Hebrew version Barkatt. For continuity in this dissertation, Barkatt will be used throughout.



unions and government. The TUC was so successful in this role that the political authority and prestige it gained during wartime ensured that from 1945 onwards it continued to be consulted by government on a variety of issues including foreign policy.<sup>46</sup> The wartime experience gained by Bevin as Minister of Labour and Atlee as Foreign Secretary was crucial in maintaining the increased involvement of the TUC with Labour government.

Their post-war partnership between the Labour Government and the TUC worked extremely well because the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin<sup>47</sup>, was assured of unswerving loyalty and support from Sir Vincent Tewson, the TUC General Secretary and Arthur Deakin, Bevin's successor as General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU).<sup>48</sup> The role of defending the Labour Government's policy in Palestine fell to two very different men.

Tewson, who was elected TUC General Secretary in 1946, was hesitant, over-cautious, suspicious of change, very much the 'insider', having spent his working life within the trade union movement. Deakin, on the other hand, was a dynamic character, who by 1948, had become the dominant figure on the TUC General Council<sup>49</sup> and WFTU President. As Tewson unable to give strong personal leadership to the TUC, a group of four powerful union leaders on the General Council, led by Deakin decided TUC policy and direction which was then implemented by Tewson.<sup>50</sup> Although many leading Labour politicians were pro-Israel, neither Tewson or Deakin visited Israel nor did they express support for the Jewish State.

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<sup>46</sup> For more information on the TUC's role and relationship with government, see Chapter 10, '*Confirmation and Consolidation 1940-1976*' in Ross Martin., *TUC: The Growth of a Pressure Group, 1868-1976*, (Oxford: OUP, 1980), pp.269-324 and Chapter 8, '*The Fourth Estate, 1939-57*', John Lovell and B.C Roberts, *A Short History of the TUC*, (London: Macmillan 1980), pp.144-164.

<sup>47</sup> Ernest Bevin was General Secretary of the TGWU from 1922 until 1940, and a member of the General Council of the TUC from 1925 to 1940. He was Minister of Labour from May 1940 –May 1945 in Churchill's wartime Government . From 1945 until his death in 1951 he was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

<sup>48</sup> For more information about Sir Vincent Tewson and Arthur Deakin see: Geoffrey Goodman, 'Tewson, Sir (Harold) Vincent (1898–1981)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 (<http://0www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/31751>, accessed 26 Aug 2009). Also V. L. Allen, 'Deakin, Arthur (1890–1955)', rev. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2008 (<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/32761>, accessed 26 Aug 2009).

<sup>49</sup> TUC policy is set by the annual Congress but between Congresses this responsibility lies with the General Council on which all the larger unions are represented. The International Committee is a sub-committee of the General Council.

<sup>50</sup> The other three members of the group were Sir William Lawther, President of the Miners union, Tom Williamson, General Secretary of the NUGMW and Lincoln Evans, General Secretary of the ISTC.

Along with Reuven Barkatt, the Head of the Histadrut International Department,<sup>51</sup> they were the key players in TUC-Histadrut relations for the next 15 years.

According to Lochery, the role of the Foreign Office at the time was "and will always be, to establish and define British interests overseas, wherever possible to expand and develop these interests further, but always defend them when they come under perceived or real threat."<sup>52</sup> Lochery argues that the Foreign Office was "Arabist" because it pursued Arab interests over Israeli ones, by offering five often complementary explanations, colonial hangover, in which the British were forced out of Palestine by Zionist military and political resistance, the strategic value of the Arabs to Britain in terms of economic and political goals, the "Lawrence of Arabia" old school attitudes prevalent in the Foreign Office, Israel as an occupying power since 1967 as the main reason for tension in their dispute with the Palestinians and the belief that there is antisemitism at the Foreign Office.<sup>53</sup>

The international labour movement was important to both the Histadrut and the TUC but for different reasons. The TUC, who believed that the members of the movement could continue to work together as it had in wartime, were responsible for the establishment of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) which included both Russian and American unions. The WFTU failed however, because it was used for political purposes in the Cold War between East and West. As a result, in 1949, the TUC along with its European and American allies left the WFTU to form the non-communist, International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU). The Histadrut remained a member of the WFTU until 1950 when it resigned as membership of the organisation conflicted with Israel's policy of strict neutrality. Three years later the Histadrut joined the ICFTU. It had used its membership of the WFTU to promote the need for a Jewish homeland in Palestine and of the ICFTU as a means to gain support for Israel.

Even though the Histadrut considered itself as an ally of the Britain, during the 1950s, it became unintentionally involved in the battle between the TUC and the American unions for the leadership of the organisation, which in turn made it harder to improve TUC-Histadrut relations because the Histadrut was viewed as an ally of the Americans. Whereas the TUC's

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<sup>51</sup> For information about Reuven Barkatt see his obituary, *Socialist Affairs*, Vol.xxii no.5 (1972), pp.103-4.

<sup>52</sup> Lochery, Neill, *Loaded Dice; The Foreign Office and Israel*, (Continuum: London, 2007), p.2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, pp.2-4

connection with the Histadrut had started in 1921 as part of the British Empire, the relationship between the American unions and the Histadrut was based solely on their support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine.<sup>54</sup>

This chapter will also examine that the Foreign Office with Tewson's support showed time and again their prejudice against Israel and bias towards the Arab States in their fight to contain the spread of communism in the Middle East and Africa, coupled with their pursuit of regional dominance and influence. They used the TUC and the ICFTU to promote these aims at the expense of the Histadrut which was the largest and best run trade union in the Middle East.

This story, however, starts neither in Palestine nor Britain but in Eastern Europe in the 1880s when as a result of the pogroms against the Jews in Russia many thousands of Jews fled the violence and became refugees. The majority went west to either America or Britain but a small number emigrated to Palestine. This chapter will review the background to the emergence of Zionism, Jewish settlement in Palestine and the emergence of the Jewish labour movement there as well as its early links to the British labour movement.

### **Jews in Palestine**

Although Jews had lived in Palestine since pre-biblical times, large scale settlement only began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Jewish immigrants who went to Palestine from Russia in the 1880s were known as the first Aliyah. Although not religious Jews, they considered themselves pioneers, rather than refugees, who had gone there to make a connection with their ancestors and at the same time build a modern, new Hebrew society based on Jewish labour living in agricultural settlements. The next wave of immigrants from the Russian Empire, the second Aliyah, included a small number of socialists known as Labour-Zionists who believed that Jewish settlement in Palestine would allow Jewish workers to play a key role in determining all branches and conditions of production. These Labour-Zionists, who came to Palestine as individuals and not as part of an organised movement were young pioneers, full of revolutionary fervour and dedication to Zionism which they believed would solve the “Jewish problem”. They were not seeking a better personal life, as many of the first Aliyah did, but instead devoted their lives to the establishment of a socialist Jewish state.

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<sup>54</sup> Gerd Koram, ‘New Politics for an American Labor leader: Sidney Hillman, 1942-46’, *American Jewish History*, (1994), pp.195-213.

Labour-Zionists brought trade unionism and political parties to Palestine, which at the time was a backward and feudal society. Although their European-based ideology had to be modified to meet the new conditions that they encountered in Palestine, they built and developed the concept of co-operative farming, the Kibbutz; defence units called Hashomer to protect the Jewish settlements against Bedouin and Arab attacks; and enabled the rebirth of the Hebrew language.<sup>55</sup>

The Histadrut, which was to become the driving force for the future Jewish state, was established in 1920 with David Ben Gurion as its first General Secretary.<sup>56</sup> Its activities were always directed towards assisting the absorption of further immigrants and their settlement in the country.<sup>57</sup> The Histadrut described itself “primarily as serving the cause of Zionism and so makes all of its ramified activists subservient to this supreme aim.”<sup>58</sup> While the European working class movement sought to defend the workers against the excesses of capitalism, the Histadrut’s trade unionism, which was not based on the factory system, created a working class from the immigrants to Palestine.

Initially a contractor on road building programmes for the British mandate, the Histadrut expanded into an organisation with its own labour exchanges, co-operative agricultural settlements, co-operative industry projects and building companies. As well as providing employment it developed a social services programme for the Jewish immigrants which included a network of schools, educational and cultural programmes, a universal sick fund (Kupat Holim), its own newspaper and bank. The Histadrut also controlled the Haganah, a defence force set up in up in 1921 to protect the Jewish community from Arab attacks.<sup>59</sup> In

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<sup>55</sup> For a history of the Labour Zionist movement see Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), pp.270-337 or Peretz Merhav, *The Israeli Left*, (San Diego: Barnes and Co, 1980), pp.13-116. For a history of the Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel see Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.10-53 and Howard Sacher, *A History of Israel: from the Rise of Zionism to our time*, (New York : Knopf, 2008), pp.138-347.

<sup>56</sup> For more information about the early years and development of the Histadrut see Samuel Kurland, *Cooperative Palestine; the story of the Histadrut*, ( New York: Sharon Books, 1947) and Gerhard Muenzner, *Jewish Labour Economy in Palestine*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1945).

<sup>57</sup> The Histadrut’s written submission to the Anglo American of Inquiry, March 1946, LMU, HD8759, p.9.

<sup>58</sup> An extract from *the Zionist Review* included in a report prepared for the security services on political parties in Palestine, 23 November 1945, TNA:PRO, KV5/16.

<sup>59</sup> For the origins of the Haganah see: Noah Lucas, *The Modern History of Israel*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), pp.167-84.

1920, membership in the Histadrut was approximately 4,400. By 1930 it had grown to 25,000 members or 74% of the entire Jewish labour force in Palestine.<sup>60</sup>

The high levels of Jewish immigration to Palestine and Jewish land purchases created fears amongst the Arab population and led to violence between Jews and Arabs in August 1929.<sup>61</sup> The Arab revolt of 1936-39 resulted in the British Government publishing the Peel Report in 1937 which concluded that the mandate was unworkable and suggested the partition of Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews. After failing to reach agreement between the parties, the British imposed their own solution for Palestine. The 1939 White Paper proposed restricting land sales to Jews and limited Jewish immigration for five years, after which Palestine would be given independence. Both sides rejected the policy, the Arabs on the grounds that it gave legitimacy to Jewish claims for a national home and the Jews on the grounds that it was an about-turn by the British who had previously supported their right to an independent Jewish state in Palestine. On the eve of World War II, the Jewish population in Palestine had reached 445,000, 30% of the total population.<sup>62</sup>

### **British Jews, the TUC and Zionism**

Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who arrived in Britain from 1870 onwards created a Jewish working class. They settled in the major cities working in sweat shops in tailoring, cabinet making, cigar making and boot and shoe manufacture.<sup>63</sup> The use of the “sweating” system of work which caused social and economic problems in certain urban areas was first debated at the TUC Congress of 1875.<sup>64</sup> The TUC campaigns between 1875 and 1905 against the sweating trades and alien immigration did sometimes contain an anti-Semitic

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<sup>60</sup> Levenberg, *The Jews and Palestine: a Study in Labour Zionism*, p.56.

<sup>61</sup> By 1931 there were 175,000 Jews representing 20% of the population of Palestine and about 880,000 Arabs, Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims a History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2000*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), p.107.

<sup>62</sup> Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p.208.

<sup>63</sup> For more information about Jewish Immigration to Britain and the trades they worked in, see; David Feldman, *Englishman and Jews*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), part 2, immigrants and workers, pp. 139-258 and Lloyd Gartner, *The Jewish immigrant in England 1870-1914*, (London: Simon Publications, 1973), pp.57-99.

<sup>64</sup> Immigration was first discussed at the 1888 TUC Congress and the issue of the “sweating” trades which employed the growing numbers of immigrants to Britain was regularly debated between 1875 and 1905. The 1892 Congress urged that every legitimate means be used to obtain legislation supporting the Government's declared intention to introduce an Alien bill to restrict immigration. See LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1892, p.29.

element, but in the main they were part of the unions' demands for better working conditions. Their efforts were rewarded with the Aliens Act of 1905 which was designed to curb Jewish immigration.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile many of the immigrants joined Jewish trade unions, some of which were affiliated to the TUC.<sup>66</sup> Jewish involvement with the TUC Congresses was initially limited,<sup>67</sup> but in 1915 Congress unanimously adopted a resolution moved by the Jewish Tailors Machinists union calling on the TUC to petition the government to support the call for political and civil rights for Jews in countries where these rights were currently denied.<sup>68</sup> Jewish rights were next mentioned in August 1917 when the Labour Party issued its "War Aims Memorandum" which included support for the demand that Jewish workers in all countries have the same rights as others and the right of the Jewish people to be allowed to return and settle in Palestine. The reasons why this clause was included is unclear but it did set the trend for Labour's and the TUC's support for Zionism.<sup>69</sup>

In Britain, support for Zionism seemed to be realised when the British Government issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917 which announced that it favoured a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. International support for Zionism followed when the Declaration was ratified at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. This eventually led to the granting of the Palestine mandate to Britain by the League of Nations.<sup>70</sup> In 1920 the Labour Party and the

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<sup>65</sup> For the origins of the Aliens act 1905 see; Bernard Gainer, *The Alien Invasion*, (London: Heinemann 1972), pp.166-215.

<sup>66</sup> The Jewish tailoring unions from Leeds were the only Jewish trade unions that regularly attended TUC congresses from 1895 onwards because it was part of their policy to assimilate with and be accepted as part of the English labour movement. In 1905 the *Jewish Chronicle* wrote that only one of several Jewish unions will be represented at the conference although between them they could have elected at least six delegates if they had wanted to. *Jewish Chronicle* 8<sup>th</sup> September 1905, p.8.

<sup>67</sup> The 1900 Congress adopted unanimously a motion moved by the Jewish Tailors from Manchester and Leeds calling for the appointment of Yiddish speaking factory inspectors. LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1900, p.85. The Manchester Jewish Tailors union raised the issue of the prohibitive cost of naturalization at the 1902 Congress. The motion, which was carried, was moved by the Amalgamated Tailors union "in order to free delegates of prejudice which may have existed if it was a Jewish question." LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1902, pp.75-6, *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 September 1902, p.24.

<sup>68</sup> This was followed in 1916 by a stronger motion moved by same union which was also passed unanimously. TUC Congress proceedings 1915, p.306.

<sup>69</sup> Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, p.7.

<sup>70</sup> For an account of the Paris peace conference see: Sachar, *a History of Israel: from the Rise of Zionism to our time*, p.119.

TUC urged Lloyd George to accept the mandate and thereby make possible a Jewish national home.<sup>71</sup>

The 1914-18 war was the catalyst for change in many fields, including the British trade union movement. The establishment of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1919 led to the British government being responsible for implementing international conventions relating to working conditions in her colonies and dependencies. As a result of its involvement with the ILO and the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), in October 1921, the TUC formed its own International committee in order to improve links with trade unions in the British Empire even though they had very little knowledge of working conditions there and had never been asked for advice by the colonial labour movements.<sup>72</sup>

In 1920 Ben Gurion established a London office in order to strengthen links between the Histadrut and the international labour movement, the TUC and the Labour Party.<sup>73</sup> Their first recorded contact with the TUC was at the 1924 IFTU Congress in Vienna.<sup>74</sup> In 1928 the Histadrut first asked the TUC for help in solving labour problems in Palestine.<sup>75</sup> By 1930, the only effective Commonwealth affiliates of the IFTU were considered to be the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress and the Histadrut.<sup>76</sup>

From the mid-1920s, Poale Zion, the Jewish Socialist Workers group, which had taken on the propaganda role for the Histadrut in Europe and America had forged links on their behalf with the Labour Party and the trade union movement. Poale Zion's relationship with the

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<sup>71</sup> In 1920, the Jewish Socialist Workers group, Poale Zion which had mobilised support for Labour candidates in the 1918 general election became affiliated to the Labour Party. Levenberg, pp.206-7, and Gideon Shimoni, "Poale Zion: A Zionist Transplant in Britain (1905-1945)", in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry Vol.2*, ed. by Peter Y. Medding, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p.236.

<sup>72</sup> Marjorie Nicholson, *The TUC Overseas, the Roots of Policy*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986), pp.41 and 46.

<sup>73</sup> Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, p.25.

<sup>74</sup> The TUC's report to 1924 Congress noted that "An interesting feature of the Vienna congress was the presence of a delegate from the trades unions of Palestine who stated that there were now in Palestine about 20,000 workers, although that number was small, it had to be borne in mind that they were pioneers in a country with a future. The national organisation represented by Mr. Dov Hoz was the only bone fide trade union centre in Palestine and he expressed his hope that the other members of the IFTU would help them in reconstructing his country and especially to introduce socialist legislation which at the present time was entirely lacking in Palestine." LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1924, p.224.

<sup>75</sup> The problems in the rebuilding of the Haifa docks were solved eventually after the TUC had intervened with the Colonial Office. See LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1929, pp.229-30, 1930, p.187 and 1931, p.238.

<sup>76</sup> Nicholson, *The TUC Overseas, the Roots of Policy* pp.129 and 132.

Labour Party was crucial in defining the Left's perception of Zionist activity in Palestine in the 1930s.<sup>77</sup>

Poale Zion was a small but powerful faction in Britain which between 1920 and 1948 put forward six motions on Palestine at Labour Party conferences.<sup>78</sup> Despite these successes, Poale Zion, because of its low level of support from within Anglo-Jewry, was never more than a small part of the British Zionist movement.<sup>79</sup>

### **The TUC and their response to persecution of Jews, 1933-39**

The Russian Revolution of 1917 led to the circulation in Britain, three years later, of the antisemitic forgery "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and the belief in an international Jewish conspiracy to overthrow the established order. Britain was at this time in the grip of a xenophobic, anti-alien, anti-Bolshevik and antisemitic hysteria which affected the status in Britain of both immigrant and assimilated Jews. As a result very few Labour or Liberal MP's opposed the 1919 Aliens Act, which was an extension of wartime restrictions.<sup>80</sup> Anti-Zionism in Britain in the early 1920s came mainly from the far Right which waged a fierce campaign in the press and Parliament. This, in turn endeared Zionism to the Left because they were supporting the underdog.<sup>81</sup> Lord's Northcliffe and Beaverbrook used their newspapers, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* to oppose Zionism and British involvement in Palestine.<sup>82</sup> Although Beaverbrook denied that his campaign was antisemitic his propaganda gave much

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<sup>77</sup> Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism History of a divorce*, p.2.

<sup>78</sup> A PZ Resolution on Jewish national home referring to transfer of land restrictions was carried unanimously at the Labour Party conference 13-15 May 1940, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/3. Also Cecil Bloom, 'The British Labour Party and Palestine 1917-1948', in *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England, Vol.36*, (2001), pp. 141-172.

<sup>79</sup> Shimoni, "Poale Zion: A Zionist Transplant in Britain (1905-1945)", pp.258-9. For an overview of the efforts of Poale Zion see Stephan Wendehorst, *British Jewry, Zionism, and the Jewish State, 1936-1956*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.140-2.

<sup>80</sup> Colin Holmes, *Antisemitism in British Society 1876-1939*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), pp.141-234, and Geoffrey Alderman, *The Jewish Community in British Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp.102-3.

<sup>81</sup> David Cesarani, *The Left and the Jews The Jews and the Left*, (London: Profile Books, 2004), pp.53-7.

<sup>82</sup> *The Sunday Express* published an article by Lord Beaverbrook which stated that Zionism set the Jews apart from the rest of the community and cost the taxpayer money. 'The Jews', *Sunday Express*, 12 February 1922, p.8.



ammunition to genuine anti-Semites and the 1922 general election was marked by more anti-Jewish feeling than any other election since 1905.<sup>83</sup>

During the 1930s the TUC's main international concern was the rise of Fascism in Europe which was discussed at every Congress from 1933 until the outbreak of war. However in 1936 Congress adopted a motion on Palestine which noted the continuous support given by the British labour movement for a Jewish national home in Palestine.<sup>84</sup> The following year Ernest Bevin, who was TUC president for 1937, described the persecution of the Jews as one of the great tragedies of the world and that he made no pronouncements on the merits or demerits of the proposal to partition Palestine. Bevin said, "the test which would have to be applied by the Labour movement is whether it will contribute towards the ending, for all time, of the persecution of the Jewish race. Will the fact that they are a State with Ambassadors at the various Chancelleries of the world assist them to a greater extent than the mandate granted to them by the League?"<sup>85</sup> Gorny considers that this was not a political ploy by Bevin but a genuine concern on his part to find a solution to the problem.<sup>86</sup> The 1938 Congress was dominated by the international situation and the Governments indecisive policies towards Germany and Italy. The President, Mr. H. Elvin, in his opening address said that "the expelling of Jews from Germany was an outrage and we must render all possible assistance to these unfortunate people."<sup>87</sup> The General Council followed up with a statement on the problems of German and Austrian refugees which referred to the setting up of a Coordinating Committee for Refugees. They also felt that "some practical expression should be given to the sympathy which is generally accepted" by these proposals which should be "subject to a yearly limit on the number of refugees entering Britain."<sup>88</sup> However the Labour

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<sup>83</sup> Alderman, *The Jewish Community in British Politics*, pp.102-3.

<sup>84</sup> George Isaacs, a non-Jew who had just returned from Palestine where he had been impressed by the Socialist movement, moved the General Council motion which also recognised that the interests of Jewish and Arab workers were threatened by the Arab rebellion which could prevent the Jewish people from developing their own political, social and cultural institutions. LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1936, pp.393-6.

<sup>85</sup> LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1937, p.75.

<sup>86</sup> Bevin sent a message to his comrades in Palestine which said "That it was not only Ernest Bevin who said it; but all the TUC stands behind it." Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, pp.140-1. In his role as Secretary of the TGWU, Bevin supported his Union's policy of helping Jewish refugees to train as agricultural workers, Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp.77-81 and p.233.

<sup>87</sup> LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1938, p. 78

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 207-8

Party and the TUC who were ambivalent towards the influx of German Jews into Britain, both agreed that the refugees should be allowed to go to Palestine regardless of whether it was beneficial to the Arabs, or the impact the refugees made on the country.<sup>89</sup>

As Britain held the Palestine mandate, all the lobbying of politicians by the Zionists for a Jewish homeland in Palestine took place in London. The Palestine Labour movement sent a series of permanent and temporary representatives to London to lobby the Government and the British Labour movement. One of the first to be posted there in 1928 was Dov Hoz whose role was the reorganise Poale Zion (PZ) and lobby both the Labour Party and the unions. Bevin came to have an especially good relationship with him as both Bevin, then General Secretary of the TGWU, and Mr. Middleton, the Assistant Secretary of the Labour Party, spoke at a farewell gathering given for Hos, before he returned to Palestine in 1931.<sup>90</sup> PZ was assisted in its lobbying activities by individuals who were not only members of the PZ, but also often members of the Labour Party and the Zionist Federation.<sup>91</sup> Hoz returned to London in 1934 after Shertok, the Head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency in Palestine reported that the Zionist executive had lost contact with public opinion and influential figures in Britain and had neglected its ties with the new generation of leaders which had emerged in the Labour Party. Although Hoz was replaced by Berl Locker in 1937, he was sent back on more than one occasion to London by Ben Gurion to talk to Ministers and the Labour Party leadership before his death in 1941.<sup>92</sup>

Hoz and Locker's lobbying of the labour movement was focused mainly on the Labour Party. Politicians were deemed to have more influence than the unions, a situation not unlike that in Palestine with respect to the relationship between Mapai and the Histadrut. Their main contacts in the unions were Bevin and Walter Citrine, the General Secretary of the TUC. In the autumn of 1938 with the situation in Germany worsening and because there was no Labour Party conference planned for that year, Locker approached the TUC with a

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<sup>89</sup> For a overview of the attitude of the Left and Anglo- Jewry towards the refugees see Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism History of a Divorce*, pp.55-64.

<sup>90</sup> 'Mr. Dov Hoz Returns to Palestine', *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, June 20, 1931.

<sup>91</sup> Labour M.P.s who were also members of the PZ were S. Silverman, I .Mikardo, M. Orbach, H. Lever, and J. Mack. Wendehorst, *British Jewry, Zionism, and the Jewish State, 1936-1956*, p.140.

<sup>92</sup> Hos had made a great impression on the Labour leadership as memorial meeting organised by the Poale Zion and the Zionist Federation for Dov Hoz held in London on 14 January 1941 was attended by Lord Middleton and the Labour M.P's Janner and Creech Jones. Dr. Chaim Weizmann, Ernest Bevin, and Herbert Morrison all sent messages. 'Memorial for Dov Hoz in London', *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, 14 January 1941,

memorandum asking for a declaration on the need for large-scale immigration. It was considered by the General Council at their pre-Congress meeting on 1 September. However it was only after Hoz had intervened that Citrine met Locker with the result that Citrine agreed that some reference might be made at Congress. However no action was taken by Congress. Instead, a resolution calling on Britain to carry out her mandate obligations so that Jewish refugees might have every opportunity to enter Palestine was adopted by a joint meeting with the Labour Party NEC.<sup>93</sup> Citrine's action had ensured that the TUC did not make political decisions on Palestine but was instead a silent partner to the Labour Party. It is not clear when or why the TUC had adopted the policy of not making any pro-Zionist political statements in favour of the Histadrut especially when the international movement of which Citrine was President as well as the Americans unions and even Bevin all supported the work of the Histadrut.

When the British government decided to implement their 1939 White paper on Palestine, which abandoned the partition of Palestine, the Labour Party initiated a pro-Zionist campaign which was stepped up with the start of the war.<sup>94</sup> In February 1940, the National Council of Labour which had the support of Mapai and the Histadrut, argued that the Government was treating Palestine as a Colonial possession and not as a mandated territory.<sup>95</sup>

The following month Hoz, who had already lobbied the Labour leadership, met with TUC Deputy General Secretary Tewson. Hoz asked that Citrine, the TUC General Secretary, who was also President of the International Federation of Unions, intervene with the Prime Minister before the forthcoming Parliamentary debate on Palestine to tell him of the British labour movement's opposition to the White Paper. Tewson told Hoz that "it was true that Congress had made declarations in regard to Palestine at the request of the Jewish Labour Movement (*Poale Zion*), but it was after all a purely political question."<sup>96</sup> Tewson made it quite clear that the TUC, unlike the Labour Party, would not become involved in what it

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<sup>93</sup> Citrine to Hos, 30 August 1938, PLILMR, IV-209-4-405. General Council minutes 1&7 September 1938, Joint meeting of the TUC General Council, the Labour Party NEC & the Executive Committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party, 7 September 1938, A. Sargent, "The British Labour Party and Palestine 1917-1949", (unpublished Doctor of Philosophy thesis, University of Nottingham 1980), p.169.

<sup>94</sup> Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, pp.146-49.

<sup>95</sup> NCL minutes, item 112, 27 February 1940, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/3.

<sup>96</sup> TUC memo of meeting between Hos and Tewson, 4 March 1940, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/3.

considered to be political matters which directly involved the Government. Tewson would not have taken this position unless this policy had been previously approved by Citrine.

The Labour Party continued to support its Jewish comrades in Palestine and at its 1940 Party conference unanimously adopted a resolution critical of the British Government's restrictions and the problem of anti-Semitic persecution.<sup>97</sup> Between 1917 and 1945 the Labour Party and the TUC were consistent in their commitment to a Jewish national home in Palestine. It was only in 1945, when the Labour Government decided to ignore their previous commitments to the Jews and continue to implement the 1939 White Paper, that the Party had to defend itself against criticism from pro-Zionist Jews.<sup>98</sup>

Berl Locker wrote to the TUC in September 1940 with details of the Histadrut's war aims which set out the problems facing the Jewish people in Palestine and the basis of any future peace settlement. He asked if the TUC Congress would adopt a motion which expressed the friendly attitude of the labour movement towards the rights of the Jewish people and the national home. The General Purposes committee decided to take no action<sup>99</sup> and Tewson replied to Locker saying that it was "not possible to submit an emergency resolution as conference lasts only three days." He added that, as the subject had been discussed by unions at the Labour Party conference in May, it was "felt to be adequate in the circumstances."<sup>100</sup> The Histadrut then sent a telegram to the TUC Congress stating that "we are working together in fight against Nazism and fascism." Citrine replied that the General Council appreciated the sentiments expressed and assured the Histadrut that the TUC would do all "they can to secure for the Jews civil, political and economic equality and their national rights."<sup>101</sup> Locker told the Mapai Central Committee in 1943 that the lack of public support by the TUC for the Histadrut was not unusual as the leadership (*Citrine*) had refused on

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<sup>97</sup> Sir Walter Citrine, TUC General Secretary, received a letter from the American Federation of Labour protesting about the land transfer regulations. His reply referred to the labour movement's involvement in relief and welfare work for German Jewish refugees from 1933 onwards, and made the point, that even at a time of national emergency in 1940; the Jewish problems were constantly on their minds. AFL to the TUC, 20 March 1940, TUC reply to AFL, 20 May 1940, all MRC, MSS.292/956.9/3.

<sup>98</sup> In an analysis of the 26 Labour Party conferences between 1917 and 1945 Palestine was discussed 18 times. Cecil Bloom, 'The British Labour Party and Palestine 1917-1948', in *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England, Vol.36*, (2001), pp.141-172.

<sup>99</sup> PLPC to TUC, 16 September 1940, MRC, MSS292/956.9/3.

<sup>100</sup> Tewson to Locker, 29 September 1940, MRC, MSS292/956.9/3.

<sup>101</sup> TUC to Histadrut, 15 October 1940, MRC, MSS292/956.9/3.

principle and had consistently declined to adopt an independent stand on Zionism and Jewish affairs. All their appeals had been rejected and passed onto the Labour Party.<sup>102</sup> He linked Citrine with a group of Labour cabinet ministers who thought it advisable to "water down" any pro-Zionist statements.<sup>103</sup> Although the TUC were unwilling to become in what involved they saw as political action they happily supported Histadrut requests for intervention over wage rates.<sup>104</sup>

### **The Communist Party of Great Britain and the Jews**

The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was founded in 1920. Although the Party failed to be a major force in the general strike of 1926, by the 1930s it could count on the support of the miners union and the engineering and textile trades. It was very strong in both Glasgow and the East End of London which had a large Jewish population. Many Jews were attracted to socialism and joined either the Labour Party or the CPGB. The attraction of communism for Jews on the political Left was not only its ideology, but also its opposition to antisemitism. Britain during the 1930s saw growing support within the Left for the Zionist project in Palestine but not amongst the young working class Jews of the East End for whom Zionism "made no headway". They preferred instead to join the CPGB which offered them the best solution to their problems.<sup>105</sup> The Party opposed the rise of fascism and was against the Conservative government's policy of appeasement towards Nazi Germany. The CPGB played a leading role in the fight against the British Union of Fascists (BUF) and in 1936, Jewish Socialists and Left wing Zionists came together with the CPGB to oppose the BUF in the "battle of Cable Street."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, p.190.

<sup>103</sup> Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, p.178

<sup>104</sup> The Histadrut asked the TUC for help to raise the minimum wage rate which had been unchanged since 1930. the TUC referred the request immediately to the Foreign Office. Histadrut to TUC, 11 December 1940, MRC, MSS292/956.9/3.

<sup>105</sup> Geoffrey Alderman, *The Jewish Community in British Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.271.

<sup>106</sup> For an overview of the London Jews opposition to anti-Semitism, Fascism and Nazism see Henry Srebrnik, , *London Jews and British communism, 1935-1945*, (Or: Vallentine Mitchell, 1995). pp.53-82.

Membership of the CPGB rose steadily throughout the 1930s and by 1939 it had nearly 18,000 members. Communists were excluded from membership of the Labour Party and were restricted by the TUC's 1934 "black circular" which forbade communists to stand as delegates for local trade councils. As a member of Comintern,<sup>107</sup> the Communist International, it was the duty of the CPGB to support Soviet actions and explain Stalin's policies to its members. While the CPGB denied Jewish claims to be a political nation, from the mid-1930s onwards it allowed the Jews to be designated as a people or nationality, but it always stopped short of support for Zionism. In 1936 the CPGB founded a Jewish Bureau to advise on policy issues such as the 'Jewish question' and the Arab-Jewish violence in Palestine.<sup>108</sup> The Middle East conflict was viewed both as a class struggle and as a liberation struggle by the Palestinian Arabs against British imperialism. Jews were called upon to support the Arab revolt and oppose Zionism - which the CPGB said served the interests of Jewish capitalists and British colonialists. In August 1939, the signing of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact obliged the CPGB to reverse its pre-war policy of standing up to Hitler. The *Daily Worker* described the agreement as a "dramatic peace move to halt aggressors."<sup>109</sup> After Hitler invaded Poland on 1 September, and Britain declared war on Germany two days later, the *Daily Worker* wrote that this was "a war that can and must be won." Within weeks, however, the CPGB had received instructions from Moscow and reversed its policy and opposed the war.<sup>110</sup>

### **The Second World War 1939-45**

The attitude of the Jewish community in Palestine to the outbreak of war was summed up by Ben Gurion as: "We shall fight with Great Britain in the war as if there were no White Paper and we shall fight the White Paper as if there were no war."<sup>111</sup> Consequently Ben Gurion placed the resources of the Jewish community in Palestine at the disposal of the British war

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<sup>107</sup> Comintern, the Communist International, was an international communist organisation established by the Lenin in 1919. The aim of the International was world revolution and as a first step communists parties should be formed in every country including Britain. Keith Laybourn and Dylan Murphy, *Under the red flag : the history of communism in Britain, c. 1849-199*, (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), p.47.

<sup>108</sup> For more information about The Jewish Section of the CPGB see: Jason Heppell, "A Question of 'Jewish Politics'? The Jewish Section of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1936-45," in Christine Collette and Stephen Bird, eds., *Jews, Labour, and the Left, 1918-48* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), pp.93-121.

<sup>109</sup> *The Daily Worker*, 23 August 1939.

<sup>110</sup> For a detailed account of this change in policy see Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party*, (London: John Murray, 1995), pp.90-7.

<sup>111</sup> Ahron Bregman, *A History of Israel*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Books, 2002), p. 33.

effort whilst continuing to oppose restrictions on immigration by supporting “illegal” Jewish immigration. Ben Gurion believed that the only way forward was the establishment of a Jewish state and all the efforts of the Zionist movement should work towards that one aim. In 1942, a conference in New York of Zionist leaders from America and 17 other countries including Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion, adopted Ben Gurion’s plans which became known as the “Biltmore Program” whose aim was the establishment of Palestine “as a Jewish commonwealth integrated into the structure of the new democratic world.” The Biltmore conference also agreed that the Jewish Agency should have control of immigration and the development of the Jewish economy to allow it to absorb large numbers of Jews after the war.<sup>112</sup> The Histadrut, which controlled the Jewish economy in Palestine, played a key role in Ben Gurion’s plans and worked with the British administration in Palestine to ensure industrial output for the war effort was maintained. At the same time it pursued a political role by lobbying Labour politicians and the TUC throughout the war. The Colonial Office described the power and influence of the Histadrut in Palestine as formidable.<sup>113</sup>

By 1945 the Jewish economy and industrial output in Palestine had expanded greatly because of the demands of the British war effort. The Zionists had hoped that recognition of the Jewish war effort would, as in 1918, produce support for their claims for a Jewish state. The British however saw the Palestine problem and the plight of the Jews in Europe as two separate issues. The TUC's relationship with the Histadrut during wartime can be described as that of branch office and head office with the TUC being asked several times to intervene with the British Government on the Histadrut's behalf on issues related to wages and conditions or emergency wartime legislation.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Sachar, *a History of Israel: from the Rise of Zionism to our time*, pp.244-45.

<sup>113</sup> SIS security file on the Histadrut and other Jewish organisations, 27 March 1942, TNA:PRO, KV5/16.

<sup>114</sup> In July 1941, the Palestine government published draft labour legislation to ensure the continuous output of supplies essential to the war effort. The Histadrut immediately cabled both the Palestine government and the TUC about their concerns and asked for a suspension of the order until the TUC General Council had discussed it. Citrine, the TUC General Secretary, immediately wrote to Lord Moyne, the Minister of State in Cairo, saying that the trade unions of Palestine were justified in asking for safeguards as it was important to keep the Palestinian workers on the British side. Moyne replied saying that the Palestinian legislation would follow the British model as closely as possible and would now include provisions to meet the reasonable claims of the Histadrut. Histadrut to the TUC, 23 July and 4 August 1941, TUC to Lord Moyne, 28 July 1941, Lord Moyne to the TUC, 22 August 1941 and the TUC’s reply to the Histadrut, 29 September 1941, all MRC, MSS.292/956.9/3. TUC report of the activities of the Colonial advisory committee, 18 November 1941, MRC, MSS..292/932.9/1

The mass murder of the Jews in Europe during the war at the hands of the Nazis was first brought to the attention of the TUC and the Labour Party in July 1942. The Labour Party NEC was so appalled by the news from Poland and Czechoslovakia that they immediately passed a resolution on behalf of the British labour movement calling for the perpetrators to be brought to justice after the war. Once the TUC had signed up to the motion a deputation then delivered it to both the Foreign Office and the American Ambassador.<sup>115</sup> The following December the TUC International committee minutes record that “Communications had been received from the Histadrut and the WJC asking the TUC to take all possible steps to stop the mass slaughter of Jews in occupied countries.” The committee also endorsed the action of the IFTU which had passed a strong resolution of protest embodying an appeal to former trade unionists in Germany.<sup>116</sup> The following month the Histadrut sent an emotive telegram to the TUC: “Our members were deeply impressed by the IFTU announcement to the workers of the Nazi dominated countries on the wholesale slaughter of the Jews. Many of us have relatives in those countries, for all of us it is a question of extermination of half our nation. Unfortunately it seems that the measures taken until now did not stop this process.”<sup>117</sup> It must have been a surreal situation for the Histadrut especially in autumn 1942, to be writing to the TUC on trade union matters knowing not only that events in Western desert and Egypt were bringing war closer to Palestine but also that the Nazis had exterminated two million Jews in Poland.<sup>118</sup>

From then on the Histadrut used every opportunity to impress upon both the TUC and the Labour Party the maltreatment of the Jews by the Nazis.<sup>119</sup> In September 1943 they urged the TUC to consider that “Jewish labour in Palestine participating wholeheartedly in war effort looks to your help and understanding in its anxiety that Jewish people does not remain losers

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<sup>115</sup> Labour Party letter with copy of motion to the TUC 22 July 1942, TUC reply 24 July 1942 NLMH, 1935-45 Box LP Foreign /defence policy

<sup>116</sup> It was reported that the Socialist International had taken similar action and proposed an inter-allied conference that would issue a warning to Germany. The TUC International Committee minutes, 15 December 1942, MRC, MSS.292/901/5.

<sup>117</sup> Histadrut to the TUC, 29 January 1943, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/3.

<sup>118</sup> Histadrut had asked to be put on the TUC mailing list for publications, Histadrut to the TUC, 22 July 1942 and the Histadrut to the TUC, querying changes in Palestine Labour Bill, 3 February 1942, all MRC, MSS.292/956.9/3.

<sup>119</sup> Histadrut to the Labour Party, 10 June 1943, the Histadrut archives at The Pinchas Lavon Institute for Labour Movement Research, Tel Aviv, IV-208-1-3313. (Hereafter cited as PLILMR), and the TUC General Council minutes, 21 April 1943, MRC, MSS.292/20/27.



in democratic victorious world. We are certain you will not fail us.”<sup>120</sup> The following month the TUC International Committee, as a mark of respect, decided to record the 1943 TUC Congress resolution which condemned the inhumane crimes “against the peoples in all the occupied countries and against the Jewish race in particular.”<sup>121</sup>

The Histadrut also asked the TUC for help when lobbying for a change in Palestine government policy after police and troops raided settlements looking for illegal immigrants and deserters.<sup>122</sup> Similar wartime protests by the Histadrut to the TUC about the Palestine Government’s actions against the Jewish population often resulted in the TUC asking the Colonial Office for advice before replying to the Histadrut.<sup>123</sup> However this did not affect their lobbying of the Colonial office on behalf of Histadrut on work related issues.

### **The situation in summer 1945**

The British labour movement had, since 1917, given their complete support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine but after winning the 1945 general election it found itself divided both personally and politically over the Palestine. This conflict of interest between support for the Jews and Britain’s need to maintain the friendship of the Arab nations was further deepened by the guilt they felt for the suffering of the Jews in the Holocaust. Moreover, Britain like many other countries had refused entry to the Jews who had survived the war and were now living in displaced persons camps. Now leading the government, Attlee and Bevin soon realised that the problems in Palestine would have to be dealt with and they would have to balance the reality of Britain's post-war situation against what the party had said in the past. The question of how much was political posturing and how much was true conviction would now be tested.

When in opposition, Labour had demanded that the 1939 White Paper be rescinded. It was therefore a surprise when the Bevin announced in November 1945 that they would continue

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<sup>120</sup> Histadrut to the TUC, 5 September 1943, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/3.

<sup>121</sup> TUC International committee minutes, 19 October 1943, MRC, MSS.292/901/6.

<sup>122</sup> Histadrut to the Labour Party, 21 November 1943, IV-208-1-3313.

<sup>123</sup> Histadrut to the TUC and the Labour Party, 27 November 1945, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4. TUC to the Colonial Office, 29 November 1945, MRC, MSS.292/20/30 and the Colonial Office reply, 10 December 1945, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

to maintain the 1939 White paper policy on Jewish immigration to Palestine.<sup>124</sup> The Jews were outraged and decided to openly challenge British rule by attacking and sabotaging British property and installations throughout Palestine. The moderate Haganah, joined with the extremist organisations, the Irgun and LEHI<sup>125</sup> to force the British to withdraw. The British brought in an extra 80,000 troops in order to put down the opposition but to no avail. The violent Jewish campaign continued and on 22 July 1946 the Irgun blew up the British military headquarters in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem killing 91 civilians. The impact of the attack shocked the British both in Palestine and Britain. At the same time as the military campaign, Jewish emissaries in Europe were actively bringing thousands of illegal Jewish immigrants every month by ship to Palestine. The result was a British naval blockade of Palestine to try and stem the flow illegal immigrants.<sup>126</sup>

### **British Labour's position**

The Labour Party's approach to Zionism had evolved from their recognition of the right of Jews to return to Palestine in 1917 into their 1944 Conference declaration that Palestine was the Jewish national home. All previous resolutions had been based on pre-war party policy and the 1944 statement was the first to take into account the plight and suffering of the Jews in the Holocaust. The declaration stated that 'there is surely neither hope nor meaning in a "Jewish National Home," unless we are prepared to let Jews, if they wish, enter this tiny land in such numbers as to become a majority. There was a strong case for this before the War. There is an irresistible case now, after the unspeakable atrocities of the cold and calculated German Nazi plan to kill all Jews in Europe.'<sup>127</sup> Although the Party knew that conference motions and policy statements such as this were not binding on any future Labour Government, the Zionists understood this latest pledge to be a binding commitment on their

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<sup>124</sup> Labour had originally pledged their support for a Jewish national home in December 1917 and had renewed that promise at another ten Party conferences, the last in May 1945. Bullock, *The life and times of Ernest Bevin vol.3 Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951*, p.164.

<sup>125</sup> The Haganah was the national defence force for all the settlements and was in effect the nucleus of a Jewish national army. A breakaway group from the Haganah, the Irgun was founded in protest against the Haganah policy of restraint and not actively responding to Arab violence. Because of its armed activities against the Arabs the group operated "underground" and was declared a terrorist organisation by the British. LEHI was a breakaway group from the Irgun. Unlike the Irgun, which suspended its underground military activities during the war, LEHI continued to fight the British.

<sup>126</sup> Sachar, *A History of Israel: from the Rise of Zionism to our time*, pp.269-70.

<sup>127</sup> "The international Postwar settlement", Labour Party declaration, NMLH, boxes 10/11, Middleton papers.

behalf by the Labour Party, which was why they were so upset when Bevin turned his back on the resolution. The declaration was also controversial not because it stated that Palestine was the new Jewish national home, but because it called for the “Arabs to be encouraged to move out as the Jews move in.”<sup>128</sup> The text had been written by Hugh Dalton, a committed Zionist who was in favour of partition. The 1944 declaration was the high point in Labour’s sympathy and identification with the suffering of the Jewish people and the Zionists’ aspiration for a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Even though the TUC had discussed the mass murder of the Jews in Europe in 1942 and was associated with the Labour Party resolution that was delivered to both the Foreign Office and the American Ambassador, the only time during the war that the murder of millions of Jews by the Nazis was ever mentioned at the TUC Congress was in 1943, in an address given by Isidore Nagler, the AFL fraternal delegate.<sup>129</sup> His statement reflected the fact that the American trade union movement was much openly more supportive of the Histadrut and sympathetic about the problems facing the Jews than was the TUC. That the TUC Congress never discussed the 1944 Labour Party resolution or the Holocaust was not unusual behaviour for them. Berl Locker, who represented the Zionist leadership in London and was close to the Labour Party, reported to the Mapai Central Committee in 1943 that the lack of public support by the TUC for the Histadrut was hardly surprising as the leadership had consistently refused to adopt an independent stand on Zionism and Jewish affairs. All appeals to them had been rejected and passed onto the Labour Party<sup>130</sup>

Although sympathetic to the plight of the Jews before the war, Ernest Bevin, who aware of the issues,<sup>131</sup> believed that Jews were a religious group and not a nation. Bevin took the view that the Jewish refugees should be returned to their country of origin regardless of whether they wanted to go there, which was why the *Exodus* refugees were sent back to Germany. He

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<sup>128</sup> Ben Gurion explained that in advocating the transfer of Arabs out of Palestine there was no intention to force the Arabs to leave Palestine against their will. Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, p.182. The Palestine Arab workers Society (PAWS) wrote to the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) about the transfer of Arabs out of Palestine. The letter was passed onto to the TUC who explained that it only referred to the voluntary evacuation of Palestine territory by the Arabs and that no compulsion of any kind was intended. TUC to the IFTU, 14 August 1944, MRC, MSS292/956.9/3.

<sup>129</sup> The TUC annual report for 1943, p. 271.

<sup>130</sup> Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, p.190.

<sup>131</sup> Bevin became involved in the controversy over the 1929 White Paper and the 1930 Whitechapel by election. Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, pp. 91-6.

also opposed the relaxation of restrictions on the numbers of Jews entering Britain, as they would be accused of using the horrors of the Holocaust to go to the head of the queue. Upon entering office Bevin realised that the Labour Party now had to take responsibility for British policy in Palestine and the Middle East. Although now often remembered as an anti-Semite for his actions and remarks as Foreign Secretary, his primary aim was to look after British interests as the governing power in Palestine, which he did to the best of his ability. Bevin was confident that having been a successful trade union leader he could solve the Palestinian problem by negotiation. However neither he nor his advisors fully appreciated that the Holocaust had united the Jews more than ever before around the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine, an ideal which they were prepared to fight for. He also deeply resented American pressure to change his policy.<sup>132</sup> The worsening conflict deepened the rift between the Labour government and its pro-Zionist MPs. Most of the criticism of the government came from the Tribune group of Left-wing MP's, who accused the government of trying to placate the Arabs and forcing moderate Zionists, who wanted to cooperate with Britain into the extremist camp.<sup>133</sup>

### **The position of the CPGB**

The prime concern of the CPGB after Germany's invasion of Russia in 1941 was the survival of the Soviet Union. Support for the CPGB amongst Britain's working classes gradually increased and they opposed any strike that affected the war effort. Once Russia had entered the war the Party dropped its support for Arab nationalism but still remained opposed to Zionism. The CPGB backed the policies of the Moscow-based Soviet Jewish Anti-fascist Committee and wooed Britain's Jews to support the USSR's struggle against Nazi Germany.<sup>134</sup> The CPGB's Jewish Bureau, which had been dissolved at the outbreak of the war, was reformed in 1943 as the National Jewish Committee (NJC). At its first meeting, the NJC, "came out in favour of the Yishuv, espousing positions that were difficult to distinguish

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<sup>132</sup> For a detailed account of Bevin as Foreign Secretary see: Bullock, *The life and times of Ernest Bevin vol.3 Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951*, pp.121-586, also Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, pp. 214-8. Bevin received many letters protesting about British policy in Palestine, examples include: The National Union of Miners (Scottish Area) Rankington No.19 Branch sent a copy of their motion deploring the British Government policy in Palestine to Bevin on 15 July 1947, also letters from the Jewish Communities in Panama, Venezuela, Geneva, Newcastle, and Manchester. TNA:PRO, FO371/52540.

<sup>133</sup> The MP's included Richard Crossman, Jennie Lee, Michael Foot, Sidney Silverman, and Woodrow Wyatt. Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism History of a Divorce*, p.121-2.

<sup>134</sup> Rubinstein, W. D. *The Left the Right and the Jews*, (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1982), pp.100-2

from mainstream Zionist positions." In March 1945, the NJC argued that since Palestinian Jewry was "the most progressive force in the Middle East," Palestine should be open to Jewish immigration on a mass scale and the White Paper should be denounced "by all sections of Jewry as wrong policy."<sup>135</sup> The monthly magazine of the NJC, the *Jewish Clarion*, which was first published in 1945, provided leading Jewish members of the CPGB with the opportunity to put forward the Jewish communist point of view especially on Palestine.

The CPGB won two seats in the 1945 general election, one in Scotland and one in Mile End in London's East End. Here the Jewish vote contributed to the party's success. Although Jews were not prominent within the top leadership of the CPGB, they held 7% of the full-time posts in the party hierarchy and administration. This was a disproportionate involvement as Jews formed less than 1% of the British population.<sup>136</sup> However, it was not unusual when compared to the relationship between Jews and communism in other countries. nor did the majority of Jewish communists have a problem with openly embracing their Jewishness while at the same time opposing Zionism.

The CPGB's post-war plans to work closely with the Labour government came to nothing because of Britain's economic problems, her dependence on American financial support and the onset of the Cold War. Both the Labour Party and the TUC mounted a campaign to isolate the CPGB, with the Labour Party rejecting the communists request for affiliation. In October 1948 the TUC General Council accused the CPGB of pursuing a strategy of industrial disruption on orders from Moscow. The following year the TUC Congress overwhelmingly backed the TUCs anti-communist position and withdrew from the WFTU.

The Labour government believed that the Middle East was critical for Britain's economic and strategic needs and saw the Soviet Union's support for Israel as a threat to its interests in this region. Bevin thought that Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe could turn Israel into an Soviet ally. The CPGB, however, thought that a pro-Soviet Jewish state would undermine Britain's 'imperialist' interests in the region. Soviet support for partition brought the CPGB into direct conflict with the Labour Party. Russia's unexpected backing for an independent

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<sup>135</sup> Johan Franzén, "Communism versus Zionism: The Comintern, Yishuvism, and the Palestine Communist Party", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Winter 2007), p.17.

<sup>136</sup> Jason Heppell, "A Question of 'Jewish Politics'? The Jewish Section of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1936–45," in *Jews, Labour and the Left, 1918-48*, edited by Christine Collette and Stephen Bird, (London: Ashgate, 2000), p.95.

Jewish state resulted in the CPGB describing that decision as an act of last resort, the outcome of the West's failure to clampdown on antisemitism and the inability to provide equality for everyone. The establishment of the State of Israel was portrayed as a "a big step toward fulfilment of self- determination of the peoples of Palestine" and "a great sign of the times."<sup>137</sup> The CPGB joined with the Labour Left in protesting against Bevin's Palestine policy accusing him of having committed a "shameful betrayal" of the Jews and claiming that "Bevinism leads to anti-Semitism and all that follows."<sup>138</sup> Both groups were disappointed with the government's approach as they both believed that the government had put at risk its commitment to a socialist foreign policy. The *Jewish Chronicle's* claim in 1949 that the *Jewish Clarion* had reversed its position in 1948 in line with the new Soviet position was vehemently denied. Nevertheless the CPGB's opposition to Zionism continued after 1948, with the *Jewish Clarion* continuing back to the official Party position.<sup>139</sup>

### **The role of Histadrut lobbying TUC**

The Histadrut cabled the Labour Party immediately after its general election victory saying "Hope you will act without delay to help save the remnants of our brethren and enable us to rebuild our free Jewish homeland."<sup>140</sup> When they heard rumours that the 1939 White Paper was about to be maintained, they lobbied both the TUC and the Labour Party asking them to support demands for the White Paper to be abolished and that Jews would be brought to Palestine by all available means.<sup>141</sup> After Bevin's announcement that the immigration restrictions in the White Paper were to be implemented, the Labour Party wrote to Histadrut saying that they understood and deeply sympathised with their disappointment, but believed it would be possible to find a fair and just solution for both the Jews and Arabs.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> *The Daily Worker*, 15 May 1948.

<sup>138</sup> Tony Kushner, 'Jewish Communists in Twentieth-century Britain: the Zaidman collection,' *Labour History Review*, Vol. 55 (1989), pp. 70-1, and June Edmunds, *The Left and Israel, party policy change and internal democracy*, (London: Macmillan, 2000), p.112.

<sup>139</sup> For an overview of the attitude of the CPGB during this period see: Stephan Wendehorst, *British Jewry, Zionism, and the Jewish State, 1936-1956*, pp.95-107.

<sup>140</sup> Histadrut to the Labour Party, 27 July 1945, PLILMR, IV-208-1-3313.

<sup>141</sup> The Labour Party replied saying that the Prime Minister would soon make a statement. Histadrut to the TUC and Labour Party, 28 September 1945 and 20 October 1945, both MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4. Histadrut to the TUC and the Labour Party, 4 October 1945, and the Labour Party's reply to the Histadrut, 27 October 1945, both PLILMR, IV-208-1-3313.

<sup>142</sup> Labour Party to the Histadrut, 30 November 1945, PLILMR, IV-209-4-359.

As well as the violence directed at British troops and property, there were continual attempts to break the British blockade directed at restricting Jewish immigration into Palestine. As part of the political campaign, the Histadrut regularly protested to the TUC and the Labour Party throughout 1946 over the Palestine Government's actions against the Jewish population and controls on immigration. The TUC General Council which always discussed these communications, would frequently ask the Colonial Office for advice before replying to the Histadrut. In July, Tewson told the General Council that the NCL had discussed recent arrests in Palestine and had decided that the matter should be discussed unofficially with the Government.<sup>143</sup> The TUC was also lobbied by trade unionists from home and abroad to intervene with the Government over restrictions on Jewish immigration into Palestine.<sup>144</sup> Tewson's reply to the AFL<sup>145</sup> displays both his and the TUC's support for the Labour Government "the matter is one of great complexity which British Government is anxious to secure a solution but obviously cannot do so on the basis of unrestricted immigration."

Britain was fighting an insurgency in Palestine with British soldiers and police dying in a foreign land and the TUC, which was a key partner of the Labour government was being asked to lobby the same Labour government on behalf of the Histadrut, to stop the repression, who themselves were a part of the Jewish insurgency. The TUC found themselves in the position of conflicting loyalties, loyalty towards the Labour government and loyalty to their colleagues in the international labour movement. The TUC choose to give unwavering support to the Labour government and defend the actions in Palestine. The Histadrut as well as Mapai continued to lobby the Labour party, the TUC and the international labour movement for support for an independent Jewish state in Palestine. They found they did have allies in the Labour Party who would speak on their behalf such as Richard Crossman M.P

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<sup>143</sup> The NCL also discussed telegrams received from Histadrut and the American Jewish Trade Union committee for Palestine protesting against the government's action in Palestine. TUC General Council minutes, 3 July 1946, MRC, MSS.292/20/30, the Histadrut to the TUC and the Labour Party, 2 July 1946, and the American Jewish Trade Union committee for Palestine to the TUC, 9 June 1946, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>144</sup> See the AFL's telegram to the TUC, 13 August 1946, and the TUC's reply, 23 August 1946. Also see the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers, London No 2 branch to the TUC, 3 July 1946 and the Leeds Trade Council to the TUC, 29 Sept 1946, all MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4. The Leeds District committee of the National Union of Tailors & Garment Workers sent their resolution to the Foreign Secretary, 19 July 1946, TNA:PRO, FO371/52541.

<sup>145</sup> AFL President Green told the 1946 AFL annual convention that "our great labour movement has been tremendously disappointed over the attitude of the party in power in Great Britain towards the open door in Palestine....." Report of the fraternal delegates to the annual convention of the AFL, TUC Annual report 1947, pp.214-5.

and Harold Laski<sup>146</sup>, but there was no one in the TUC or the unions who was willing to challenge Bevin or Deakin over Palestine. This situation had come about because their lobbying of the British labour movement which started in the 1930s, had concentrated mainly on the Labour Party and not the unions and the TUC. Consequently they had failed to recruit any trade unionists who would speak on their behalf at the General Council. This is confirmed by archives which also show that most of the contact during 1945-8 between the Histadrut and the TUC was by either telegram or letter.

### **The emergence of the WFTU**

The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)<sup>147</sup> was the brainchild of Sir Walter Citrine, the then TUC General Secretary, who in October 1943 set out his ideas for a new world conference of trade unions which he hoped would play a substantive role in international affairs. He envisaged that by building on the cooperation and links that had been forged during the war the new organisation which would include all the unions in Europe, America and Russia.<sup>148</sup>

The Soviet Union had realised early on that the WFTU would be an ideal organisation for promoting Communist values within the workers' movement and as a result took the WFTU more seriously than the TUC. Palestine was just one of many East–West flashpoints during this period. As a member of the international labour movement, the Histadrut lobbied the WFTU to put pressure on the TUC. This provided the USSR with an opportunity to support the Histadrut and thwart British influence in the Middle East. The WFTU's involvement in Palestine affairs lasted from 1946 to the beginning of 1948.

In order to challenge the Russians for the leadership and counter their dominance of the WFTU, Deakin became the organisation's President in 1946, ignoring Bevin's advice that the WFTU would gradually fall under Russian control and that a non-communist President would

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<sup>146</sup> When Parliament debated the withdrawal from Palestine in March 1948, 32 Labour M.Ps voted against their Government's policy. Several ministers who doubted the wisdom of this policy included Bevan, Creech Jones, Dalton, Shinwell, Strachey, Strauss and Williams.

<sup>147</sup>For a history of the WFTU see; John Windmuller, *American Labor and the International Labor Movement 1940 to 1953*, (Ithaca New York: Cornell University 1954), pp. 52-133, or Anthony Carew, 'A False Dawn; The WFTU 1945-1949' in *The International Confederation of Free Trade Union*, (Berlin: Peter Lang 2000), pp.167-184 and V.L. Allen, *Trade Union Leadership*, (London: Longmans 1957), pp.289-313.

<sup>148</sup> TUC memorandum, I/C1, 1943-44, 19 October 1943, MRC, MSS.292/901/6.



give a false impression of unity.<sup>149</sup> Deakin remained President until 1949 when as a result of disputes over support for the American Government's Marshall Plan, the non-Communist unions led by the TUC left the WFTU to form the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICTU). Their withdrawal allowed the Russians complete control the WFTU.<sup>150</sup>

Representatives from 63 trade union movements from around the world attended the founding WFTU conference in London in February 1945. All the major powers were represented, including the Soviet Union, Britain and the USA. Because the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which had taken an anti-communist position, refused to join the WFTU, its much smaller rival, the CIO, represented the United States. Palestine was represented by the Histadrut, which included Arab members of the Palestine Labour League in their delegation as well as two organisations representing Arab workers - the Palestine Arab workers Society and the Federation of Arab Trade Unions.<sup>151</sup> Among other issues, delegates discussed the situation in Palestine.<sup>152</sup> Article 26 of the declaration "The Union Attitude to the Peace Settlement", which was adopted by the Conference, supported the idea of a Jewish national home in Palestine.<sup>153</sup>

### **Palestine and the WFTU**

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<sup>149</sup> Allen, *Trade Union Leadership*, p.290.

<sup>150</sup> For an account of the involvement of the TUC and Foreign Office in the breakup of the WFTU see; Anthony Carew, "The Schism within the World Federation of Trade Unions: Government and Trade Union in Diplomacy", *the International Review of Social History*, Volume XXIX (1984), pp.297-335.

<sup>151</sup> For the background to the issuing of invitations to the Histadrut and the Arab trade unions see: TUC International committee minutes, 17 February and 28 November 1944, both MRC, MSS.292/901/6.

<sup>152</sup> The British press was more concerned about East-West relations in its coverage of the conference. Palestine was only briefly mentioned in their reports.

<sup>153</sup> The statement on Palestine which was backed by the Soviet Union, Britain and the USA was based on the declaration made by the allies at the Yalta Conference. A committee chaired by the CIO, who were known to support the Histadrut and a Jewish State in Palestine, wrote article 26 which stated "This World Conference is of opinion too that after the war, thorough going remedies must be found, through international action, for the wrongs inflicted on the Jewish people. Their protection against oppression, discrimination and spoliation in any country must be the responsibility of the new International Authority. The Jewish people must be enabled to continue the rebuilding of Palestine as their National Home, so successfully begun by immigration, agricultural resettlement and industrial development; respecting the legitimate interests of other national groups and giving equality of rights and opportunities to all its inhabitants." See Appendix D (ii) Clause 26 of the Declaration on the Attitude to the Peace Settlement, the World Trade Union Conference, 6-17 February 1945, MRC, MSS..159/5/2/124. For a report of debate on the Declaration on the Attitude to the Peace Settlement see: John McIntosh and Stephen Ireland, *Report of the World Trade Union conference, London, 6-17 February 1945*, (London: TUC, 1945), pp.184-92.

The Histadrut wrote to the WFTU in October 1945 saying that they had called a general strike in order to warn Britain about continuing to restrict the rights of the Jews in Palestine and appealed to WFTU to stand by its conference declaration calling for immediate Jewish immigration to Palestine. The WFTU Executive Board decided not to support the strike action but confirmed the decision taken in London. They stood by the declaration while “scrupulously” acting as a conciliator to both the Palestinian Arab and Jewish labour organisations. The TUC representative told the Board that the WFTU could give moral support to the Histadrut but they should not approve strike action as it could create difficulties with the authorities (the British Government).<sup>154</sup>

Throughout 1946 and 1947, the Jews waged a bloody and violent insurgency to try and persuade the British to withdraw from Palestine.<sup>155</sup> As well as the violence, the British authorities had to deal the arrival of thousands of illegal Jewish immigrants who were brought to Palestine each month, many of whom were survivors of the Nazi concentration camps. In April 1946, the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry which had been set up by the American and British governments to investigate the fate of the displaced persons and the Palestine question recommended that 100,000 certificates be issued immediately for the admission of Jews into Palestine.<sup>156</sup> The Attlee government refused to accept the committee's recommendations as the immediate admission of 100,000 Jews would almost certainly have provoked an Arab uprising.

Louis Saillant,<sup>157</sup> the WFTU General Secretary, was in regular contact with the TUC from 1946 onwards over the Palestine question and Tewson's responses reflected his support for the British government's policies. The TUC had strong reservations about Saillant from the outset because of his strong connections with the Russians. Saillant was entitled to write to Tewson because the WFTU had adopted a resolution at their founding conference supporting

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<sup>154</sup> WFTU Executive Board meeting minutes, 6 October 1945, the WFTU Collection at the International Institute of Social History Archives, Amsterdam, WFTU series, file 38. (Hereafter cited as ISSH: WFTU).

<sup>155</sup> For an account of the events in Palestine during 1947-8 see; William Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp.439-514, Michael J. Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers 1945-1948*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982), pp.203-28 and Benny Morris, *1948; a History of the first Arab-Israeli War*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008), pp.37-180.

<sup>156</sup> See the *Report of the Anglo American Committee of Enquiry regarding the problems of European Jewry and Palestine* (London: HMSO 1946). For an account of the work of the committee, Richard Crossman, *Palestine Mission*, (London: Harper, 1947).

<sup>157</sup> Louis Saillant, a French trade unionist, was the USSR's nominee for post and served as General Secretary of the WFTU from 1946-68.

the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine. It is not known whether his interventions on behalf of the Histadrut were made genuinely in support of the Histadrut or if, as a Communist he was following orders from Moscow to try and weaken British influence in the Middle East.<sup>158</sup> Whatever the reason, Tewson always replied, as was expected because the WFTU was the TUC's brainchild.

Salliant wrote to Tewson in August 1946 asking for his opinion on the request from the Dutch unions, the NVV, that the WFTU should investigate the latest incidents in Palestine and intervene with the British Government if necessary.<sup>159</sup> Tewson replied saying that the Palestine issue was a very complex problem and that it was impossible to allow unrestricted immigration into Palestine. He told Salliant that as this was a political problem and not an industrial matter he doubted whether anything would be achieved by discussing the matter unless "you want to see the contentions of the Arabs and the Jews being fought out within our Federation on a matter which has no direct industrial implication."<sup>160</sup> Tewson's efforts were successful because Salliant told the NVV that as the WFTU had not been notified directly by either the Arab or Jewish trade union centres in Palestine of the problem "they must be happy to observe these events without calling for outside intervention."<sup>161</sup> A few days later, after receiving another telegram from the Histadrut regarding action by British troops against the Jewish population, Salliant wrote again to Tewson who replied that this request also fell into the same category as previously but added that he was hopeful that the conference currently meeting in London may reach an agreement. Tewson then told Salliant that the London conference was held up due to absence of Jewish representatives and they were hopeful that negotiations will soon be able to proceed but although the British Government were anxious for a settlement they could not ignore the Arab point of view.<sup>162</sup>

In November 1946 the Histadrut requested TUC intervention in order to stop the deportation of 4000 "uncertificated" Jewish immigrants to Cyprus. Their request was quickly followed by a note from Walter Schevenels, Deputy General Secretary of the WFTU who wrote to

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<sup>158</sup> Peter Brod, 'Soviet-Israeli Relations 1948-56', in *The Left against Zion*, ed. by Robert Wistrich, (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1979), pp.58-9.

<sup>159</sup> Salliant to Tewson, 5 August 1946, MRC, MSS.292C/918.23/2.

<sup>160</sup> Tewson to Salliant, 22 August 1946, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>161</sup> Salliant to Tewson, 27 August 1946, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>162</sup> Histadrut to the WFTU, 7 September 1946, and Tewson to Salliant, 12 September and 30 September 1946, all MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

Tewson that he had received a personal appeal from the Histadrut, "which, as you know, has been for many years and still is one of our most faithful trade union movements, to intervene in a personal capacity with the TUC in favour of the Jewish refugees threatened with deportation to Cyprus." Schevenels asked if would be possible for the TUC to intervene either "officially or otherwise" with the Government on the matter of these Jewish refugees? He stated that he thought "that at this juncture the TUC, better than any other organisation in the world, could exert a conciliatory influence in the solution of this thorny problem, in which the labour forces constitute on both sides the main element."<sup>163</sup> Tewson wrote back saying that the TUC would discuss the matter but pointed out that the Histadrut claimed to have "no contact with any organisation for illegal immigration". He went on to say that the Histadrut had also stated that although they would obviously prefer immigrants to enter Palestine in a normal way they would help the immigrants to reach their "homeland" in whatever way they could. Tewson added that a conciliatory attitude towards the Jews was likely to result in strong Arab protests and also be regarded "as a climb-down to the terrorist tactics used in Palestine".<sup>164</sup> After the International committee had discussed the Histadrut's telegram, the TUC cabled the Histadrut asking "if they were asking the TUC endorse the policy of illegal immigration?"<sup>165</sup> That the TUC should try to overturn the ban on illegal immigration was exactly what the Histadrut wanted. It is not clear why or how the committee arrived at this decision.

The Histadrut's reply made it clear that the situation had arisen because of the "absolute inadequacy of authorised immigration" and urged the TUC to make representations for the implementation Anglo-American committee recommendations including the admission of 100,000 refugees into Palestine."<sup>166</sup> The relentless stream of telegrams that the Histadrut sent to the WFTU and the TUC, as well as Deakin's Presidency of the WFTU, ensured that the TUC took on the role of defending the Government's political decisions and actions in Palestine. It was a role that it had not previously undertaken, but was now necessary and the

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<sup>163</sup> Schevenels was a loyal supporter of the TUC and their choice for WFTU General Secretary but he lost to Saillant. Histadrut to the TUC, 27 November 1946 and Schevenels to Tewson, 28 November 1946, all MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>164</sup> Tewson to Schevenels, 2 December 1946, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>165</sup> The TUC telegram to the Histadrut asked for a reply not later than Monday 16 December 1946, when matter was to be considered by the General Council. TUC International committee minutes, 10 December 1946, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>166</sup> Histadrut to the TUC, 15 December 1946, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

TUC International Department, with help from the Foreign Office, regularly updated both Deakin and the General Council on the latest developments. At its December meeting the General Council<sup>167</sup> discussed the Histadrut's telegram and agreed that the TUC would not intervene on the Histadrut's behalf. Their reply noted that they had considered the Histadrut telegrams and whilst sympathetic to the position of the "displaced persons" they strongly urged the Palestinian Jews to accept the British government's invitation to a joint conference with the Arabs.<sup>168</sup> Throughout the exchange of letters the TUC had continued to express their support for the government whilst using every opportunity to point out the problems and pitfalls of the situation.

The Palestine conference met in London at the end of January 1947 and Bevin soon realised that it would be impossible to arrive at a peaceful settlement in Palestine on any basis whatsoever, except with the support of the Americans and the UN. Without an agreement in sight, Britain's commitment to Palestine seemed pointless as British lives were being lost, it was costing too much money which Britain could ill afford and above all there seemed no benefit, strategic or otherwise to Britain. The following month, the Government announced that they would refer the mandate back to the UN in April 1947. By this time there over 100,000 British soldiers were stationed in Palestine.

The Colonial Office, regularly updated both Tewson and Deakin on the security situation in Palestine.<sup>169</sup> Deakin, who was also Chairman of the International Committee and an influential member of the General Council, which allowed him to dictate TUC policy. When the government proposed imposing martial law in Palestine in February 1947, the Histadrut cabled both the TUC and the WFTU. Salliant responded immediately by asking the TUC to arrange a meeting with the British government in order to secure postponement of the

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<sup>167</sup> The International Department provided the General Council with a six page briefing document on the Governments decisions regarding the recommendations of the Anglo-American Inquiry. TUC International Department briefing note on Palestine, 16 December 1946, MRC, MSS292C/918.23/2-TUC

<sup>168</sup> The General Council minutes record that Mr. Naesmith, from the Amalgamated Weavers Association, felt that "responsibility for the situation in Palestine should be thrown on to the Palestinian Jews and the Histadrut should be informed that the British TUC was not prepared to take any action on the lines suggested by them." TUC General Council minutes, 18 December 1946 and the telegram from the TUC to the Histadrut, 24 December 1946, both MRC, MSS.292C/20/31.

<sup>169</sup> The briefing prepared by the International department in February 1947 included details of unpublished British government proposals for a five year trusteeship agreement, Bell to Deakin, 11 February 1947, MRC, MSS.292C/918.23/2.

proposal.<sup>170</sup> Tewson and Deakin met with Salliant in London and it was decided that Deakin should informally approach the Foreign Secretary in order to safeguard the position of the Histadrut. It is not known if Deakin did talk to Bevin but they had managed to satisfy Salliant.<sup>171</sup>

### **The Prague conference as a forum for Histadrut to lobby, with US Labour support**

As a result of Britain's renunciation of the mandate in early 1947, the UN established a special committee, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), to investigate and make recommendations regarding the future of Palestine. In June representatives from unions from all over the world, including the Histadrut, and the Palestine Arab TUC assembled in Prague for the WFTU General Council meeting. The conference took on extra significance as it took place just before the UNSCOP committee arrived in Palestine. The implications of this coincidence was understood by the Foreign Office who briefed both Tewson and Deakin before they left for Prague. The future of Palestine, although of major importance to the Jews, was just one of many issues discussed and the Foreign Office was satisfied that the two men would be able to defend British interests.<sup>172</sup>

The Histadrut wrote the motion on Palestine which was proposed by the American trade union, the CIO<sup>173</sup> It was first discussed by the Executive Bureau<sup>174</sup> where Deakin made it clear that he found the draft motion unacceptable because it attacked British government policy.<sup>175</sup> After the removal of the wording attacking British policy, the Bureau approved the

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<sup>170</sup> WFTU telegram to the TUC, 12 February 1947 and the Histadrut telegram to the TUC, 12 February 1947, both MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>171</sup> The memorandum of the meeting at TUC between Salliant, Tewson and Deakin, 13 February 1947, MRC, MSS.292/918.2/3.

<sup>172</sup> The Foreign Office commented that it is probable that Deakin was concerned that the WFTU had become an "an instrument for purely political ends in the international field" and that "in the past eighteen months there have been several occasions when it looked as though an open rupture might come, but both sides have been anxious to avoid this and have found ways of 'papering the cracks'." FO briefing document for Prague Embassy, 2 June 1947, TNA:PRO, LAB13/597. Also see P. Mason, file comment, 7 May 1947, TNA:PRO, FO371/64485B, and D.J. McCarthy, file comment, 10 May 1947, TNA:PRO, FO371/67613.

<sup>173</sup> PLILMR, report on the WFTU conference in Prague, Histadrut Executive Committee minutes, 25 June 1947.

<sup>174</sup> The Executive Bureau, which was the inner Executive of the Executive Committee consisted of nine members; one each from Russia, Britain, America, France, China, Holland, Italy, South America and the WFTU General Secretary. Deakin was the TUC representative as well as the WFTU President.

<sup>175</sup> Minutes of the WFTU Executive Bureau meeting in Prague, 7 June 1947, the WFTU Collection at the International Institute of Social History Archives, Amsterdam, WFTU series, file 66, (Hereafter cited as

motion for discussion by the General Council.<sup>176</sup> The General Council debate was an acrimonious affair, which Deakin said illustrated the difficulties that the British government had faced before they had returned the Palestine mandate to the UN. Significantly the American, British and Russian delegates all voted for the motion which was carried by a large majority. However after complaints by the Lebanese delegation, a compromise text was produced which was unanimously accepted by all the delegations including the Histadrut.<sup>177</sup>

The Foreign Office was highly satisfied with how both Tewson and Deakin had firmly defended British interests and noted that the resolution appeared "to have been intentionally ambiguous to avoid antagonising the Arab delegates"<sup>178</sup> The Histadrut, who had made it a priority to build relations with the WFTU, must have felt enthused that their motion had been unanimously adopted. Uniquely, it was one of the few times that Great Britain, France, Russia and America all agreed to support a resolution calling for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. What is not clear is if the Histadrut realised that they were being used as a pawn in the confrontation between East and West, however membership of the WFTU enabled the Histadrut to put pressure on Britain and the TUC.

Another potential East-West confrontation that the TUC had to contend with was the WFTU plan to send a delegation to Palestine during the autumn of 1947. The British government, clearly did not want the mission to go ahead, and along with the TUC put several difficulties in the way of the mission during its preparation phase. As a result, in January 1948, Salliant and the WFTU were left with no alternative but to cancel the trip.<sup>179</sup> The WFTU's Palestine

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ISSH:WFTU) and PLILMR, Histadrut Executive Committee minutes, report of the WFTU conference, 25 June 1947.

<sup>176</sup> The motion also expressed the hope that the Jewish and Arab workers in Palestine, could through their respective trade unions, find a basis for "rapprochement." PLILMR, Histadrut Executive Committee minutes, report of the WFTU conference, 25 June 1947 and the minutes of the WFTU Executive Bureau meeting, 14 June 1947, ISSH:WFTU,66.

<sup>177</sup> For details of the meeting see N. Jackson's report on the Palestine debate at the WFTU, 1 July 1947, the Levenberg Collection at the London School of Economics Archive, University of London, file G/1/2. (Hereafter cited as LSE), TUC memorandum on WFTU conference, TNA:PRO, FO371/67613 and the report of the WFTU conference, PLILMR, the Histadrut's Executive committee minutes, 25 June 1947.

<sup>178</sup> The Foreign Office memorandum on WFTU conference, 17 June 1947, TNA:PRO, FO371/67613 and the Foreign Office meeting with Deakin and Tewson, 30 June 1947, TNA:PRO, FO371/6761. Deakin told the Histadrut that as Chairman it was his international duty to demand that the Palestine issue should not be brought to the Council and would not reflect badly on his government. The report of the delegation to WFTU conference, PLILMR, the Histadrut Executive Committee meeting minutes, 13 August 1947.

<sup>179</sup> TUC report IC2/1, for the International committee, 21 January 1948 includes the minutes of the WFTU Executive Bureau meeting, 19-24 November 1947, MRC, MSS.292/901/8, the TUC report of the WFTU delegation to Palestine, IC3/2, 17 February 1948, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/7 and the TUC report on the WFTU,

mission was the last opportunity for the WFTU and the Russians to put pressure on the British over Palestine. At Prague, Deakin did everything he could to stop a resolution being adopted which criticised his government's actions. Even if the mission to Palestine had gone ahead it is unlikely that it would have achieved anything and by the time it was cancelled its usefulness had been overtaken by events on the ground.

The WFTU failed because of the Cold War and was used by the TUC, the Histadrut and the Russians to promote their own political agendas. The TUC was always on the defensive whenever Palestine was discussed by the WFTU and the outcome of the Prague congress allowed each party to claim some success. Between 1945 and 1949, the WFTU passed two motions on Palestine, yet the organisation had very little impact on the emergence of the State of Israel.

### **Impact of Antisemitism and Fascism on British attitudes and activities**

Jewish insurgency in Palestine which had intensified in 1946 continued into 1947. One of the most serious incidents took place in July 1947, when the radical Zionist group, the Irgun, hanged two British Army sergeants in retaliation for the execution of three Jewish terrorists. The British press and population were horrified by the hangings and anti-Jewish riots broke out in Liverpool, Manchester, London, Cardiff, Halifax and Glasgow. Fortunately the violence disappeared almost as quickly as it had started.<sup>180</sup> Two local Trade Councils passed motions on the situation and sent copies to the TUC. One condemned the outrage in Palestine and called on the Government to punish those responsible for series of anti-Semitic outrages in Britain while the other demanded the recall of British troops from Palestine.<sup>181</sup> A draft statement was prepared for the General Council, which was not used possibly as may have been decided that they wanted to "cool" the situation in the run up to the TUC Congress at

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IC/5/3, 30 April 1948, MRC, MSS.292C/918.2/9. WFTU correspondence includes Salliant to Tewson, 2 February 1948, Tewson to Salliant, 11 February 1948, TUC General Council minutes, 28 January 1948, all MRC, MSS.292/956.9/7, WFTU Executive Bureau meeting minutes Rome, 4 May 1948, ISSH:WFTU, 75 and the WFTU to the TUC, 22 January 1948, MRC, MSS.292C/918.23/2.

<sup>180</sup> "No trace of kidnapped sergeants", *The Manchester Guardian*, 31 July, 1947. For an account of the anti-Jewish riots see: "New outbursts against Jews: Manchester scenes, fire and looting in Liverpool", *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 August 1947 and *The Jewish Chronicle*, 8 August, 15 August and 22 August 1947. Also see Tony Kushner, 'Antisemitism and Austerity; the August riots in Britain', ed. by Panayi Panikos, *Racial Violence in Britain 1840-1950*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), pp.149-68.

<sup>181</sup> The Beckenham Trade Council to the TUC, 9 August 1947 and the Holborn and City Trades Council to the TUC, 9 August 1947, both MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.



the beginning of September.<sup>182</sup> The General Council, at their pre-Congress meeting, discussed the trouble in various parts of the country caused by anti-Jewish activities, including the unofficial strike by members of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) at Birkenhead who had refused to handle kosher meat. As this action could be seen as antisemitic the General Council sent a message to USDAW saying it was the desire of the General Council that the spread of antisemitism should be discouraged.<sup>183</sup> Nor did the General Council want the matter discussed at Congress as it would raise the “Jewish problem.” If necessary, delegates would be told that the only effective way of getting the “Jewish problem” examined was through the UN.<sup>184</sup> The TUC leadership had conflated anti-Jewish activities in Britain with the problems in Palestine. To the relief of the General Council there was no debate on the section of the international report relating to Palestine as Congress was more concerned about the rise of fascist activities in Britain than the problems in Palestine. The only mention came from Solomon Lever of the London Jewish Bakers Union who told Congress that the fascists’ activities had nothing to do with the campaign in Palestine. The *Jewish Chronicle* reported that delegates had cheered his speech and that “strong demands were voiced for taking more positive and energetic measures and the General Council were left in no doubt that they were expected to initiate definite action for stopping fascism” Even though Tewson told delegates that the General Council could “handle the matter” delegates voted by a large majority to refer back to the General Council, for further action, the section dealing with the National Council of Labour report on fascism.<sup>185</sup> The *Daily Herald* wrote that “the anger and alarm expressed by various speakers at the Congress about the growth of fascist activities in London and other cities was widely shared

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<sup>182</sup> The statement said that “The General Council’s sense of outrage is shared by the British people and responsible Jewish organisations and individuals . . . . Believing they speak the mind of all the people of Britain the General Council denounces any attempt to put the responsibility for the activities of minority criminal elements upon the shoulders of the Jewish community in Britain which has declared itself to have no sympathy with or part in such activity.” Draft statement on events in Palestine statement, undated, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>183</sup> The TUC General Council Minutes noted that the “USDAW strike will finish at the end of the month, kosher meat handling to restart on Monday”, 30 August 1947, MRC, MSS.292/20/32.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> "Menace to democracy" and "TUC condemn fascism, Jewish speakers cheered", *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 September 1947. The TUC report to Congress noted that the TUC had received a letter dated 14 February 1947, from the Amalgamated Engineering Union "asking the TUC jointly with the Labour Party use their influence to secure immediate legislation outlawing fascist and pro-fascist activities." The National Council of Labour, which had issued on 26 February 1946 a declaration against fascism, considered this letter along with others and pledged to continue to closely monitor the fascist activities in Britain. LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1947, paragraph 244, p.213, and pp.516-19.

and appealed to the Government that a way must be found to prohibit antisemitic provocation.”<sup>186</sup>

### **The illegal immigrants on board the ‘Exodus’**

As a reaction to the hanging of the two British army sergeants and the outrage that it had caused in Britain, the British government decided to return the 4,500 Jewish illegal immigrants aboard the ship the "*Exodus*" to Germany. It was a public relations catastrophe for Britain and a disaster for their relations with the Jews in Palestine.<sup>187</sup>

Shortly before Salliant contacted Tewson about the "*Exodus*", Salliant had sent him a copy of a telegram from the American Jewish Labor Council referring to martial law and conditions in Palestine.<sup>188</sup> Tewson replied that the letter's "content is a travesty of the fact" and the fact that there was an Arab problem as well as a Jewish problem in Palestine.<sup>189</sup> Salliant then cabled Tewson urging that "the TUC to agree that an allied neutral country be found to receive the emigrants on the "*Exodus*". The General Council considered his request along with one from the World Jewish Congress and decided to take no action.<sup>190</sup> Tewson's long reply to Salliant not only gives an insight into his thinking at the time but also shows his irritation with him. He explained to Salliant that the matter of the 'Exodus' could not be dealt with in isolation from the whole problem of Jewish immigration into Palestine and blamed the instigators of the action responsible for sending the illegal immigrants on the ships, saying that the immigrants had declined to go to France and could not come to Britain as there was no suitable accommodation for them. There was a serious health risk if the Jews remained on the ship, but the only place "where they could be accommodated under reasonable conditions" was the British Zone in Germany.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> *The Daily Herald*, 6 September 1947, p.2.

<sup>187</sup> Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951*, pp. 464,470 and 477. For an account of the journey of the ship the Exodus 1947: Ruth Gruber, *Exodus 1947: the ship that launched a nation*, (New York: Union Square Press, 2007).

<sup>188</sup> Salliant to Tewson, 14 August 1947, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>189</sup> Tewson to Salliant, 20 August 1947 and the TUC memo to Tewson, 26 August 1947, both MRC, MSS..292/956.9/4.

<sup>190</sup> Salliant to Tewson WFTU to the TUC, 27 August 1947 and World Jewish Congress to the TUC, 25 August 1947, both MRC, MSS..292/956.9/4. TUC General Council minutes, 30 August 1947, MRC, MSS..292/20/31.

<sup>191</sup> The letter from the Foreign Office to the TUC stated that "Immigrants were given opportunity to disembark in France," 28 August 1947, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

Tewson also described as “sheer nonsense” a message they had received from a Soviet organisation which claimed that following the hanging of the two sergeants in Palestine, pogroms were taking place in Britain but admitted that there had been trouble in one or two centres. He said that the General Council had not intervened because of delicate nature of the situation and pointed out that all foreign criticism had been directed at the British Government, rather than at the instigators of the problem. Tewson reminded Salliant that no solution could be found in Palestine without considering the wishes of the Arabs and although they were waiting for a UN recommendation he was not personally satisfied "that a solution will be found upon which both Jews and Arabs will be agreed."<sup>192</sup>

### **Relations between the Arab labour movement and the TUC**

The Arab trade unions in Palestine, although not as well organised, received encouragement from both the Palestine administration and the TUC. After 1945, the Arabs, like the Histadrut, lobbied the British government and attended international labour movement conferences.

In 1944, the Histadrut produced a survey of Arab labour organisations in Palestine which criticised the Palestine Government for giving considerable assistance to the Arab workers organisations regardless of their quality and “ultimate” aims as well as encouraging them to amalgamate into one organisation. The Histadrut believed that their organisation was only tolerated by the authorities and not encouraged to find an Arab partner.<sup>193</sup>

The Arab workers organisations mentioned in the report were the Communist controlled Palestine Arab workers Society (PAWS), the Federation of Arab Unions (FAU), and the Palestine Labour League (PLL) which was part of the Histadrut. The survey found that the FAU had shown no sign of genuine trade union activity but published a weekly newspaper containing violent anti-Jewish propaganda and that the PLL, was not supported by the Arab public or the other Arab workers organisations. The report concluded that the social status of

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<sup>192</sup> Tewson concluded with a warning that the letter “contains my personal comments for you on a problem which will be as big headache to the WFTU if they become embroiled in it as it is to the British Government and the UN.” Tewson to Salliant, 16 September 1947, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>193</sup> Histadrut survey of Arab labour organisations in Palestine, Jan 1945, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4. In 1944 the IFTU asked the Histadrut their largest affiliate in the Middle East, to produce a survey of the labour movements in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Histadrut to the IFTU, 3 December 1944, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/3. The TUC were told in August 1945 of the formation of an Arab TUC by the Government of Palestine who hoped this move would result in all the Arab trade unions agreeing to affiliate to one central body. The Government of Palestine to the TUC, 22 August 1945, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

the Arab workers had changed radically since the 1920s and working conditions and wages were far higher than those in neighbouring Arab countries.<sup>194</sup>

By 1943 PAWS, which had substantial support amongst Arab workers, "lacked the bargaining power with the British civil and military authorities nor did it have anything approaching the Histadrut's close and long standing connections" with the Palestine government or the Colonial Office or the TUC.<sup>195</sup> The TUC received a copy of PAWS letter to the IFTU asking about the 1944 Labour Party comment that the Arabs should be encouraged to move out as the Jews move in. The TUC explained that it only referred to the voluntary evacuation of Palestine territory by the Arabs and that no compulsion of any kind was intended.<sup>196</sup> During the final years of the Mandate the TUC was frequently approached by both the Arab unions and the Histadrut for their help regarding wages and conditions and the recognition of Arab unions in military workshops.<sup>197</sup> During 1946-47 the PLL was not involved in Arab-Jewish workers disputes and by 1947, the Histadrut's Arab department knew that the PLL was ineffective and "discredited amongst Arab workers in Palestine".<sup>198</sup>

The TUC supported the Palestine administration's efforts to build up the Arab unions<sup>199</sup> and noted that the Histadrut had been good for raising the wages and working conditions for Arabs workers. The industrialisation of Palestine was a consequence of the war effort also raised awareness amongst the Arab population of trade unions.<sup>200</sup> These links with Palestine

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<sup>194</sup> The status of the Arab trade unions was confirmed in a letter the TUC received from a British army officer, Captain Filsan, who wrote that PAWS and FAU were as steeped in Arab nationalism as the Histadrut was in Jewish nationalism but the PLL has no real standing in the Arab world. Filsan to the TUC, undated, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>195</sup> Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies Arab and Jewish workers in Palestine 1906-1948*, pp.278-9

<sup>196</sup> The IFTU reply to PAWS said that they were not prepared to discuss the issues in writing, but hoped that PAWS would be able to present their views to the world for a just solution safeguarding the social and economic rights of Jewish and Arab populations. TUC to the IFTU, 14 August 1944, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/3 and IFTU to PAWS, 22 August 1944, MSS.292/956.9/3.

<sup>197</sup> The TUC received telegrams from the Arab Workers Society, Jaffa, 27 September 1945, PAWS, 25 August 1946 and the Arab TUC, 12 March 1947. Tewson then wrote to the Colonial Office, 13 March 1947 who replied on 27 March 1947. Also see the Arab TUC to the TUC, 21 May 1947 and the Colonial Office to TUC, 8 and 23 October 1947, all MRC, MSS..292/956.9/4.

<sup>198</sup> Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies Arab and Jewish workers in Palestine 1906-1948*, pp.344-5

<sup>199</sup> The TUC wrote to the Colonial Office on 13 March 1947 saying that the Arab trade unions in Palestine still do not have the legal right of collective bargaining. TUC to Colonial Office, 13 March 1947, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4

<sup>200</sup> Estimates indicated that out of a total labour force of 285,000 in industry, some 110,000 workers were employed in war work according to the interim report of the Palestine Government committee to consider employment problems in Palestine, 7 July 1944, TNA:PRO, FO921/312, p.3. The Histadrut estimated that the

stood the TUC in good stead for its role after 1948 which we will see involved continuing to monitor the progress of the Arab workers in Israel.

### **The UN and Palestine**

The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), which went to Palestine in June 1947, met with Jewish representatives but was boycotted by the Arab community in Palestine. UNSCOP presented its report on 31 August 1947 with the proposal that the mandate should be terminated and the land partitioned between Jews and Arabs. On 29 November 1947, the UN General Assembly with the support of both Russia and the United States, adopted UNSCOP's partition recommendation. This was due to an effective Jewish diplomatic lobbying campaign and widespread sympathy for the Jewish people, following the death of six million Jews in the Holocaust.<sup>201</sup>

The British understood that partition would likely result in civil war and thought that the Arabs would have the upper hand. The government announced early in 1948 that the mandate in Palestine would end on 14 May by which time all remaining British forces will have been withdrawn.

Ben Gurion and his colleagues, who had been planning for independence, realised well before the UN decision that the Arab states would not accept the partition and planned accordingly for a military conflict with the neighbouring Arab states. The civil war in Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews started in December 1947 with the Arabs initially gaining the upper hand. Following the Haganah offensive called "Plan D" in March 1948, however, the Jews soon gained control of most of the areas assigned to them with the exception of the Negev. It was during the civil war that the "Palestinian refugee problem" first emerged. It started when the Palestinian leadership and middle classes left for what they believed to be temporary refuge in neighbouring Arab states. The rumours of an Arab massacre by the Jews at the Arab village of Deir Yassin in April 1948 convinced many Arabs

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Army employed 45,000 workers, 15,000 Jews and 30,000 Arabs. The majority of Arabs were villagers for whom their employment as hired labourers was only on a temporary basis, The Histadrut survey of Arab labour organisations in Palestine, January 1945, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4, p.16. Membership of the Histadrut at the end of 1944 was 143,311 (223,651 if one included children and dependants) which was 35% of the Jewish population in Palestine, *The Zionist Review*, 23 November 1945, TNS:PRO, KV5/16.

<sup>201</sup> For an account of the British withdrawal from Palestine 1947-8 see: Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951*, pp.499-571 and Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers 1945-1948*, pp.301-344.

to leave and it is estimated that 750,000 in total left at this time. This radically altered the strengths of the two communities in Palestine.<sup>202</sup>

In December 1947, as the situation in Palestine worsened, the Histadrut sent copies of their telegrams to the TUC to the WFTU and the American and Russian unions in order to put pressure on the TUC. They asked the TUC to intervene with the government in order to avoid further bloodshed and chaos and support the UN decision to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. The TUC, which received similar letters from the AFL and the WFTU, replied saying the matter was now in the hands of the UN.<sup>203</sup> Tewson wrote the NCL statement regarding the British withdrawal from Palestine which followed British Government policy by saying that “Britain could not accept responsibility for imposing by force a solution of the Palestine problem which is unacceptable to either Jews or Arabs” and also called upon both parties to enter into negotiations for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.<sup>204</sup>

The British mandate ended on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May 1948 and at the same time, Ben Gurion, as leader of the Jewish community in Palestine, declared Israel's independence. Within twenty-four hours armed forces from Egypt, Trans-Jordan, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon had invaded the country and Israel was at war with her neighbours.<sup>205</sup> The Arabs who had refused to accept the UN plan promised that the aim of the invasion was “the elimination of the Jewish state.” In terms of numbers, by mid-July, the Haganah which was now incorporated into the Israel Defence force [IDF] had 65,000 troops against 40,000 in the Arab armies. The numbers had increased by early 1949 to 115,000 in the IDF and 55,000 in the Arab armies, which gave the IDF a huge advantage. The war of independence was over by January 1949 and Ben Gurion's strategy of creating facts on the ground had paid off, because, after several UN called truces, Israel now controlled an area one third larger than that envisaged by the UN partition plan. Separate armistice agreements to end the fighting were signed in 1949 with

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<sup>202</sup> Morris, *Righteous Victims a History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2000*, pp.205-9.

<sup>203</sup> The TUC also asked the Histadrut who else they had written to. The Histadrut ignored this request as the TUC already knew the answer. See the Histadrut to TUC, 26 December 1947, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4 and to the WFTU, 3 January 1948, MRC, MSS.292C/918.23/2. See also the TUC to the Histadrut, 3 January 1948, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4 and the TUC International committee minutes, 21 January 1948, MRC, MSS.292/901/8.

<sup>204</sup> The NCL statement on Palestine, 15 April 1948, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/3 and Labour Party to Tewson, 24 February 1948, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>205</sup> For an account of the 1948-49 Israeli –Arab war see: Morris, *1948; a History of the first Arab-Israeli War*, pp.180-375.

Egypt, Lebanon, Trans-Jordan and Syria. The UN did try to bring a lasting peace to region when in 1949, at Lausanne, it convened a peace conference, but no agreement was reached as the differences between the parties over refugees and borders were too wide. The result of the war left the Arab nations humiliated in defeat and Palestinian Arab society shattered. Israel although surrounded by hostile nations had survived and was now an independent nation that was internationally recognised and in 1949 became a member of the UN. It did, however, have an Arab minority of 150,000 out of a total population of 900,000 which were regarded by many Israelis as either as an unknown quantity or potential fifth column. The areas in which they lived were controlled and supervised by the military government and although it was not official policy, they were treated as second class citizens. It was not until 1966 that these military government controls were abolished. The proposed Palestinian state envisaged by UN plan did not materialise either, the West Bank was taken over by Trans-Jordan and the Gaza Strip by Egypt.

After 1945 the Histadrut sent dozens of telegrams to both the TUC and the Labour Party on various issues and incidents in Palestine in the hope that they might interest someone who would lobby the Labour Government on their behalf. As a strategy it was partially successful. Within the Labour Party, Harold Laski, the Labour Party Chairman or Richard Crossman MP frequently raised matters on their behalf. The approach failed completely with the TUC because Deakin was able to subdue any possible criticism from within the trade union movement. Unlike the Labour Party there was nobody of Laski's stature on the General Council who was prepared to support the Histadrut. Although the Histadrut and the WFTU had tried to provoke a reaction from the TUC over Palestine, they failed because the TUC was totally loyal to the Labour Government. Nor was Palestine an important issue for the TUC as it was not discussed at any of their Congresses during this period. Their priority was to oppose the spread of communism in Europe. As we shall see elsewhere in this chapter, the Histadrut was always fundamentally pro-British and saw it as a priority after independence to rebuild links with the British Labour movement.

### **Rebuilding relations 1948-51**

As the second most important Jewish organisation in Palestine after the Jewish Agency, the Histadrut's immediate priority after independence had been declared, was to build support within the international labour movement for a Jewish state. This would be the Histadrut's contribution to Ben Gurion's foreign policy objectives to find friendship and understanding

for their cause anywhere in the world.<sup>206</sup> Almost immediately after declaring independence the Histadrut received telegrams of support from both the Russian and American trade union movements, but not from the TUC who had backed Bevin's Palestine policy.<sup>207</sup>

Once the State of Israel had been declared in 1948 the connection between the Histadrut and the TUC immediately changed to a relationship between two national centres rather than that of head office and branch office. Both still had similar political roles as they both supported a Labour Government and each promoted their government's policies to the international labour movement. However during the final years of the mandate there had been a noticeable tension between the two organisations and relations with the Histadrut were by then at their lowest point since 1920.

The Histadrut's first action was to thank the American and Russian trade unions for their support, but not the TUC. In an attempt to rebuild links the Histadrut announced in June 1948, that they intended to send goodwill delegations to several European countries including Britain and Russia to explain the Histadrut's work and its part in the struggle for Jewish independence. Whereas the Russians responded immediately by thanking the Histadrut for their desire to strengthen relations, Tewson replied saying that their request would be discussed at the next General Council meeting.<sup>208</sup> The Histadrut's telegram to the TUC spoke of strained relations in recent years and the British Government's attitude towards Israel but they hoped that the visit would improve relations and asked if TUC would be interested in meeting with them.<sup>209</sup> The TUC however continued to follow the Labour government's lead by saying that as the situation in "Palestine" (not Israel) was unclear, no action should be taken.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Uri Bailer, *Between East and West; Israel's foreign policy orientation 1948-56*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.12.

<sup>207</sup> AFL to the Histadrut, 28 May 1948, TNA:PRO, KV5/16.

<sup>208</sup> AUCCTU to the Histadrut, 21 July 1948, TNA:PRO, KV5/16.

<sup>209</sup> Further pressure was applied on the TUC when a few days later the *Daily Worker* printed an interview with the Histadrut General Secretary, Sprinzak stating that the Histadrut intended to send a special mission to TUC. See the TUC International committee minutes, 16 June 1948, MRC, MSS.292/901/8 and the TUC to the Histadrut, "Your request will be considered by the General Council," 7 June 1948, MSS.292/956.9/4. The Histadrut also sent a copy of their telegram to Berl Locker, the Head of the London office of Mapai, 10 June 1948 and Berl Locker to the Histadrut, 6 June 1948, TNA:PRO, KV5/16.

<sup>210</sup> See the TUC International Committee minutes, 16 June 1948, MRC, MSS.292/901/8 and the TUC to the Histadrut, 24 June 1948, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.



## **The Histadrut attends the 1948 TUC Congress**

The Histadrut's second action was to send Reuven Barkatt, the Histadrut Political Secretary, to Europe in summer of 1948 in order to try and rebuild links with the European labour movement. When the Home Office refused Barkatt an entry visa, the Jewish Agency in London phoned the TUC, saying they were ringing on behalf of Berl Locker<sup>211</sup> and asked for the TUC's help to obtain a visa, claiming that Barkatt was a personal friend of Tewson. The caller was told that "Tewson has no knowledge of Barkatt and resents him using his name in this connection." The TUC, however, did check with the Home Office and in order to cover themselves the TUC told the Home Office that they would have no objection to a visa being granted. Barkatt was given his visa and arrived in time to attend the TUC Congress at the beginning of September.<sup>212</sup>

Barkatt told his colleagues that he now had a better understanding of the current state of affairs in the WFTU, which he blamed on the Western Federations and the TUC in particular. The TUC had objected to any cooperation with Russia by the trade unions from the smaller countries and he thought that Deakin's TUC Congress speech was a worrying sign for the future of the WFTU. The TUC withdrew from the WFTU the following year. Barkatt described relations with Britain as the hardest and also the most important because they needed to find a way to rebuild and reconnect with the British labour movement.

He was disgusted with the way the TUC had behaved towards Solomon Lever, of the London Jewish Bakers Union, and had submitted a motion to Congress which called on the Government to recognise the State of Israel.<sup>213</sup> There was no way that Deakin would allow Congress to either discuss or vote on such a motion as Britain had not yet recognised Israel and was still recovering from having recently exited a bloody campaign in Palestine. Barkatt was told that the President of the TUC had asked that Lever's pro-Zionist motion be

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<sup>211</sup> Berl Locker, was one of the founders of the Jewish Labour movement in Palestine and a member of the Executive committee of the Jewish Agency for Palestine. Since 1937 he had been responsible for the political work of the Zionist movement in London. He represented the Histadrut at the WFTU where he would have met Tewson.

<sup>212</sup> TUC to the Histadrut, 24 June 1948. See also the TUC memorandum to Tewson, 18 August 1948, the PLPC to the TUC, 26 August 1948 and the TUC's reply, 30 August 1948, all MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>213</sup> The London Jewish Bakers Union resolution read: "This Congress, having in mind the many promises given by the Labour movement to the Jewish people, in support of their struggle to establish a home in Palestine calls upon the Government to recognise the State of Israel as set up in accordance with the decision of the United Nations. Congress also calls on the Government to support the application of Israel for admission into the United Nations organisation." "Recognition of Israel demanded", *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 August 1948.

withdrawn as Congress would not approve the motion and the Zionist cause would suffer a “prominent defeat.” Barkatt, who was politically astute enough to know the real reason described the subsequent negotiations with Lever as a “scandalous fiasco” because Lever agreed to withdraw the motion in return for permission to address Congress.<sup>214</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian* newspaper reported that Solomon Lever had "made a challenging speech on Palestine in which he protested that it was a tragedy that Britain had not recognised the State of Israel. Were she to do so, he declared, then there was ample evidence that many people would follow her example and, what was even more important, that many Arabs would do to. It was equally possible that peace would result. Jews, he added, could hardly believe that Britain would be guilty of such bad faith. It was all the more deplorable because Britain had a Labour Government in power. How many Labour conferences had promised Palestine to the Jews? Why had the Government antagonised its friends the Jews? Lever's observations were supported Mr. Hunter, on behalf of the Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) who said the "Palestine problem should not be approached as an imperialist struggle".<sup>215</sup>

Barkatt noted that Lever's speech was made to a half-empty hall on the last day of Congress passed without “any impression or reaction” and concluded that “our issue was presented there in a very poor way, unprepared and undignified.” Deakin had told Barkatt that he had opposed the discussion of the Lever's motion by Congress because people had not forgotten "the Sergeants’ affair” and he urged Barkatt not to raise the issue again. Deakin and his colleagues had protected the Labour government in Palestine from any embarrassment or criticism.<sup>216</sup>

Barkatt's trip to Europe took two months and he left England a few days after the assassination in Jerusalem of Count Bernadotte, the UN mediator, by the militant Zionist group Lehi. On his return to Israel Barkatt spoke to the Histadrut Executive committee about his trip. He started his report with the murder of Bernadotte which had already been

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<sup>214</sup> Barkatt’s report on his visit to Europe. PLILMR, Histadrut Executive Committee minutes, (Hebrew original), 29 September 1948.

<sup>215</sup> " TUC critics of purge policy", *The Manchester Guardian*, 11 September 1948. Lever withdrew his motion on Palestine and spoke instead on paragraph 400 of the TUC report to Congress "Palestine" which only contained the NCL statement in full. LMU, TUC Congress 1948 p.299 and pp.527-9

<sup>216</sup> Barkatt’s report on his visit to Europe, PLILMR, Histadrut Executive Committee minutes, (Hebrew original), 29 September 1948.

forgotten about in Israel but was still talked about in Europe. He commented that the British public had reacted more strongly to the killing of Bernadotte than had the British press, but in Britain, they still talk about the hanging of the two sergeants a year after the event. Barkatt told his colleagues that to the masses, Bernadotte had been a symbol of peace, who had been murdered by the Jews, and that his death might affect Israel's relations with both Britain and Europe for some time to come.<sup>217</sup>

After Israel's independence in 1948, the maintenance and monitoring of links with the Histadrut became a priority for the Foreign Office because Mapai dominated both the Histadrut and the coalition Israeli Government.<sup>218</sup> The importance of this close alliance was due to half the population being members of the Histadrut, as well as the Histadrut owning the biggest industrial conglomerate in Israel and being the biggest employer after the government.<sup>219</sup>

The Foreign Office, which had appeared to follow a pro-Arab line during the war, now wanted stability in the Middle East to ensure that oil supplies would not be interrupted and that any unrest in Palestine would not inflame the Muslims in India who were about to gain their independence.<sup>220</sup> They were also determined to curb increasing Russian interest in the region as they feared that Israel might become a Communist or a Russian satellite state because the majority of new Jewish immigrants who came from behind the Iron Curtain were Communists.<sup>221</sup> Once Israel supported the UN over Korea, the Foreign Office gradually realised that she was moving towards the West, which was confirmed after the 1952 Prague

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<sup>217</sup> Barkatt visited Britain, France, Belgium, Holland and Czechoslovakia. Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Mapai held 46 out of the 120 seats in the 1949 government. For more information see: Peter Y. Medding, *Mapai in Israel: Political Organisation and Government in a New Society*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972). Mapai also controlled the leadership of the Histadrut as they received 57% of the votes in the 1949 Histadrut elections. See the report on Histadrut elections, 10 May 1955, TNA:PRO, LAB13/449.

<sup>219</sup> "Trades Unions as "Auxiliary" Israeli Government", *The Times*, 9 May 1955, p.9.

<sup>220</sup> For a detailed account of Bevin's policies and attitudes as Foreign Secretary see: Bullock, *The life and times of Ernest Bevin vol.3 Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951*, pp.121-586, also Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, pp.214-8.

<sup>221</sup> Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945-1951*, pp.569-70. Between 1948-51, 256,639 immigrants out of a total of 687,624 who came to Israel were from the Soviet Union, Poland, Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The figures for 1952-60 were 96,425 out of a total of 297,138 immigrants. The Israel Government Central Bureau of statistics, [http://www.cbs.gov.il/publications12/1483\\_immigration/pdf/tab05.pdf](http://www.cbs.gov.il/publications12/1483_immigration/pdf/tab05.pdf) .(accessed 26 June 2013).

trials by the British Ambassador in Israel who reported that Russia had now given up "hope of bringing Israel into the communist orbit."<sup>222</sup>

Unlike Russia and America, Britain waited until 1949 before it recognised the State of Israel. However in 1948, soon after independence had been declared, the TUC received letters from several American unions urging them to lobby for the reversal of British policy towards Israel and stop aiding the Arabs. Tewson, who had been fully briefed on the situation, was told that recognition of the State of Israel cannot be given until the "usual conditions have been fulfilled, a functioning Government, known frontiers and the ability to carry out international obligations." He therefore saw no wrong in talking about the current situation in Palestine rather than Israel.<sup>223</sup>

### **Reciprocal visits and improving Histadrut relations with Britain**

While he was in Britain attending the 1948 TUC Congress, Barkatt sounded out both the TUC and the Labour Party about sending a delegation to Israel. Deakin told him that it was too soon but it was the Government, not the unions, who would make the final decision. With regard to the WFTU Deakin said that it was too soon for them to send a delegation which would be seen as a communist action which he would "vigorously" oppose. Before meeting Tewson, Barkatt talked to the Secretary of the parliamentary faction of the Fabian society, who was very keen on the idea of a delegation and raised the matter with the Parliamentary executive of the Labour Party, which approved of the idea of sending a delegation to Israel. Barkatt's meeting with Tewson was difficult and like Deakin, Tewson thought the suggestion was premature and that contacts could be made without a delegation. Tewson offered to give Barkatt all the information he wanted without the need for a visit but changed his mind when Barkatt told him it had the approval of the Labour parliamentary group, saying, then maybe the trade unions should initiate this delegation. Barkatt then met with James Griffiths, the chairman of the Labour party and Morgan Philips, the Party Secretary. Their discussions revealed, to Barkatt, the state of mind in the Party regarding Israel. Griffiths told him that he would to talk with Attlee and Bevin, as this was a significant

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<sup>222</sup> The British Ambassador to the Foreign Secretary, 13 February 1953, TNA:PRO, FO371/104733. For a detailed analysis of Israel's Foreign policy alignment see; Bailer, *Between East and West; Israel's foreign policy orientation 1948-56*, pp.206-55.

<sup>223</sup> AFL to the TUC, 25 May 1948 and the TUC's reply, 10 June 1948. The TUC also received seven other similar letters from American unions between 22 May and 30 August 1948, all MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4. The TUC briefing document on Palestine, 31 August 1948, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5.

political issue. The answer Barkatt received was that the government didn't think that it could prevent anyone from joining an unofficial delegation. But, "if asked for its opinion on whether the Party should aid such a thing, then it thinks that the time is too early and that the delegation won't be serving any useful purpose at the moment." After meeting with Michael Foot and other Labour MPs, Barkatt concluded that whoever he spoke to from the British Labour movement had been happy to talk to him and were ready for a new approach towards Israel.<sup>224</sup>

The question of sending an official Labour movement delegation to Israel was an important one for the Attlee government because Britain had yet to recognise the State of Israel. Barkatt was very careful when he talked about a delegation, stressing that it would be unofficial. He also made sure that his meetings with Labour Party officials and MP's were on an unofficial basis. Although there was enthusiasm for a visit, it was clear that any official trip would have to wait until after Britain had officially recognised Israel, which took place in January 1949.

Barkatt concluded his report to the Histadrut Executive Committee saying that it was now up to them to decide whether to pursue the visit or "to wait for greater changes in England". He advised that he didn't "want to make general conclusions, as anyone going to Europe today feels himself treading a very narrow wire, stretched above a great chasm. Many things we thought to be firm are found to be illusionary; there are sympathies that are built on sand. On the other hand, there is interest we didn't see from here and this is real interest. We are now, politically speaking, in a very fluid position, and many possibilities and many mishaps rest on the doorstep of our future. I have the feeling that by this trip a large opening for political action was opened for the Histadrut, which can be valuable if we persist in it, both to the state and to the Histadrut."<sup>225</sup>

Barkatt's report to the Histadrut executive is one of the few detailed documents that have survived that outline his views and thoughts on the TUC and their relationship with the Histadrut. He indicates that Deakin made all the decisions relating to the TUC's international policy and that Tewson was unimpressive. One thing was clear from his visit that there was support from within the unions and the Labour Party for the rebuilding of links with Israel.

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<sup>224</sup> Barkatt's report on his visit to Europe, PLILMR, Histadrut Executive Committee minutes, (Hebrew original), 29 September 1948.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

Before independence, the Jewish Agency, the Histadrut and Mapai had their own representatives in Britain, often sharing offices and personnel. By 1949, Dr Schneier Levenberg, a lifelong Zionist and Labour Party member was the London representative of the Jewish Agency, the Histadrut, and Chairman of both the Palestine Labour Political Committee (PLPC) and Poale Zion. He also worked closely with the Israeli Legation in London. In August 1949, on Barkatt's instructions, Levenberg, issued a joint invitation to Labour Party, the TUC and the Co-operative Union to send a joint labour movement delegation to Israel.<sup>226</sup> It was accepted and organised for late December. The delegation was to be led by the Labour Party Chairman and Durham miners' leader Sam Watson.<sup>227</sup> Levenberg advised Barkatt that other than Alice Bacon MP,<sup>228</sup> none of the party had any prior connection or knowledge of Israel.<sup>229</sup>

The delegation was received with the highest protocol; they met with the President of Israel, the Prime Minister, members of his Cabinet and leaders of the Histadrut. As well as visiting schools, kibbutzim and factories they met with the Palestine Labour League. Even Sir Alexander Knox Helm, the Head of the British Legation who was not known for his positive views on Israel, reported that he was glad the visit had taken place and that the delegation had realised how little was known in Britain about Israel.<sup>230</sup> Watson made it clear he would in future try to correct some of the misapprehensions that existed about Israel; saying "I came as a friend but somewhat ignorant of what that State was trying to accomplish and left as a

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<sup>226</sup> Levenberg to the TUC, 9 August 1949, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5 and Barkatt to Levenberg, 22 August 1949, PLILMR, IV-208-1-5217.

<sup>227</sup> According to Levenberg, Sam Watson was anti-Communist and although he had had little previous contact with the Palestine issue was known to be generally appreciative of Jewish achievements. Levenberg to Barkatt, 6 October 1949, PLILMR, IV-208-1-5213. Also see: Samuel Watson, (1898–1967), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/64621>, accessed 11 Feb 2013]

<sup>228</sup> According to Levenberg, Alice Bacon was an ambitious young MP and vice-chairman of the Labour party. She had a sizeable Jewish electorate in her constituency and wanted to be a member of the delegation. Bacon was extremely friendly to Labour Zionism and worked behind the scenes in parliament for the defacto recognition of Israel. Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Levenberg advised Barkatt of various strategies for the visit including political points that would need explaining such as; Israel was a democracy, Arab equality, trade and cultural relations and that Israel intended to live in friendship and peace with Britain. Levenberg to Barkatt, 25 November 1949, PLILMR, IV-208-1-5213.

<sup>230</sup> Legation report to the Foreign Office, 2 January 1950, TNA:PRO, FO371/82526. The Histadrut file of the delegation's visit includes minutes of the meetings with delegation, press conference details, speeches and radio broadcasts by Watson and an article in the *Daily Herald*, PLILMR, IV-219A-7-352.

friend, much better informed, much clearer in their conception of Israel's hopes and desires."<sup>231</sup>

The official report of the visit noted it had been inspired by political reasons because of the deteriorating relations during the mandate. The delegation was deeply impressed with the spirit and determination to build the country on a democratic and socialist basis which they hoped would prove a most valuable development in the Middle East. They also noted a real fear of a second round of war, and were reminded many times that Britain was supplying arms to Egypt and Trans-Jordan. The delegation discovered an admiration for the British labour movement and a desire for friendship with Britain which they hoped would be reciprocated and recommended that relations between the two countries be urgently improved.<sup>232</sup> However the Foreign Office advised Attlee not to attend the reception Levenberg had organised for the delegation on their return on the grounds of not wanting to upset the Arabs countries.<sup>233</sup>

The issue of arms sales to Israel figured prominently at this time as Britain was arming the Arab countries. In March 1950, the TUC received from the AFL a copy of a memorandum they had presented to President Truman, which included a request for arms for Israel. Tewson's non-committal reply noted that "we recognise difficult problems the state of Israel has at the present time as we sent a delegation to Israel in December."<sup>234</sup> Tewson told the TUC General Council that they would be raising the issue of arms sales with the Foreign Secretary at their next meeting with him.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> British Legation report to the Foreign Office, 13 January 1950, TNA:PRO, FO371/82526. Sherringham, an official in the Foreign Office wrote that "the visit may have led to increased understanding but may increase the pressure when the Israelis want to get something from us e.g. arms", 11 January 1950, TNA:PRO, FO371/82526.

<sup>232</sup> The report of the Joint NCL Delegation to Israel, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5.

<sup>233</sup> Attlee apologised for his absence citing pressure of work and instead sent the meeting a message. Foreign Office to Prime Minister's Office, 19 January 1950 and Attlee to Levenberg, 23 January 1950, both TNA:PRO, FO371/82526. Levenberg to the Histadrut, 25 January 1950, PLILMR, IV-208-1-5213.

<sup>234</sup> The memorandum also noted American support for a just and permanent peace settlement and additional financial support by World Bank. See the AFL-CIO to the TUC, 3 March 1950, the TUC's reply, 3 March 1950 and the TUC memorandum to Tewson, 7 March 1950, all MRC, MSS.292/956.9/4.

<sup>235</sup> The TUC General Council minutes, 22 March 1950, MRC, MSS.292/20/34 and Tewson's letter to Bevin which confirmed the request, 23 March 1950, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5.

In March 1950 the Labour Party decided to invite a Histadrut delegation to pay a return visit Britain.<sup>236</sup> The invitation was issued in spite of objections from the Foreign Office who were concerned that any Histadrut delegation would also include members of the pro-Moscow Mapam Party.<sup>237</sup> The visit eventually took place in December 1950 with Barkatt leading the delegation.<sup>238</sup> The Israelis talked to leading politicians and trade union leaders impressing upon them Israel's wish for peace in the Middle East and the Histadrut's desire for good relations with the workers movement in Britain.<sup>239</sup> Attlee declared the visit had done much to promote friendly relations between Britain and Israel.<sup>240</sup> After independence, the Histadrut's priority in Europe had been to rebuild relations with the British labour movement.<sup>241</sup> On all levels both visits were successful, with the Labour Party being the main beneficiary as many senior members of the Labour Party went to Israel during the next few years, several of whom encouraged both Tewson and Deakin to visit Israel. As it turned out neither man visited Israel and maybe if Tewson had done so the experience gained would have improved relations with the Histadrut. The Foreign Office also used the visits as part of their monitoring of Israel's intentions towards the Communists.

As we shall see, the TUC only ever had problems in dealing with the Histadrut when it came to political issues and the Israel-Arab conflict. Relations between the two organisations did improve as a result of the visits but not to the same degree as those with the Labour Party. It

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<sup>236</sup> The Labour Party General Secretary, Morgan Phillips wrote to the TUC wrote about the "delegation to Palestine" and not "delegation to Israel." 23 March 1950, MRC, MSS.292/156.9.8. The TUC International committee gave its approval for the visit on 14 April 1950, MRC, MSS.292/901/9.

<sup>237</sup> Foreign Office to Morgan Phillips, 2 May 1950, MRC, MSS.292/156.9.8. Philips then wrote to the Histadrut General Secretary, Lubianker saying he was looking forward to the visit which he hoped would "put our problems in their proper perspective", 28 July 1950, IV-208-1-5220. Levenberg wrote to Barkatt; "the delay in issuing the invitation was caused by procedural rather than political reasons" 16 August 1950, PLILMR, IV-208-1-5212.

<sup>238</sup> Levenberg's letter to Barkatt included the Labour Party National Executive Committee report which was presented to the 1951 Labour Party Conference, 25 September 1951, PLILMR, IV-208-1-6063. For full details of the activities of the Histadrut delegation to Britain, see Liff to letter to Bar-Tal, 17 January 1951, PLILMR, IV-208-6061 and the Israel Legation in London to the Foreign Office in Israel, 8 December 1950, the Israel State Archives, Jerusalem HZ36/7 (Hereafter cited as ISA).

<sup>239</sup> Ernest Davies, a Parliamentary-under-Secretary described as "very useful" a conversation with a pro-communist, Mapam delegation member who had told him that to ensure Israel's future political and economic independence, the best policy for Israel was to remain neutral. Report of a conversation with Mapam members of the delegation, 6 December 1950, TNA:PRO, FO371/82637.

<sup>240</sup> Attlee sent a message to the farewell reception for the delegation. Levenberg to Barkatt, 25 September 1951, PLILMR, IV-208-1-6063.

<sup>241</sup> See Barkatt's report on his visit to Europe, PLILMR, Histadrut's executive committee minutes, 29 September 1948, (Hebrew original).



did not help that the Histadrut had remained in the WFTU after the TUC had resigned. Sadly, until they joined the ICFTU in 1953, Tewson made sure that he was never directly in contact with Barkatt.

In March 1950 the Histadrut approached the British Legation in Tel Aviv with a proposal to send workers to Britain for training.<sup>242</sup> Levenberg met the TUC to discuss arrangements for the training<sup>243</sup> which was approved by the TUC General Council and the visit went ahead in July 1950. That this three-month trip was successful<sup>244</sup> was due in part to the success earlier in the year of the NCL delegation to Israel.

### **The role of British Labour Attaché in Tel Aviv**

Because of the importance the Foreign Office accorded to events in Israel, Ivor Thomas was appointed the first Labour Attaché to the British Legation in Tel Aviv in January 1950 shortly after Britain had recognised Israel.<sup>245</sup> Previously, the British Labour Attaché based in Cairo had covered labour issues in Palestine, but after 1948, he was no longer allowed to travel to Israel or directly contact his opposite number in Tel Aviv in case he jeopardised his credibility with the other seven Arab countries he covered in his work. The MOL sent copies of Thomas's reports to the Foreign Office, who before sending them onto the TUC, often edited out passages which it did not want them to see, which were usually references to political matters. This was because the Foreign Office decided in January 1948 as a matter of policy that in future the TUC would not normally be sent material on "hot political subjects". This decision only compounded the TUC's lack of knowledge and understanding of the politics of the region.<sup>246</sup>

### **Was Bevin's international labour policy successful?**

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<sup>242</sup> The Histadrut formally approached the British Legation three months after they had made an informal approach. Ministry of Labour to Bell, 28 March 1950, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5.

<sup>243</sup> For full details of the visit including the placements for the Histadrut personnel see the TUC memo, 25 May 1950 and Histadrut to TUC to 21 July 1950, both MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5

<sup>244</sup> Levenberg met with the TUC to discuss the proposed three month visit for 30 Israelis to work in British factories, learning about methods of production and trade union procedures. Levenberg told Barkatt that the TUC had co-operated fully "as it wasn't easy for them to agree to place, without wages, foreign workers in this country." Levenberg to Barkatt, 7 July 1950, PLILMR, IV-208-1-5212.

<sup>245</sup> Ministry of Labour to TUC, 19 January 1950, MRC, MSS.292/900/5.

<sup>246</sup> The Foreign Office also decided that they should keep a record of what documents that were sent to the TUC File note, 28 January 1948, TNA:PRO, LAB13/280.

Bevin who understood the importance of the international workers' movements suggested to the Foreign Office in 1946 that there should be an exchange of information between the Labour Party, the TUC and the Foreign Office. Consequently Hubert Gee became the first Foreign Office Labour Advisor in April 1949.<sup>247</sup> His main duties were public relations work with the TUC, unions and employers organisations and to provide a link with British labour attachés abroad in order to counter Communist influence in international federations and conferences. Bevin then recruited the TUC to work closely with the Labour attachés and by 1952 it was a government priority to encourage the development of bone fide trade unions in the Middle East.<sup>248</sup> With their own advisor on international labour questions and their network of labour attachés the Foreign Office was often better informed on events in Israel than the TUC.

Bevin's Middle East policy was dictated by the need for Britain to regain its position of influence in the Arab world as well as securing oil supplies for Britain and a military base in the region; whilst actively opposing the spread of communism and Russian efforts to gain a foothold in the region. The emergence of a Jewish state which was opposed by the Arabs complicated matters. His choice of the international labour movement as one of several avenues open to him to implement these aims was very successful, and successive British governments continued to support the movement long after his death. On his instructions the Foreign Office worked closely with the TUC and both were well supported by the labour attachés based in Tel Aviv and Cairo. The post of Foreign Office Labour Advisor, has continued to exist right up to the present day. His plan was for the Labour Attachés and the TUC to establish and build pro-British links with trade unionists internationally rather than just in the British Empire, which had been the TUC's pre-war policy. The TUC was unable to fulfil this role because, although they were highly influential at the WFTU and subsequently the ICFTU, they were unable to compete with the American unions which were backed financially by the CIA. They could afford to develop contacts in Africa and Asia.<sup>249</sup> The TUC

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<sup>247</sup> Gee was seconded to the Foreign Office in 1947 and officially appointed Labour advisor two years later. See the discussion of the proposal for an interchange of information between the TUC, Labour Party and Foreign Office and the appointment of a Labour Relations Officer, 30 October 1946, TNA:PRO, FO371/67613.

<sup>248</sup> In April 1949, the MOL organised a conference in London for Labour Attachés which was addressed by the FO Labour advisor and the TUC. By 1952 there were 22 Labour Attachés covering 47 countries whose role was to establish relationships with workers and employers organisations in the country or region in which they were operating. The Conference of Labour attachés in London organised by the MOL, 25 April 1949 and TUC memorandum, 30 October 1952, both MRC, MSS.292/900/5.

<sup>249</sup> Anthony Carew, 'The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: The Free Trade Union Committee and the CIA', *Labor History*, Vol.39, No1, (1998), pp.25-32.

lacked the necessary resources for this work because of the poor economic conditions in post-war Britain, and had to depend on the labour attachés who were civil servants and not trade unionists. Tewson rarely went on foreign visits and when he did it was frequently on international labour movement business. Because the TUC's wartime involvement with the government and their loyalty to Bevin and the Labour Government they continued to align their Middle East policies with those of the subsequent Conservative governments. Without Bevin none of this would have happened.

### **The Histadrut leaves WFTU**

As was evident at Prague, not only was the WFTU being used by both sides as a weapon in the Cold War, but the TUC were also fighting the Russian unions for control of the WFTU. Matters came to a head in early 1949 when the TUC, along with the American and European trade unions, resigned to form the anti-Communist, International Confederation of Trade Unions [ICFTU]. When it was clear that the TUC were about to leave the WFTU, Barkatt asked Levenberg to monitor the attitude of the TUC towards the WFTU. It was important for the Histadrut at that time to maintain contact with and follow the developments both inside and outside the WFTU, but it had to balance this against the stance taken by the TUC.<sup>250</sup> The break-up of the WFTU, which coincided with the Israeli government's negotiations with Russia, Romania and Hungary about Jewish emigration to Israel, presented Mapai and the Histadrut with a problem. Should the Histadrut remain a member of the WFTU? The subsequent discussions highlighted the political and ideological differences between Mapai and Mapam. The issue was first discussed at the Histadrut's conference in 1949.<sup>251</sup> Although delegates formally adopted the recommendations of the Mapai secretariat for the Histadrut to remain part of the WFTU, they also agreed to send observers to both the forthcoming WFTU conference in Milan and the preliminary conference in Geneva to prepare for the formation of the ICFTU.<sup>252</sup> This decision, which followed the Israeli government's policy of neutrality between West and East, was at the time a convenient solution. The Head of the British

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<sup>250</sup> Barkatt to Levenberg, 22 August 1949, PLILMR, IV-208-1-5217, 11 October 1949 and 8 November 1949, both PLILMR, IV-208-1-5213, and 5 December 1948, PLILMR, IV-208-1-5218.

<sup>251</sup> For a full report of conference see *Israel Labour News*, 29 June 1949, ISSH:ICFTU, 3501 and PLILMR, the minutes of the Histadrut's 7th conference, 28 May 1949 (Hebrew original).

<sup>252</sup> Tewson wrote on the eve of the Geneva conference in his "*Free Trade Unions Plan for Unity*", a survey of the non – communist trade union movement that the Histadrut was a special case and that while Mapai strove to remain neutral Mapam supported the WFTU, ISSH:ICFTU, 392a.

Legation in Tel Aviv reported to Bevin that there was a strong divergence of views between Mapai who wanted the Histadrut to leave the WFTU immediately and declare its neutrality and Mapam and the communists who argued that the Histadrut should remain a member and condemned those who had left the WFTU.<sup>253</sup>

Barkatt attended both conferences as a neutral observer and reported that at Geneva there was not just an ideological battle but also a tactical one between Britain and America for the future leadership of the ICFTU. The attitude toward Israel, he noted, had changed since they were “no longer the world's focus of attention” nor had “to beg for the help of our friends and sympathisers,” but overall “we were treated with coolness and lack of knowledge.” He also reported that the Lebanese delegation had queried the Histadrut’s right to be present at Geneva. As the Histadrut was a neutral observer, all Barkatt could do was to work behind the scenes to ensure that question of the Histadrut's status did not receive official approval. He warned that once the many unions in Asia and Africa had become members of the new Federation, the Histadrut had to expect to find serious problems caused by the increase of these unions' disproportionate voting power in the new organisation.

He described the Milan conference as a show of power, with the atmosphere as one of “unanimous voices of all the speakers” with applause after every speech. Whereas in Geneva, because according to protocol the Histadrut was not allowed to address the conference, in Milan, Histadrut delegates spoke twice. Although their speeches were accepted coolly because they were so different and they were given disproportionate importance because the Russians wanted to impress the non-communist members of WFTU. In addition the Russians wanted the Histadrut to remain as members of the WFTU and not join the ICFTU. Barkatt described the atmosphere as "a unanimous voice of all speakers, show of power, applause after every speech". The main aim of their delegation, however, was to try and negotiate with the Russians, Romanians and Hungarians about the right of Jews to emigrate to Israel. Barkatt revealed that that the Russians had made it clear that leaving the WFTU "would seriously damage our relations with Russia" and put an end to the talks about discussions regarding Jewish emigration. It was more difficult for the Histadrut to maintain their neutral status in Milan because some Mapam members their delegation had given an interview to the

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<sup>253</sup> Report on the 7th conference of the Histadrut, Knox Helm to Bevin, 8 June 1949, TNA:PRO, FO/371/67613.

press in which they attacked the ICFTU and opposed the Histadrut's neutrality.<sup>254</sup> Barkatt asked Levenberg to find if the Histadrut were to be given observer status at the founding conference of the ICFTU in London or if they would be excluded because of their WFTU membership.<sup>255</sup> As the British were keen for the Israel to stay out of the Russian sphere of influence, the Histadrut were invited to attend as observers.

These two meetings were very important for the Histadrut which was just coming to terms with its newly gained status as a minor but independent member of the international labour movement. Many Israelis, including the Histadrut, saw themselves as natural allies of Britain and since their priority was the rebuilding of relations with the TUC they were concerned that by going to Milan their invitation to come to London would be withdrawn. They need not have worried, because Tewson had already said that the Histadrut was a special case. Since the TUC had left the WFTU, Barkatt no longer had any direct contact with the TUC and was dependent on Levenberg to act as a go-between. The British Legation closely observed these developments reporting that the Histadrut was thinking hard about its international policy but their government's concern for the Jews in the USSR and satellite countries as well as the strength of the Left wing minority in their organisation would prevent any change of course for some time.<sup>256</sup>

In March 1950, Thomas, the Labour attaché, reported that in the light of their continued membership of the WFTU the Histadrut had become "very cagey" when discussing their "international position" which was in sharp "contrast to their former readiness".<sup>257</sup> He then reported that Barkatt had said that the TUC had wanted the Histadrut to leave the WFTU but in his opinion Bevin's recent comments in Parliament had undone all the work they had done to improve Israel-UK relations and there was no way that they could now leave the WFTU. Thomas commented that while Barkatt had used the opportunity to air his views on Bevin, partly in the hope that his views would be passed on to the TUC and to justify their continued

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<sup>254</sup>Barkatt gave a report of the conferences to both the Histadrut's executive committee and the Mapai Secretariat. See PLILMR, the minutes of the Histadrut's executive committee, 11 August 1949, (Hebrew original). For a report of the Mapai secretariat discussions see Bailer, *Between East and West: Israel's foreign policy orientation 1948-1956*, pp.22-5.

<sup>255</sup> Barkatt to Levenberg 22 August and 8 November 1949, PLILMR, IV-208-1-5217.

<sup>256</sup> Thomas to the MOL, 23 February 1950, TNA:PRO, LAB13/554.

<sup>257</sup> Thomas to the MOL, 24 March 1950, TNA:PRO, FO371/82513.

membership of the WFTU. Thomas concluded that he was most anxious to remain on good terms with the TUC.<sup>258</sup>

It soon became clear that Israel, as only one of two non-Communist members of the WFTU, could no longer remain in the organisation. In addition, the three issues that had resulted in their 'neutral' stance were no longer relevant. The Israelis now realised that the matter of Jewish emigration was no longer conditional on the Histadrut remaining a member of the WFTU.<sup>259</sup> In addition, Mapai had been unable to form a government coalition with Mapam while the split between the ICFTU and WFTU had become irreversible. The debate over affiliation resumed on 30 March 1950 at a joint meeting of the Mapai secretariat, Mapai Knesset members and the executive committee of the Histadrut.<sup>260</sup> Discussions continued two weeks later at the Mapai central committee. Finally on 11 May, the Histadrut Executive Committee decided, after a lengthy debate, by 26 votes to 16 to leave the WFTU. In moving the resolution Barkatt argued that the realignment of the international labour movement was an extension of the Cold War and both the WFTU and the ICFTU were political in character and purpose. Whilst membership of either organisation conflicted with Israel's policy of strict neutrality he denied that the decision to leave the WFTU was the result of pressure from the West and said that "the British labour delegation which visited Israel had expressed sympathetic understanding of the delicate position in which the Histadrut found itself." The Histadrut also decided that for the time being to maintain friendly relations with labour organisations irrespective of their affiliation and not align itself at present with either of the ICFTU or the WFTU.<sup>261</sup>

The British Legation noted that "It is too soon to cast Mapai in the role of the "Western" party", or that the Histadrut's withdrawal from the WFTU indicated an "early move towards closer relations with, or membership of the ICFTU". He noted that withdrawal from the WFTU was not designed "to orientate the Histadrut westwards", but an "attempt to shake it

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<sup>258</sup> Thomas to the MOL, 1 April 1950, TNA:PRO, LAB13/554.

<sup>259</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett : biography of a political moderate*, (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1996), p.527 and Bailer, *Between East and West: Israel's foreign policy orientation 1948-1956*, p.25.

<sup>260</sup> For a full report of the Mapai meetings see Bailer *Between East and West: Israel's foreign policy orientation 1948-1956*, pp.25-9 and PLILMR, the Histadrut debate [82 pages], the Histadrut's executive committee minutes 11 May 1950, (Hebrew original).

<sup>261</sup> Knox Helm to Bevin, 15 May 1950, TNA:PRO, FO371/82637 and PLILMR, Histadrut Executive Committee minutes, 11 May 1950. Unsigned comment in FO file "This is excellent" but "the strong Mapam minority vote must be noted"

free of an affiliation which was sincerely felt to be incompatible with the official policy of “non identification”. He concluded by saying that neither the Histadrut as a whole, nor the Mapai element within it, are yet ready to make a positive move towards the West." Although the TUC's main focus for the next few years was the leadership of the ICFTU, along with the Foreign Office they continued to monitor the Histadrut. In order to maintain its neutrality the Histadrut turned down the WFTU's request to discuss their withdrawal.<sup>262</sup>

Even though leaving the WFTU was an important decision for the Israelis, persuading the Histadrut to join the ICFTU as Israel was moving towards the West was not a priority for either the Foreign Office or the TUC. There is very little evidence of direct contact between them before the Histadrut joined the ICFTU in 1953.<sup>263</sup> The Histadrut used the British and Israeli Labour Attaché's, the ICFTU and Levenberg, as intermediaries with the TUC. Nor did Tewson deal with the Israelis directly for possible fear of offending the Arabs in his role as President of the ICFTU and his connection with the Foreign Office. The excellent work of the first Israeli Labour attaché in London is discussed later on in this chapter.

### **The Histadrut joins the ICFTU**

Israel's foreign policy orientation which in 1950, when the Histadrut had resigned from the WFTU, was one of neutrality, started to change after the Korean war to one which by 1956 fully indentified with the Western powers. The question as to whether the Histadrut should join the ICFTU was part of a much wider debate in Israel at this time which focused on whether Israel should be aligned with the West or the Third World. By 1952, the Israeli government had realised that it could no longer remain neutral and the country's survival depended on friendship with other powers. But the ruling Mapai party postponed making a decision to join the ICFTU<sup>264</sup>, firstly for foreign policy considerations and secondly because the pro-Soviet Mapam opposition, which had opposed the Histadrut's decision to resign from

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<sup>262</sup> The British Legation to the Foreign Secretary, 26 February and 16 April 1951, both TNA:PRO, LAB13/554

<sup>263</sup> Levenberg told the TUC in March 1952 that Mapai was very keen to establish as soon as possible a closer relationship with ICFTU, but they were not yet ready to affiliate as they expected that this would mean another serious fight with Mapam. This information was passed onto the ICFTU along with a request for the Histadrut to be invited as observers to the next ICFTU meeting in Berlin. ICFTU memo from Krane to Oldenbroek, 19 March 1952, ISSH:ICFTU, 3501.

<sup>264</sup> The ICFTU wanted the Histadrut to affiliate earlier to their organisation but did not pressurise them to do so. ICFTU to the NVV, 14 February 1951, ISSH:ICFTU, 3501. Tewson, as President of the ICFTU gave an assurance that no pressure would be put on the Histadrut to join the Federation. “American Trade Unionists visit,” *Jewish Chronicle*, 27 July 1951.

the WFTU, was still strongly supported and Mapai did not want to cause a domestic crisis by splitting the Israeli labour movement.<sup>265</sup>

In June 1952, Barkatt travelled to Brussels, Helsinki and London in order to ascertain the ICFTU's plans for the Middle East. Tewson only agreed to meet him after being told that the discussions would be about the Histadrut's future relationship with the ICFTU.<sup>266</sup> Their meeting was reported to have been very friendly and the Histadrut indicated that they would have sent observers to the next meeting of the ICFTU General Council if it had been held anywhere else other than Berlin. Tewson had said that it would improve matters if the Histadrut became an affiliate in order to help build up the ICFTU's Middle East regional organisation and he did not believe that the Arab-Israel conflict presented any "insuperable obstacles" to the development of the regional grouping.<sup>267</sup> The cooperation between the Foreign Office, the TUC and the ICFTU was apparent when, in October 1952, Mapai resumed participation in the Socialist International which it had suspended after West Germany had been admitted to the International. The TUC told the ICFTU that Israel could no longer afford to be isolationist and that the Socialist International was a suitable forum for its activities, which indicated that they may soon affiliate to the ICFTU.<sup>268</sup> Shortly afterwards Israel was invited to attend the Asian Socialist conference, a move which interested the Foreign Office because Attlee was to be part of the British delegation.<sup>269</sup>

The Slansky show trial in Prague November 1952 provided Mapai with the opportunity to move against Mapam, because one of their leaders, Mordechai Oren, was arrested in Prague and charged with spying for western intelligence. His arrest split Mapam, while Jews both in

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<sup>265</sup> Thomas to Greenhough, 3 March 1952, TNA:PRO, LAB13/554. In March 1952, Mapai passed a message to the TUC saying that they wanted to establish a closer relationship with ICFTU but were not yet ready to affiliate as this would mean a fight with Mapam. The message was passed onto the ICFTU with a request from the Histadrut to attend as observers the next ICFTU General Council meeting. ICFTU memo to Oldenbroek, 19 March 1952, ISSH:ICFTU, 3501.

<sup>266</sup> TUC memo to Tewson, 10 June 1952, and TUC to Levenberg, 19 June 1952, both MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5.

<sup>267</sup> Diack's comments on Barkatt's visit, 21 June 1952, TNA:PRO, FO371/98819.

<sup>268</sup> A copy of Thomas to Greenhough was sent to the TUC, 15 September 1952, TNA:PRO, LAB13/554. Tewson to Oldenbroek, 17 October 1952, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5.

<sup>269</sup> Diack wrote that if the Israelis succeeded in establishing close contacts with Asian countries, it could be useful if Britain was on friendly terms with the Histadrut. Diack's comments, 30 October 1952, TNA:PRO, FO371/98820.



the Diaspora and Israel were shocked by the antisemitic nature of the trial.<sup>270</sup> The first thing Mapai did was in January 1953, was to ban Communists from holding office in the Histadrut.<sup>271</sup> By May the Mapai leadership had decided that the Histadrut should join the ICFTU and the following month the 68th Council of the Histadrut approved the decision by 109 votes to 63. Barkatt told delegates that affiliation was necessary for the Histadrut and a diplomatic necessity for Israel in order to fight the political battle for Israel's survival in the international labour movement. The Histadrut, he had argued, could no longer remain neutral as they had been rejected by the WFTU whilst the ICFTU and its affiliates had shown sympathy and understanding towards them and had not done anything so far that might have been interpreted as an unfriendly act towards them. he said it would also enable them to strengthen the friendships with the trade unions of the USA, England, Scandinavia and other non-communist states. In order to be able to attend the ICFTU Congress in Stockholm at the end of July, the Histadrut applied immediately to affiliate to the ICFTU.<sup>272</sup> Barkatt hoped that membership of the ICFTU would also provide an opportunity for closer cooperation with the TUC.<sup>273</sup> Although there had been no direct contact with the TUC or the ICFTU since 1949, Barkatt had received updates about the TUC and the ICFTU's plans for the Middle East from the British Labour Attaché.<sup>274</sup>

The Histadrut's presence in Stockholm justified their participation and served the interests of the State of Israel<sup>275</sup> because they had returned with a seat on the Executive Board and had prevented Congress discussing the report on the Arab refugees which contained several unfriendly statements towards Israel. Barkatt was assured that the proposal for a regional

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<sup>270</sup> "Prague Trial Throws Jews in Communist Countries into Mortal Fear", *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, 24 November 1952 and Peretz Merhav, *The Israeli Left*, pp.130-8.

<sup>271</sup> "Histadrut executive acts to ban Communists", *Jerusalem Post*, 16 January 1953, The decision was formally approved by 68th Council of the Histadrut.

<sup>272</sup> Poulson, the Labour Attaché wrote to Greenhough four weeks before saying that the Histadrut had decided to join the ICFTU. Poulson to Greenhough, 15 May and 1 July 1953, which was copied to the TUC, both TNA:PRO, LAB13/1079, the minutes of ICFTU Executive Board meeting at Stockholm, 9EB/18, ISSH:ICFTU, 24, 1 July 1953 and PLILMR, the minutes of the meeting of the Council of the Histadrut, 21 June 1953. and Barkatt to Tewson, 1 June 1953, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5.

<sup>273</sup> Barkatt to Tewson, 1 June 1953, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5.

<sup>274</sup> The MOL to the TUC, 15 June 1953, 17 June 1953, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5.

<sup>275</sup> For details of the Stockholm Congress of the ICFTU see: John Windmuller, 'The Stockholm Congress of the ICFTU', *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol.7, No.3 (1954), pp.434-43.

office in Beirut was to be only an information office for Arab countries.<sup>276</sup> Barkatt had already known about the ICFTU's regional office plans, as he already discussed them with Thomas, the Labour attaché in Israel.<sup>277</sup> But he did not mention the office when the Histadrut Central Committee voted to join the ICFTU.

However their participation in the 1953 Stockholm conference led to more than they had bargained for. Several European unions had originally proposed expanding the executive but it was the American's proposals that won in the end. In their bid to wrest the leadership of the organisation away from the TUC and Europe, the Americans had made it known that they would not accept Tewson's re-election as ICFTU President.

Windmuller wrote that "the expansion of the executive was "in part precipitated and certainly aggravated" by the recent affiliation of the Histadrut. The Histadrut's argument was that should have a seat on the Executive otherwise they would be represented by an Arab union with far fewer members and from a country that did not recognise Israel. It was also possible that if the Executive had not been enlarged the Arab unions might have resigned rather than give up their place to Israel.<sup>278</sup> The Histadrut, as the largest and most successful trade union in the Middle East was then enlisted in US plans to enlarge the Executive as part of the AFL-CIO's bid to extend American influence through cooperation between trade unions in the Americas and Asia. To do this they needed more places on the Executive for their allies.

Although this only seems to have come about in Stockholm, it is possible that Barkatt would have known in advance of the AFL-CIO's plans because the Histadrut had a very close relationship with the American unions.<sup>279</sup> It also seems probable that he would also have discussed the ICFTU regional office plans also with the Americans especially as he had already talked to the British about them. Barkatt, however, made no mention of any prior knowledge of any of this in his post-Congress report to the Histadrut executive because he

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<sup>276</sup> ICFTU to Histadrut, 3 August and 12 November 1953, Histadrut reply, 30 September 1953, Barkatt to Oldenbroek, 3 August, 30 September and 12 November 1953, all ISSH:ICFTU, 3501. The Report on the Palestine refugees, 9EB/15 and the minutes of the Executive Board meeting in Stockholm, ISSH:ICFTU, 23.

<sup>277</sup> Thomas to Greenhough, 25 August 1952, TNA:PRO, FO371/98318.

<sup>278</sup> For more information about the enlargement of the executive board see John Windmuller, *American Labor and the International Labor Movement 1940 to 1953*, (Ithaca New York: Cornell University, 1954), pp.208-17.

<sup>279</sup> For the Histadrut's close relationship with the American unions see: Peter Hahn, "The influence of organized labor on U.S. policy toward Israel", 1945-1967, in *Empire and revolution : the United States and the Third World since 1945*, (Columbus : Ohio State University, 2001), pp.154-77.

told them that they had only found out about the ICFTU plans to expand the executive on their arrival in Stockholm. Their delegation then discussed the matter and decided to wait two or three years before standing for the Executive. But once they learnt of ICFTU's report on Arab refugees and their regional office plans, they changed their minds, because membership of the Executive was then no longer about "representation and prestige," but an issue of "political realism" which was essential for the Histadrut and Israel. Barkatt did not "go into detail regarding the delegation's actions" but said they "felt a terrible tension" and worked hard during the rest of the conference. Barkatt described the two days spent discussing the enlargement of the executive as a dramatic struggle which he believed was a fight for Israel. He felt there were four reasons why delegates were opposed to the enlargement of the executive; a divided Executive, the maintenance of the status quo, the feeling that the Histadrut's presence on the Executive would affect ICFTU activity amongst the Arabs and a small amount of an anti-Israeli feeling.<sup>280</sup>

The British embassy in Stockholm reported that the TUC's opposition to the enlargement of the executive had disappointed Barkatt because, they had in the past strongly advised them to join the ICFTU and had therefore hoped for a more sympathetic attitude from the TUC. The report suggested that the TUC should be advised that next time "it would be worth showing the Histadrut a little extra consideration."<sup>281</sup> Poulson, the Labour attaché in Israel, was told that when discussing the Stockholm Congress with the Histadrut he should be aware that although the Israelis might say the Congress was worthwhile, deep down this might not be the case.<sup>282</sup> Mason, the Foreign Office labour advisor, saw no reason for the Israeli delegation to feel hurt and suggested their disappointment was due to the domineering role played by the Americans. Not everybody agreed with him, as the Foreign Office files reveal "the Israelis are inclined to be oversensitive, but they generally respond well to being given explanations in confidence, and it would be our interests to preserve good relations" and "it was incumbent on the TUC to explain fully why they could not support their candidature."<sup>283</sup> When Poulson informed London that the Histadrut were more concerned with the wider aspects of the

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<sup>280</sup> PLILMR, Histadrut Executive Committee minutes, (Hebrew original), 17 September 1953.

<sup>281</sup> Tel Aviv Embassy to Foreign Office, Poulson to MOL, both 14 August 1953, TNA:PRO, FO371/104849.

<sup>282</sup> MOL to Poulson, 20 August 1953, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1080.

<sup>283</sup> Mason file comment, 21 August 1953, Baker file comment, 26 August 1953, and Thompson file comment, 26 August 1953, TNA:PRO, all FO371/104849.

ICFTU than about what happened in Stockholm,<sup>284</sup> Mason defended the TUC by saying that their actions were understandable as the Histadrut had only joined the ICFTU just before Congress and because of American pressure to enlarge the Executive to make room for the Histadrut. He blamed the American unions rather than the TUC for pressing the Histadrut to join the ICFTU. He adding that the TUC would discuss the matter with the Histadrut at the following month's TUC Congress.<sup>285</sup>

### **The appointment of an Israeli Labour Attaché in London**

The building of bridges between Britain and the new Jewish state was slow and it was only after the NCL and Histadrut visits that the British Labour Party began to return to its previous pro-Zionist stance. The arrangement between the Israeli Embassy and Levenberg, as their contact with the TUC, lasted until December 1953,<sup>286</sup> when Moshe Bar Tal was appointed Labour Attaché.<sup>287</sup> His appointment reflected the importance Israel placed on its relationship with the TUC, as London was the first Israeli Embassy to have its own Labour Attaché. Bar Tal made a huge impact building relationships with the TUC and the unions. Unlike British Labour Attachés who were civil servants, Bar Tal's membership of the Histadrut enabled him to relate to his fellow trade unionists. They could now also count on support from Sam Watson, the Durham Miners leader and member of the Labour Party National Executive, Bar Tal reported that his "influence, importance and respect that he gets from all circles were readily apparent."<sup>288</sup> After his return from Israel in 1949, Watson was true to his word and went on to become a leading supporter of Israel in Britain during the 1950s. The TUC's growing cooperation<sup>289</sup> with the Histadrut included official invitations for them to attend the

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<sup>284</sup> Poulson to MOL, 27 August 1953, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1080.

<sup>285</sup> Mason file comment 28 August and 24 September 1953, Tel Aviv Embassy to FO, 12 October 1953, all FO371/104849, and FO to TUC, 3 September 1953, MSS.292/956.9/6.

<sup>286</sup> It was soon obvious that there were problems with duplication of pro-Israel work including parliamentary lobbying. The embassy unsuccessfully tried to control the work of the Zionist Federation, Levenberg, Poale Zion and Barnett Janner MP. Israel Embassy to the Israel Foreign Office, 11 February 1954, (Hebrew original), ISA, HZ43/14.

<sup>287</sup> Barkatt to Tewson, 4 December 1952, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5.

<sup>288</sup> Bar Tal to the Labour Office Israel, 6 August 1953, ISA, "Labour Attachés England", (Hebrew original), G2776/9.

<sup>289</sup> The MOL and the British Council supported three or four official visits a year by Histadrut officials and Israeli workers. The TUC wrote to unions asking for help in organising the visits. Barkatt to Tewson, 13 December 1951, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/5.

TUC Congress in 1953 and 1955.<sup>290</sup> With the build up of arms in the Arab States from the autumn of 1954 onwards the Histadrut returned to its policy of contacting its friends in the TUC<sup>291</sup> and the Labour Party asking them to oppose arms deals which threatened peace and stability in the region.<sup>292</sup> The Histadrut thanked the TUC in December 1955 for their opposition to the British arms deal with Egypt.<sup>293</sup> The Israelis, who had adopted the strategy of inviting politicians and trade unionists to Israel, in the early 1950s, soon discovered that this was to be best way to gain support. The Israeli embassy in London divided Israel's parliamentary supporters into two groups; the first group who were loyal supporters and helped on every issue included MPs Janner<sup>294</sup> and Greenwood.<sup>295</sup> The second, Sam Watson's group, which didn't want to be characterised as pro-Israeli, would help in most of the time but occasionally turned down requests for help.<sup>296</sup>

The Israeli ambassador repeatedly complained to Barkatt that the trade unions were being neglected as Bar Tal had not been replaced, and the embassy did not have the time or anyone with the necessary experience to do the work.<sup>297</sup> Although the Embassy appreciated the benefits of having a Labour Attaché, Bar Tal was never replaced and another five years would pass before the Histadrut posted a permanent representative to London.

### **The Foreign Office monitors the Arab population in Israel**

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<sup>290</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 19 April 1955, MRC, MSS.292/901/11.

<sup>291</sup> The Histadrut also contacted the ICFTU which passed on the information to all its affiliates. Histadrut to the TUC, 5 September 1954, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/6.

<sup>292</sup> The Histadrut open letter to the ICFTU included discussion of recent political developments in Middle East including the Egyptian attitude to towards Israel and the Czechoslovak - Egyptian arms deal, 4 November 1955, ISSH:ICFTU, 3503, the Histadrut open letter to the TUC, 5 December 1955, MRC, MSS.292/956.9/6.

<sup>293</sup> The Histadrut also contacted the British Seamen's Union thanking the Liverpool Dockers for their reaction to British arms sales to Egypt. Histadrut to the TUC, 1 December 1955 and the Histadrut to the Seamen's Union, 3 January 1956, both IV-208-1-8593.

<sup>294</sup> Barnett Janner served as a Labour MP from 1945-70. In 1955 he was elected President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/31285>, accessed 17 May 2013.

<sup>295</sup> Arthur Greenwood served as a Labour MP from 1922-54 and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party from 1935-45. He was a great supporter of Israel. The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/33543?docPos=1>, accessed 17 May 2013.

<sup>296</sup> The Israel Embassy in London to the Foreign Office Jerusalem, 29 January 1954, (Hebrew original), ISA, HZ43/14.

<sup>297</sup> Elath to Barkatt, 5 July 1955 and 18 Aug 1955, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-14A.

Even though Britain had withdrawn from Palestine, she was still a dominant power in the region and the Foreign Office monitored the status of the Arab population which had remained behind in Israel after 1948. They wanted to know if the Arabs would become a 'fifth column' in any future wars and their attitude to the possibility of Israel aligning with Russia.

Bevin was told that the Arabs had suffered few problems but due to the economic crisis, Arab unemployment figures were proportionally higher as a result of Jews being given work in preference to Arabs.<sup>298</sup> Thomas, the Labour Attaché reported that the Histadrut planned to raise the standard of living of Arab members, he noted that if successful this would go far to prevent Arab grievances being exploited by the Communists.<sup>299</sup> In January 1954 the Foreign Office were told of the growing co-operation between Arabs and Jews but were warned that if war broke out the 14,000 Arab Histadrut members were considered to be a potential fifth column and that the political factors that kept "the Arabs in a condition of inferiority" outweighed the benefits of the measures introduced for improving the Arab standard of living.<sup>300</sup>

### **The Foreign Office uses the TUC-ICFTU link to promote British interests in the Middle East**

The TUC's international work during the 1950s included supporting both the ICFTU and British Labour Attachés in their efforts to build independent trade union movements in the Middle East. The Foreign Office played a major role in influencing TUC actions and policy and worked hard behind the scenes to bring to fruition the ICFTU proposal for a regional office in Beirut.

The ICFTU first became involved in the Middle East in April 1952 when a delegation went Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Jordan to investigate trade union activity.<sup>301</sup> The mission reported that generally speaking labour codes existed but governments had the power to refuse

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<sup>298</sup> Knox Helm to Bevin, 9 July 1949, TNA:PRO, FO371/67613.

<sup>299</sup> Thomas to Greenhough, 1 April 1950, TNA:PRO, LAB13/554.

<sup>300</sup> Poulson to Greenhough, 12 January 1954, TNA:PRO, LAB13/449.

<sup>301</sup> The TUC advised the Foreign Office of the ICFTU mission, which arranged for the delegation to meet with Audsley, the labour attaché in Damascus The ICFTU Executive Board meeting minutes, 13EB/21, 9 November 1950, ISSH:ICFTU, 3289 and Foreign Office file, "ICFTU plan to send delegation to Middle East" 5 May 1952, TNA:PRO, FO371/98318.

authorisation and suspend or suppress any organisation. Their report recommended opening an information centre in Beirut.<sup>302</sup> The Foreign Office already had their own report on trade unionism in the Middle East which described the Histadrut as the most powerful trade union organisation in the Middle East and the most influential organisation in Israel.<sup>303</sup> Barkatt, who was aware of the ICFTU mission and the proposal for a Beirut office, asked Thomas, the British Labour Attaché if Audsley, the British Labour Attaché in Cairo, could come to Israel to discuss the issues with him. Sir Francis Evans, the British Ambassador, supported Barkatt's request warning that if an ICFTU office was opened and operated only in Arab States, Israel would become more isolated.<sup>304</sup> He also advised that as the Histadrut was moving cautiously towards the ICFTU and it was important that the ICFTU should not make further progress impossible.<sup>305</sup> Although the Minister was originally in favour, the Foreign Office vehemently opposed the visit, arguing that if it became public knowledge it might seriously prejudice Audsley's standing in Arab countries.<sup>306</sup>

The Foreign Office also believed that there was a risk that the Israelis might use his visit for propaganda purposes. Undeterred, Evans then wrote that although it seemed almost impossible to realise British policy to integrate Israel into a secure Middle East, Britain should try to encourage better relations between the ICFTU and Jewish and Arab trade union leaders. He warned that if the ICFTU recognised the much smaller Arab unions and established an office in the region without making an approach to the Histadrut, such a move would be regarded by them as blatant discrimination. Despite his opposition, the weight of opinion within the Foreign Office was against the visit and the meeting between Audsley and

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<sup>302</sup> The ICFTU Executive Board which discussed the problem of the Palestinian refugees also approved the mission's recommendations which included opening an information centre in Beirut. The report of ICFTU delegation to Middle East, April- June 1952, 8EB/7f, 11 December 1952, ISSH:ICFTU,18 and the ICFTU Executive Board meeting minutes, 24-27 October 1952, the TUC International Committee minutes, 27 January 1953, all MRC, MSS.292/901/10.

<sup>303</sup>The Histadrut, the Foreign Office Labour Advisor wrote, can "hardly fail to impress neighbouring countries in spite of the "political differences between Arabs and Jews." It is not clear if this conclusion was based on information received or just wishful thinking on his part. Foreign Office report "Trade Unionism in the Middle East", brief prepared for Sir Roger Makins visit to the Persian Gulf", 13 January 1952, TNA:PRO, FO371/98785.

<sup>304</sup> Thomas to Greenhough, 25 August 1952, TNA:PRO, FO371/98318.

<sup>305</sup> British Embassy to the British Middle East Office, 29 September 1952, TNA:PRO, FO371/98318.

<sup>306</sup> Audsley's brief covered not only Egypt, but the Lebanon, Ethiopia, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Syria Foreign Office file comment (unidentified), 8 September 1952, TNA:PRO, FO371/98318

Barkatt never took place.<sup>307</sup> The TUC was never officially consulted by the Foreign Office although if Tewson had been asked he would no doubt have supported their decision.

After the Stockholm Congress, Barkatt wrote to Oldenbroek the ICFTU General Secretary, warning that the principles of international labour cooperation would be breached if the Histadrut was not allowed to enter the country where the office was established. Oldenbroek's replied saying that the ICFTU had never intended to set up a regional office in Beirut, but only an information centre.<sup>308</sup> Meanwhile the Foreign Office told the TUC that although the Histadrut had misgivings, their embassy in Israel supported the proposal and that they had advised Lebanese trade unionists to support the proposal. They then told their embassy in Israel that the TUC hoped that trade union leaders in Israel and the Arab states could rise above national political feelings and be prepared to work through the ICFTU office wherever was established. Their letter declared "this may be utopian" but asked for advice on how the Histadrut could be persuaded to work along these lines. The Labour Attaché's reply which the TUC saw, stated that as it was impossible for an Israeli to enter an Arab country, the Histadrut felt that a neutral country should be chosen such as Cyprus, though they knew that the TUC did not support this idea.<sup>309</sup> From the subsequent correspondence it appears that the Histadrut were aware of the Foreign Office's position and made no secret of their worries.<sup>310</sup> With the ICFTU having serious second thoughts on the matter, a TUC delegation visited the Lebanon in November 1953 to show support for a Beirut office.<sup>311</sup> Oldenbroek

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<sup>307</sup> See unidentified Foreign Office file comment, 1 September 1952, the British Middle East Office to the Foreign Office, the British Embassy Cairo to the Foreign Office, both 13 September 1952, the MOL to the Labour Attachés in Tel Aviv and Cairo, 15 September 1952, The British Middle East Office to the Foreign Office 17 September 1952, the British Embassy to the British Middle East Office, 29 September 1952, Richmond, file comment, 13 October 1952, all TNA:PRO, FO371/98318.

<sup>308</sup> See the correspondence between Oldenbroek and Barkatt, 3 August, 30 September and 12 November 1953, all ISSH:ICFTU, 3501.

<sup>309</sup> The Embassy was also advised that their colleagues in the Lebanon supported the choice of Beirut. Poulson to Greenhough, 11 August 1953, Mason to Bell, 17 August 1953, Poulson to Greenhough, 20 August and 27 August 1953 and Greenhough to Bell, 4 September 1953, all TNA:PRO, LAB13/1080.

<sup>310</sup> The Embassy reported that the Histadrut's opposition was obvious as they would not be able to attend meetings in Beirut. This was an impossible situation for them as Israel was a member of the Executive and "it seemed unwise that an international organisation where Israelis and Arabs sit together should promote an arrangement which would exacerbate the differences between them." The British Embassy to the Foreign Office, 20 October 1953, FO371/104849, Poulson to Greenhough, 21 September 1953, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1080.

<sup>311</sup> The Histadrut's pressure paid off, when the British Embassy in Beirut were told that the ICFTU were having serious second thoughts as the Histadrut had indicated that they would object to Beirut. The Foreign Office to the British Embassy Beirut, 24 October 1953. Also unsigned Foreign Office file comment, "We have since



told the ICFTU Executive Board in November 1954 that their proposal now was for an information and advisory centre in Beirut, not an office.<sup>312</sup> Over the winter the ICFTU sent a representative to the Middle East whose recommendations were leaked by the British Labour Attaché in Brussels.<sup>313</sup> Finally in May 1955, nearly three years after it had been first discussed, the ICFTU Executive Board finally agreed a compromise which allowed their Middle East representative to work in an “appropriate way” in consultation with Histadrut. The TUC told the Foreign Office that the representative would have a roving commission in order to overcome rivalry between the various national Federations and the difficulty with the Histadrut.<sup>314</sup>

Audsley reported in May 1955 that Egypt was considering forming an Arab Federation of Labour, which would be an independent labour bloc of Arab nations free from foreign influence.<sup>315</sup> He was also told that that Egypt would not join the ICFTU whilst Israel was a member and that Egypt considered that the American government which was controlled by the Jews had been responsible for the Palestine war and were now heavily financing Israel.<sup>316</sup> The Foreign Office who were trying to improve relations with Egypt saw this as a setback and did not pass this information on to either the TUC or the ICFTU.<sup>317</sup>

At the fourth ICFTU Congress in Vienna in May 1955 the Lebanese and the Tunisian trade unions used the opportunity to present to Congress the Arab side of the conflict with Israel.<sup>318</sup>

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heard from Brussels that the ICFTU is not to open a regional office in Beirut but something much smaller and less controversial,” 19 November 1953, all TNA:PRO, FO371/104849.

<sup>312</sup> Bar Yaccov to Barkatt, 24 November 1954, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV 104-1296-5.

<sup>313</sup> The report recommended that the ICFTU continued its work in the Middle East and that an information office be established in the region. The Labour Attaché Brussels to Barnes, 5 February and 13 April 1955, both TNA:PRO, FO371/115610-2.

<sup>314</sup> The minutes of ICFTU Executive Board meeting, 16 May 1955, ISSH:ICFTU, 44, the British Embassy Brussels to the British Embassy Beirut, 16 June 1955, and Barnes to the Labour Attaché Brussels, 22 September 1955, both TNA:PRO, FO371/115610.

<sup>315</sup> The TUC were allowed to pass on this information to the ICFTU as long they did not reveal the source. Barnes to Bowers, 18 May 1955, TNA:PRO, FO371/115610.

<sup>316</sup> Audsley to Barnes, 14 May 1955, TNA:PRO, FO371/115610. See also the minutes of the meeting of the founding Inter-Arab Confederation of Trade Unions, held in Cairo, 8 October 1955, ISSH:ICFTU, 3289.

<sup>317</sup> Unidentified comments in the Foreign Office file, 24 May and 24 June 1955, TNA:PRO, FO371/115610.

<sup>318</sup> The Lebanese delegate told Congress that there were more than 100,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and the ICFTU had accepted Israeli affiliation before the problem has been solved. Barkatt's response was that the Histadrut's aim was to integrate the Arab community in Israel and to give it full and equal opportunity. He blamed the Arab States for this tragic situation as they had invaded Israel in 1948. The Report of the 4th ICFTU World Congress Vienna, 20 May 1955, ISSH:ICFTU, ZO474496.

Barkatt thought this attack on Israel had done Israel more good than harm. Although his meetings with Tewson had a “cordial and lively attitude”, the TUC had seemed to be rather aloof as they had not been conspicuous in the main Congress.<sup>319</sup> According to the Ministry of Labour (MOL), the TUC had been anxious not to put a foot wrong by appearing to be friendlier with one delegation than another.<sup>320</sup> Barkatt was pleased however that this time, the Histadrut had been allowed to manoeuvre at Congress without being seen by the Europeans as “hostages of the USA.”<sup>321</sup>

At the end of 1955, Oldenbroek presented comprehensive proposals for future ICFTU work in the Middle East to the Executive Committee. He acknowledged that the ICFTU was seen by Arab trade unionists as part of the Western bloc, and they had been reproached by them for not having taken a position on the Palestinian refugee problem and for not having established a regional office. Oldenbroek said the Arabs believed that the ICFTU had been unable “to act in their favour” because Israel's influence was so great. He concluded that the ICFTU's programme for peace and social progress in the region was handicapped by Arab political demands and Israel's desire for recognition by its neighbours. The committee accepted his plan to divide the region into two fields of action, one for the Arab countries and the other for Turkey, Iran, Cyprus and Israel.<sup>322</sup> Although the regional office plan had been rejected Barkatt knew that they would have to continue to monitor future events.<sup>323</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that the TUC gave unquestioning support to British government policies towards Palestine both during and after the mandate and after the emergence of the State of Israel. The difference between the TUC and the Histadrut was that whilst the

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<sup>319</sup> Marsh to Greenhough, 21 June 1955, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1111.

<sup>320</sup> The Ministry of Labour explained that the TUC's attitude had not been not connected to their relationship with the Histadrut which has “always been sound and is likely to remain so.” The TUC was told of their reserved behaviour at the time, but had not taken the hint. Greenhough to Marsh, 13 July 1955, TNA:PRO, LAB/13/1111.

<sup>321</sup> Barkatt to Elath, 22 June 1955, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-14A.

<sup>322</sup> The plan was accepted on the understanding that discussions would be held with the ICFTU affiliates in the area. The ICFTU Executive Board meeting agenda 16EB/26 and the ICFTU Executive meeting minutes, 16EB/43, 12-16 December 1955, ISSH:ICFTU, 46.

<sup>323</sup> Barkatt later remarked that “the intrigues which are formed against us are also in the field of the workers movement.” Barkatt to the Foreign Office in Jerusalem, 29 December 1955, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-104-1296-5.

Histadrut knew that its international role both before and after independence was to support the State of Israel, the TUC, which had previously operated independently of the British Government, found itself in partnership with the Government after having been given a role for which it was ill-prepared and under resourced. The TUC was suddenly asked to expand its international work having previously only worked with the unions in the British Empire.<sup>324</sup> Given Britain's financial problems at the time it is highly unlikely that the Government gave the TUC extra funding for its expanded international role. This was confirmed by Taylor who wrote that "the TUC has almost always tried to punch above its weight to the outside world" and "may have seemed like a substantial and imposing organisation." However in reality it has "been very much a shoestring operation, dependant on the willingness of its affiliate unions to provide it with the limited authority and financial resources to promote the wider influence of organised labour in the political workplace"<sup>325</sup>

After the First World War the TUC's primary international role was to build links with trade unionists in the British Empire which enhanced their reputation in the international labour movement. Building links with the Histadrut was never a problem for the TUC who were always willing to contact the Colonial Office on their behalf or give advice. Even after 1948, the TUC continued to work with the Histadrut on trade union related issues.

While Bevin had a vision of what he wanted the TUC to do, its international work was implemented not by him but by his two close allies; Deakin, who had told the Histadrut in Prague in 1947 that his masters were Bevin and the Labour government, and Tewson, who made sure that there was no direct contact between himself and Barkatt until the Histadrut joined the ICFTU. Tewson, who played a major role in establishing the ICFTU, was by all accounts a mediocre General Secretary and hesitant policy maker. The British Government supported his main concern to ensure that the emerging unions in the Middle East, Africa and Asia supported the ICFTU and would not join the communist backed WFTU. Tewson made many references in his correspondence to the situation the Palestinian Arabs found themselves in, we do not know if this was genuine concern on his part, a stalling tactic or

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<sup>324</sup> A 1949 Foreign Office report said that the TUC should be encouraged to be "more active and more alive to their international responsibilities, now that their WFTU inhibitions are lifted. In particular there is the question of better trade union information to counter Communist propaganda. It is doubtful whether the TUC have ever really studied what the situation now requires, in terms of money, staff or concentrated effort..... Expansion means more money and more men, and more organisation than the TUC have so far been prepared to put into it." The TUC and its International policy, 19 May 1949, FO1110/258.

<sup>325</sup> Robert Taylor, *The TUC from the General Strike to New Unionism*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p.17.

support for Bevin. We do know however, that Tewson always wanted to do the right thing for his country and regardless of any personal feelings towards Jews and the Holocaust, he believed that if he openly gave his support to the Histadrut and Israel it would antagonise the Arab world and damage British interests. This explains both his and the TUC's continued support for the Middle East policies of the Conservative Government which took office in 1951. Israel was not important for the TUC or the unions, and only Sam Watson showed the same level of support for Israel as the Labour Party leadership.

The TUC's relationship with the Histadrut was affected by the TUC's connection with the American unions. After the First World War both the American and British labour movements supported the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Whereas all the TUC did from then on was little more than pass motions at Congress and support Labour Party policy, the American unions gave both political and financial support to the Histadrut for the establishment of a Jewish State which they saw as a safe haven for European Jews fleeing persecution. They believed that the establishment of a democratic state supported by a strong labour movement would be an example to others in the Middle East. Whereas grassroots support in Britain was mainly limited to a small number of union branches with a large number of Jewish members, the Histadrut had the backing of all the major trade unions in the United States. The political support for the Histadrut by the unions in America included lobbying President Truman as well as Attlee and Bevin. Indeed, the Foreign Office was so concerned by this that it monitored the pro-Jewish activities of the American unions.<sup>326</sup> Because the TUC and the Americans had been on opposite sides when it came to the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine, it is clear that in the 1950s the TUC saw the Histadrut as a close ally of the US and a threat to the TUC's aspirations at the ICFTU. The American unions, who not only had a large number of Jewish union leaders, lobbied the US government and the ICFTU on behalf of Israel. This was in complete contrast to the TUC who promoted British Middle East policies. Compared to the Americans very few Jews held leading positions in the British unions.

The Foreign Office also had its own agenda in the Middle East and used the TUC to help rebuild British interests in the Arab world at the ICFTU, often at the expense of the Histadrut.

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<sup>326</sup> For more information about the relationship between the American labour movement and the Histadrut see, Adam Howard, "Sewing the Seeds of Statehood: Garment Unions, American Labor, and the establishment of the State of Israel 1917-1952", (unpublished Doctor of Philosophy thesis, University of Florida, 2003 and Peter Hahn, "The influence of organized labor on U.S. policy toward Israel", pp.154-77.

Their desire to establish an ICFTU office in Beirut is an obvious example. The TUC would only support Israel and the Histadrut as long as it did not cut across Foreign Office guidelines. Unlike Bevin, the Foreign Office did not totally trust the TUC and held back information about Israel and the Histadrut. Direct contact between the Histadrut and the TUC which resumed after the Histadrut's election to the ICFTU Executive Board in Stockholm was seen by the TUC as a setback to British interests. This resulted in TUC-Histadrut relations being cordial at best and certainly not at the level of the Labour Party's good relations with Israel.

The relationship between the Histadrut and the TUC had fundamentally changed after Israel's independence. The Histadrut's priority was to rebuild relations with the British labour movement and their success was due to the efforts of Schneier Levenberg, Moshe Bar Tal, and Sam Watson. Along with Barkatt and the Histadrut leadership they all believed they had successfully rebuilt relations with the TUC, especially when related to trade union matters but there is no evidence to suggest that they fully understood the TUC's position on political matters. However it does indicate that support for the Histadrut over trade union issues appears to have been conflated with political support for Israel. It is also possible that because there was a very close relationship between the union and political leadership in Israel some Israeli's may have also believed that a similar relationship between the Labour Party and the TUC existed in Britain. Although the unions had the power to make policy through the block system voting at the Labour Party conferences, Israel was never an important enough issue for them to make policy and were happy to always support the Labour Party, firstly over Palestine and then Israel in the period up to 1955.

From 1948 onwards, Israeli policy was to invite politicians and union leaders to visit Israel in order to find out for themselves firsthand about Israel and the political situation. They believed then and still believe, that until one visits the country one cannot understand Israel's problems. What stands out is that whilst many leading Labour politicians and a few trade union leaders made the trip and were impressed with what they saw, neither Deakin nor Tewson went to Israel. Tewson never went because he would never purposely put himself in the position of taking sides.<sup>327</sup> Once again, it is not clear whether Barkatt or his colleagues understood Tewson's real reasons for not accepting.

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<sup>327</sup> Author's conversation with Nicolas Kolarz, whose mother, Alexandra was Tewson's personal assistant 1947-60, 23 November 2009.

From the very beginning in 1920, the Histadrut successfully lobbied both the Labour Party and the TUC for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. However once the Labour Party came to power in 1945, this support rapidly ebbed away. However from 1943 onwards the Histadrut knew that the TUC would not become directly involved in political matters as a matter of policy and passed on all such requests to the Labour Party.<sup>328</sup> This was why the continuous stream of telegrams to the TUC asking for their intervention with the Labour Government, ultimately came to nothing. The Histadrut chose to do this in order to keep their options open for the future and also retain close relations with the Labour Party. Similar telegrams, which were also sent to the Labour Party, were frequently acted upon by Harold Laski who was able to discuss the issues at the highest levels of government. Although there were senior Labour politicians and even Bevin himself who had admired the development of the socialist Jewish community in Palestine before the war, there was no-one of a similar stature to Laski within the trade union movement who was committed to the Jewish cause and prepared to question Bevin or Deakin over government policy. Sam Watson was the first sympathetic union leader to emerge after the Labour party visit to Israel in 1949 and that was unexpected as he had never previously had any connection with the Jewish community. There is no evidence that Histadrut leadership realised that the “good” contacts they had with the TUC, which had been developed over the previous 25 years, were not going to pay off. What we do know is that they had tremendous respect for Deakin. It also must be remembered that the TUC supported both the Labour and Conservative governments' Middle East policies.

While the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was an important event for the labour movement, the Labour Party and the Left, subsequent events in the Middle East involving Israel were ignored as other issues such as the Cold War between Russia and the West assumed greater importance. Cold War events such as the 1949 Berlin airlift, the Korean war of 1950 and the debate over Britain's nuclear deterrent during the 1950s dominated their discussions. The Iranian oil crisis of 1949 and the emergence of Nasser and relations with Egypt were at the forefront of their discussions relating to the Middle East and not peace between Israel and her neighbours. The priority for many of the prominent Labour politicians and trade unionists who visited Israel during the first part of the 1950s was the rebuilding of

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<sup>328</sup> Locker to Mapai Central Committee, 6 October 1943, Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, p.190.

links with the Labour Party and the TUC. In the next Chapter I will examine how the Labour Party and the TUC reacted to the Suez crisis and Britain's involvement with Israel.

## Chapter 2            1956-1966

Israel's collusion with the UK and France in the 1956 Suez conflict was totally unexpected considering how poor Anglo-Israel relations were at the time.<sup>329</sup> TUC-Histadrut relations which had reflected Anglo-Israel relations since 1948 were also at a low ebb. However unlike Anglo-Israel relations, which started to improve in 1958, the TUC's dealings with the Histadrut remained indifferent for another four years. This chapter will show that Sir Victor Tewson, the TUC General Secretary, was main reason for the TUC's continued indifference towards the Histadrut. His primary aim after Suez was to support the Foreign Office and help Britain regain her credibility and influence with the Arab states. It was only after Tewson had retired in 1960, that TUC-Histadrut relations started to improve and the chapter ends with beginning of a "golden" period in relations. Tewson opposed the Histadrut's international aid programme in Africa and the Histadrut's Afro-Asian institute, which he saw as a direct challenge to the ICFTU's own efforts. Rather than embrace the work of the Histadrut, Tewson saw them as a threat. Nor did it help that these Histadrut programmes were financially supported by the TUC's arch rival, the AFL-CIO, with whom Tewson clashed regularly at the ICFTU over various issues, including how the organisation should support trade unions in the newly independent African states. By 1959, the Foreign Office had come to appreciate the success of the Histadrut's Afro-Asian institute and their international aid work, yet it would take the TUC a few more years to reach the same conclusion.

### **Anglo-Israeli and TUC-Histadrut relations**

Since gaining her independence in 1948, Israel's chief concern had been her survival and maintaining equivalence militarily with her Arab neighbours. Israel's poor relations with Britain were due to her requests for British arms, which were constantly turned down as it would upset Britain's Arab allies. The Foreign Office had realised that it was regularly saying

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<sup>329</sup>For more information about Britain's involvement in the Suez conflict see Keith Kyle, *Suez*, (London: Weidenfeld, 1991), Leon D. Epstein, *British Politics in the Suez crisis*, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1964), Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez, Diaries 1951-56*, (London: Weidenfeld, 1986) and Ritchie Ovendale, *The origins of the Arab-Israeli wars*, (London: Pearson, 2004).

For more information about Israel's involvement in the Suez conflict see Morris, *Righteous Victims a History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2000*, Sachar, *A History of Israel: from the Rise of Zionism to our time*, and Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall, Israel and the Arab world* (London: Penguin Books, 2000).



'no' to Israel and had tried to improve relations with Israel, as long as no damage had been done to its relations with the Arab world.<sup>330</sup>

By 1955, Israel, like Britain was concerned by Nasser's ambitions to be the leader of the Arab world. Egypt, who had blockaded of the Straits of Tiran and the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping in 1950, raised the tension between the two countries again in September 1955, by closing the airspace over the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli aircraft and signing a major arms deal with Russia. Nasser was also supporting the fedayeen terrorist raids to Southern Israel. Although Israel had considered retaliating by launching a pre-emptive strike against the Egyptian army while they was still relatively weak, it was Egypt's nationalisation of the Suez canal in 1956 and the military intervention by Britain and France, which provided Israel with the opportunity to defeat the Egyptian army and the recognition of the Straits of Tiran as an international waterway open to Israeli shipping.

Israel's 1948 war of independence had also had a catastrophic effect on British influence in the region as many Arabs blamed Britain for the creation of the State of Israel. The defeat of the Arabs had led to a rise in Arab nationalism which threatened both the regions existing governments and ruling monarchies. Britain's immediate post-war aim, as we have seen, was to try to stop the spread of communism throughout Africa and regain her influence in the Middle East. Good relations with Egypt as well as her military bases in the Suez Canal zone were key to this policy. Nasser's rise to power in the early 1950s resulted in Britain to trying appease Nasser who became more belligerent and anti-British. In 1954, Britain agreed to his demands withdraw their troops from the Canal Zone within two years. Britain attempted to reassert its position in the region with the signing in 1955, of the Bagdad pact, with Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Turkey. The Foreign Office attempted to bring other Arab states into the military pact and even considered punishing Israel when her actions threatened the policy of extending the pact framework.<sup>331</sup> By supporting Iran and Iraq, Britain found herself opposing the Arab nationalists backed by Nasser, who had also upset the French government with his support for the independence movement in Algeria.

British policy towards Israel has always been decided by self-interest and throughout the 1950s, her Middle East policy was determined by her need for the friendship of key Arab

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<sup>330</sup> Neill Lochery, *Loaded Dice; The Foreign Office and Israel*, (Continuum: London, 2007), p.49.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid* p.59.

states as well as regular oil supplies. By the spring of 1956, Britain's relations with both Israel and Egypt were at a low point. The Foreign Office was aware that the Israelis might launch a pre-emptive strike, but made no attempt to tell the Israelis that they would also like to see Nasser overthrown. Once Egypt had signed the arms deal with Russia, Israel made plans to acquire a similar quantity of arms in order to redress the balance. Because both Britain and America had refused Israel's requests for arms, she turned to France, so that, by the autumn of 1956, France had delivered sufficient arms to Israel to overcome any possible Egyptian threat. Israel's involvement in the Suez war was closely connected to her relationship with France which began with the supply of arms and quickly developed into political and military cooperation.<sup>332</sup>

Almost immediately after Nasser had announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal on 26 July, both Britain and France made plans to regain control of the canal by either diplomatic means or military force. France also made contingency plans for joint military action with Israel, independent of any action with Britain. Even though there was a deep suspicion between the British and the Israelis, because of their strained relations over the previous eighteen months, Israel joined forces with France and Britain in October to launch a tripartite assault on Egypt. Given the extent of the collusion, the stakes for Britain were extremely high as her true interests lay with the Arabs and not Israel.<sup>333</sup> The Suez war began on 29 October when Israel invaded the Sinai Peninsula and was followed a few days later by the Anglo-French landings at Port Said and Suez. Pressure from the Americans, who had refused to support the venture, meant that British and French troops were withdrawn shortly afterwards. The result was an unfinished Suez operation and a humiliating political disaster for both Britain and France. Israel, on the other hand, had achieved all her objectives. The Suez conflict had very little impact on Anglo-Israel relations which remained unchanged until 1958, by which time the Foreign Office had recognised Israel's role in preventing Nasser's expansion in the region and as a result agreed to sell Centurion tanks to Israel.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> For details of how Israel developed her military and political connection with France see Shlaim, *The Iron Wall, Israel and the Arab world*, pp.162-9.

<sup>333</sup> "Very few Foreign Office officials had any of the idea of the collusion with Israel .....For much of the Foreign Office it was business as usual for both the duration of the war and in the immediate aftermath with Israel ... during the war Israel was officially referred to as an enemy..." Ibid, pp.63-5

<sup>334</sup> Ibid, p.77

Throughout the 1950s and 60s the TUC, which was well respected in international trade unions affairs vied with the American unions for the leadership of the ICFTU, the international body for democratic free trade unions which had been formed in 1949 when the TUC and others left the Russian dominated WFTU. The TUC's delegation to the ICFTU throughout the 1950s was led its General Secretary, Sir Victor Tewson, who had been involved with the Foreign Office since Bevin's time and was known not to favour one side over the other in the Israeli-Arab conflict. Under his leadership, the TUC actively supported British government Middle East policy at the ICFTU. While Tewson was in charge, the TUC was indifferent to the Histadrut and for most of the 1950s, relations mirrored Anglo-Israel relations. Whereas Anglo-Israel relations improved after 1958, TUC-Histadrut relations did not.

Unlike Gaitskell and his Labour Party colleagues who understood the Arab-Israel conflict and also received regular briefings from the Israelis, the Suez conflict demonstrated the TUC's lack of understanding of the politics of the Middle East. Labour's Middle East policy received support from both the Left and the Right wings of the Party because, whilst supportive of Israel for its social democratic values, the policy also backed Britain's alliance with the United States and her strategic interests in the region.<sup>335</sup> Although the TUC was in regular contact with the Foreign Office, they did not collaborate with the Labour Party on international issues and had no first-hand knowledge of either Israel or Egypt. The result was that they were described by their own government as 'ill informed.'<sup>336</sup>

The Israeli Government along with the Histadrut from 1953 onwards, pursued a very active international policy with two main aims; first, they sought to demonstrate to the world Israel's achievements and, second, to win friends and influence people in countries outside the Arab World. The Histadrut made a fundamental change of direction in international affairs in 1953 when it joined the ICFTU; as previously the Histadrut's international activity had been limited to America and Europe. Confirmation that the ICFTU was important to Israel came from Reuven Barkatt, Head of the Histadrut's Political Department, who told the Histadrut Convention in March 1956, that at a time when Israel had few friends in the world, the

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<sup>335</sup> Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism History of a Divorce*, p.9.

<sup>336</sup> Macleod to Eden, 14 August 1956, TNA: PRO, FO371/82526.

friendly attitude of the labour movements in Western countries was due to Israel's active membership of the ICFTU.<sup>337</sup>

Although the Histadrut had tried desperately hard after Suez to improve relations with the TUC, change only came in 1960 when Tewson retired as TUC General Secretary. A new positive relationship between them began with the appointment of George Woodcock<sup>338</sup> as his replacement, and was aided by the enthusiasm for international affairs and Israel by the new generation of trade union leaders. The appointment of a Histadrut representative in London, coupled with Woodcock's visit to Israel in 1962, the first by a TUC General Secretary, plus the enthusiasm for the Histadrut's work in Africa shown by Woodcock and the Foreign Office, ensured that the 1960s would be a 'golden era' in Histadrut-TUC relations.

Africa was targeted by both the ICFTU and the WFTU between 1956 and 1966 as a key area in their expansion plans for the international labour movement with both organisations offering aid and training packages to local trade union movements. The British and American governments worked closely with the TUC and the AFL-CIO respectively to further these aims<sup>339</sup> using their labour attachés to monitor, the ICFTU, the rise of Arab nationalism, the Arab trade unions and the Histadrut. Throughout this period the TUC liaised with the trade unions in Britain's colonies and helped them get ready for independence.<sup>340</sup>

With the support of the Americans and the Israeli government, the Histadrut worked hard throughout the second half of the 1950s making new connections with the trade union movements in Asia and especially in East and West Africa. This led to the Histadrut, providing aid and training for the African trade unions and helping them prepare for independence. This brought the Histadrut into conflict with Tewson who believed that it was the TUC's role to train the trade unions in Britain's African colonies. It didn't help either that

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<sup>337</sup> Marsh to Greenhough, "The eighth convention of the Histadrut (7/56)", 27 March 1956, TNA: PRO LAB13/449.

<sup>338</sup> For more information see: George Woodcock, (1904–1979)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31854>, accessed 11 Feb 2013]

<sup>339</sup> For more information see: Anthony Carew, 'The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: the Free Trade Union Committee and the CIA', *Labour History*, 39, (1998), 25-42 and Anthony Carew, 'Conflict within the ICFTU: Anti-Communism and Anti-Colonialism in the 1950s', *International Review of Social History*, 41(1996), 147-81.

<sup>340</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *Never had it so good: a history of Britain from Suez to the Beatles*, (London: Little, Brown, 2005), pp.260-89.

Tewson identified the Histadrut as a close ally of the AFL-CIO, with whom he regularly clashed with at the ICFTU.

### **The build up to Suez**

By 1956 Britain was beginning to enjoy the benefits of the legacy of the Attlee government, the welfare state, full employment, the general recognition of the trade unions and British involvement in the Cold War. The Parliamentary Labour Party had also changed and was now a mixture of working class trade unionists and middle class intellectuals. Although the majority of trade unions were still led by colleagues of Bevin and Deakin, new leaders on the Left such as Frank Cousins were starting to emerge with new radical ideas.<sup>341</sup> The primary concern of the trade unions throughout the fifties, apart from support for nuclear disarmament,<sup>342</sup> were domestic economic issues. They had little involvement in international issues.

Even though Labour lost the 1951 general election, the TUC's relations with the Conservative government remained unchanged as Prime Minister Churchill and his Minister of Labour, Walter Monckton, continued to consult and collaborate with the TUC as frequently as had the previous Labour government because the General Council were not prepared to relinquish over ten years of consultation and cooperation with the government.<sup>343</sup> The TUC General Council continued to be dominated by the cabal of union leaders led by Arthur Deakin who were powerful enough to dictate TUC policy. They were solidly behind the Labour Party and openly hostile to the Communists.<sup>344</sup> This status quo continued until Deakin died in May 1955, only a few weeks after Churchill and Monckton had resigned from the Government. The outcome was that Eden's government adopted a harder line towards the TUC and with Deakin's death the consensus within the General Council disappeared once Frank Cousins, the new General Secretary of the TGWU joined the General Council as his left wing views

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<sup>341</sup> For a review of life in Britain in 1956 see Sandbrook, *Never had it so good: a history of Britain from Suez to the Beatles*, pp.29-62.

<sup>342</sup> For a review of the campaign for nuclear disarmament, *Ibid*, pp245-59.

<sup>343</sup> "Post-war governments treated the TUC as if it was an estate of the Realm, an impressive and respected organisation that could act as a partner or at least an ally of the state." Robert Taylor, *The Trade Union Question in British Politics; Government and the Unions since 1945*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p.12.

<sup>344</sup> The group consisted of Arthur Deakin, General Secretary of the TGWU, Sir William Lawther, President of the Miners union, Tom Williamson, General Secretary of the NUGMW and Lincoln Evans, General Secretary of the ISTC. The TGWU, the Miners and the NUGMW accounted for 40% of the votes at the TUC Congress. Lovell, John and Roberts B.C, *A Short History of the TUC*, (London: Macmillan 1980), p.162.

were consistently at odds with the other members of the Council.<sup>345</sup> Although by middle of the 1950s, the Labour party had moved away from many Left wing policies, Left wing union support for the party was split into three distinct groups of unions. The largest group<sup>346</sup> often disagreed with the party but almost always gave its support. The second group,<sup>347</sup> the extreme Left, usually voted together but were sharply divided on issues such as communist affiliation to the Labour party, Hungary and nuclear disarmament. The third group,<sup>348</sup> the moderate Left, consistently voted against the party and with the collapse of Bevanism split into either consistent opposition or regular support for the party. However the majority of votes at Labour party conferences remained in the hands of the big six unions.<sup>349</sup>

Throughout this period the Foreign Office were concerned about the rapid industrialisation of the Middle East and any possible inroads the communists could make within the Arab labour movements. It was to the government's advantage that Tewson and the TUC continued to back Britain's need for good relations with the Arab world, resulting in minimal connections with Israel and the Histadrut. It made no difference that the Histadrut was a member of the ICFTU executive or the leading labour movement in the region. The British government's awareness of Israel's political and economic problems was heightened by a series of reports written by Marsh, the British labour attaché in Tel Aviv. He noted that the Histadrut was the most powerful institution in Israel employing about 25% of the country's wage earners and producing a somewhat larger proportion of its national income.<sup>350</sup> In August, after Egypt's

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<sup>345</sup> Lewis Minkin, *The Labour Party Conference: a study in the politics of intra-party democracy*, (London: Allen Lane, 1978), pp.82-3, and Ross M, Martin, *TUC: The Growth of a Pressure Group, 1868-1976*, (Oxford: OUP, 1980), p.300.

<sup>346</sup> The group consisted of the National union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, National Society of Pottery Workers, Prudential Staff Union, National Association of Theatrical and Kine Employees and the Scottish Bakers union. Martin Harrison, *Trade Unions and the Labour Party since 1945*, (London: George Allen, 1960), p.213.

<sup>347</sup>The group consisted of the Electrical Trades Union, Nation Union of Vehicle Builders, Constructional Engineering Union, Amalgamated Union of Foundry Workers, National Union of Metal Mechanics, United Society of Boilermakers, Shipbuilders and Structural Workers, Chemical workers union and the Fire Brigades Union. *Ibid*, p.213.

<sup>348</sup>The most important were the AEU, NUR, USDAW, National Union of Furniture Trade Operatives, Plumbing Trades Union, Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen and the National Union of Garment workers. *Ibid*, p.213.

<sup>349</sup> TGWU, NUM, AEU, NUGMW, USDAW and the NUR. *Ibid*, pp.129-58.

<sup>350</sup> The British Embassy Tel Aviv to the Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, 17 July 1956 and 'The Growth of the Histadrut, its relations with Mapai and the Israel State (9/56)', Marsh to Greenhough, 13 July 1956. A great deal of praise was given to Marsh by the Foreign Office for his excellent reports on the economic situation, wages policy and the strikes in Israel. "His report on the growth of the Histadrut was labelled as a very valuable aid to

nationalisation of the Suez canal, Marsh commented that "Israel believes herself at present to be in greater danger than at any time since 1948."<sup>351</sup>

The ICFTU's plans for a regional office in Lebanon were enthusiastically supported by the Foreign Office because their own plans for the Middle East were broadly similar to that of the ICFTU. The Foreign Office, which had a reputation for being strongly pro-Arab,<sup>352</sup> were unhappy with the Histadrut's continued opposition to an ICFTU regional office.<sup>353</sup> After Barber, the British labour attaché in Brussels, had reported in January 1956, that the Israelis and Jewish American union leaders were very touchy on the subject of the Beirut office,<sup>354</sup> an official at the Foreign Office noted that the prospects for the ICFTU in the region were not bright because of the hold "the American Jews and the Israelis had over the foreign policies of the American labour movement" which effectively antagonised the Arabs, preventing any ICFTU action which might be regarded as deferring to Arab opinion.<sup>355</sup> Barber then wrote that the ICFTU were worried that Egypt's moves to link the Arab labour movements of North Africa were another anti-Israel move, as the ICFTU, which was also trying to forge links in the region, might now face a hopeless situation that could exclude it indefinitely from these Arab countries.<sup>356</sup> Barber who frequently knew more than the TUC about the business of the ICFTU and its intentions in the Middle East, was often reluctant, like the Foreign Office to

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understanding the position and influence of this organisation." Undated file comment, all TNA:PRO, LAB13/1181.

<sup>351</sup> Marsh to Greenhough, "Problems of Policy and leadership in the Israel Labour Party (10/56)", 23 August 1956, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1181.

<sup>352</sup> A Labour Party delegation, which met with Prime Minister Macmillan, discussed Israel's problems including the supply of arms to Egypt and Israel came away from the meeting with the impression that "Macmillan and the Foreign Office had a strong pro-Arab and anti-Israel bias." Report of the Labour Party deputation to the Foreign Secretary on 29 November 1955, 2 January 1956, The Labour Party archives at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, LP/ID 1955 Palestine/Israel, ME, Palestine, Israel. (Hereafter cited as LHASC).

<sup>353</sup> Report of the December 1955 ICFTU Executive committee meeting. The Israelis also opposed the proposal to split the Middle East region into Arab and non-Arab countries. Greenhough report to all Labour Attachés, 10 January 1956, TNA: PRO, LAB13/1147.

<sup>354</sup> Barber to Greenhough, 30 January 1956, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1149.

<sup>355</sup> Bulpitt file note, 7 February 1956. Barber also wrote that the ICFTU has attempted to pacify the Histadrut's suspicions about ICFTU activities in the Middle East by asking it to carry out a mission for the ICFTU in Iran. Barber to Greenhough, 30 January 1956, both TNA:PRO, LAB13/1149.

<sup>356</sup> Barber to Greenhough, 9 February 1956, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1149.

share information with the TUC.<sup>357</sup> It is clear that the Foreign Office used the TUC for their own ends, while being totally aware of Tewson's limitations and lack of ability. Their concerns about the region were reinforced by an Ministry of Labour report published in March which concluded that the combination of nationalism and pan-Arabism along with the suspicion of Western countries ensured there was no easy solution of the problem of establishing sound trade unions in the region. The situation in the region was not helped by the recent Russian diplomatic offensive in the Arab countries which involved an intensification of WFTU propaganda.<sup>358</sup>

At their meeting in early July 1956, the ICFTU Executive committee decided to accept an invitation from the Histadrut to send a delegation to Israel.<sup>359</sup> Barkatt told Marsh, the British labour attaché, after the ICFTU meeting that he had been happy with the discussion on the Middle East by the Executive, especially as a paper on the Middle East situation, prepared by the secretariat, had been withdrawn.<sup>360</sup> Greenhough, at the MOL, however, thought it odd that Barkatt should be "happy" with the situation as the inability of the ICFTU "to make any progress would cause alarm and despondency in any ICFTU member, particularly one from Israel."<sup>361</sup> He obviously did not know that Barkatt's priority was to defend Israel and avoid any discussions that would invite criticism of Israel. Barkatt told Elath that although he hadn't originally supported inviting the ICFTU to Israel, he now thought that it was the least

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<sup>357</sup> Barber asked that the contents of the letter are not shared with the TUC. Barber to Greenhough, 13 February 1956, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1149.

<sup>358</sup> The Ministry of Labour report which was based mainly on information from Labour Attachés, the ILO and the ICFTU, noted that with the exception of Israel, they could not rely on any information received from governments or the unions concerning trade union strength and organisation. The strengths and weaknesses of trade unions in all the Arab states and Israel were discussed as well as the future prospects for the Arab Confederation of Labour. The principal difficulties the ICFTU had to contend with included; the absence of a sound industrial basis for trade unionism in the Arab States, a general suspicion that the ICFTU was the agent of the West and Western Governments and the conviction of the Arab countries that the ICFTU was dominated by pro-Israel supporters; a belief reinforced by the unconcealed sympathies of the U.S. trade unions. The original Overseas Information Paper, 'ICFTU and the Trade Unions in the Middle East', 28 March 1956, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1149, was updated in September 1956 and re-issued with 'ICFTU' missing from the original title. Overseas Information Paper Ho.9, 'Trade Unions in the Middle East' 1 September, 1956, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1229.

<sup>359</sup> Minutes of the ICFTU Executive Board meeting held in Brussels, 2-7 July 1956, ISSH:ICFTU, 60.

<sup>360</sup> Barkatt also said that "the recent ICFFTU conference in Brussels was one of disappointment and uneasiness at the present lack of vigour in the organisation.....He felt that the national trade union movements in the Western countries were all, to some degree, in trouble and that even the T.U.C. is not an exception." Marsh to Greenhough, 26 July 1956, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1147.

<sup>361</sup> Greenhough file note, 23 August 1956, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1147.



that the ICFTU could do after everything that they had put the Histadrut through. However it appeared to him that the ICFTU were now trying to cancel the invitation as it could jeopardise their efforts with the Arab unions.<sup>362</sup> Despite the Histadrut's success in thwarting Oldenbroek's plans for a Middle East office and his attempts to bypass the Histadrut rather than consult with them, the Israelis now faced a new problem; Oldenbroek and the Americans were "running" after the Arab trade unions. In September Barkatt discussed with Namir, the Histadrut General Secretary, how best to deal with the "Arab issue" at future Executive meetings. They anticipated that the developments over Suez might cool or even postpone discussions but as a precaution they decided to activate their friends in the American workers' movement.<sup>363</sup>

As a result of the pressures which were building in the Arab world, ensuing from the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and Egypt's aspirations to lead the Arab Federation of Labour,<sup>364</sup> the ICFTU received an urgent request, in late August, from its Tunisian affiliate to issue a statement of solidarity with Egypt and Arab aspirations.<sup>365</sup> Conscious of the ICFTU's desire for links with the Arab unions and with the knowledge that the WFTU had already issued a statement supporting Egypt, Oldenbroek believed that the ICFTU should take a position and immediately sent out a draft statement asking for comments.<sup>366</sup> The statement emphasised the need to find a solution for freedom of passage through the Suez Canal, and the need for all interested parties "to live together in peace with one another as good neighbours." It overlooked, as had others, that when it came to freedom of passage Egypt had not allowed Israeli ships to use the canal. Since the statement did not criticise British actions over the canal, Tewson agreed with the statement and suggested only a slight change, that in the sentence demanding that any agreement on the Suez Canal should be under the auspices and guidance of the United Nations, the words "under the auspices" should be replaced by the phrase "associated with". After receiving replies from several others, Oldenbroek decided that

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<sup>362</sup> Barkatt to Eliahu Elath, 12 August 1956, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-14A.

<sup>363</sup> Namir to Barkatt, 15 September 1956 and Barkatt to Namir, 30 September 1956, (both Hebrew original), both PLILMR, IV-104-1296-5.

<sup>364</sup> Britain's labour attaché in Beirut, wrote "Communist organisations and newspapers in Arab Countries are hailing Nasser's action as a blow struck for Arab nationalism which they profess to support. In the name of this nationalism they are applauding the Arab Federation of Labour and attacking the ICFTU as a tool of imperialism." Hird to Greenhough, 14 August 1956, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1149.

<sup>365</sup> Barber to Greenhough, 20 August 1956, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1149.

<sup>366</sup> ICFTU Circular ES/25(1956), 20 August 1956, ISSH:ICFTU, 476.

the ICFTU was unable to issue a statement at that time as there were “considerable differences of opinion” but left himself the option of reactivating the matter if necessary.<sup>367</sup>

Throughout the first half of 1956 the rising tension in the Middle East caused by the Egypt's alignment with Russia was at the centre of all contacts and correspondence between the British labour movement and the Israeli embassy in London, the Israeli Labour party, Mapai, and the Histadrut.<sup>368</sup> Elath, the Israeli ambassador met regularly with Hugh Gaitskell, the Labour opposition leader throughout the year and sent over twenty reports of meetings with Gaitskell and other members of the Shadow Cabinet to Jerusalem.<sup>369</sup> Their relationship with the Labour party was so good<sup>370</sup> that when Labour were about to send another deputation to see the Foreign Secretary, they first asked Mapai if they had any special points that should be made at the meeting.<sup>371</sup>

A key figure in the Labour Party and close confidant of Gaitskell was Sam Watson, the Durham miners' leader and chairman of the Labour party's international committee.<sup>372</sup> It was due to the efforts of Watson, who was a keen supporter of Israel, and Elath that the Labour party at that time was the most pro-Israel of all the political parties. Elath could also call on support from the Socialist International, the worldwide organisation of social democratic, socialist and labour parties which was based in London. Apart from Watson, the only other union leader the Israelis could count on was Solomon Lever, the General Secretary of the London Jewish Bakers' Union, one of the smallest unions affiliated to the TUC. Lever was willing to speak on behalf of Israel at TUC Congress and submit, if necessary, motions to

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<sup>367</sup> For full details of the replies received see point 12, agenda Item 1(a): Trade Union Action on Hungary and the Middle East, ICFTU Executive Board, Brussels, 26-30 November 1956, 18EB/12(i), ISSH:ICFTU, 63.

<sup>368</sup> The Histadrut wrote to all ICFTU affiliates including the TUC explaining the dangers for peace of the Czech arms deal with Egypt and the alignment of Egypt with Russia on 5 November 1955, MRC, MSS292/956.9/6 and 9 January 1956, ISSH:ICFTU, 3503.

<sup>369</sup> These reports include a personal message from Gaitskell to Ben Gurion who assured him of Labour's support for Israel and help with buying arms. But Gaitskell asked that Israel stop the reprisal actions that "lead to our condemnation in the UN and increase the tension in the area" 24 January 1956, ISA, HZ 329/8.

<sup>370</sup> The Foreign Office was also aware of the close relationship between the embassy and the Labour party. See Memo of meeting between Sir Ian Kirkpatrick, Foreign Office and the Israeli Ambassador, 15 August 1956, TNA:PRO, FO371/8252.

<sup>371</sup> Ericsson, the Labour Party International Secretary, to Morrat, 4 May 1956, LHASC, LP/ID 1956 ME, Palestine, Israel.

<sup>372</sup> Frank Cousins considered Watson to be one the most influential figures in the party. Geoffrey Goodman, *The Awkward Warrior; Frank Cousins: His Life and Times*, (London: Davis -Poynter, 1979), pp.136-7.

Congress. All the effort that Bar Tal, the Israeli Labour attaché, who had returned to Israel in 1954, had put into building relationships with the unions had not been followed up as the TUC was now very reticent towards the Histadrut.

Apart from receiving a letter from the Histadrut in January 1956, which explained Israeli concerns about the Egyptian arms deal, the TUC International committee did not discuss the mounting tension in the Middle East until August by which time Nasser had nationalised the Suez canal.<sup>373</sup> Schneier Levenberg who, as UK representative for Mapai, and the Embassy's link with the Labour Party, was also their link with the Socialist International.<sup>374</sup> Both Mapai and the British Labour Party supported the Socialist International, but for different reasons. Although the Socialist International had very little real influence in world affairs it was one of the few international bodies at Israel's disposal for strengthening their position internationally, in Europe, America, Asia and Africa.<sup>375</sup> In February 1956, the Socialist International adopted, with Levenberg and Watson's support, the British and Norwegian Labour Parties resolution on the growing tension in the Middle East.<sup>376</sup>

### **The TUC and Suez**

Two weeks after the Suez canal had been nationalised, the British government felt it necessary to consult with the unions and the TUC, not only because of their immense power base within the Labour party but because of the possibility of industrial action as part of their opposition to government plans to retake control of the canal by force. Ian Macleod, the Minister of Labour, met with Tewson, who told him that the TUC Congress in September was likely to pass an emergency resolution on the Suez situation and that although there had been no discussion or consultation, he thought that the TUC would follow Labour Party policy, while insisting that the Government should refer the nationalisation of the Suez canal

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<sup>373</sup> Histadrut letter to TUC, 9 January 1956, MRC, MSS292/956.9/6.

<sup>374</sup> Throughout the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s Socialist International saw the State of Israel as living proof that the ideals of social democracy were attainable and as a result supported her position in the Middle East conflict. For more information see; Yoram Peri, 'The fall from favour: Israel and the Socialist International', *Institute of Jewish Affairs research report*, 21 and 22, (1980).

<sup>375</sup> Elath to Sharett, Israel Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1 February 1956, (Hebrew original), IV-219A -1-14A.

<sup>376</sup> The resolution noted the growing tension in the Middle East and urged all socialist parties to urge their governments that Israel be allowed the necessary arms for self-defence. See the Resolution adopted by the Council of the Socialist International, Zurich, 2-4 March 1956, LSE, Levenberg G/5/2. Marsh to Greenhough, 14 March 1956, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1181.

to the UN and not use force to retake the canal.<sup>377</sup> Tewson thought it would be difficult to draft an acceptable resolution which "provided for action outside the United Nations."<sup>378</sup> The position of the TGWU and Frank Cousins, Macleod reported, was crucial if the Left wing unions united to oppose the use of force in any circumstances. He recommended that the TUC be properly briefed as he thought that Tewson was "very feeble and ill-informed about Suez."<sup>379</sup> The Cabinet decided that the Prime Minister would meet with a TUC delegation on 20 August in order to ensure that both the resolution and debate would not embarrass the government.<sup>380</sup> The TUC President, Charles Geddes, who led the delegation, sent Eden a personal letter afterwards saying that the TUC International committee had reached agreement on the need for a firm and positive General Council statement and requested Eden not to let the government say anything that could undermine the TUC's statement.<sup>381</sup>

Both the General Council and the International Committee were able to refer in their discussions to a comprehensive TUC report on the Suez crisis which dealt with the political and trade implications for the United Kingdom.<sup>382</sup> The only mention of Israel in the report referred to the 1950 Egyptian decision to impose a blockade on Israeli shipping to stop Israel receiving oil through the canal. The General Council was split between the older members on the Right, led by Geddes, who preferred not to have a motion at all, or one which was so uncritical of Government policy that it made no difference, and the younger members on the Left led by Alan Birch of the Union of Shop Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) who took the view that Britain must refer the dispute to the Security Council. Birch threatened to put down a hostile amendment if the General Council sponsored a motion which supported the government's actions.<sup>383</sup> Eventually on 30 August, after hours of discussion the Right-

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<sup>377</sup>Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the world Vol.2 Labour's foreign policy since 1951*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp.34-8.

<sup>378</sup> British Government Cabinet minutes, 14 August 1956, TNA:PRO, Prem11/1172.

<sup>379</sup> Macleod wrote that Tewson believed Britain was more isolated than it actually was. Macleod to Eden, 14 August 1956, TNA:PRO, FO371/82526.

<sup>380</sup> Suez Canal, Cabinet Secretaries' notebooks, 14 August 1956, TNA:PRO, CAB195/15.

<sup>381</sup> Geddes to Eden, 28 August 1956, TNA:PRO, PREM11/1172.

<sup>382</sup> TUC report No11/1 30, 'The Suez Crisis', 30 August 1956, MRC, MSS292/901/12.

<sup>383</sup> 'Labour's complicated position', *The Observer*, 2 September 1956, p.7. and 'Congress Commentary', *Tribune*, 14 September 1956.

wingers eventually agreed to a compromise emergency motion to be put to Congress. The motion was certainly not dynamic or forceful but it told the Government that, if the Cairo talks broke down, “force should not be used until the question has been referred to the United Nations and with its consent.”<sup>384</sup> The Congress debate lasted over an hour and delegates voted unanimously in favour of the resolution. The case for Israel was put by Solomon Lever from the Jewish Bakers union, who said that Nasser had sworn to wipe Israel off the map and called on the General Council to do their utmost not to permit it. Other speakers told Congress that Israel was worthy of the TUC's support and that peace depended on the Arab states recognising Israel. Later that day delegates applauded the announcement that the Government had decided to recall Parliament.<sup>385</sup>

Political commentators noted afterwards that although Congress had been united over Suez and their opposition to the Government's economic policies, neither the General Council nor the General Secretary had shown any signs of leadership.<sup>386</sup> Four days later Tewson sent a copy of the resolution to Eden<sup>387</sup> which was discussed the following day by the Cabinet. Their chief concern was how would the unions, especially the dockworkers and the mineworkers, would react if it came to military action. Macleod was asked to ascertain the likelihood of serious industrial trouble if Britain invaded Egypt.<sup>388</sup>

The effect of the government's Suez invasion plans was to unite the Labour Party behind Gaitskell's anti-war campaign. Labour's strong support for Israel was due to its links with the Israeli leadership and an awareness of the potentially damaging political effect of adopting an anti-Israel policy given the long relationship that had existed between Jews and the party. It did not have comparable links at the time with Arab nationalists.<sup>389</sup> The Labour Party felt that

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<sup>384</sup> TUC emergency motion on Suez see 1956 TUC annual report p 433

<sup>385</sup> For more information on the TUC emergency motion, and the debate on Suez, see LMU, TUC annual report 1956, pp.433-441 and p.451.

<sup>386</sup> “During the last 12 months the General Council of the TUC appear to have abdicated from the leadership of the trade union movement. On the major issues of the day they have remained silent.....the truth is the old General Council died with Deakin....there has perhaps been a greater dependence than before on initiative from the staff but Sir Vincent Tewson, the General Secretary has not the qualities of a leader....” “Lack of guidance from the TUC General Council”, *The Times*, 30 July 1956. p.6.

<sup>387</sup> Tewson told Eden that the General Council had not yet had discussed the resolution. Tewson to Eden, 10 September 1956, TNA:PRO, PREM11/1172.

<sup>388</sup> Cabinet minutes 11 September 1956, TNA:PRO, PREM11/1172.

<sup>389</sup> June Edmunds, *The Left and Israel, party policy change and internal democracy*, 2000), p.61.

protests against military action should be kept strictly within the law, and jointly organised, with the TUC, nationwide anti-war protests including a rally in Trafalgar Square as well as sixty local meetings.<sup>390</sup> The leadership were also aware that a high proportion of the Labour Party's working class supporters approved of the Suez intervention and that no resolutions were adopted at local and national level at branch level either in the party or the unions which directly supported the Eden government's actions.<sup>391</sup> In Parliament, 81 Labour MP's signed a pro-Israel early day motion.<sup>392</sup>

Once military action began, the National Council of Labour, representing the Labour Party, the TUC and the Co-operative movement, issued a statement which not only condemned the invasion but also urged workers not to take industrial action.<sup>393</sup> The government's concerns about industrial action were justified, but protests were confined to local and regional levels. They included the call from the Sheffield district committee of the AEU for a total stoppage of the engineering industry, the leaders of the Fire Brigades union who called for a national strike, whilst the South Wales area of the Mineworkers union rejected a call for industrial action.<sup>394</sup> The only strike action that took place was at Crawley when 1200 workers attended a protest meeting to urge for an immediate ceasefire.<sup>395</sup>

### **The ICFTU and Suez**

On 31 October the ICFTU issued a statement which protested against the military action in the Middle East and proposed an equitable solution of the Israel-Arab problem.<sup>396</sup> The

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<sup>390</sup> 'Law, Not War', *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 November 1956, p.11.

<sup>391</sup> Martin Harrison, *Trade unions and the Labour party since 1945*, p.122.

<sup>392</sup> June Edmunds, *The Left and Israel, party policy change and internal democracy*, 2000), p.175-6.

<sup>393</sup> National Council of Labour statement, 1 November 1956, LHASC, uncatalogued papers, Box 6 file 5, NCL Minutes and Papers, 20 October 1954-November 1956.

<sup>394</sup> 'Sign Protest', *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 November 1956, p.9.

<sup>395</sup> 'Work stopped for protest over Suez policy', *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 November 1956, p.4.

<sup>396</sup> The statement urged affiliates to do everything possible to defend freedom and to prevent war spreading by making representations to their Governments to support UN resolutions; and action for stopping Soviet armed intervention in Hungary and for the immediate end to hostilities in Middle East. ICFTU press release, 5 November 1956, TNA:PRO, FO371/122384.

Following the lead of the Austrian and Italian trade unions, Oldenbroek sent telegrams to all affiliates urging them to join in a worldwide workers' protest against war and foreign intervention by calling upon all workers to stop work if possible on 8 November for five minutes before noon. ICFTU circular No17(1956), 6 November 1956, ISSH:ICFTU, 359a.

Hungarian revolution, which took place at the same time as the Suez intervention was more important for the ICFTU, because it had taken place in Europe, involved working class freedom, trade union rights and democracy. The Suez crisis on the other hand, was seen by the ICFTU partly as Israel's fight for survival and for recognition by her neighbours. At its meeting at the end of November, the ICFTU Executive committee discussed a report on the ICFTU's reaction to events in Hungary and the Middle East. The report concentrated mainly on Hungary and possible repercussions with regard to Russia and the Cold War. It also expressed the hope that the UN could find a genuine solution to the problems of the Middle East including the Suez Canal and Israeli-Arab relations. The debate on the report unequivocally condemned the Soviet intervention in Hungary, yet the discussions on the Middle East were muted by comparison.<sup>397</sup> At the back of everyone's mind was the fear of a third World War. The Anglo-French invasion, which had divided the democratic world, was hardly mentioned even though the report described their military action in Egypt as "absolutely inexcusable."<sup>398</sup> The Arab and Muslim states were understandably more interested in the Middle East than Hungary and viewed Israel's involvement as secondary to the imperialist military action by Britain and France. Throughout the crisis, the TUC had kept the ICFTU informed of their opposition to military action. In the debate, Sir Charles Geddes, demanded that every effort be made to achieve peace between Israel and Arabs and that a way should be found to guarantee Israel's continued existence.<sup>399</sup>

The Histadrut felt that Israel's actions had attracted a great deal of sympathy and understanding from all sides and that the British had been more sympathetic towards them compared with three years earlier in Copenhagen.<sup>400</sup> The Histadrut recognised however that the ICFTU's problem in future was how it was going to balance the Histadrut's needs with ICFTU plans for growth in the Middle East. The challenge for the Histadrut would be how to

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<sup>397</sup> The committee was advised that its affiliates, especially those in Europe, had either supported its day of action or held mass meetings to protest against military action in Hungary and the Middle East. Agenda Item1(a): Trade Union Action on Hungary and the Middle East, ICFTU Executive Board, 26-30 November 1956, 18EB/12(i), 63 ICFTU. Minutes of the ICFTU Executive Board meeting, 26-30 November 1956, 18EB/18 ISSH:ICFTU, 65, pp. 26-8.

<sup>398</sup> Point 34, Agenda Item1(a): Trade Union Action on Hungary and the Middle East, ICFTU Executive Board, 26-30 November 1956, 18EB/12(i), ISSH:ICFTU, 63.

<sup>399</sup> Yareblum's report to the Histadrut of the ICFTU Executive Board meeting, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-44A.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

use their position on the ICFTU executive to make new connections and gain understanding, and support for Israel throughout the world.

The crisis also exposed the ICFTU's shortcomings in the Middle East and North Africa and showed that they would have to work harder in future to gain acceptance especially after the emergence of the Egyptian-led Arab Confederation of Labour and Russian links with Egypt. Two weeks later the ICFTU issued a statement on the Middle East crisis which recognised Egypt's right to nationalise the canal and expressed the hope that the UN would find the basis for a just and durable peace, which included the recognition of Israel and her borders.<sup>401</sup>

### **The CPGB, the Jews and Suez**

The 1956 Suez crisis saw the CPGB adopt a pro-Arab position as a result of its close relations with Russia. The communists saw the nationalisation of the canal as 'Egyptian defiance of western imperialism' and the Anglo-French invasion as evidence of the West's intention to undermine national liberation movements in the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>402</sup> Israel was seen as an imperialist state and as an ally of the West. Although the Labour Party and the CPGB were both opposed to the Suez invasion, Labour clearly indicated that its anti-war stance was not anti-Israel and that its opposition to the war did not mean support for Nasser's nationalist aims. The CPGB joined the anti-war demonstration in Trafalgar Square, along with the Labour Party and the TUC, but explicitly identified itself with Arab nationalism and anti-Zionism.

1956 was a landmark for the Jewish members of the CPGB. Until then, the Soviet authorities' treatment of the Jews had never been openly questioned by the party's Jewish members. Although the NJC had discussed the charges of antisemitism at the time of the Doctors plot in Russia and the Slansky trials in Czechoslovakia, the NJC and the *Jewish Clarion* strenuously denied the accusations - describing them as being part of the Cold War rhetoric. However, in 1956, the party's position on Israel was challenged from within the CPGB by leading Jewish Communists on the NJC who questioned whether the Soviet Union was a safe haven for the Jews. The subsequent revelations of Soviet antisemitism spilt Jewish communists in Britain, with many resigning from the Party. Disillusionment with the Soviet Union as a society free

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<sup>401</sup> ICFTU statement on the crisis in the Middle East, 12 December 1956, ISSH:ICFTU, 65.

<sup>402</sup> June Edmunds, *The Left and Israel, party policy change and internal democracy*, (London: Macmillan, 2000), p.113.



of antisemitism, and the cover-up of the truth about Stalin's anti-Jewish moves, compounded the effect of the upward social mobility of Jews in post-war Britain which made communism less and less of an attractive option.<sup>403</sup> This was the beginning of the end for Jewish communism which by the end of the 1950s ceased to have any significance in Jewish life in the UK.<sup>404</sup>

### **The immediate aftermath**

The Suez fiasco had shown that Britain was no longer a global power and had confirmed Britain's reliance on the USA. Post-Suez, the British government pursued a policy of attempting to rebuild its position and influence in the Arab world and consequently Israel was not given an easy ride by the Foreign Office.<sup>405</sup> Relations remained at a very low ebb until the end of 1957 and were characterised by the Shell Oil decision to stop supplying Israel with Iranian oil and the closure of all its operations in Israel. The affair was resolved not by direct discussion with the Israelis, but by a meeting between the Labour party and the Prime Minister who agreed to under the counter sales.<sup>406</sup> 1958 saw a steady improvement in relations as Britain supplied Israel with jets and artillery. By June, that year, the Foreign Office had started to recognise Israel's positive role in checking and preventing Nasser's expansion in the region. A coup in Iraq had made the government realise that the help and cooperation of Israel was 'strategically vital' to support British interests in the region such as happened in Jordan. Soon after a meeting, in August 1958, between the British and Israeli Foreign Ministers, Britain agreed to supply Centurion tanks to Israel.<sup>407</sup>

Although Suez had reunited the Labour party, the invasions of Suez and Hungary "gave birth to an independent anti-colonialist Left and sounded the death-knell of unthinkable obedience to the Kremlin."<sup>408</sup> In Britain, the changes in the Soviet Union following Stalin's denunciation

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<sup>403</sup> Tony Kushner, 'Jewish Communists in Twentieth-century Britain: the Zaidman collection,' *Labour History Review*, Vol. 55 (1989), pp.66-75 and June Edmunds, *The Left and Israel, party policy change and internal democracy*, pp.125-6.

<sup>404</sup> Stephan Wendehorst, *British Jewry, Zionism, and the Jewish State, 1936-1956*, p.107.

<sup>405</sup> For more information about Anglo-Israel relations 1956-58, see Lochery, *Loaded Dice: The Foreign Office and Israel*, pp.66-83.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid*, pp.73-75.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid*, p.80.

<sup>408</sup> For more information on the New Left see, Colin Shindler, *Israel and the European Left between Solidarity and Delegitimation*, (New York: Continuum, 2012), pp.208-13.

by Khrushchev in 1956 and the crushing of the Hungarian uprising led to the formation of what became known as the New Left. It brought together those members of the Labour movement who rejected the existing Labour Left led by Aneurin Bevan and saw the Suez invasion as an example of imperialism and the supporters of the Communist party, which included many trade unionists, who had disapproved of the Soviet actions.<sup>409</sup>

The Labour Party believed the way forward was without the continued commitment to defences east of Suez.<sup>410</sup> Elath continued to lobby Gaitskell and his shadow cabinet because the Israelis wanted to make sure Labour understood Israel's motives for her strategies and possible actions, which included resolving the Shell Oil affair.<sup>411</sup>

Reuven Barkatt told the Histadrut Convention in March 1956, that the friendly attitude of the labour movements in Western countries was due to Israel's active membership of the ICFTU.<sup>412</sup> Although the Israelis received the outright backing of the American unions and limited support from the ICFTU over Suez, the TUC had remained silent. Even though Israel had joined with Britain in the battle for the canal, nothing had changed. Barkatt knew that relations with the British unions were problematical and needed to be improved. Their failure to build a network of contacts within the TUC and the unions became immediately obvious once Egypt had nationalised the Suez canal. Barkatt first raised his concerns with Elath, in August, saying that the situation was far from satisfactory and that the TUC was being overwhelmingly cautious towards Israel. Elath suggested that while Watson continue to try to persuade the TUC General Council to publish a declaration supportive of Israel, the American unions should be asked to publically support the efforts made on Israel's behalf by the Labour party.<sup>413</sup> What neither Elath or Barkatt admitted was that there was no one on the

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<sup>409</sup> Geoffrey Foote, *The Labour Party's Political Thought: A History*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), p.279.

<sup>410</sup> Rhiannon Vickers, *The Labour Party and the world Vol.2 Labour's foreign policy since 1951*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p.39.

<sup>411</sup> See the report of meetings with Labour MP's Crossman, Greenwood, Wilson, Robens, Griffith, Strauss and Gordon Walker. Israel Embassy to Prime Minister Ben Gurion, 15 November 1956 and instructions for the meeting with Gaitskell and Bevan. A Labour Party delegation, briefed by the Israelis, met with Prime Minister Macmillan to discuss Israel's problems including the supply of arms to Egypt and Israel. Israel Foreign Ministry to Elath, 4 December 1956, and Elath's undated reply to Israel Foreign Ministry, December 1956, ( all Hebrew original), all ISA, HZ329/8 and report of the Labour Party deputation to the Foreign Secretary, H Macmillan on 29 November 1955, 2 January 1956, LHASC, LP/ID 1955 Palestine/Israel, ME, Palestine, Israel.

<sup>412</sup> Marsh to Greenhough, "The Eighth convention of the Histadrut", 27 March 1956, TNA:PRO, LAB13/449.

<sup>413</sup> Elath to Eban, 25 November 1955, ISA, HZ46/5.

General Council apart from Watson who was pro-Israel or, if there were, they were never mentioned. It appears that they had assumed that as the Labour Party and the TUC were part of the same labour movement, the TUC would automatically support the Labour Party in a similar manner to which the Histadrut would support Mapai. As Barkatt had other priorities as Head of the Histadrut International department, relations with the TUC and the unions had been left to the Embassy, the labour attaché and Levenberg, who all seem to have equated friendship with support in times of crisis. But it is still not clear why the obvious difference between the support for Israel by the leaders of the Labour Party and that of the TUC leadership had not been flagged up before.

Although both men continued to lobby for another labour attaché based in London,<sup>414</sup> Barkatt suggested that in the meantime they should work together to try and recreate Elath's successful lobbying of the Labour party within the TUC and the trade unions. The Histadrut was ready, to invite a TUC delegation to visit Israel but only on the condition that the invitation would be accepted, which he thought was unlikely at that time. He also proposed that they should invite people who could influence attitudes on Israel, if not the view of the TUC.<sup>415</sup> Whereas many Labour MPs had visited Israel in the past, very few trade union leaders other than Watson had made the trip.<sup>416</sup> As a first step, Levenberg was asked to make contact with the TUC and in January 1957 he met with Vic Feather, TUC Deputy General Secretary, who told him that although politically the TUC backed Labour party policy, there was a certain amount of internal criticism. Feather assured Levenberg that the TUC was 'fully appreciative of Israel's point of view' and their friendly feelings towards the Histadrut were unchanged.<sup>417</sup> Although Feather was known to be sympathetic to Israel, he appears to have been saying what he thought Levenberg wanted to hear. Levenberg also floated the idea of a visit by a National Council of Labour delegation with Gaitskell, Bevan and Frank Cousins all showing interest in the suggestion.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Barkatt to Elath, 21 September 1956, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-14A and Elath to the Israel Foreign Ministry, 22 November 1956, (Hebrew original), ISA, HZ329/8.

<sup>415</sup> Barkatt to Elath, 12 August 1956, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-14A.

<sup>416</sup> Tom O'Brien MP, who was also the General Secretary of the National Association of Theatre Employees and a member of the TUC International committee accepted an invitation to visit Israel but only in a personal capacity in the autumn of 1956. O'Brien to Tewson, 9 August 1956, MRC, MSS292/956.9/6.

<sup>417</sup> Levenberg to Barkatt, 1 January 1957, PLILMR, IV-208-1-10089.

<sup>418</sup> Levenberg to Barkatt, 23 January 1957, PLILMR, IV-208-1-10089.

In what appears to be part of the same strategy, Marsh, the labour attaché, had contacted Greenhough at the MOL to say that Hayut, the Director of the Histadrut's International Department, had told him that the Histadrut did not have a regular channel of contact with the TUC and that Tewson had blocked the opportunity to build informal relations at ICFTU Executive meetings. Tewson more than likely had not wanted to appear to be friendlier to the Israelis than the Arabs. Marsh pointed out that although the Histadrut had more in common with the TUC than they had with the American unions, relations with the TUC were poor compared with the Americans. Relations had been strengthened in recent years with exchange visits and declarations of support for Israel. Marsh suggested to Greenhough that he make discreet enquiries with the TUC about establishing a direct contact.<sup>419</sup> Greenhough, who had known for some time that the Histadrut were using Marsh rather than the TUC made arrangements for the Histadrut to contact the TUC directly.<sup>420</sup> Because there is no other mention of his intervention in either the TUC or Histadrut archives and in the light of how TUC-Histadrut relations remained cool were during the rest of the 1950s, nothing changed.

In February 1957 the TUC General Council discussed the freedom of passage through the Suez Canal. Although Britain was the biggest user of the canal it is not clear who was responsible for putting this on the agenda. Concern was raised that the earlier blockade by Egypt, of Israeli ships and the ships from other nations trading with Israel including Britain, should not be renewed in the event of Israel complying with the UN resolutions calling for her withdrawal from Sinai. Tewson reported that he had been visited by a representative of Histadrut (probably Barkatt) who was touring Europe, who asked that he write to the UN. He discussed the request with the chairman, but since it came within the "established policy of the Council", he wrote to the UN without further consultation, strongly urging that any solution should effectively safeguard the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba as international waterways open to the shipping of all nations without discrimination.<sup>421</sup> This was an important moment in TUC-Histadrut relations because, at last the TUC had responded

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<sup>419</sup> Ezra Hayut, Director of the Histadrut's International Department, discussed with Marsh the lack of contact between the Histadrut and the TUC. Marsh to Greenhough, 29 January 1957, TNA:PRO, LAB13/450.

<sup>420</sup> Wilson, file note, 22 February 1957, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1255.

<sup>421</sup> Tewson reported that he had been visited by a representative of Histadrut (probably Barkatt) who was touring Europe, who asked that he write to the UN. He discussed the request with the chairman, but since it came within the "established policy of the Council", he wrote to the UN without further consultation. Minutes of the International Committee for 22 February 1957, MRC, MSS.292/901/13 and the International committee report, LMU, TUC Congress 1957 report, pp.200-1

positively to a Histadrut request concerning a political matter rather than a straightforward labour issue. The Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai and the Gaza Strip was only completed in March after they had received international reassurances that the Straits of Tiran were recognised as an international waterway and would be open to Israeli shipping. This development allowed Israel to establish trade links with Asia. The Egyptians, however, refused to open the Suez canal to Israeli ships.<sup>422</sup>

### **The lessons of Suez**

Where did this leave the TUC? Bevin and Deakin had provided strong and decisive leadership for the TUC until 1955, but with their departure, no-one had yet come forward to fill the void. Tewson was clearly not capable of leading. In addition, the close ties on domestic issues that existed between the Labour party and the TUC were absent when it came to foreign affairs. The TUC had been ill-informed about the Middle East and Israel and had little real contact with the Histadrut. Lobbying by the Israeli embassy of the Labour Shadow cabinet, whose natural inclination was to be friendly towards the Jews and Israel, was capitalised on during the Suez crisis especially when there was little or no lobbying from Arab supporters. As a result of his inability to lobby the TUC during the crisis Barkatt had concluded that fresh efforts must be made with the unions, who still held an important and influential role in British society, in order to counter the pro-Arab inclinations of the Foreign Office and the ICFTU. The TUC, under Tewson saw its international role after Suez as active participation in international organisations such as the ICFTU and the ILO and the need for strong and independent trade unions throughout the free world, including those in the soon to be independent countries of the British Commonwealth. The TUC, along with the Labour Party opposed British Government policy over Suez, and supported all efforts to bring peaceful solutions to the problems of the Middle East. Its international work was however severely hampered by a lack of resources and manpower, depending on others such as the Ministry of Labour and the ICFTU to provide training, support and technical assistance.<sup>423</sup> When it came to Israel and the Middle East, Tewson continued to be guided by the Foreign Office, who would, in theory, not do anything that would favour one side over the other and despite the efforts of the Histadrut, kept contact with the Israelis to a minimum.

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<sup>422</sup> For information on Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai and Gaza see Sachar, *A History of Israel: from the Rise of Zionism to our time*, pp.507-514 and Kyle, *Suez*, pp.501-48.

<sup>423</sup> TUC Notes for Sir Alfred Roberts, chairman of the International committee who attended the labour attachés' conference in London, 3 April 1959, MRC, MSS292/900/5.

Rather surprisingly, during the summer of 1958, and out of character with the pro-Arab sentiments shown by the TUC, the General Council endorsed a statement issued by the National Council of Labour on threats to peace in the Middle East.<sup>424</sup> This pledge provided Levenberg with the opportunity to discuss with the International departments of both the Labour Party and the TUC the possibility of a debate on the Middle East at their respective annual conferences. Levenberg drafted a motion to be submitted to the TUC Congress which reiterated Labour party policy whilst taking into account TUC caution and ICFTU plans to gather support in the Arab States. The resolution, which was adopted by Congress was proposed by Solomon Lever from the London Jewish Bakers' union who used the opportunity to promote Israel's desire for peace and her economic progress since independence.<sup>425</sup> The Israelis were extremely pleased when the Labour party conference in October adopted a similar resolution.<sup>426</sup> Levenberg also raised the possibility of sending a TUC delegation to Israel in the light of improving Anglo-Israel relations. He was fobbed off once again with the excuse that even though Tewson and Roberts would like to visit Israel it was unlikely as they were both extremely busy and that there was concern about the political implications such a visit would have on ICFTU aims in the region.<sup>427</sup>

After Suez, Israel's search for diplomatic support had become increasingly important and the Histadrut reassessed its role in Europe. The Israelis had always assumed that they could count on the friendship of the European Labour movement, but by 1958, Barkatt had realised that Europe, as a political force in the world, was becoming more important and that they would have to become more active in Europe as a new generation of leaders emerged.<sup>428</sup> As a result, in September 1958, Hugo Morratt was appointed as the labour attaché at the Israeli Embassy in Brussels to deal initially with the ICFTU. Parker, the British labour attaché in Tel Aviv, reported that the question of Israel appointing a labour attaché in London was still under

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<sup>424</sup> TUC International Committee report on the Middle East, LMU, TUC Congress report 1958, p 219.

<sup>425</sup> Levenberg to Barkatt, 28 August 1958, PLILMR, IV-208-1-10089. Also see TUC to London Jewish Bakers Union, 21 August 1958. ISA, HZ336/8 and the debate on the Middle East, LMU, TUC Congress report 1958, pp.403-6.

<sup>426</sup> Israel embassy to Israel Foreign Ministry, 25 September 1958, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-16B.

<sup>427</sup> Levenberg to Barkatt, 28 August 1958, PLILMR, IV-208-1-10089.

<sup>428</sup> R Barkatt address to the Histadrut's executive committee, PLILMR, Histadrut's executive committee minutes, 4 March 1958, (Hebrew original).

discussion and that since that role was unlikely to be covered by Morratt, Ambassador Elath would continue to cover the British labour movement.<sup>429</sup>

Whilst the TUC had yet to visit Israel, the TUC arranged, with Foreign Office agreement, for Sir Alfred Roberts, chairman of the International committee, to visit the Lebanon in November 1957. The aim of the visit was to help reverse any anti-British feeling which had occurred after Suez as well as boost support for the ICFTU and build links with the TUC.<sup>430</sup> Eighteen months later, Roberts again showed his pro-Arab side, when he supported the ICFTU's plans to invite, as observers, to the next ICFTU Congress, the Egyptian Confederation of Labour (EFL). The Histadrut, along with the AFL-CIO opposed this proposal on the grounds that the ICFTU should not compromise its principles by inviting a government controlled organisation like the EFL.<sup>431</sup> Barkatt, who did not believe that the Egyptians would be willing to join the ICFTU, interpreted ICFTU's move as part of an intensive effort by them and the TUC to woo the Egyptian trade unions whilst at the same time attempting to weaken the Histadrut's position within the ICFTU. Barkatt was also concerned that the TUC's support for the ICFTU's overtures towards the Arabs indicated that relations with the British labour movement were still not good, especially as he was aware of the recent improvement in Anglo-Israeli relations.<sup>432</sup> The TUC seems to have been either very badly advised or Tewson and his colleagues were too set in their ways, because, while the TUC was still trying to improve Britain's relations with the Arab trade unions, the Foreign Office had moved on and were now trying to reduce Nasser's influence in the Arab world as well as being committed to improving relations with Israel.

With the TUC continuing to show interest in the Arab world, Barkatt asked Elath in 1959, to give top priority to persuading the TUC to send a delegation or as an alternative, encourage visits by Sir Alfred Roberts, the International committee chairman or Cousins. He warned Elath against "running after" Roberts as they had made many attempts in the past to take him

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<sup>429</sup> Parker to Marsh at the Brussels Embassy, 23 September 1958, TNA:PRO, LAB13/450.

<sup>430</sup> See letters from the Ministry of Labour to the Labour Attaché in Lebanon, 28 October 1957, the TUC to the Labour Attaché in Lebanon, 29 October 1957, the Foreign Office briefing note for Sir Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, 6 November 1957 and the Labour Attaché in Lebanon to the Ministry of Labour, 30 November 1957, all TNA:PRO, LAB13/1149.

<sup>431</sup> Parker to Ministry of Labour, 31 July 1959, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1353 and ICFTU Executive Board Minutes, 24EB/19, 29 June-3 July 1959, ISSH:ICFTU, 93.

<sup>432</sup> Marsh letter to MOL, 14 July 1959, LAB13/1353. Barkatt letter to Morratt, 7 August 1959, (Hebrew original), and Morratt reply to Barkatt, 18 August 1959, (Hebrew original), both PLILMR, IV-219A-1-32A.

to Israel.<sup>433</sup> The following year, Morrat the Histadrut's European representative, was told that a visit by either Tewson or Roberts was unlikely and he should concentrate instead on other members of the General Council.<sup>434</sup>

### **The Histadrut in Africa – the new beginning for relations with the TUC**

When the ICFTU was established in 1949, it was agreed that it would take the lead in international policy and affiliates would assist agreed programmes and not work independently. However throughout the first ten years of ICFTU's existence, the rivalry and mistrust that existed between the ICFTU's two dominant affiliates, the AFL-CIO and TUC, was at the root of its failure to develop and support international trade unionism, and no more so than in Africa.<sup>435</sup> Trade unionism was at the heart of the independence movements which flourished in 1950s in the British and French colonies in Africa both before and after independence. Not surprisingly the AFL-CIO and TUC disagreed over how the ICFTU should deal with pan-Africanism and communist infiltration in Africa. The TUC, which had worked closely with the British Government and their colonial administrations since the 1930s, knew that Britain's colonial interests and the TUC's interests would be protected with Oldenbroek in charge of the ICFTU's African programmes.<sup>436</sup> The TUC believed that because of their colonial experience in Africa only they understood what was needed for trade union development, which in their opinion, was to build from grass roots upwards in a similar fashion to how the British trade unions had developed a century earlier. This strategy was threatened in 1957 by the AFL-CIO who were looking to invest in African trade unionism as well as encouraging the ICFTU to adopt a more forceful approach. The AFL-CIO and the ICFTU both took the opposite view to the TUC, believing that they needed to recognise and support these emerging labour movements now, even if they lacked an

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<sup>433</sup> Barkatt to Elath, 3 August 1959, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-29C.

<sup>434</sup> Morrat to Hayut, 29 April 1960, and Hayut to Morrat, 6 June 1960, (both Hebrew original), both PLILMR, IV-219A-1-32B.

<sup>435</sup> For a fuller understanding of the differences that existed between the between the TUC and the AFL-CIO see; Anthony Carew, 'Conflict within the ICFTU: Anti-Communism and Anti-Colonialism in the 1950s' and the MOL report "The Conception of Pan Africanism and other influences affecting trade union organisations in Africa", 9 March 1959, Bowers to Woodcock, 14 April 1959, MRC, MSS292/901/15 and the MOL Overseas Information paper No12, 'Pan African Trade unionism', undated, but is thought to be January 1960, TNA:PRO, CO859/1512.

<sup>436</sup> For information about the TUC's colonial policy see, D. I. Davies, 'The Politics of the TUC's Colonial Policy', *Political Quarterly*, 35 (1954), 23-34.



organisational structure. By actively giving their support to the leadership they hoped that the African trade unions would affiliate to the ICFTU rather than the WFTU or an independent African trade union federation. The TUC, although concerned about African nationalism did not believe that communism posed a threat whereas the Americans believed the opposite. It was against this background that the Histadrut, a member of the ICFTU executive, decided with the backing of their government to develop their own aid programmes for Africa. Although the TUC was initially wary of the Histadrut's activities, their development programme proved to be a significant factor in the improvement of relations between the TUC and the Histadrut during the 1960s.

Prior to 1948 the Histadrut's international activity had been limited to America and Europe. Once the State had been established, as it was no longer necessary for them to promote the Zionist movement, it became an active member of the ICFTU making connections, especially in Asia and Africa, building links and understanding for Israel. From 1953 onwards, the Israeli government pursued a very active international policy with two main themes, one to demonstrate to the world the achievements of the State of Israel and the other to win friends and influence people in countries outside the Arab world, as she needed friends whenever she could find them as well as votes at the UN. Israel was also concerned about the spread of Arab nationalism and Russian influence in Africa and her African policy developed through political necessity, once the Arab states had attempted to persuade the non-aligned countries in Asia and Africa to isolate Israel both politically and economically.

One of Israel's first attempts to make friends in the Asian world was in 1952, when she attended the Asian Socialist conference in Rangoon. This led to the establishment of diplomatic relations and from 1954 onwards Israel worked with the Burmese authorities on a variety of medical, agricultural and industrial development projects with the technical support for the majority of these programmes provided by the Histadrut. Once news of these programmes spread, Israel's standing in the Far East improved. Israel's reputation spread in West Africa in a similar manner once it had established relations with Liberia in the early 1950s.<sup>437</sup> Her plans received a setback in 1955, when the Arab nations succeeded in blocking Israel's participation in the Bandung conference, the first big Afro-Asian meeting of ex-

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<sup>437</sup> Israel's attendance at the Rangoon conference was noted by the British Foreign Office. For more information on Israel's development programmes in the third world see: *Israel in the Third World*, ed. by Michael Curtis and Susan Aurelia Gitelson, (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1976), pp.55-119.

colonial states.<sup>438</sup> This decision came as a big shock to Israel's leaders as they had believed they were members of this group, but her relations with the third world were not helped a year later by Israel's participation in the Anglo-French intervention at Suez. In order to challenge the isolation that the Arabs wanted to impose on Israel, from 1956 onwards, both the Histadrut and the Israeli government targeted Africa because Israel was in a unique position to offer her nation building experience in the form of development and technical programmes to the newly independent counties in Africa and Asia. In return, Israel hoped that aid would bring both diplomatic and political support. The Histadrut, with its myriad of enterprises and institutions was set to become the cornerstone of Israel's plans for cooperation and support in the third world.<sup>439</sup>

In spite of the Arab tirade against Israel at Bandung, branding Israel as the bridgehead of western colonialism, four African trade unionists visited Israel in 1957 as guests of the Histadrut.<sup>440</sup> The visit had a tremendous impact on John Tettegah, from Ghana, who announced that the Ghana TUC was to remodel itself on the Histadrut.<sup>441</sup> This decision upset the TUC, who jealously guarded their own interests in Africa and not only felt let down by the Ghanaians, but were also worried about their future relations with them.<sup>442</sup>

The Histadrut attended the ICFTU World Congress which took place in Tunis in July 1957, which was the first time it had been held in the Arab world. Although there had been calls,

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<sup>438</sup> For more information on the Left and Bandung see, Colin Shindler, *Israel and the European Left between Solidarity and Delegitimisation*, pp.202-7

<sup>439</sup> Notes for Barkatt's report about the International department's work to the Histadrut's 8th conference in March 1956, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, 4-11-1950-28.

<sup>440</sup> The four trade unionists who came from Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia and Upper Volta contacted the Histadrut because they were curious why to why the Arab states, with no free trade union movements themselves, should be so biased against the one country in the region with a model trade union movement. Mordechai E. Kreinin, 'Israel and Africa: the Early Years, in *Israel in the Third World*, pp.54-68 and Akiva Eger, 'Histadrut: Pioneer and Pilot Plant for Israel's Cooperation with the Third World', in *Israel in the Third World*, pp.75-80.

<sup>441</sup> John Tettegah made his decision after studying two different forms of centralised trade union structure, the Histadrut and the West German DGB, as well as discussing the matter with the ICFTU. He decided that he would recommend not to send students any longer to Britain for training and "that he had learnt more in eight days in Israel, than he would have done in two years studying trade unionism in any Britain University. He did not know of any country in which the dignity of labour was so highly respected as in Israel, where "the Prime Minister continues to hold a trade union membership card." 'Union leaders to train in Israel', *Ghana Daily Graphic*, 13 August 1957, p.3.

<sup>442</sup> Shortly after Tettegah made his statement about the Histadrut, Magnus George, Tettegah's assistant General Secretary, came to London as guest of the TUC and published some highly complementary remarks about the British movement. As a result of this he was immediately recalled by Tettegah, and was not allowed to complete his visit. The TUC were surprised and resentful, not to say insulted. Lucatz to Barkatt, 7 November 1957, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-18.

prior to the Congress, for Israel's membership to be withdrawn, the Histadrut's attendance did not cause any major problems.<sup>443</sup> Barkatt told Congress that the Histadrut's experience gained in building the state of Israel was similar to that of the emerging nations in Asia and Africa and offered to train and promote co-operatives and trade unions in those nations.<sup>444</sup> The Americans disappointed him as they were busy promoting the work of the ICFTU in the Arab world and had not come to Israel's aid when the Arab states attempted to exclude Israel from the Afro-Asian framework. The attempt failed because several Asian and African delegations opposed the Histadrut's exclusion and created instead an atmosphere of sympathy for Israel. Barkatt was disappointed by the overtures made towards the Arab unions by the Americans and the ICFTU which were supported by some members of the TUC delegation.<sup>445</sup>

After more than four years of vehemently opposing plans for an ICFTU regional office in Beirut, Barkatt announced in November 1957, that the Histadrut had withdrawn its objections to the appointment a regional representative in the Lebanon, provided that his main role would be to assist the development of trade union movements in Arab countries. He asked for a clear undertaking that their representative would maintain regular contact with other affiliated trade union movements in the area, including the Histadrut and the Cypriot unions. Barkatt also emphasised that the Histadrut would welcome the emergence of a genuine free and democratic trade union movements in Arab countries, which could help to establish relations and mutual respect between Israel and the Arab countries.<sup>446</sup> This change in attitude was probably due to a number of factors, including the fact that there already been for several years an ICFTU presence in Beirut. While not wishing to further antagonise the ICFTU,

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<sup>443</sup> The ICFTU affiliate in the Lebanon called on the ICFTU to extend its activities in the Middle East, urgently assign a representative to Beirut, and use the Beirut office as a regional centre. British Labour Attaché in Beirut to the Ministry of Labour, 2 April and 18 June 1957, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1149.

<sup>444</sup> Report of the ICFTU 5th World Congress, 5-13 July 1957, ISSH:ICFTU, ZO474496, pp.427-29.

<sup>445</sup> Barkatt report to Histadrut executive committee about the ICFTU Congress, 5-13 July 1957, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-4-11-1947-9A.

<sup>446</sup> Barkatt reminded the ICFTU why the Histadrut had opposed the establishment of an ICFTU regional office in the first place. He said that it was against the traditions and principles of the international labour movement by having an office in one country when neighbouring countries would not be admitted or allowed to participate and co-operate in the work of the office. Barkatt to Millard ICFTU, 25 November 1957, ISSH:ICFTU 3503. Boudali was ICFTU Special Representative in the Middle East from 1955-57. In 1959, the ICFTU appointed Victor Defalle, as their Special Representative in the Middle East. ICFTU Executive Board minutes, 24EB/8(d) (v), 29 June 1959, ISSH:ICFTU, 90.

Barkatt felt that this gesture might assist towards the ICFTU's acceptance of Histadrut's aid programmes in Africa and Asia.<sup>447</sup>

In 1958, Marsh, the labour attaché in Tel Aviv reported to the MOL about the work of the Histadrut and their relationship with the Ghanaians commenting that "the free trade union movement generally can derive a good deal of benefit from contact between Israel and underdeveloped countries."<sup>448</sup> He admitted that "Israel had a good deal to offer by presenting herself as a model, an alternative adviser to the ex-colonialist powers of the West and as a counter-attraction to communist countries." He also pointed out that the Histadrut could, through its links with other labour movements, act as the agent of the Israeli Government and further the general interests of the country in a way that might be blocked to normal communication, for example in the Muslim States.<sup>449</sup> The ICFTU, was also unhappy that the Histadrut as a member of the ICFTU, was undertaking activities in Africa which the ICFTU felt should be under its auspices. Barkatt justified the Histadrut's actions by saying that the Histadrut's growing links with Ghana allowed them to further the cause of international labour solidarity and to contribute to the growth of free trade unions in Africa as well as acting as a buffer against Soviet efforts at penetration in Africa in general and in Ghana in particular.<sup>450</sup>

As news of Israel's aid programmes spread, more people went to Israel each year to study the Histadrut's blend of trade unionism and commerce. This led to the Histadrut organising a three month study programme in November 1958 for workers from Asian and African countries. Four months later, Parker, Marsh's replacement as labour attaché, reported that the Israeli government fully supported the seminar and that "Israel has proved to herself and to many of the "uncommitted" nations that she has a variety of expert technical knowledge and

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<sup>447</sup> At its next meeting, in January 1958, the ICFTU Executive Board authorised its Secretariat to discuss these activities with the Histadrut whilst stressing the need for close cooperation with the ICFTU Barkatt report to Histadrut executive committee about the ICFTU Congress, 5-13 July 1957, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, 4-11-1947-9A and ICFTU Executive Board minutes, 24EB/16, 10 January 1958, ISSH:ICFTU, 3501.

<sup>448</sup> Report "Labour in Israel", Marsh to the Ministry of Labour, 7 February 1958, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1182. "The Histadrut and the Ghana TUC", Marsh report to the Ministry of Labour, 16th April 1958, TNA:PRO, LAB13/450.

<sup>449</sup> The following month Barkatt asked Marsh for information about the trade union movements in India and Pakistan, as Israel was trying to foster relationships with those countries and did not have diplomatic relations with either country. Marsh to the Labour attaché at the British embassy in Delhi, 13 March 1958, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2291.

<sup>450</sup> Barkatt to ICFTU, 15 January 1958, ISSH:ICFTU, 3503.

experience.” He warned that “The Israelis are still sometimes nervous that we may resent their efforts to take an interest in Africa and I imagine we should want to disabuse them of this idea in as far as we can. At the same time it might be no bad thing to mitigate the stigma of "colonisation" by a display of our own knowledge and experience, as well as our good intentions, on these occasions. This is in addition to taking the chance of channelling Israeli efforts in this field in an acceptable direction.”<sup>451</sup> Tewson, whilst agreeing that African co-operative movements could benefit from Israel's knowledge, queried what exactly the Histadrut seminar had to do with the unions and why they had not invited the East African labour movements.<sup>452</sup> There is no evidence of any reply to this letter. As a probable response to Tewson's letter, Barkatt asked Elath, to discuss the Histadrut's African development programme with the TUC. In order to minimise TUC objections, Elath was told to say that the Histadrut would be willing to share information with the TUC about their activities as well as coordinating with them in areas which overlapped.<sup>453</sup> We do not know if this meeting took place as there is no further information available in either the TUC or the Histadrut archives. Even if an approach was made, it is probable that the TUC would not have been interested as they backed the ICFTU stance on the Histadrut. Nor is it known if the either MOL and the Foreign Office shared with the TUC the regular updates they had received on the Histadrut's African activities.<sup>454</sup> It was a shame if they did not receive copies because Marsh's reports were significant because they were written at a time when the Anglo-Israel relations were just starting to change for the better. The Foreign Office was also greatly impressed by Marsh's reports on the work of the Histadrut and those by Parker, his successor.

Between 1958 and 1961, Britain came under great pressure to grant independence to her colonies, especially in Africa.<sup>455</sup> She also attempted during the same period to counter the Soviet Union's drive for greater influence on the continent. In August 1958, as a result of the

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<sup>451</sup> Parker to Wallis MOL, 16 March 1959, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1352.

<sup>452</sup> Barkatt to Tewson, 16 April 1959, handwritten note to Walter Hood from possibly Marjorie Nicholson, 21 May 1959, Tewson to Barkatt 18 June 1959 to which there is no record of a reply, all MRC, MSS292/956.9/6.

<sup>453</sup> Barkatt to Elath, 3 August 1959, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-29C.

<sup>454</sup> Unsigned and undated file note, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1420.

<sup>455</sup> In 1957 Ghana was granted independence, in 1960, Somaliland, Cyprus and Nigeria became independent: they were joined by Sierra Leone, the British Cameroons and Tanganyika in 1961, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Uganda in 1962, Malaysia, Zanzibar and Kenya in 1963 and in 1964 by Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. For more information about the end of the British Empire see Seabrook, *Never had it so good : a history of Britain from Suez to the Beatles*, pp.261-89.

coup in Iraq and the need to support Jordan, Britain agreed to full co-operation with Israel. It was the start of a new era of Anglo-Israeli relations especially as they both agreed to the need to halt the spread of both Nasser's and Soviet influence in the region.<sup>456</sup>

The Foreign Office wrote to the Colonial Office in January 1959, suggesting that it would be in Britain's interests to help the Israelis in British territories in Africa. The advantages for Britain "in this spread of Israel's contacts and influence" included the Israelis acting as a "counterweight to the spreading of Arab nationalist ideas and Nasser's activities" and as a way of demolishing Israel's suspicion of Britain's hostility towards them. In this way it would increase Britain's "chances of restraining their (*Israel's*) perennial urge to act tough with their neighbours." The Foreign Office concluded by asking that Britain's Colonial Governors, High Commissioners and Foreign Office representatives in Africa to help the Israelis as a general rule.<sup>457</sup> The British Ambassador to Israel also advised Selwyn Lloyd, the Foreign Secretary, that Israel's courtship of both former and current British and French colonial territories in West Africa was by no means a unilateral exercise as there was evidence "that her attentions were eagerly sought by a number of countries because she had a rich fund of technological know-how and experience which the Afro-Asians badly needed for their development", and was "untainted by the suspicion of imperialist ambition." The Ambassador suggested that Lloyd might consider giving the Israelis some discreet encouragement as there did not seem to be any real conflict between British and Israeli policies or tactics in Africa.<sup>458</sup> The endorsement by both the Foreign Office and the Ambassador of Israel's foreign aid programmes is further evidence of the changing balance in Anglo-Israel relations and the transformation of Israel's image post-Suez. Parker, the labour attaché in Israel, who was monitoring the overseas work of the Histadrut suggested that as large numbers of labour and political activists from Britain's African territories were visiting Israel, it provided an ideal opportunity for Britain to assess their thoughts on future political developments in Africa.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> For more information on Anglo-Israel relations for 1957-8, see Lochery, *Loaded Dice: The Foreign Office and Israel*, pp.75-83

<sup>457</sup> Foreign Office to the Colonial Office, 27 January 1959, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1353.

<sup>458</sup> The three month seminar was attended by delegates from Burma, Ceylon, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Japan, Kenya, Nigeria, Thailand and four of the French West African territories. Ambassador Rundall to Selwyn Lloyd, Foreign Secretary, 20 February 1959, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1353.

<sup>459</sup> Parker to MOL and the Foreign Office, 4 September 1959, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1309.

Unfortunately Tewson either ignored or was unaware of these changes in British policy towards Israel and continued to oppose the Histadrut's work.

The Histadrut then announced in March 1959, that it was to establish a liaison centre in Africa to maintain contact with local labour movements as well as acting as an information centre. Parker reported that the real purpose of the centre was yet another part of Israel's campaign for friends amongst independent and dependent countries, and would probably be active in those areas where Israel had no diplomatic representation.<sup>460</sup> Whilst the British Government was eager to find out more about Israel's future plans,<sup>461</sup> it was reported that the ICFTU was concerned that this development could provide the Americans or the British with the justification they needed for their own independent activity.<sup>462</sup> They were concerned about the economic and political benefits that a liaison office would provide, but considered that being directly involved with the local trade unions, the Histadrut would undercut the work of the ICFTU.<sup>463</sup>

The differences between the TUC and the AFL-CIO over the issues of the African colonies resulted in open conflict between them at the sixth ICFTU Congress held in December 1959. Tewson had his own agenda regarding Africa, and opposed any attempts to muscle in on what he regarded as his domain, Britain's African colonies. He also knew that the TUC did not have the necessary resources to run their own programmes and was also concerned that the Americans might start their own independent activities, which would directly affect the ICFTU's own work.<sup>464</sup> His position on African trade unionism was that trade unions should be built from the ground upwards along the lines of the British model, whereas the Americans believed that the way forward was to support national trade union centres.<sup>465</sup> The AFL-CIO thought that that Tewson was being unrealistic because of the TUC's colonial background

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<sup>460</sup> Parker to Wallis, 26 March 1959, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1353,

<sup>461</sup> When the Israeli Labour Minister, Mr Namir, was due to visit London in July 1959, Foggon briefed Mr Ian Macleod, the Colonial Office Minister, and asked him to mention if possible Britain's general interest in Israel's desire to extend her contacts in Africa. Foggon was disappointed when he learnt that Barkatt was not a member of delegation. Foggon, MOL to Buist, Colonial Office, 18 June and 24 June 1959, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1353.

<sup>462</sup> Morratt, Histadrut Brussels, to Barkatt, 15 April 1959, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, 4-11-1952-10B.

<sup>463</sup> Millard ICFTU to Barkatt 8 June 1959 and Barkatt's reply, 19 June 1959, ISSH:ICFTU, 3504.

<sup>464</sup> Bar Yaakov to Barkatt, 27 August 1959, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, 4-11-1947-9A.

<sup>465</sup> For more information see Anthony Carew, 'Conflict within the ICFTU: Anti-Communism and Anti-Colonialism in the 1950s', p.158.

and the current conditions which indicated that the Communists could gain a foothold in Africa as a result of the prevalent anti-colonial outlook. Despite opposition from the TUC the ICFTU agreed to establish an African regional organisation to support the new unions in Africa.<sup>466</sup> Six months later, the Histadrut announced that as a natural development of their existing training schemes, the Afro-Asian Institute of Labour Studies would be established in Israel to run two five-month courses a year each for around 60 trade unionists from Asian and African countries.<sup>467</sup> Financial support for the project would come from the AFL-CIO and the Israeli government.<sup>468</sup> This move was made independently of the Israeli government's own assistance programmes which were now administered by a separate department in the Foreign Ministry. The ICFTU, who were initially unhappy with the proposed college reluctantly agreed to support the plans as they knew that the Histadrut would go ahead with the scheme with or without their approval.<sup>469</sup>

By the end of 1960, both the TUC and the Foreign Office had expressed an interest in the Institute.<sup>470</sup> The Colonial Office commented that if the Institute developed as forecast it could make a significant impact on the shaping of any new trade union structures which might emerge as Britain's African colonies moved towards independence.<sup>471</sup> From then on, Parker's reports about the Institute were of great interest to his colleagues in London. His report about the Institute's second course in 1961 noted, that, by establishing an institute which was independent of the ICFTU, it might achieve more for Western trade unionism than if it were

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<sup>466</sup> For more information about the ICFTU efforts in Africa see, Anthony Carew, *A False Dawn; The WFTU 1945-1949 and Towards a Free Trade Centre : the ICFTU (1949-72) in The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*, (Berlin: Peter Lang 2000), pp.258-270.

<sup>467</sup> Parker to Ministry of Labour, 4 March 1960, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1371. The Histadrut's plans were the subject of articles in the *Washington Daily News* on 15 and 17 March 1960 and the *Economist*, 19 March 1960, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1420.

<sup>468</sup> AFL-CIO financial support was initially set at \$175,000, *AFL-CIO news*, 26 March 1960, MRC, MSS292-956.9-6.

<sup>469</sup> British Labour Attaché in Washington to the Ministry of Labour, 10 March 1960, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1420.

<sup>470</sup> The TUC and the Foreign Office both asked the Histadrut for the names and countries of the course participants. The Histadrut only gave them a list of the countries as they would not divulge the names of the Institute's students to organisations which were not directly connected to the project. Morrat to Hayut, 26 December 1960, (Hebrew original), IV-219A-1-32B, Hayut reply to Morrat, 11 January 1961, (Hebrew original), IV-219A-1-32C.

<sup>471</sup> Colonial Office to Ministry of Labour, 10 May 1960, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1420.

The Colonial Office thought that the information would interest the Governors of Britain's colonies in Africa and asked for a more detailed study to use for comparative purposes as they were looking at training schemes in Britain for trade unions from overseas. MOL to Parker, 6 July 1961, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1503.



associated directly with an ICFTU scheme, as not all students supported the ICFTU in Africa. He also reported that although the AFL-CIO was meeting half the cost of the first year's working, it took no part in the direction or the management of the Institute.<sup>472</sup>

On his return to Israel after visiting East Africa in March 1963, Levin, the Director of the International department of the Histadrut told Marshall that he was beginning to think that the ICFTU was finished in Africa unless it became more flexible and more realistic in its attitude towards African trade unionism. He said that the international and Western trade union movements might not like what they saw in the African trade unions, but African unions, he felt, were beginning to have less and less in common with the ICFTU and Western unions and were turning more and more towards association with other African unions. Wherever he had gone, there had been evidence of Russian influence in the unions, but it was clear, he said, that both the Russians and Chinese understood as little about the Africans as anyone else, and had very little influence there and none of the unions were communist. Levin had concluded that the training facilities provided by the West for African union officials in future should be in situ rather than outside Africa. The Histadrut, Levin said, should encourage African trade unions to ask for the services of Israeli trade union experts, rather than send their officials to the Afro-Asian Institute.<sup>473</sup>

The result of the ever increasing expansion of Israel's assistance to the third world, meant that by 1966, 28 countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia had signed technical aid and co-operation agreements with Israel, Israeli experts were working in 62 countries and students from 80 countries studying in Israel.<sup>474</sup> Her success was summed up by a British Foreign Office official who wrote "Israel has either given some form of aid to, or opened negotiations on aid with, most newly independent countries in Africa. Israeli assistance has attractions for African countries since she has no colonial associations, has won her independence very

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<sup>472</sup> Parker to MOL, 14 August 1961, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1503.

<sup>473</sup> Marshall to MOL, 29 December 1964, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2006. Marshall reported that the British labour attaché in Dakar had suggested that since the Togolese trade unions request for a British trade unionist in to run seminars in Togo was unlikely to be fulfilled, it should be passed onto the Histadrut who, unlike the TUC, had their own French speakers. British Labour Attaché Dakar to MOL, 14 January 1965, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2006.

<sup>474</sup> Marshall report "Israeli Technical assistance" to MOL, 28 March 1966, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2445.

recently, and has successfully created a modern state and an impressive defence force by methods applicable to Africa.”<sup>475</sup>

### **The 1960s, a new era in TUC – Histadrut relations**

Two significant decisions were made in 1960, which were both instrumental in improving TUC-Histadrut relations over the next decade. The first was made by the Histadrut, when in March 1960, they decided to open a European office in London in order to strengthen contacts with the British and European labour movements. London was chosen because the majority of the leaders of the international organisations and trade federations were Europeans and based there.<sup>476</sup> The Histadrut had decided to present Israel’s case themselves rather than continue to depend on the Israeli embassy, as recent developments at the ICFTU with their overtures towards the Arab unions, had proved once again to them that they should not neglect Europe. The second decision came in September 1960, when George Woodcock was appointed TUC General Secretary. Woodcock, who had no previous experience of international affairs, decided that the TUC would, in future, only deal with issues which directly related to the TUC and would work on other issues by supporting organisations such as the ICFTU rather than through direct action by the TUC.<sup>477</sup>

Gideon Ne’eman, who had been appointed in 1960 as the Histadrut representative in London, worked hard trying to build bridges and the first step towards a better relationship was taken when a Histadrut delegation of trade unionists came to Britain in November 1961. This was followed, in January 1962, by a visit by Frank Cousins who had previously admitted that he knew very little about the Arab-Israeli problem. Simchoni, the Head of the Histadrut International department, wrote that “Cousins will be helpful for us regarding constructive action”<sup>478</sup> His visit, although not the first by a British trade unionist to Israel, was extremely successful and caused a positive change in his opinions. Although other British trade unionists such as Sam Watson had visited before, they came either as MP’s, or members of

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<sup>475</sup>Briefing notes for the Minister of State’s visit to Israel October 1965, 17 September 1965, TNA:PRO, FO371/180866.

<sup>476</sup> "Histadrut Political Bureau for London", *Jerusalem Post*, 25 May 1960, p.3, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1420, Hayut to Morrat, 6 June 1960, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-32B and the British Embassy in Israel to the Foreign Office, 3 March 1961, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1503.

<sup>477</sup> Morrat to Hayut, 15 November 1960, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-32B.

<sup>478</sup> Lehmann to the Histadrut, January 1962, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-21 9A-2-18B.

the Labour Party, or as representatives of the international trade union organisations. Marshall, who had recently been appointed as British labour attaché, noted that the visit showed the importance of visits by leading British trade unionists. Although no practical benefit had resulted from the visit the opportunity to discuss problems with a leading trade union figure was worthwhile in terms of goodwill created towards Britain and its trade union movement. Five months later, a delegation from the General and Municipal Workers Union (GMWU), led by Fred Hayday, became the first ever British trade union delegation to visit Israel. The visitors remarked after visiting the Afro-Asian institute, that the Histadrut had contributed much more to the underdeveloped states than their British colleagues. The aim of all these visits was to provide the visitors with a good understanding of the Histadrut and Israel's problems and the Histadrut soon realised that they urgently needed to educate the British labour movement who knew very little about the subject.<sup>479</sup>

Eighteen months after coming to London, Ne'eman persuaded George Woodcock to visit Israel. Woodcock became the first TUC General Secretary to go there, forty years after the Histadrut had first made contact with the TUC. Marshall wrote to Woodcock saying that his visit along with those by Cousins and Hayday had finally dispelled any suspicions the Israelis had that their own warm feelings towards the British trade union movement had not always been reciprocated.<sup>480</sup> A report on TUC-Histadrut relations compiled by the Foreign Office labour advisor, in April 1963, was very positive and noted that Woodcock had frequently said publically that he was deeply impressed with Israel and with the Histadrut's achievements, including its aid programmes.<sup>481</sup>

### **British Unions investments and visits**

One unexpected outcome of the improvement in relations was the announcement in the *Daily Herald* of April 1963 that the TGWU and NUGMW were to invest £250,000 in Histadrut enterprises and that other unions were thinking of following suit.<sup>482</sup> The investments would be in the form of loans to be used for whatever purposes the Histadrut thought fit, but would

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<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Marshall to Woodcock, 24 September 1962, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9/2.

<sup>481</sup> Ne'eman to Simchoni, 29 April 1963, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-104-286-1-320.

<sup>482</sup> 'Unions invest abroad' *Daily Herald*, 16 April 1963, p.2.

be subject to some conditions as to how it was used.<sup>483</sup> Ne'eman, who had been negotiating with the unions since the previous autumn, went to the press once he became aware of opposition to the project from those who believed that the unions should remain neutral in light of the political climate in the Middle East. He commented later, that when the Egyptians found out that the unions were about to invest money in Israel, they had reacted in a similar manner as they had previously, when the West German unions announced plans for economic cooperation with Israel and attempted to pressurise the TUC and the unions into changing their minds.<sup>484</sup>

The British ambassador commented that the increased interest in the Histadrut over the last two years by British trade unions and the TUC, would increase goodwill towards the British labour movement, and towards Britain. The single most important reason for this increased interest was the "enthusiasm for Israel brought back" by the various British trade union visitors to Israel. They had all been impressed by Israel's achievements at home and their technical assistance abroad. Both Hayday and Woodcock had praised the Histadrut's work in Africa and said that the Histadrut could do much for the trade union movements of Africa that Western trade union movements could not do. The Ambassador concluded that the announcements by the TGWU and the NUGMW showed how successful the Histadrut had been and "the stock of Britain and of the British labour movement could hardly be higher in Histadrut eyes than it is today. Relations between Britain and Israel are the better for that."<sup>485</sup> However negotiations over terms and conditions were long and convoluted and, by August 1966, the conditions for investing in Histadrut dollar bonds were no longer financially attractive and the Histadrut investment managers decided to reject the deal.<sup>486</sup> However as both unions, especially the TGWU, were still willing to make the loans, discussions continued for another two years until August 1968 when the Histadrut finally told Cousins

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<sup>483</sup> Marshall to Treganowan, 1 May 1963, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1764.

<sup>484</sup> Ne'eman to Simchoni, 3 April and 5 May 1963, PLILMR, IV-104-286-1-320 and 27 October 1963, (all Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-106.

<sup>485</sup> Ambassador Beith to Foreign Secretary, Rab Butler, 29 November 1963, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1764.

<sup>486</sup> Marx to Ne'eman, the department for economic cooperation, 23 May 1965, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-142C, Marx to Levinson, the workers cooperative, Tel Aviv, 24 January 1966, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-160C and Levinson to Marx, 7 August 1966, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-19A.

that because of the difficulties involved due to the British government's financial restrictions on overseas investments they had no alternative but to cancel the proposed investment.<sup>487</sup>

### **TUC support for the Afro-Asian Institute**

On his return to London after visiting Israel, Woodcock asked the International department to write a paper on the Afro-Asian Institute. The TUC asked Walter Treganowan, the Foreign Office labour advisor, for help in compiling impartial evidence on the Institute. Treganowan contacted the labour attachés in West Africa, Singapore and India asking them to make discreet enquiries about the effect of the training on individuals who had been through the course. He said that the TUC's interest in this, as far he was aware, was that the apparent success of the Institute might tend to undermine its own efforts, such as they were, in Commonwealth countries. He continued "we are all, I think, anxious to see the TUC and the British unions themselves giving a lot more help with trade union training abroad, whether directly or in partnership with the ICFTU. It is perhaps no bad thing that Congress House should have been spurred on by the potential challenge of the Israeli effort to embark on an assessment which could have quite wide implications."<sup>488</sup> The labour attaché in Dakar responded positively about Israeli influence on labour movements in West Africa, saying that most of these territories had sent trainees to the Institute and had also received Israeli advisers who were generally held in high esteem.<sup>489</sup>

In April 1963, the report on the Afro-Asian Institute was presented to the TUC International committee along with the proposal that the TUC should finance a number of scholarships at the College, which since its establishment in 1960, had trained more than 300 students and that the courses now included students from Latin America and the Caribbean. The report not only discussed the course programme and how students were selected but also the history and

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<sup>487</sup> The Histadrut investment fund issued a prospectus to issue two million dollar bonds, listed on the Tel Aviv stock market. The bonds were made available for purchase in mid-December 1965 for 6 months. They had a 6% interest rate. However there was a problem in paying the dollar premium, which was determined according to the pound and dollar rates. After negotiating with both unions, the Histadrut agreed with the TGWU that both unions will share the premium equally. The GMWU did not agree and offered to pay the entire premium on its own and later deduct the sum from the whole investment. Marx to Israel Embassy London, 3 May 1968, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-19A.

<sup>488</sup> Treganowan to the labour attaches' in West Africa, Singapore and India, 12 November 1962. The Dakar Labour attaché replied saying that the Senegalese candidates thought the course had been beneficial, Labour Attaché Dakar to MOL, 11 December 1962, both TNA:PRO, LAB13/1581.

<sup>489</sup> Report on trade union developments in West Africa by the Labour Attaché based in Dakar, 31 December 1962, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1852.

structure of the Histadrut, its relationship with trade unions and the relevance of the Histadrut model.<sup>490</sup> In its discussion the committee raised concerns about the special relationship between the Histadrut and the state, and were apprehensive that after attending courses in Israel students might be inclined to model their own particular institution too closely on the Israeli model, as had happened in Ghana.<sup>491</sup> Their discussions noted that the problems facing many underdeveloped countries were similar to those which had faced Israel. They were critical of the approach of the TUC to the problems of working people in these countries especially those who were outside the scope of the unions because they regularly thought the solution lay with trade unions when they would benefit more readily from bodies similar to Israel's co-operative groups. It was recognised that by promoting the Institute for both political and altruistic reasons, the Histadrut's had sought to develop relations with countries which might support Israel. The view was expressed that in many respects the Histadrut example was excellent especially as regards agricultural co-operation, but doubted whether the Israeli trade union structure provided a suitable model. After an extensive discussion the committee agreed to provide £2,000 for four scholarships at the Afro-Asian Institute<sup>492</sup> which the Histadrut agreed would be reserved for trade unionists from either Africa or the West Indies.<sup>493</sup>

This generous gesture by the TUC, following on as it did so quickly after the announcement to invest in the Histadrut, showed a positive appreciation of the Histadrut's work in the third world as well as the limitations of the TUC's own efforts. As a measure of the TUC's and the Government's appreciation of the value of this work they continued to fund scholarships at the Institute for the rest of the decade. With both the TUC and AFL-CIO support, the ICFTU soon dropped their objections to the Institute and accepted that useful lessons could be learnt.<sup>494</sup> Although the British Government had realised in 1960 the value of the Histadrut's

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<sup>490</sup> The Institute had trained more than 300 students on four general courses, four special courses for French-speaking African countries, and others for more specialised groups, which included trade union leaders from Tanganyika, and an ILO inter-regional course on co-operation. TUC report, IC7/5, "Scholarships at the Afro – Asian Institute in Israel," 23 April 1963, MRC, MSS 292B/901/3.

<sup>491</sup> Treganowan to the labour attaché in Dakar, 5 February 1963, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1764. The Dakar labour attaché reported that much of the philosophy behind the Niger trade union movement was borrowed from the Israeli Histadrut. Report for 1962 on trade union developments in West Africa by the labour attaché Dakar, 31 December 1962, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1852.

<sup>492</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 23 April 1963, MRC, MSS 292B/901/3.

<sup>493</sup> Vincent-Smith, MOL to Barclay, FO, 13 June 1963, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2006.

<sup>494</sup> Labour Attaché Brussels to MOL, 27 March 1963, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1764.

work, it had taken the TUC another three years to reach the same conclusion. Histadrut-TUC relations had finally caught up with Anglo-Israel relations. It was also clear that the Foreign Office, who for some time had wanted the TUC to become more involved in this kind of work, had yet to persuade them to do so.

Two months later, Ne'eman discussed with Simchoni, the future programme of work for the Histadrut in Britain. He felt that the Histadrut's political activity in Europe faced an important challenge, not only in Britain but also in several other countries where the popularity of the Socialist parties was increasing. Since Britain was facing an election in 1964, with the possibility of a Labour win, the Histadrut decided in December 1963, to relocate Eli Marx to London to work alongside Gideon Ne'eman and reinforce their connections with the unions and the TUC.<sup>495</sup> Although nobody knew at the time, this move was to have an enormous influence on future relations.

### **The Arab boycott of Israel and the Mancroft affair**

The Arab boycott of Israel did not start as many people believe in 1948, but in December 1945 when the Arab League issued a formal boycott declaration urging its members not to import or use the products of Palestinian Jews. The League reaffirmed its ban in 1948 on all commercial and financial transactions when the State of Israel was established.<sup>496</sup> During the 1950s, the British government made it clear on a number of occasions that the boycott was illegal and unjustified, but left it to individual companies to decide whether to comply with the boycott or not.<sup>497</sup> The result was that amongst the Western nations, Britain was one of the most cooperative in complying with the Arab boycott. Many of the British companies which

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<sup>495</sup> Minutes of the Histadrut's International department meeting, 15 December 1963, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-87B, Ne'eman to Simchoni, 16 December 1963, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-106.

<sup>496</sup> For more information about the Arab boycott of Israel, see chapter 2, The history of the Arab boycott and its administration, in G. Feiler, *From Boycott to Economic Cooperation: The Political Economy of the Arab boycott of Israel*, (London : Frank Cass, 1998), pp.21-63 and Terence Prittie and Walter Henry Nelson, *The economic war against the Jews*, (New York : Random House, 1977).

<sup>497</sup> "...The position of Her Majesty's Government with regard to the Arab Boycott of Israel is a delicate one. We have always refused to condone it in any way and we have been careful to avoid anything which suggests that we recognise it officially. Never the less, and within the limits thus set we and the Board of Trade are always prepared to offer assistance and advice to any firm or agency in the United Kingdom which finds itself in difficulties with the Boycott authorities...." Foreign Office to the Crown Agents, 7 February 1961, TNA:PRO, FO371/158745.

found themselves on the Arab League's boycott list took the commercial decision to comply with the request.<sup>498</sup>

The TUC, which was aware of the boycott call, did not become involved until December 1963, when Lord Mancroft, a British Jew, was forced to resign, as a result of Arab pressure, from the Board of Directors of the Norwich Union insurance company.<sup>499</sup> The British government acted quickly by informing the Ambassadors of three Arab states that it opposed outside interference in British domestic affairs and strongly resented pressure on British firms to discriminate against their staff.<sup>500</sup> Once Norwich Union had admitted their compliance to the boycott request, the incident became a public scandal and was widely covered in the media and Parliament.

On hearing the news, Ne'eman met with twelve members of the TUC International committee to express the Histadrut's serious concern about the issues surrounding the incident including racial discrimination, antisemitism and a boycott of Israel. He reported that they all had unanimously agreed that the TUC should speak publically about this issue and advised Ne'eman that since this was mainly an "internal" British affair it would be best if one of the unions wrote to demand a discussion on the issue rather for the Histadrut write to the TUC.<sup>501</sup> Cyril Plant, the leader of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation, who had previously visited Israel, wrote to the TUC demanding a discussion of the affair and suggested that the General Council issue a statement.<sup>502</sup> A clash at the General Council with Woodcock was inevitable because, since becoming General Secretary, the TUC had avoided making political

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<sup>498</sup> Between 1958 and 1961 British Banks, Insurance companies and industrial firms including ICI, Unilever, Shell Oil, VentAxia and Plessey asked the Government for advice on *whether* to comply or not with the Arab boycott of Israel, see files TNA:PRO, FO371/133848, 133849 and 158745. See also the section on Great Britain, in G. Feiler, *From Boycott to Economic Cooperation: The Political Economy of the Arab boycott of Israel*, pp.209-19.

<sup>499</sup> For more information about the Mancroft affair see: Prittie, *The economic war against the Jews*, pp.59-63.

<sup>500</sup> After the Norwich Union had issued their statement the Arab League information centre in London published a press release which boasted of their achievement. The League of Arab States press release, 4 December 1963, BT58/1243. For full details of British government response and press cuttings from the Times, Financial Times and the Guardian see file TNA:PRO, BT58/1243.

<sup>501</sup> Ne'eman to Simchoni, 5 December, 14 December, 15 December 1963, (all Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-106.

<sup>502</sup> Plant wrote "this episode has now become a matter of concern to the TUC, since it touches on the integrity and independence of British life and is not only a commercial question. Racial discrimination is foreign to the traditions of this country and its trade union movement. Discrimination in trade and employment has been clearly condemned by the TUC, the International Free Trade Union Movement and by the United Nations." Inland Revenue Staff Federation to the TUC, 13 December 1963, MRC, MSS.292B/901/4.



statements. Woodcock told Ne'eman that the boycott was a political issue and that if the boycott was causing serious damage to the Israeli economy and the livelihood of Israelis, which it was not, then it only served as an expression of the animosity between the Arab states and Israel, so he saw no reason to take a stand.<sup>503</sup>

The International department prepared a report for the General Council on the activities of the Arab boycott office which noted that fifty British companies had been blacklisted and fifteen British companies including Shell and BP had taken steps to comply with the boycott. The report stated that General Council policy on international trade did not have guidelines on trade with Israel nor many restrictions as it had been formulated to support the defence of the West.<sup>504</sup> The view of the General Council and the International committee was that it was impossible for the TUC to remain silent on the issue, because not only was the Mancroft affair related to racial discrimination, but the Arab boycott might affect British jobs. Woodcock found no backing for his belief that the TUC did not have to take a stand in this issue as it was a political dispute. The General Council also realised that a formula had to be found which allowed them to support the proposed boycott against South Africa, while at the same time condemning the Arab boycott, and supporting those British companies that were willing to make a stand against it.<sup>505</sup> The result was a TUC press statement which called on British companies not to surrender to any pressure which aimed at discrimination "by either side" in a political dispute to which Britain was not a party.<sup>506</sup>

The fact that Ne'eman was able to engineer a response from the TUC highlighted the good relations that he had built with the unions. It also provided him with an opportunity to learn about the character of the TUC as well as their friends and sympathisers. Ne'eman commented that "of course there could have been a better decision, but this is the TUC we are talking about and its response to an issue that a British union had put forward and not the Histadrut." He also knew that the TUC's approach was that Britain was not directly involved

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<sup>503</sup> In Woodcock's opinion the TUC also were unable appeal to the Government since, as he had already said that in the near future they will announce a TUC boycott against South Africa. Ne'eman to Simchoni, 5 December, 14 December, 15 December 1963, (all Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-106.

<sup>504</sup> TUC report IC3/3 "Activities of the Arab boycott office", 17 December 1963, MRC, MSS.292B/901/4.

<sup>505</sup> The TUC were considering supporting the ICFTU call for a boycott South Africa. See Ne'eman to Simchoni, 24 December 1963, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-106 and TUC International committee minutes, 17 December 1963, MRC, MSS.292B/901/4.

<sup>506</sup> TUC press statement, 18 December 1963, ISSH:ICFTU, 2887D.

in Israel's dispute with the Arabs and that TUC policy in general was to avoid taking political decisions. The Israelis however were pleased with the outcome, especially as the TUC had taken a decision that every other non-Jewish body had so far refused to take. In order to build on their success, the Israeli embassy and the Histadrut tried unsuccessfully to get the Arab boycott discussed at the 1965 TUC Congress. Their plan would have included asking the American unions to encourage the TUC to take immediate public action against the boycott in Britain.<sup>507</sup> Twelve years would pass before the TUC and the Histadrut would next discuss the Arab boycott of Israel.

### **Woodcock's special relationship with Becker**

In many ways 1963 was the year when Histadrut-TUC relations really started to improve. Aharon Becker's successful visit to London in May 1963, his first as Histadrut General Secretary, was seen in Israel as a turning point in the Histadrut's "European relations" which would influence future relations with other labour movements in Europe.<sup>508</sup> It was reported that the TUC General Council had never spent so much on an overseas guest. Woodcock said it showed the TUC's special appreciation of Israel and the Histadrut. In London Becker met several politicians including Harold Wilson, the Labour Party leader who listened to what he had to say both as trade unionist and a member of the Knesset for Mapai, the ruling party in Israel. The visit consolidated the understanding and friendship between the two organisations as well as between Becker and Woodcock. Hayday assured Ne'eman that "You can trust even in troubled times your many friends and their enormous empathy towards the Histadrut and Israel." Woodcock described Israel as indestructible and emphasised that the free world would support Israel against the Arabs. When asked if the TUC would issue a statement supporting Israel, Woodcock said that he understood the Histadrut's need for supportive statements, like those from the American unions, but he preferred not to do this unless a special development took place in the region. Any decision, he said, would be made in consultation with the Labour party, as had happened during the Cuba crisis.<sup>509</sup> There is evidence that a close relationship existed between the two men when in November 1963,

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<sup>507</sup> The plan failed because Marx, the Histadrut representative in London contacted the TUC only one month before the 1965 Congress and was told it was far too late for the topic to be included. Israel Ambassador to Marx, 11 August 1965 and Marx reply, 6 September 1965, (both Hebrew original), both PLILMR, IV-219A-7-254.

<sup>508</sup> Levin to Ne'eman, 30 April 1963, PLILMR, IV-219A-1-123C and Simchoni to Becker, 5 June 1963, (both Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-97B.

<sup>509</sup> Ne'eman to Simchoni, 5 May 1963, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-104-286-1-320.

Becker, went at short notice to London prior to the meeting of the governing body of the ILO and the ICFTU Executive committee in order to talk to Woodcock about several issues including the TUC attitude towards South African membership of the ILO.<sup>510</sup>

By the end of 1963, British trade union delegations started to visit Israel on a regular basis. The purpose of the trips was to learn about Israel, the work of the Histadrut and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Cousins returned to Israel in November 1963 as the leader of a TGWU delegation. After meeting with the Foreign Minister, Cousins said that "if a Labour government came to power, Israel would gain a better understanding from the Foreign Office".<sup>511</sup> A TUC General Council delegation, led by TUC President, George Lowthian, visited Israel in April 1964. The delegation met with the President, the Foreign Minister, Golda Meir, and the Minister of Labour, Yigal Allon. The visit was very successful, with Lowthian promising continued TUC support for the Afro-Asian Institute. The Histadrut felt let down when the report of the visit, which concentrated on work and welfare in Israel, was published, as it summarily dealt with Israel's aspirations for peace and the Histadrut's position in the state, with no mention of its economic activities.<sup>512</sup>

Two visits to Britain by the Histadrut in the autumn of 1964 are worth mentioning. The first was by a delegation of Histadrut Workers Council General Secretaries who came to learn about the structure of British trade unions, both at a local and national level. The delegation noted the warm and friendly reception they received as well as the positive attitude of their hosts the AEU and the NUGMW. The second visit was a return visit for the one made by the TGWU to Israel a year earlier. The Histadrut's visit was seen as a return visit by friends, and the TGWU insisted that it should go ahead as planned even though Cousins had recently been appointed as a Minister in the new Labour government. Marx, the Histadrut representative in London, wrote that there was still of work plenty to do with the British unions, who knew very little about the Histadrut and Israel, especially as the Labour Party was now in government and the trade unions were a powerful group within the party.<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Marshall to MOL, 7 November 1963, TNA:PRO, LAB13/1764.

<sup>511</sup> Histadrut report of the visit of the TGWU delegation to Israel, November 1963, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-2-21B.

<sup>512</sup> TUC circular, 4 March 1965, MRC, MSS292B/956.9/1. Ne'eman to Simchoni, 20 August 1964, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-141B.

<sup>513</sup> Marx to Simchoni, 12 October 1964, PLILMR, IV-219A-1-129A and 24 November 1964, (both Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-142B.

Becker used his special relationship to write to Woodcock, outlining the Histadrut's view of the current situation in the Middle East, reminding him of the continuing threats of war and annihilation from Israel's neighbours as well as the abuse the Histadrut had received when they offered the hand of friendship to the Arab trade unions.<sup>514</sup> Woodcock responded saying that they were studying developments and the TUC supported the peaceful settlement of all outstanding problems between Israel and the Arab States. Becker's reply suggested that any steps that the TUC might be able to take in supporting peaceful negotiations towards the settlement of these differences, would carry great weight, and prove a positive factor in the promotion of international peace and understanding.<sup>515</sup>

Their close relationship was also reflected in the access Marx was given to Woodcock, who regularly discussed with him ICFTU business including the Afro-Asian Institute. The importance that the Israelis placed on relations with the labour movement was emphasised when in March 1965, Israeli Prime Minister Eshkol came to London for a week of meetings with the British Government and a meeting was arranged for him with the TUC.<sup>516</sup> Zev Levin, the Head of the Histadrut International department, who met separately with TUC, the Labour Party and the MOL, reported that the TUC was taking even less interest in international issues than before, with Woodcock taking an extreme position by talking about the ICFTU withdrawing from the underdeveloped states in Africa. The MOL also referred to the TUC's lack of interest in international issues and blamed Woodcock's passive approach as a serious obstacle to providing British aid to the unions in underdeveloped states. Levin noted that although the people he met understood Israel's political and security problems friendly and were sympathetic towards Israel and the Histadrut, there was a lack of interest and willingness to get involved in new international crises. Their attitude towards Israel's problems, he said, was more rooted in British politeness than real sympathy, as if to say "I pray that we won't have to test the British friendship." He concluded that they should continue to foster direct contact with the unions as well as the TUC as this would strengthen

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<sup>514</sup> Becker to Woodcock, 13 July 1964, MRC, MSS.292B/901/9.

<sup>515</sup> Woodcock to Becker, 5 August 1964, MSS292B/956.9/1, and Becker's reply, 14 September 1964, MRC, MSS292B/956.9/1.

<sup>516</sup> The TUC delegation included Woodcock, the TUC chairman, Collison, the deputy chairman, Lowthian, and Hayday, the international committee's chairman. Their discussions were described as lively and friendly and focused not on foreign affairs, but on employment and economic issues. 'Britain's views on Arab-Israel issues outlined to Eshkol in London', *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, 28 March 1965 and Marx to Simchoni, 30 March 1965, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-142C.

support within the Labour Party and that the visits to Israel by union leaders were very valuable as they were the best ambassadors for Israel.<sup>517</sup>

Addressing the tenth Histadrut Convention in December 1965, Becker said that with a Labour government in Britain, the Histadrut was entitled to a more truthful view of the Middle East situation and demanded that British workers abstain from strengthening those forces in the Middle East which regularly called for the destruction of Israel.<sup>518</sup> His comments reflected the state of Histadrut-TUC relations which had improved out of all proportion compared with five years earlier. The TUC failed to attend the convention, but Victor Feather, TUC Deputy General Secretary, who had visited Israel for the first time earlier that month, met senior members of the Histadrut and the government. Even though he described himself as an old friend of the Histadrut, it was apparent that he knew very little about Israel or the Histadrut.<sup>519</sup>

### **Problems at the ICFTU**

In November 1964 Marx approached Woodcock with a draft resolution to be submitted to the next ICFTU Executive Board meeting on the need for a peaceful settlement of all outstanding problems between countries, especially in the Middle East. He told Woodcock that the Histadrut and their friends thought that the ICFTU could no longer remain silent whilst continued threats to Israel were voiced by its neighbours. Marx pointed out that the ICFTU had never issued a clear and positive statement on behalf of the Histadrut concerning Israeli-Arab relations even though it regularly expressed its views on other international issues. Woodcock advised Marx that whilst having no objection to the motion it should be tabled by the Histadrut.<sup>520</sup> The Histadrut took Woodcock's advice and their resolution appealing for the differences between Israel and various Arab countries be settled by peaceful means was adopted by the ICFTU Executive Board.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>517</sup> Levin to Simchoni, 30 March 1965, and Marx to Simchoni, 30 March 1965, (both Hebrew original), both IV-219A-1-142C.

<sup>518</sup> Ambassador Beith to the Foreign Secretary, 13 January 1966, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2445.

<sup>519</sup> Perdo to Levin, 21 December 1965, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-129B.

<sup>520</sup> Marx to Woodcock, 23 November 1964, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9/2. Woodcock reply to Marx, 26 November 1964, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9/1.

<sup>521</sup> Minutes of the ICFTU Executive Board, 30 November 1964, TUC International Committee minutes, 19 February 1965, MRC, MSS.292B/901/5.

Because the TUC and the AFL-CIO clashed over the future direction of the ICFTU, Marx started to monitor TUC relations with both the ICFTU and the AFL –CIO because he thought that the TUC, who led a pro-European faction favouring a strong European organisation, could mean a weaker ICFTU, which in turn could work against the Histadrut.<sup>522</sup>

The Histadrut, used its position as a member of the ICFTU Executive Board, to defend Israel from criticism and censure. When the Lebanese unions submitted a motion regarding Palestinian refugees to the 1965 ICFTU Congress in Amsterdam, the Histadrut briefed its friends on the ICFTU Congress motions committee including Fred Hayday, Chairman of the TUC International committee which ensured the motion was removed from the Congress agenda.<sup>523</sup> The Congress, which was notable for the dissent and ill feeling amongst delegates,<sup>524</sup> resulted in a series of acrimonious exchanges between the Israeli and the Lebanese delegates during the discussion of the General Secretary's activities. Khoury, the leader of the Lebanese unions, introduced the Palestinian refugee problem into his speech and questioned Israel's right to exist. He said that the lack of support for the ICFTU in the Arab world was because the West supported Israel and had ignored the Palestinian refugee problem. Khoury called on the ICFTU to condemn Israel's policy towards the Palestinian refugees and their discrimination against Israeli Arabs. Mrs. Simchoni, replying on behalf of the Histadrut, told Congress that the Executive committee had decided that the Lebanese motion was not the right place for this kind of discussion. She emphasised that Israel wanted peace with her neighbours but the Palestinian refugee problem was part of a wider political issue in the Middle East, which presented a constant threat to regional and world peace.<sup>525</sup>

By now the TUC was on very good terms with the Histadrut and helped the Histadrut whenever it could. In May 1965, the Histadrut asked both the ICFTU and the TUC to write to the Syrian President asking for clemency for Eli Cohen, an Egyptian-born Israeli agent living in Damascus who had been sentenced to death for spying.<sup>526</sup> The TUC responded positively

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<sup>522</sup> Marx to Haring, 6 May 1966, (Hebrew original), ISA, HZ1389/28.

<sup>523</sup> ICFTU to Levin, 16 June 1965, ISSH:ICFTU, 3505 and Marx to Simchoni, 23 June 1965, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-160A.

<sup>524</sup> For more information, John P Windmuller, "Cohesion and Disunity in the ICFTU: The 1965 Amsterdam Congress", *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol.19, No.3 (April 1966), pp.348-367.

<sup>525</sup> Report of the ICFTU 8th World Congress, 7-15 July 1965, ISSH:ICFTU, ZO474496, pp.462-70.

<sup>526</sup> For more information see Sachar, *A History of Israel: from the Rise of Zionism to our time*, pp. 634-5

whereas ICFTU refused to help.<sup>527</sup> The following year, Becker successfully lobbied both the ICFTU and the TUC for help in gaining Israel's admission as an associate member of European Community.<sup>528</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Many Israelis including the Histadrut identified themselves more with Britain than America, yet the Histadrut was considered by the TUC to be an ally of the AFL-CIO as the Histadrut always seemed to have the support of the Americans. In 1953, Tewson opposed the election of the Histadrut to the ICFTU Executive Committee which had been arranged by the Americans. Three years later, the TUC, unlike the AFL-CIO, were unable to publically support the Histadrut and Israel's involvement in the Suez crisis. The TUC also opposed to the activities of the Histadrut in Africa, including the Afro-Asian Institute which was supported financially by the AFL-CIO.

It was unfortunate that, given the status of the unions and the TUC in British society at the time of Deakin's death, the subsequent leadership vacuum allowed Tewson to continue to give priority to the TUC's interests in Africa and support for the ICFTU in its efforts to get the Arab unions onside, which helped towards Britain regaining its influence in the region. However his failure to modify his stance, once Anglo-Israel relations improved meant that Bevin's influence on foreign affairs and the Middle East in particular persisted at the TUC until Tewson retired in 1960.

While the Labour Party was building strong links with Israel in the 1950s, the TUC was committed to supporting the Foreign Office in the Middle East and Africa. The retirement of the last of Bevin and Deakin's colleagues on the General Council in the early 1960s plus the arrival of a new General Secretary provided Frank Cousins and his colleagues on the Left with their opportunity to influence and direct the TUC 's international policies. Unlike their

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<sup>527</sup> The ICFTU contacted the Lawyers International organisation in Geneva and the TUC protested to Syrian embassy in London. Marx to Levin, 18 May 1965, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-142C and Woodcock to Aldouby, 1 December 1969, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9/1.

<sup>528</sup>The TUC reported that the General Assembly of European Free Trade Unions had adopted a resolution urging that Israel's request should be urgently expedited. TUC International Committee minutes, 25 November 1966, MRC, MSS.292B/901/7 and Becker to Buiter, 16 October 1966, ISA, HZ1389/28.

predecessors, the Left pursued international issues on the basis of peace, agreement and cooperation rather than those on the Right of war, conflict and competition.

Although Tewson professed to have a long-felt ambition to visit Israel, he turned down six invitations using his heavy workload as the excuse. The real reason was that he always tried not to favour one side over the other as happened during the final years of the mandate.<sup>529</sup> Once Bevin and Deakin had departed, the TUC lacked strong leadership and relations with the Histadrut were left to Tewson and the remainder of the old guard, which were only polite at best and why very few union leaders went to Israel during this period.

Why then did the Israelis continue to issue invitations to the TUC? Primarily because they believed that it was the best way for visitors to learn about the country and its problems. Even though they had received many European and American union delegations since 1948, the Histadrut was concerned that a TUC delegation had never been to Israel. When the General Council, turned down an invitation to send an official delegation to Israel in 1958, by then the TUC had already hosted, during the 1950's, several Histadrut leaders and delegations. Between 1956 and 1965 the Histadrut were invited to attend the TUC Congress four times, yet the first time the TUC sent a representative to the Histadrut Convention was in 1965, long after Tewson had retired.

This chapter has shown that even though Israel was a partner to Britain in her Suez campaign, Anglo-Israel relations only started to improve in 1958. The Histadrut's relationship with the TUC however never got out of first gear until Tewson retired in 1960 because he had remained wedded to Bevin's view of the Middle East and the restoration of Britain's influence with the Arabs. Unlike the Foreign Office, Tewson saw the Histadrut's aid work in Africa as a threat, especially as it was supported by the Americans with whom Tewson regularly clashed at the ICFTU.

By 1966, given that Britain needed to maintain her interests in the Arab world, Foreign Office relations with Israel were at an all time high and the Histadrut were for the first time able to believe that their own warm feelings of friendship towards the British trade union movement were finally being reciprocated. It was due to the personal relationship between Woodcock and Becker along with an immense contribution from Frank Cousins which meant

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<sup>529</sup> Author's conversation with Nicolas Kolarz, whose mother was Tewson's personal assistant 1947-60.



that by 1966, TUC-Histadrut and Anglo-Israeli relations were now on the same page. This new relationship was about to be tested at both the ICFTU and the TUC when war came to the region the following year.

### Chapter 3            1967-1972

The main focus of this chapter is the work and hopes of two men, Frank Cousins and Fred Hayday who endeavoured to use the international trade union movement as a force for good and peace in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War. Although their brave attempt to persuade their fellow trade unionists in the Arab world to talk directly to the Israelis failed, they never gave up, but found it difficult playing the role of honest broker as the TUC was perceived by the Arabs as a pro-Israel organisation. Along with the ICFTU, who in October 1967 arranged a face to face meeting with both parties, their efforts have gone unnoticed and never been given the credit they deserve. This period also saw an unprecedented divergence between the TUC and the Foreign Office.

Woodcock's priority as General Secretary was to safeguard the interests of the TUC, support the UN and the Labour government's Middle East policy.<sup>530</sup> Even though he considered Becker to be a personal friend, Woodcock always did this best to appear to be supportive of the Histadrut and Israel. Always reluctant to make any written or public commitment on any international political issue, let alone towards Israel, Woodcock was more than happy to work on their behalf behind the scenes, especially at the ICFTU. It took the Histadrut three months to persuade the TUC to call for Arab recognition of Israel and direct peace negotiations between Israel and the Arab states which more than compensated for their previous lack of a public commitment to Israel.

Cousins was very much the driving force behind the TUC missions to the Middle East as he realised there was an opportunity for the British labour movement to play its part in breaking the deadlock between Israel and Egypt and Arab states. Despite Hayday being the chairman of the TUC international committee, he was very much the junior partner to Cousins on their trips. The pair also gave their visits balance; Cousins represented the Left wing of the party and Hayday the Right. Cousins was also very close to Harold Wilson, the Prime Minister, who was very supportive and looked upon him very much in the way that Attlee had looked and depended upon Bevin.<sup>531</sup> Cousins was very strong on international affairs and had serious conversations with Golda Meir and President Nasser as he very much wanted there to be

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<sup>530</sup> Author's Interview with Mike Walsh, Head of TUC International Department, 1980-99, London, 29 November 2012.

<sup>531</sup> Authors interview with Geoffrey Goodman, biographer of Frank Cousins, London, 11 November 2007.

cooperation between the Israelis and the Arabs. Their initiative had the backing of the Foreign Office even though the Wilson government had adopted a neutral policy during the Six-Day War. The Foreign Office saw the TUC missions as an opportunity to boost British interests in the region and re-engage with the Arabs whilst at the same time reducing the power and influence Israel and the Histadrut had on the TUC General Council. The visits, however, opened up an extraordinary gap between TUC and the Foreign Office because the two men saw their primary role as trying to bring peace to the Middle East through the international labour movement and not as part of an effort to rebuild British relations with the Arab States. The government, established the Overseas Labour Consultative Committee (OLCC) in 1968,, one of whose aims was to encourage the TUC to become more actively involved in international affairs.

The Labour party had continued to be pro-Israel but the big difference between 1956 and 1967 was that both the British Labour Party and the Israeli Labour Alignment were in government with broadly similar ideological and political policies. The Israelis also believed that this time they had friends in high places. There was some support for the Arabs in Parliament in 1967, although within the Labour party pro-Israel MPs vastly outnumbered pro-Arab MPs who were on the Right of the Party.<sup>532</sup> The Left were divided over the war, and some of the *Tribune* group of 41 MP's were concerned that Israel might retain some of the newly occupied territory, while others remained supportive of Israel.<sup>533</sup>

The Histadrut's move to Brussels in 1968, whilst making perfect sense in terms of their relations with the international labour movement had not, by 1972, seriously affected their relations with the unions and the TUC, as Jones had replaced Hayday as chairman of the International committee. What had happened was very similar to what had taken place in the early 1950s after Bar-Tal, the Israeli Labour attaché based in London had returned to Israel; connections were not as strong, with greater reliance, once again being placed on the Israeli embassy. Being based in Brussels and flying into London only for a short visit once or twice a month was clearly not the same as being permanently based in London as the opportunity to network with the new generation of unions leaders network was no longer an option.

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<sup>532</sup> Just over 300 Labour MPs were members of the Labour Friends of Israel and 105 Labour MPs were signatories to a 1967 pro-Israel Parliamentary Early Day Motion compared with 19 Labour MPs who signed a pro-Arab Early Day Motion. See June Edmunds, *The Left and Israel: Party Policy Change and internal Democracy*, pp.64-71.

<sup>533</sup> Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism History of a Divorce*, p.151.

By 1970, the warning signs for continued good relations with Israel and the Histadrut were there for all to see. As well as the renewed interest in the Arab world by both the British Government and the TUC, the Arab unions had started to lobby the TUC and the ICFTU to specifically counter Histadrut and Israeli influence. Not only had the TUC moved to the Left but the younger members of the Labour party and the unions especially those on the Left were beginning to show an active interest in foreign affairs and the Arab-Israeli conflict by questioning Labour's traditional support for Israel at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs. The cancelling of the TUC financial support for the Histadrut's Afro-Asian institute, whilst on its own was not a major event, when viewed through the changes in attitudes that came about after the 1967 war was significant and a warning for future relations.

### **Anglo-Israel relations**

Israel's victory in the Six-Day War in June 1967 not only totally changed the dynamics of the region but also altered Anglo-Israel relations. Before the war, Britain's Middle East policy was one of disengagement from the region whilst attempting to achieve a balance and even-handedness towards the Arabs and Israelis. The war provided Harold Wilson with the opportunity to deflect attention away from Britain's economic problems, and also heighten expectations of Britain's influence in world affairs.<sup>534</sup> His proposal on 23 May, which was overtaken by events, that an international naval force should keep the Straits of Tiran open was made to discourage Israel from going to war. He wanted to be seen as working with Washington and the UN, and to avoid any charges of imperialism being levelled against Britain.<sup>535</sup> The key issue for the Wilson government in 1967 was Britain's poor economic performance and its prospects for recovery. Even though the UK had tried to remain neutral during the war it was accused of involvement by Egypt in the war, which resulted in an Arab oil embargo on the West and the withdrawal of funds from British banks by the Arab states.<sup>536</sup> The disruption caused by the Six-Day War and the closing of the Suez canal had a

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<sup>534</sup> Chris Wrigley, 'Now you see it now you don't, Wilson's foreign policy' in *The Wilson Governments*, ed. by Coopey, Fielding and Tiratsoo, (London: Pinter, 1993), p. 123.

<sup>535</sup> Richard Crossman, *The diaries of a Cabinet Minister Vol.2, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, 1966-68*, (London: H. Hamilton and J. Cape 1976), pp 357-8.

<sup>536</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *White heat : a history of Britain in the swinging sixties*, (London : Little, Brown, 2006), pp.393-5

damaging affect on Britain's balance of payments, which Wilson said was the biggest contributing factor in the devaluation of sterling which came in November 1967.<sup>537</sup>

The war transformed Britain's Middle East policy as the government adopted a more active foreign policy in the hope of securing an Arab -Israeli peace agreement. The initial upsurge of pro-British sentiment in Israel disappeared once Britain publically disagreed with Israel on how best to achieve a political settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict and over contentious issues including Jerusalem, refugees, and the Suez Canal. Britain did, however, continue to play its part in world affairs when in November 1967, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 242 which had started life as a British initiative.<sup>538</sup>

Once the euphoria of Israel's stunning victory had passed and it was clear that the Arab states were unwilling to talk peace and recognise Israel, there was a re-evaluation of attitudes within the Labour party towards the conflict between Israel and her Arab neighbours. Dissent against Labour's support for Israel came from MP's on both the Right and the Left in the party. The priority for those on the Right was the promotion of British interests in Arab States, whilst those on the Left began to question Labour's traditional support for Israel.<sup>539</sup>

Anglo-Israel relations deteriorated from 1969 onwards due to Israeli concerns about Britain's involvement in the great power talks in New York, which they believed was motivated by Britain's attempts to remain a world power, and by pro-Arab feelings in the Foreign Office, British criticism of Israel's policy on Jerusalem and the sale of British tanks to Israel, which had yet to be agreed. Britain's view was that her diplomatic efforts were an attempt to ensure that hostilities between Israel and her neighbours were not resumed which could endangering Britain's oil supplies.<sup>540</sup>

Between 1970, when the Conservatives came to power, and 1973, although relations appeared cordial on the surface the Israelis felt that the British effort at the UN to secure a

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<sup>537</sup> Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-1970: a personal record*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson: Joseph, 1971), p.400.

<sup>538</sup> The British sponsored UN Security Council resolution 242 which was accepted by Egypt, Jordan, and Israel from the outset was adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council on November 22, 1967. For more information, Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp.414-22.

<sup>539</sup> June Edmunds, "The Evolution of British Labour Party Policy on Israel from 1967 to the Intifada" *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol.11, No.1, 2000, pp.28-31 and Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism History of a Divorce*, pp.151-62.

<sup>540</sup> Michael Stewart, *Life and Labour: an autobiography*, (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980), p.213.

settlement was motivated by their interests in the Arab world at the direct expense of Israel. The British government, who saw the Israelis as being totally inflexible over territorial concessions were gradually moving away from Israel, towards the Arabs.<sup>541</sup>

### **The 1967 Six-Day War and the Labour movement**

Israel's stunning victory in the Six-Day War had an immediate effect on all parts of her society. Not only had victory reunited Jerusalem but the newly occupied territories provided a buffer zone for her security along with the promise of recognition by her enemies and an agreement on peace and security. However Israelis were divided over how to deal with the occupied territories. Shortly after the war the 'Land for Israel' movement was formed by leading members of Mapai and the religious parties who called for Israel to retain the territories not only for security reasons but also on religious and historical grounds.<sup>542</sup> They were opposed by the Israeli Left who feared that holding onto the territories would be too much of a financial and political burden as well a demographic problem. As time went on more and more Israeli settlements were built in these areas and this debate would become a major issue and divide Israeli society.<sup>543</sup> But for the next few years Israel's priority was, with the help of her allies, to try and reach a peace agreement with her enemies.

The Arab leaders however decided at their summit meeting in Khartoum in August 1967 there should be no peace, no recognition and no negotiation with Israel.<sup>544</sup> Nevertheless in the autumn, the UN adopted resolution 242. As a result over the next year the four great powers became involved in trying to reach a peaceful settlement. 1968 saw the emergence of the PLO as a third world independence movement as well as the start of their terror campaign based on the hijacking of passenger aircraft.

The Histadrut's priority in January 1967 was to lobby the ICFTU and affiliates for support with the Israeli government's application for associate membership of the European Community. Following the Histadrut's complaint that the ICFTU had never visited their

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<sup>541</sup> For information about Anglo -Israel relations, Lochery, *Loaded Dice; The Foreign Office and Israel*, pp.119-47.

<sup>542</sup> For information on the Land for Israel movement ,Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 411-12.

<sup>543</sup> For information on issues and development of the settlements, Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*, pp. 134-46 and Sachar, *A History of Israel: from the Rise of Zionism to our time*, pp. 667-89.

<sup>544</sup> For information on the Arab and Israeli view of the Khartoum summit meeting Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp.407-14.

country, a ICFTU delegation went to Israel in March 1967, led by its Secretary General, Harm Buiter, who promised that he would make the necessary recommendations at European and national level to ensure that Israel's application was not "pushed off the conference table."<sup>545</sup>

When Egypt concentrated large-scale forces in the Sinai on 15 May, tension in the region increased. The Histadrut's regular work was set aside and replaced by intense lobbying on behalf of Israel. This was followed four days later with the withdrawal of the UN Emergency Forces in Sinai and the blockade of the Straits of Tiran by Egyptian forces during the night of 22-23 May, actions that were seen by Israel as a threat to her security.<sup>546</sup> The Histadrut reacted by sending telegrams appealing for support for Israel to twenty-four unions worldwide including the TUC.<sup>547</sup> The response from the international labour movement was overwhelmingly sympathetic, and statements of support for both Israel and the Histadrut were received from many ICFTU affiliates.<sup>548</sup>

The TUC General Council issued a statement before the war, which expressed their concern at the recent developments in the Middle East. They appealed to the governments of both Egypt and Israel to withdraw "from positions of confrontation" and called on the British Government and others to bring the matter before the UN Security Council, as a matter of urgency. Copies of the statement were sent to the British Government, the UN, the Israeli and Egyptian Governments, the Labour Party, the ICFTU, the Histadrut and the Federation of

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<sup>545</sup> ICFTU press release on the ICFTU visit to Israel, 9 March 1967, the ETUC Collection at the International Institute of Social History Archives, Amsterdam, ETUC series, file 1452, (Hereafter cited as ETUC:ICFTU) and Skinner letter to MOL, 15 March 1967, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2445.

<sup>546</sup> For more information about the build up to and the Six-Day-war see Tom Segev, *1967, Israel, the war and the year that transformed the Middle East*, (London: Little, Brown, 2007) and Morris, *Righteous Victims a History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2000*, pp.302-347.

<sup>547</sup> The Histadrut telegram to the 24 unions, 24 May 1967. The Israel Seaman's union sent a telegram to the Seafarers section of the ITF urging the Seafarers' federation to convene a conference to discuss the blocking of the straits. Copies were also sent all ITF members in Europe including Britain, 29 May 1967, PLILMR, both IV-219A-6-29.

<sup>548</sup> Alfred Braunthal, as Deputy General Secretary of the ICFTU was responsible the ICFTU's response during the current crisis. Braunthal to Becker, 31 May 1967. Messages of support were received by the Histadrut and the ICFTU from the DGB Germany, CGT Force Ouvriere France, Osterreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund Austria, CGT Luxemburg, Confederation of Free Trade Unions Norway, LO Sweden, LO Denmark, CTP Peru, the International Federation of Chemical and General Workers Unions Congress, the International union of Food and Allied workers Congress, PSI International, the International Federation of Plantation, Agricultural and Allied Workers, the Postal, Telegraph and Telephone International, ORIT, the International Textile and Garment Workers Federation, the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical and Technical employees, the International Transport Workers Federation, the International Metalworkers Federation and the International Federation of Building and Woodworkers, all ISSH:ICFTU, 3509 and the NVV Holland, ISA, HZ1389/28.

Labour of the United Arab Republic.<sup>549</sup> George Brown, the Foreign Secretary, in his reply to the TUC after the war had started, said that “prior to the outbreak of hostilities on 5 June the Government had made strenuous efforts to avert an armed conflict and had subsequently taken energetic action aimed at bringing about a general cease-fire and, without taking sides in the conflict, were concerned to ensure a peaceful solution to the problems of the area.”<sup>550</sup> Although the minutes of the TUC's International committee and the General Council which had met on the 23 May, do not show that there was any discussion of events in the region, the speed at which the TUC issued a statement the next day indicates that Woodcock, Hayday and Cousins must have previously discussed and agreed the TUC's rapid response.<sup>551</sup> To the disappointment of the Israelis both the TUC and the ICFTU had issued statements which discussed the run up to the war in general terms without a direct mention of Israel, or solidarity with the Histadrut, or the Egyptian actions which had precipitated the crisis.<sup>552</sup>

### **Histadrut lobbying of the TUC**

On 31 May, the TUC received a letter from the Histadrut asking “the General Council to express as a matter of urgency, open solidarity with the Histadrut in supporting Israel’s right to unchallenged peace for the continuation of its social and economic development.”<sup>553</sup> Even though the friendship between the Histadrut and the TUC was at an all time high, the TUC's statement of the 25 May had been carefully constructed so as not to mention Israel or Egypt by name and was their only public declaration on the war. This was not totally unexpected as the TUC had never previously issued a statement in support of Israel or on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Throughout the Six -Day War, the Labour Party produced a series of internal briefing papers and daily updates on the war, the military balance in the region, a list of Labour Party

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<sup>549</sup> TUC General Council statement on the situation in the Middle East, 25 May 1967, MRC, MSS.292B/956/3 and International Committee report, LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1967, pp.263-4.

<sup>550</sup> LMU, paragraph 226, TUC Congress proceedings for 1967, p.266

<sup>551</sup> The minutes only show that the TUC decided to invite the Histadrut to send a delegation to Britain in April 1968 as it had been four years since a TUC delegation had last visited Israel. TUC General Council minutes, 23 May 1967, MRC, MSS.292B/901/8.

<sup>552</sup> ICFTU press release, 25 May 1967, ISSH:ICFTU, 3509.

<sup>553</sup> The letter is not in the files but is mentioned in the TUC International Committee minutes, 12 June 1967, MRC, MSS.292B/901/8



motions and party statements that had been issued between 1955-67 and a discussion document reflecting on the aftermath of the war. The Labour Party's last statement on the Arab-Israeli conflict dated back to 1960. It is unlikely this information was shared with the TUC as all these papers were marked "private and confidential."<sup>554</sup> The only British union to issue their own statement on the war was the TGWU led by Frank Cousins, whose declaration followed the same format of the TUC and failed to mention either of the participants in the conflict.<sup>555</sup>

As had happened at the time of the Suez campaign, Israel used the Socialist International as a means of gaining international support. On 26 May, the International adopted a resolution on the crisis.<sup>556</sup> The German trade union federation, the DGB, unlike the TUC, condemned the Arab threat to destroy Israel, and as an expression of solidarity with the Histadrut had agreed to invest DM 3 million in Israeli bonds.

By following the Labour government's policy of remaining neutral in the dispute, the TUC International committee waited until the war was over before meeting to discuss their response to the Histadrut letter as well as those received from Arab trade unions accusing Israel of aggression.<sup>557</sup> The International department prepared a briefing note for the meeting written by Alexandra Kolarz, who had been Tewson's personal assistant and was now a senior member of the International Department, which clearly outlined the committee's options. They were advised that if they decided to comply with the Histadrut request it would be impossible to satisfy the Histadrut completely without at the same time losing the goodwill of the unions in the Arab states for many years to come. It was also pointed out that the Histadrut could reasonably expect an expression of TUC solidarity on the basis of Israel's right to exist and in the light of the friendly relations that had existed between the Histadrut and the TUC over a long period. An alternative suggestion was that the Histadrut might

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<sup>554</sup> See the files, LHASC, LP/ID 1967 Middle East, Palestine, Israel.

<sup>555</sup> TGWU to the Israeli embassy London, 6 June 1967, ISA, HZ1389/28.

<sup>556</sup> For more information about Israel's relationship with the Socialist International see; Yoram Peri, 'The fall from favour : Israel and the Socialist International', *Institute of Jewish Affairs research report*, 21 and 22, 1980, pp.1-20 and Resolution on the Middle East, the Bureau of the Socialist International, 26 May 1967, LSE, Levenberg G/5/2.

<sup>557</sup> The International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions to the ICFTU, 17 May 1967, The UAR Federation of Labour to the ICFTU, 27 May 1967 and The Arab Federation of Petroleum Workers to ICFTU, 30 May 1967, all ISSH:ICFTU, 3509. Also TUC International Committee minutes, 12 June 1967, MRC, MSS.292B/901/8.

accept a truthful explanation from the General Council that it was really hard for them to issue a statement which was satisfactory to them mainly because of Britain's special position in relation to a number of Muslim Commonwealth countries. The report advised that as hostilities had ended another acceptable alternative might be a non-committal statement on general lines which also included a call for all parties to observe the cease-fire and negotiations on a peace treaty which recognised Israel's right to exist.<sup>558</sup>

Only Hayday, Cousins, Douglass, and Woodcock attended the special meeting of the committee to discuss the war. No reasons were given as to why only the four of them attended or why they had waited so long to respond, but it is clear that Woodcock had been in no hurry to reply. The minutes show that that the cease-fire was welcomed as it offered an opportunity for both sides to arrive at a negotiated settlement which was in line with TUC policy. The General Council took the view that it "should avoid formally taking sides in the conflict even though their sympathies may lie in a certain direction." After the committee had been told that "the General Council might wish to indicate their views informally to the Histadrut as it would be unwise for the General Council to make public pronouncements that might add to present difficulties," it was agreed to a draft reply to the Histadrut along the lines of a non-committal statement for the committee's next meeting.<sup>559</sup> No record exists of this letter and it is unlikely that it was ever drafted.

The CPGB's position towards Israel from the 1950s onwards consistently reflected the Soviet Union's anti-Zionism and support for the Arabs nations. Hence, the 1967 Arab-Israel War led to another spate of anti-Zionism from the CPGB. The party demonstrated its solidarity with the Arabs and accused the Labour Government of colluding with the United States by supporting Israeli aggression. Leading the party's attacks on Israel was Bert Ramelson. He was born a Jew but was a fervent anti-Zionist who believed that Jewishness was defined only by religion and not nationality. Ramelson wrote in his pamphlet on the Middle East crisis, that "Zionism as an ideology is based on false premises" which was "incapable of solving the real problems of the Jews."<sup>560</sup> He maintained that Israel intended to periodically "teach the Arabs a lesson and intimidate them" and that Israel's "military, financial, strategic" force depended on "imperialist arms and general support in exchange for acting as the West's

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<sup>558</sup> Briefing note for the TUC International Committee, 11 June 1967, MRC, MSS.292B-956-3.

<sup>559</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 12 June 1967, MRC, MSS.292B/901/8.

<sup>560</sup> Bert Ramelson, "The Middle East, crisis causes, solution", Communist Party pamphlet, 1967, p.9.

watchdog in the Middle East" and "Zionist inspired financial, economic and "pressure group" support from the widespread Jewish communities, conditioned by years of Zionist propaganda to believe that they owe allegiance to the Zionist State of Israel."<sup>561</sup> Ramelson also claimed that it was "no accident that the "new found friends" of the Jews and Israel during 1956 and 1967" were "often the same ones who supported Munich and the rise of Hitler and Mosley, and for exactly the same reasons - considerations of imperialist advantage."<sup>562</sup>

### **The Histadrut has concerns about the TUC and ICFTU**

The Histadrut did not wait long to thank their friends for their support. Shortly after the war had finished, it embarked on a worldwide information campaign to explain Israel's case to the labour movements with a view to retaining their support for Israel's cause. Delegations were sent to the USA, West Germany, Holland, Scandinavia, Austria, Switzerland and a number of Latin American countries with reciprocal visits occurring in many cases.<sup>563</sup>

Skinner, the British labour attaché in Tel Aviv, reported that the Histadrut was very concerned that the TUC "as the one prominent labour movement in the free world (*which*) had not yet taken a positive stand on the current Middle East situation." Nor were the Histadrut totally happy with the "non-committal and disappointing" policy of the ICFTU "towards Arab-Israeli affairs" They had made it their first priority "to obtain a clear expression of solidarity and support from the TUC, both in its own right and as a member of the ICFTU."<sup>564</sup>

As a first step to obtaining a positive statement from the TUC, in June, Becker went, to Geneva for the ILO conference where he met with Woodcock, who informed Becker of "Labour's warm support for Israel's cause in her just fight." Woodcock also accepted Becker's invitation to visit Israel to see for himself the effects of the war and indicated that he might be able to make a short visit in August.<sup>565</sup> However, after his meeting with Woodcock, Becker decided that the best course of action would be to come to London himself to discuss

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<sup>561</sup> Ibid pp.36-7.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid, p.41.

<sup>563</sup> Skinner to the MOL, 1 January 1968, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2180.

<sup>564</sup> Skinner to the MOL, 22 August 1967, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2445.

<sup>565</sup> Skinner to the MOL, 23 June 1967, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2440 and 22 August 1967, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2445.

the issues face to face with the TUC.<sup>566</sup> This move enabled the International committee at their next meeting to delay discussion of the Middle East situation until the General Council had met with Becker. The committee were advised that any future TUC statement which stressed the need for a negotiated settlement, freedom of passage through the Straits of Tiran, and the settlement of the refugee problem would not satisfy Histadrut who wanted the TUC to openly express support for Israel. The meeting heard that recognition by the Arab states was a basic requirement for Israel's future security and that the Wilson Government "was bound to be concerned at the possible repercussions of Arab hostility on the level of sterling balances."<sup>567</sup> Woodcock subsequently told Marx, the Histadrut's representative in London, that he would not be able to go to Israel before the TUC Congress in September but would support the alternative suggestion that a delegation of at least two Council members should go to Israel as it was important that a statement about Israel appeared in the General Council's report to the forthcoming Congress. He suggested that Cousins and Hayday would be the ideal members of the delegation.<sup>568</sup>

Becker's meeting with the TUC General Council took place on 10 August, but immediately before the meeting he had a private discussion with Woodcock who made it clear to Becker that he was personally dissatisfied with the TUC's position regarding the situation in the Middle East as well as the lack of progress of the discussions both in the International committee and at the General Council. Woodcock pointed out to Becker that there were a number of senior members of the Council who had prevented the TUC from taking a clear position on the subject. He also told Becker that apart from making the general decision to call on all countries in the area to avoid warlike actions, the TUC had made no other decisions. He explained to him that in the past he had always tried to postpone discussions on political problems in the General Council, especially those which related directly to British government foreign policy. On the question of Israel, however, Woodcock said that he would like to see a clear declaration of policy from the TUC, because, in his opinion, the TUC could not avoid this problem and must therefore make its opinion heard. He urged Becker to stand by his demands and not shy away from criticising the TUC's inaction. Woodcock then explained to Becker that the rulebook would not allow an emergency resolution to be

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<sup>566</sup> Author's interview with Hanan Lehman, the Histadrut European representative 1968-71, Tel Aviv, 30 September 2005.

<sup>567</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 27 June 1967, MRC, MSS.292B/901/8.

<sup>568</sup> Marx letter to Becker, 14 July 1967, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-32.

submitted to the TUC Congress in September. This was Woodcock's way of ensuring that although Congress would be able to debate the war, there would be no official TUC policy in place which could either restrain future TUC action or embarrass the Labour government. Becker agreed to Woodcock's suggestion that when he met with the General Council he would mention the invitation to send a delegation to Israel, but he made it clear to Woodcock that in order to achieve this aim the TUC must make a clear declaration of policy at the beginning of the meeting without the need for questions or comments from him.<sup>569</sup>

In his address to the General Council, Becker called on the TUC to issue a constructive declaration of sympathy with Israel's requirements for negotiations and peace in the Middle East. When Woodcock's turn to speak came he told his colleagues that "Becker had not expressed strongly enough the Histadrut's unhappiness with the neutral stance of the TUC" and that apart from wanting to send a delegation, the TUC had not yet said anything regarding the Middle East. Woodcock "praised the victors for talking about peace, whilst the defeated Arabs still talked of their plans to destroy Israel, and denied any attempts at negotiation." He also said that that "the most important thing to do was to bring the Arabs to the negotiating table, thus making them recognise the existence of the State of Israel," and that this should be agreed as the official policy of the TUC. When Cousins spoke he immediately offered to be part of the delegation and said Israel's friends would better serve her interests by using their influence directly on the Arabs, to convince them that Israel exists rather than going to Israel and tell them that they should talk the Arabs. The TUC, Cousins said, should use its international position to bring both sides together.<sup>570</sup> The meeting decided that Hayday and Cousins should go to Israel to report on the country's economic and political situation, which would be presented to the TUC Congress. Becker was quoted as saying on his return to Israel that "he had been delighted by the unanimous support of Israel's position by members of the TUC General Council."<sup>571</sup>

Why did Woodcock, who usually did not favour the limelight for the TUC in international affairs, make a positive intervention and meet with Becker beforehand to ensure that Cousins and Hayday would be asked to visit Israel? This move was certainly out of character as

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<sup>569</sup> Marx report to Haring of Becker's meeting with the TUC, 10 August 1967, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-32.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

<sup>571</sup> D. Haworth, 'Cousins to visit Israel' *The Guardian*, 13 August 1967, p.2.

Woodcock had previously ensured that the TUC would not embarrass the Wilson Government or the Labour party by issuing a statement in support of Israel. So why would Woodcock, normally so cautious, suddenly demand that the Arabs be brought to the negotiating table and the TUC make a stand? We know that he privately deeply cared about Israel and felt that the time had come for the Arabs to recognise Israel.<sup>572</sup> He probably saw this as an opportunity to allow him to make a positive contribution behind the scenes. It is possible, as he himself said later, that without his intervention the visit might not have taken place. Friendship and support for Israel may have helped but it is not the complete answer. Goodman suggests that the Foreign Office, as they had in past, saw an opportunity for the TUC to assist the British government and help bring about a peaceful solution in the Middle East.<sup>573</sup> In addition the Histadrut who, had made it a priority to obtain a positive statement of support for Israel's aims from the TUC, would not have embarked on such a mission without the prior agreement and support of the Israeli government of which they were an integral part. It is not known whether the suggestion for the visit was a purely Israeli proposal or had been planned beforehand between Britain and Israel as Harold Wilson was also known to have close personal and political ties with Israel. What we do know is that the MOL and therefore the Foreign Office knew in June of the invitation and whilst the official British position was to be neutral the Government were trying to take a leading role in Arab-Israeli peace efforts.<sup>574</sup> Therefore by supporting the Cousins initiative, Britain became involved immediately, several months before their participation with UN resolution 242.

Whatever the reason, the visit provided Cousins and Hayday with an opportunity to mediate in the Arab-Israeli conflict, a role which lasted several years. The TUC's message to both sides was that peace and a permanent settlement could not be reached unless the Arab States recognised the permanent existence of the State of Israel. This visit had the approval of the Foreign Office and it was only when their mission was extended to visiting Arab states that a rift developed between them and the TUC.

### **Cousins and Hayday's fact finding trip to Israel**

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<sup>572</sup> Woodcock made this point to the pre-Congress General Council discussion. TUC General Council minutes, 31 August 1967, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9.3.

<sup>573</sup> When Bevin was Foreign Secretary he sent Feather to Greece on a similar mission. Geoffrey Goodman, *The Awkward Warrior; Frank Cousins: His Life and Times*, pp.536-7.

<sup>574</sup> John W. Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-70, Vol.2: International Policy*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.109.

Cousins and Hayday left London on 17 August for a hectic three day fact finding trip. Their visit was highly regarded by the Histadrut and meetings were arranged with the Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol, the Foreign Minister, Abba Eban and the Minister of Labour, Yigal Allon. They also attended of the opening of the Histadrut branch in East Jerusalem. Cousins and Hayday's speeches were non-controversial and they called on Arab workers to work together with Jewish workers. They advised the Arabs that it was in their own interests to join the free trade union movement through the Histadrut. Both men were deeply impressed by what they saw and Hayday indicated to Marx on their return that their report would include a recommendation to the TUC to support direct negotiations between Israel and the Arab states.<sup>575</sup> Skinner, however, told the MOL that his impression of the visit was that it was "friends meeting with friends", and it "provided welcome confirmation for the Israelis that the events of June 1967 have not altered the strong bonds which exist between the TUC and the Histadrut." Skinner was left "in no doubt of their sympathy and support for Israel." He referred to an interview with the *Jerusalem Post* in which Cousins and Hayday said that the recognition of Israel by the Arab states and direct Arab-Israel peace negotiations were among the basic Middle East policy recommendations which they would be submitting to the TUC General Council.<sup>576</sup>

As part of their visit, the two men had a meeting with Hadow, the British Ambassador to Israel. They told Hadow that their primary international objective was to strengthen trades union cooperation and the free world trade union movement, but in the present situation "the political aspect was bound to impinge on their views and actions." Hadow advised the Foreign Secretary "that the Israelis have been both skilful and successful in putting across their point of view" as well as "the political solution they would like to see as the outcome of the war." The Israelis were "well satisfied" with the outcome of the visit. Although Cousins had told Hadow that it was up to the General Council to decide on any resolutions dealing with the Middle East situation which might be put before Congress, Hadow commented that the Israelis are unlikely "to have anything which they would find unsympathetic." He added that it was unfortunate that arrangements could not be made in time for Cousins and Hayday

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<sup>575</sup> Marx to Becker, 21 August 1967, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-33.

<sup>576</sup> Skinner to MOL, 22 August 1967, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2445.

to visit Jordan immediately after their visit to Israel. The result, he said "may lead to the Arab case going largely by default in important trade union circles in England."<sup>577</sup>

The close links the Israelis had with the Parliamentary Labour Party ensured that there was very little dissent, even from the Left over their support for Israel. Nor was there much support for the Arabs.<sup>578</sup> The Histadrut's hard work in the previous five years had ensured that there was a similar degree of support within the unions even though the TUC had yet to make a public commitment.

Woodcock told the General Council at their pre-Congress meeting on 31 August, that it was essential for the Council to make a statement to Congress, but it "should be limited to expressing the hope that the parties concerned in the conflict in the Middle East should negotiate and settle their differences." He also advised that the Council should not become involved in the question of Israel's occupation of Jerusalem or the territories that had recently been gained. We do not know for sure, but the advice about Jerusalem which Woodcock gave the Council indicates that he had received instructions from the Foreign Office.<sup>579</sup> Hayday told the Council that any declaration it made must make it "clear that the Arab countries should recognise the existence of Israel and should be willing to negotiate with Israel" on the problems that had arisen as a result of the recent conflict. Mr. McGarvey of the Boilermakers union, reminded the Council "that the Government which the General Council wishes to support had a specific policy on the Middle East which should be backed .....rather than expressing a policy of their own." In response, Woodcock said that although it was preferable for the General Council not to get involved in international politics, "it was however, important that the recognition of Israel was necessary in order to avoid further conflict in the Middle East."<sup>580</sup> The Council generally agreed with this sentiment and decided that Hayday

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<sup>577</sup> British Ambassador to Israel to the Foreign Secretary, 24 August 1967, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2440.

<sup>578</sup> Just over 300 Labour MPs were members of the Labour Friends of Israel and 105 Labour MPs were signatories to a 1967 pro-Israel Parliamentary Early Day Motion compared with 19 Labour MPs who signed a pro-Arab Early Day Motion. Edmunds, *The Left and Israel: Party Policy Change and internal Democracy*, pp.64-71

<sup>579</sup> George Brown, the Foreign Secretary, had already told a special UN meeting in June calling for the return of conquered territories including East Jerusalem. John W. Young, *The Labour Governments 1964-70, Vol.2: International Policy*, p.108.

<sup>580</sup> TUC General Council minutes, 31 August 1967, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9.3.



would make a short statement on paragraph 226 of the General Council's report to Congress.<sup>581</sup>

Such was the interest in the Six-Day War in Britain, that the Congress debate was shown live on television. Hayday began with a report of their visit to Israel the previous month. The view of the General Council, he said, was that the Arab nations should recognise the existence of the State of Israel and that direct negotiations should take place between the two sides over the problems arising out of the war which the Council hoped would lead to a general settlement of the Middle East situation. Israel, he said, desired to live in peace, secure from future attacks, but the war aims of the Arab states were very simple, to drive the Israelis out of Israel and to destroy them as a people. Cousins said that "one of the greatest disservices Congress could make was to divide into pro-Jew and pro-Arab." He added that they had told Arab workers that they had met in Jerusalem, that the TUC would be happy to meet the representatives of workers in the Arab states. He appealed to Congress saying that "if we have done part of a job of expressing your views about the need for peace in the Middle East, what you ought to be saying is that you endorse the action we have taken and ask the TUC to go on with it. It is not over yet but it will be over much quicker if we can convince the Jordanians, the Egyptians, the Lebanese, and the people who are not as violently opposed to the State of Israel as are some others that their workers' interests will best be served by sitting down and talking on how the two sides can help to emancipate the total area for the benefit of the total people."<sup>582</sup>

Although it had taken the Histadrut three months to accomplish, the TUC's public call for Arab recognition of Israel and direct peace negotiations between Israel and the Arab states was exactly the outcome they had sought when they invited the TUC to come to Israel. Woodcock told Marx afterwards, that he was very pleased with the outcome and that without Becker's influential presence at the meeting he doubted if the General Council would have agreed to send Cousins and Hayday to Israel.<sup>583</sup> The fact that the TUC Congress had not formally adopted a statement of intent did not dim the Histadrut's enthusiasm for the TUC's support, which they hoped would have a big impact on public opinion in Britain and elsewhere. Both the General Council and Congress, who were broadly pro-Israel, had also

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<sup>581</sup> Paragraph 226, the Middle East, LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1967, p.266.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid, The Middle East debate, pp. 489-92.

<sup>583</sup> Marx to Becker, 8 September 1967, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-33.

given Cousins and Hayday a mandate to talk to the Arab trade unions. This had a twofold advantage for Britain, not only it would enhance Britain's role in the peace process but also would help to rebuild her image in the Arab world by building links with the Arab trade union movement.

Three weeks later, Marx met separately with both Woodcock and Cousins to discuss the TUC's next move. Woodcock told him that there was a strong possibility that a letter outlining their position would be sent to the Foreign Office.<sup>584</sup> He was however apprehensive about Cousins plans to visit various Arab states and make contact with, not only the unions, but also with their governments and political parties. The TUC, he said, should only interact with trade unions in countries like Jordan and Lebanon and he was opposed to the TUC having contact with governments, especially those who were members of the Arab League. Woodcock asked Marx to tell Becker that he was always ready to discuss matters with him and that Becker should contact him whenever necessary.

A few days later Marx raised the same issues with Cousins, who told him that he had already received requests for visits from Lebanon,<sup>585</sup> Jordan, Kuwait, and the Secretary of the Arab League. He added that "it was important that the TUC take an active role in furthering peace in the Middle East, and therefore must be in contact with the Arabs." Cousins said he was not concerned that the TUC might be seen as a tool of Israeli propaganda, as he saw the TUC's role as trying to influence the Arabs into taking a realistic view by recognising Israel and entering into peace talks with them. After telling Marx that he wanted to develop contacts in the Arab states in order to bring peace to the region, Cousins emphasised that the Histadrut could count on his friendship and sympathy adding that was glad that he "had not inherited the opinion of his predecessor Bevin."

When Marx pointed out that there were only a small number of Arab states that allowed independent trade unions, Cousins agreed, adding that he wanted also to make contact with other groups and would not hesitate to meet government representatives, as he had in Israel. The scope of his visits and contacts, he said, would however be decided by the General Council but would not include the Arab League. These conversations confirmed Woodcock's personal attitude, TUC policy and the wider context involved. Marx concluded that Cousins

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<sup>584</sup> No record was found of this letter in the archives.

<sup>585</sup> Lebanon Federation of Trade Unions letter to the TUC, 15 September 1967, ISSH:ICFTU, 3510.

understood Israel's position and that there was only so much pressure that the Histadrut could put on the TUC as they were not going to make any more pro-Israel statements until they had seen if their policy would work.<sup>586</sup>

The ICFTU Executive Board meeting at the beginning of October 1967 provided Woodcock the opportunity to use his friendship with the Histadrut to ensure a positive outcome to discussions about the Middle East conflict. This meeting of the Executive was the first since the June conflict and both the Israelis and the Arabs were determined that their views should be heard and not ignored. Barritt, the British labour attaché in Brussels, described the debate as a "draw" as both the Histadrut and the Arab representatives, the Tunisian and Lebanese unions, were satisfied with the outcome and the Histadrut had considered that victory was theirs. He added that, for once, in his opinion, the ICFTU had given the impression that it really had a job to do. The initial difficulties over the draft statement, had been overcome by establishing an ad-hoc committee which was the very first time, in an international labour forum, that Arabs and Israelis had sat down together and discussed their respective viewpoints. This working group eventually produced two draft statements, one supported by the DGB, Histadrut and the AFL-CIO, which called for bilateral Arab-Israel peace talks and the other supported by the UGTT and the Lebanese Federation of Trade Unions, which called for the Arab refugee problem to be solved as part of a general settlement. Both statements were then composited into a final resolution for approval by the Executive Board. The identical paragraphs in the two statements were adopted unanimously and the statement supported by the Histadrut adopted by a majority of ten votes to one with two or three members of the Board abstaining. Although not an agreed statement, as the ICFTU had originally hoped for, this declaration called for direct negotiations between Israelis and Arabs on all issues including the refugee problem. This was a truly important initiative not only for the international labour movement but also for world affairs, as the ICFTU had achieved a successful outcome to direct talks between the Arabs and Israelis, a feat which had not yet been equalled by any other forum in the world.

The ICFTU also decided that because of the good atmosphere in the debates, the ad-hoc committee should be given permanent status in the hope that it might help further in bridge-building between the two parties. After the vote, the Lebanese delegate withdrew from the meeting in protest, whilst the UGTT representative stated that his future attendance would be

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<sup>586</sup> Marx to Haring, 27 September 1967, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-32.

decided by his organisation. Haring reported to the Histadrut Central Committee, that the worldwide information campaign that the Histadrut had carried out played an important part in securing support for the ICFTU resolution and gave special mention to the friendship shown by the American and German unions.<sup>587</sup> The only mention of the role played by Woodcock in the negotiations, came from Haring, who is quoted in the *Jerusalem Post* praising Woodcock's personal role "in behind-the-scenes talks." Nor do we know how Woodcock voted.<sup>588</sup> The continually changing political landscape in the Israel-Arab conflict meant that the moment in the spotlight for the ICFTU working group on the Middle East passed and did not reconvene until November 1968 when the working group decided not to discuss the conflict as it appeared at the time that the current UN mediation process would yield positive results.<sup>589</sup>

The ICFTU was forced, for financial reasons, to close its Beirut office in October 1968.<sup>590</sup> From then on, mainly due to pressure from the TUC and the AFL-CIO who wanted to run their own aid programmes, the ICFTU only offered advice and the coordination of activities on behalf of affiliates rather than run the programmes themselves.<sup>591</sup> During his time in Beirut, the ICFTU representative had never been to Israel or met with the Histadrut outside ICFTU meetings, probably because the ICFTU felt that his credibility with the Arab trade unions would have been compromised if he been in regular contact with the Israelis. For the same reason, the British Labour attaché in Israel was never allowed to travel to neighbouring Arab States, yet the ability of the TUC meet with both Arab and Israeli trade unionists was never questioned. The ICFTU had been unable to get both sides together, primarily, because it was used as a political battleground by both the Arabs and Israelis whose trade union movements were also part of their political infrastructures.

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<sup>587</sup> For more information about the meeting see: Barritt to MOL, 12 October 1967, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2599, the ICFTU Executive Board meeting, 4-6 October 1967, Item 8, 43EB/8e(i), ISSH:ICFTU, 3506, The ICFTU Press release, PRS/41, 12 October 1967, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2599 and the TUC International Committee minutes, 24 October 1967, MRC, MSS.292B/901/9.

<sup>588</sup> "Arabs and Israelis sit on same labour committee", *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 October 1967.

<sup>589</sup>The minutes of the ICFTU ad hoc Committee on the Middle East, 20 November 1968, 44EB/8[b], ISSH:ICFTU, 3513, TUC International Committee minutes, 23 July 1968, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9.3.

<sup>590</sup> Notes of a discussion on the ICFTU between the British and American labour attachés based in Beirut. The British Labour attaché in Beirut to Foggon, MOL, 24 January 1968, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2599. By 1968 the TUC no longer considered political propaganda, such as preventing a communist takeover as an important or primary justification to keep the Beirut office open. Marx to Haring, 28 February 1968, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-30.

<sup>591</sup>Anthony Carew, *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*, (Berlin: Peter Lang 2000), pp.311-2.

## **TUC missions to Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt**

Cousins and Hayday's missions to Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt came about as the result of their successful visit to Israel in the aftermath of the Six-Day War. Yet none of this would have happened if the TUC had not prevaricated over a public response to the war. The two men only went to Israel in the first place because the Histadrut were concerned about the TUC's silence. When the visits to Jordan and Lebanon were first discussed in September 1967, the Foreign Office immediately saw them as an opportunity to re-establish links between the TUC and Arab trade unions which they believed would be helpful in their efforts to restore Britain's position in the Arab world after the setbacks incurred due to the war. They considered that the trade unions in the Arab states had been ignored for far too long and as a result many were now under Egyptian influence.<sup>592</sup> However, the visits caused an unprecedented difference of opinion between the TUC and the Foreign Office who had worked together in the past on international affairs, especially in the Middle East.

It was not the missions as such that caused the Foreign Office concern, rather the TUC itself and Cousins and Hayday. The Foreign Office wanted to use the visits to counter the strong influence of the Histadrut within the TUC General Council, which in their view, had taken "a rather one-sided view of Arab-Israel affairs." They were also aware that "as the Histadrut had exchanged visits with the TUC and had previously attempted to get the TUC to make statements favouring the Israel position on the settlement of the Middle East crisis, they will want to keep the TUC in play." It was only after Woodcock and Cousins had taken charge at the TUC five years previously that the Histadrut's influence on the General Council had started to increase. Cousins was also a concern for the Foreign Office, because as an ex-government minister his views and opinions were respected. He had also in the past, been critical of the government's Middle East policy on the grounds that it was too pro-Arab. The Foreign Office had already noted, even before the visits took place, that if either Cousins or Hayday were asked "to make any public comment on the Histadrut's extension of trades union activities in the occupied territories, especially Jerusalem," they should be made aware of the political implications of such a move.<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>592</sup> Foggon to Moore FCO, 27 September 1967, TNA:PRO, FCO17/42.

<sup>593</sup> Foggon to Maitland FCO 27 November 1967, TNA:PRO, FCO17/42

Foggon, the Foreign Office Overseas labour advisor,<sup>594</sup> welcomed the reopening of relations with the Arab world as he saw this as an opportunity for further visits by the TUC to other countries in the region.<sup>595</sup> He recommended that because of the longstanding relationship between the labour movements in Britain and Israel there was an imbalance in the number of visits the unions made to Israel and to the Arab countries and if the TUC was to participate in bringing peace to the area it needed to try and follow the British Government's example of attempting "to be scrupulously neutral in the Arab-Israel dispute." He warned that it was important not to neglect Arab trade unionists who had been ignored for far too long and as a result many were now under Egyptian influence and might turn to Moscow for help.<sup>596</sup>

The Foreign Office advised the TUC, that in order to avoid any embarrassment when travelling to the Lebanon and Jordan, Cousins needed a new passport as his current one contained an Israeli visa. Cousins declined their request and told the Lebanese Ambassador in London that he saw no reason why he should travel to the Lebanon on the basis of a lie and that since everyone knew he had been to Israel, why did he need a new one in order to go there? His refusal was seen as a setback which could cancel the whole initiative. However, after an intervention by the Foreign Office, the Lebanese and Jordanian Ambassadors, to everyone's surprise, issued the necessary visas on his existing passport.<sup>597</sup>

Hayday told the Foreign Office that their visits would enable the TUC to try to get the Arabs and Israelis talking to each other. He made the point that the TUC was only interested in non-political contacts because of Woodcock's "very rigid views on this subject" and therefore they "would not want to get too close to the British diplomatic network."<sup>598</sup> The visit to Jordan and Lebanon was eventually arranged for December 1967 and in addition to briefing Cousins and Hayday, the Foreign Office arranged a meeting with Goronwy Roberts, the Minister of State

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<sup>594</sup> The post of Foreign Office Overseas Labour Advisor had been established by Bevin in 1948 to advise the Foreign Office and the MOL on the international labour movement as well as to liaise with the TUC.

<sup>595</sup> Foggon recommended visits to Libya, the Sudan, Morocco and Tunisia but not Algeria, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Aden. He did not totally reject a visit to Egypt. Foggon to FCO North and East African Dept, 5 October 1967, TNA:PRO, FCO17/42.

<sup>596</sup> Foggon to Moore FCO, 27 September 1967, Foggon to Fred Mulley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 28 November 1967, briefing notes for Sir R. Beaumont, 1 December 1967 and the Eastern Department briefing notes, 5 December, 1967, all TNA:PRO, FCO17/42.

<sup>597</sup> Moore, FCO, to Benchley and Maitland, FCO, 27 November 1967, TNA:PRO, FCO17/42.

<sup>598</sup> Haighton, FCO to Moore, Eastern Dept, 10 October 1967, TNA:PRO, FCO17/42.

for Foreign Affairs.<sup>599</sup> The Foreign Office, which in the past had a reputation for being pro-Arab, had supported TUC and the ICFTU activities in the Arab world when it was to their advantage. This meeting was arranged because one of their most loyal supporters had "changed sides" and they needed TUC support for British diplomatic efforts attempting to bring the Arabs to the negotiating table. The Israeli Government viewed these efforts as further appeasement of the Arabs.<sup>600</sup>

Cousins and Hayday were told that the Histadrut had just completed arrangements for full representation for East Jerusalem Arabs in the next elections for the Jerusalem Labour Council to be held in 1969 and that since the Histadrut had not shown any interest in other towns on the West Bank, the Foreign Office felt that the political significance of this decision was to extend the Israel municipality of Jerusalem to include East Jerusalem. The two men were then asked to ensure that if they made public comments on the Histadrut's future role in the occupied territories they should be aware of the political implications.<sup>601</sup> This discussion was significant because it highlighted the government's concerns about Jerusalem and how soon after the war it had already been flagged up by the Foreign Office as a possible sticking point for future peace negotiations. Hayday was asked by Roberts, "if he would, in future contact with the Histadrut, advise them of the political difficulties and dangers of pre-judging the future of Jerusalem." He replied saying that "neither he nor Mr. Cousins would be able to say to the Histadrut that they would not like to see Jerusalem unified. Divided cities produced nothing but bitterness and misery and the Jews should have access to their historical and holy buildings." Hayday was told that "the Arabs would be bound to resent this pre-judging of the final solution and the consequences could be dangerous". Hayday was "unmoved" by their request to adopt a more pro-Arab line and the Foreign Office concluded that he was "obviously no help to us."<sup>602</sup> The Foreign Office were left in no doubt that the two men's priority was to use the international trade union movement as a force for good in the Middle East and that in future they were not going to take a more pro-Arab line.<sup>603</sup>

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<sup>599</sup> Foggon to Fred Mulley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 28 November 1967, TNA:PRO, FCO17/42.

<sup>600</sup> For the state of Anglo-Israel relations at this time see Lochery, *Loaded Dice; The Foreign Office and Israel*, pp.119-25.

<sup>601</sup> Foggon to Maitland, FCO, 27 November 1967, TNA:PRO, FCO17/42.

<sup>602</sup> Arbuthnott, FCO to Eastern Dept, 7 December 1967, TNA:PRO, FCO17/42.

<sup>603</sup> " Evidently no help to be expected from Messrs Cousins and Hayday", Moore, file note, 8 December 1967, TNA:PRO, FCO17/42

On their return from the Middle East, Cousins and Hayday reported to the International committee that they had met with trade union leaders, ministers and officials, and had visited factories and refugee camps. Their report acknowledged that the conditions in Lebanon and Jordan differed considerably, though in both countries there were extremes of poverty and wealth. A dominant feature in both was the refugee population and both men were upset by the conditions they had witnessed in the refugee camps. Neither country had pursued, in their opinion, effective measures of settlement and refugees were being encouraged to look towards a return to the Palestinian territories with no regard to the human problem that they presented. The men gained the impression that the Lebanese saw the Palestinian refugees as foreigners and a burden on society and the conditions in the camps in Jordan illustrated clearly for them that there was very little social conscience in the Arab world. In all of their meetings with trade union and Government officials, Cousins and Hayday explained Congress policy and the need to enter into a dialogue with the Israelis. All they heard in return, especially in Jordan, was "a recital of all the political arguments dating back to the time of the Turks, followed by the colonial powers of Britain and France in the time of the mandate, the Balfour declaration, Zionism, the war of 1948, the constant acts of Israeli aggression since that time, Eliat in 1949, Sinai in 1954, the 1956 Suez campaign and the Gulf of Aqaba passage conceded by the UN. At no time in these discussions was it accepted that talks could commence with the Israelis other than on the basis of a restoration of the pre-1948 situation." In their opinion, the human problems involved, appeared not to have had priority and were secondary to the political arguments, that Israel was considered the aggressor and the enemy. The trade unions in both countries had originally been established to serve political ends, rather than the interests of the workers, particularly in Jordan, where the trade unions were the only mass organisations allowed. The political views that were presented to them were dominated by the Israel question and the Jordanian trade unionists tended to support the views of President Nasser which isolated and reduced the influence in the Arab world of the Lebanese and Tunisian ICFTU affiliates. Cousins remarked on a general lack of concern about the immediate need to relieve the suffering of the refugees and noticed there was greater concern that a settlement consistent with Jordan's honour and justice should be achieved. Hayday thought that the Jordanian trade unionists in particular laid too much emphasis on well known Arab political points of principle and too little on the social welfare of their members or their fellow countrymen. Both men were worried by the



Jordanians willingness to accept the inevitability of further war if they were unable to achieve Arab rights through negotiations.<sup>604</sup>

This remarkable document not only concisely and clearly revealed what the Jordanians thought of the refugees and how they were treated by them but also that the Palestinians were being used as political pawns in the long running Arab-Israeli conflict. Both Cousins and Hayday were distressed by what they saw in the camps and it is clear that their discussions in both countries readily confirmed that the Arab-Israeli conflict dominated both political life and trade union activities in the Arab world. The Jordanians' willingness to accept the inevitability of another war if they were unable to achieve Arab rights through negotiations also gave them concern. Although they never gave up, they must have realised then that it would be an almost impossible task to bring about direct negotiations between the parties. In the circumstances a more realistic goal was the building of relations with the Arab trade union movement, which would please the Foreign Office.

After the TUC's successful visit to Jordan and the Lebanon, the Ministry of Labour (MOL) were extremely upbeat about future relations with the Arab unions especially as the TUC had received an invitation to visit United Arab Republic (UAR).<sup>605</sup> The MOL thought that this was because the trade unions in the Arab world were "now beginning to appreciate the degree of isolation into which they had allowed themselves to lapse."<sup>606</sup> The TUC however had no plans to visit any other Arab states than the UAR.<sup>607</sup>

Cousins and Hayday went to the UAR in March 1968, The pair held extensive discussions with the UAR Federation of Labour, government officials and President Nasser. Whenever they discussed the Arab-Israeli conflict, they were told that there would be no negotiations as long as Israel occupied the Sinai. They reported that their hosts "constantly referred to Zionists and the choice of Palestine for the Jewish state" as well as questioning "the right of the British government to issue the Balfour declaration which they declared allowed the Jews

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<sup>604</sup> Report of visit to Jordan and the Lebanon, IC4/3, TUC International Committee minutes, 19 and 23 December 1967, MRC, MSS.292B/901/9.

<sup>605</sup> The TUC received an invitation in November 1967 to send a delegation to visit Egypt as guests of the Workers Federation of the UAR. Although Cousins was keen to accept, Woodcock felt that this was not the right time. TUC International Committee minutes, 21 November 1967, MRC, MSS.292B/901/9.

<sup>606</sup> Foggon to Barritt, 11 January 1968, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2599.

<sup>607</sup> Haighton FCO, to NEAD, FCO, 28 February 1968, TNA:PRO, FCO17/42.

to have dual loyalties." It soon became apparent that whenever Cousins and Hayday referred to direct talks with Israel in their discussions it was seen by the Egyptians as "a constant irritant" and they came to the conclusion that in order to move the peace process along, an alternative to direct negotiations would be needed. President Nasser told them that he would only accept the existence of Israel provided the borders were based on the original UN boundaries and a satisfactory solution to the refugee problem had been negotiated. While he presented a picture of Israel as the aggressor, Nasser flatly denied ever making a declaration that his aim "was to drive the Israelis into the sea." He also said that a settlement could not be achieved by direct talks and the UN and the great powers would need to underwrite any agreement. Hayday and Cousins accepted his contention.<sup>608</sup>

On their return to London, Cousins and Hayday presented a report to the General Council recommending that when deciding future policy the Council consider UN initiatives. Although the two men had succeeded in establishing contact with the trade union movements in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, they had been unable bring about a better understanding and an improvement of relations between the Arab states and Israel. Because of the deep-rooted opposition to direct negotiations with Israel in all three countries they had been continually rebuffed whenever they had suggested that a permanent settlement of the conflict was possible only if the Arabs were prepared to recognise and to accept the existence of the State of Israel. After considering their report the General Council decided that contact with the UAR Federation of Labour should be maintained and that both TUC and member unions should consider inviting UAR federation representatives to UK. In order to avoid any misunderstandings with the Histadrut, the committee sent copies of the report to the Histadrut, the UAR embassy in London and the ICFTU.

Two years later, Hayday spoke to the British labour attaché in Beirut about their visits. He said that it had not been easy for them to play an impartial role in the Arab-Israel dispute as many of his colleagues were sympathetic towards Israel and had also previously visited Israel as guests of the Histadrut. He added that the TUC had followed Government policy and they had tried to steer a middle course in order to build bridges between the two sides. Hayday

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<sup>608</sup> Copies of the reports of their visits to Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt were sent to ICFTU, "on the understanding that they will be treated as private and confidential." Draft report of the TUC visit to Egypt, 4-9 March 1968, TUC International Committee minutes, 26 March and 23 April 1968, TUC General Council minutes, 27 March 1968, all MRC, MSS.292B/9.56.9.3.

revealed that the Israelis knew of TUC's contacts with the Arabs and had not been opposed to their initiative.<sup>609</sup>

The Foreign Office was certainly happy with the outcome of Cousins and Hayday's visits as they had succeeded in reopening contacts with the Arab trade unions. However their efforts to persuade the Arabs to come to the negotiating table were unsuccessful because, not only were they perceived as friends of the Histadrut, but also seen as promoting the Israeli point of view for direct talks, which the Arab states were opposed to.

### **The Foreign Office forms the Overseas Labour Consultative Committee (OLCC)**

The OLCC was formed shortly after Hayday and Cousins had made their initial trips to the Middle East which gave their work credibility and support.

In 1965, a Foreign Office review of British influence and organised labour overseas revealed that despite the TUC's influential position within the international labour movement the TUC was not really interested in international affairs and building links with their foreign counterparts.<sup>610</sup> Woodcock was blamed for the TUC's indifference, primarily, because his priority was domestic affairs and that he considered the ICFTU to be wasteful and dominated by the Americans. The review had been instituted because the Government was concerned that British influence abroad was falling behind that of Germany and America. In addition organised labour was being targeted by the Communists because of their influential role in political decision making in many of the newly independent states in Africa and Asia. The role of the labour attaché was considered to be vital along with that of the TUC. The outcome was that in September 1968 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) established the Overseas Labour Consultative Committee (OLCC) on which both the TUC and the CBI were represented.<sup>611</sup> The OLCC, which met regularly, expanded the work started by the TUC visits to the TUC's involvement in the Middle East. In Cousins and Hayday, they had two trade unionists who believed that the labour movement could play its part in bringing peace to the region.

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<sup>609</sup>Note of a discussion on Arab Labour affairs with representatives of the British trade union movement, Morris, the British Labour attaché in Beirut to the Foreign Office, 9 September 1969, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2680.

<sup>610</sup> Foreign Office review "British influence and organised labour overseas", February 1965, TNA:PRO, FO1110/199.

<sup>611</sup> The TUC and the CBI issued a press release welcoming the establishment of the OLCC, 5 September 1968, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2474.

The trade union situation in the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict were discussed at the second meeting of the OLCC in February 1968. Lord Shepherd, the Minister of State, told the committee that the unsettled conditions of the Palestinians had been made worse by the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and that they were treated as second class citizens in all Arab countries except Jordan. The Minister said that the only point of direct contact between Jews and Arabs at present was at the ICFTU Executive Board which the Israelis hoped would lead to political talks. He asked for the TUC to help with this aim. The committee used as a basis for their discussions a paper that had been prepared by Foggon, the Overseas Labour Adviser. His report, which focused on Britain's oil interests in the Middle East, included an assessment of the activities of the oil companies, the trade union situation, and the influence of the ICFTU, the WFTU, and the ILO. Foggon concluded that the ICFTU had lost ground in the Arab world to the Egyptian led International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (ICATU). He thought the situation was unlikely to change as long as the Histadrut, with AFL-CIO support, continued to be a leading ICFTU affiliate. Hayday and Cousins reported on their recent visit to Jordan and the Lebanon. Hayday, while agreeing with Foggon's evaluation of the situation regretted that it did not deal with the refugee problem which was hugely important in Lebanon and Jordan. He thought Foggon had over-estimated the influence of Histadrut in the ICFTU.<sup>612</sup> At the next OLCC meeting in April 1968, Hayday and Cousins reported on their visit to Egypt. They added that as well as the TUC, some of the larger British unions now wanted to develop friendly relations with their counterparts in the Arab States. Relations with the Histadrut, he said, would not be affected, because the TUC was "convinced that understanding between Israeli and Arab workers was necessary for peace and all their (the TUC's) efforts would be directed to Arab-Israeli reconciliation."<sup>613</sup>

Foggon told the FCO in May 1968 that the OLCC had already helped "lever the TUC out of its self-imposed isolation. " The OLCC had supported the TUC's efforts to improve relations with the Arab trade unions as it was in the government's interests to continue to do so. He reported that the TUC General Council had already endorsed a proposal to finance a Foundation for overseas work, which along with governmental financial help could support

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<sup>612</sup> "Labour and trade unions in the Arab Countries of the Middle East" Paper prepared by Overseas Labour Advisers Office, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2625. Minutes of the 2nd Meeting of the OLCC, 2 February 1968, TNA:PRO, FCO59/493.

<sup>613</sup> Minutes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the OLCC, 29 April 1968, TNA:PRO, FCO59/589.

future aid programmes.<sup>614</sup> The fourth meeting of the OLCC meeting discussed the work of non-governmental organisations operating in the labour field overseas; the German Friedrich Foundation, the American Institute for Free Labor Development, and the African American Labor Centre, and the Histadrut. The meeting noted that all the organisations had government and trade union support and that funding for their activities was provided not only by the organisations themselves, but from other sources as well. The report on the Histadrut presented to the OLCC, had been originally written by Skinner, the labour attaché in Israel and included details of the history, structure and international activities of the Histadrut as well as the Afro-Asian Institute.<sup>615</sup> The TUC continued to take a keen interest in the work of the OLCC and cooperated with the government whenever possible on a wide range of issues over the next few years which included discussions relating to the future of the labour attaché service, various aspects of overseas aid, the work of the ILO and the development of TUC contacts in the Middle East. They notified the OLCC of all the TUC's overseas visits as well as visits by trade union delegations to Britain.

In September 1969, Foggon explained to Lehmann, the Histadrut European representative, that relations with the Arab unions were under Foreign Office supervision. Their policy was to try and improve relations with those unions with whom they had contact with prior to the 1967 war as well as preventing the Arabs moving closer to the WFTU. Foggon told Lehmann that an Egyptian delegation had visited the UK that year and that Cousins future plans included visits to Egypt, Sudan and maybe Libya. Lehmann warned that these visits might be exploited by the Arabs for anti-Israel propaganda. Foggon admitted that "there was a risk and that the Foreign Office is trying to prevent this by giving guidance in advance and advising all British trade unions not to intervene in the Israeli-Arab conflict."<sup>616</sup>

By 1970, the TUC's links with the UAR had expanded, even though not all the major British unions were as keen the TUC to build links with their Arab counterparts. The OLCC reported that with the exception of the TUC all the major Western European trade union movements had either neglected the UAR or were pro-Israel. The TUC told the OLCC that they had attempted to involve their European colleagues, but had made little progress, as support for

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<sup>614</sup> The funding of a TUC overseas aid programme was never discussed again. Foggon to Johnson FCO, 1 May 1968, TNA:PRO, FCO77/20.

<sup>615</sup> Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the OLCC, 31 July 1968, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2630.

<sup>616</sup> Lehmann to Haring, 29 September 1969, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-15.

Israel was very strong both in Germany and Scandinavia.<sup>617</sup> All this effort by the TUC to build links with the Arab trade unions paid off, when in September 1970, the approach made by the TUC to the UAR Federation of Labour regarding the hijacking of a British airliner by Palestinian terrorists received a more positive response from Egyptians than similar requests made by others.<sup>618</sup>

The OLCC was successful as it brought together government, industry and the unions and helped change the TUC's attitude to international affairs. It was an honest attempt by the Foreign Office to rectify the mistakes made by disbanding the Colonial Committee in 1961 and downgrading the role of a specialist labour advisor two years later. The OLCC was formed shortly after Hayday and Cousins had made their initial trips to the Middle East, which gave their work credibility and support. The committee did not directly input into the TUC's involvement in Arab-Israeli affairs, but it did allow the Foreign Office to influence their international work. The main thrust of the transformation in remodelling the TUC's international presence in the Middle East only came after Woodcock's retirement and from within the TUC itself with the energy, enthusiasm and vision of Feather, Cousins, Hayday and Jones. But the reality was that a lack of resources did not allow the TUC to run its own aid programmes in developing countries or send specialists abroad, which meant that its international work was limited to making contacts and the ICFTU.

### **Building on improved TUC -Histadrut relations**

Building on the success of Cousins and Hayday's visit to Israel in August 1967, several of Britain's largest trade unions sent delegations to Israel over the next year including the Inland Revenue and Staffs Association,<sup>619</sup> the ETU,<sup>620</sup> and the TGWU<sup>621</sup> The unions' unique

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<sup>617</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 24 March 1970, MSS.292B/901/12 and the Meeting of the OLCC, 15 May 1970, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2625.

<sup>618</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 30 October 1970, MRC, MSS.292D/901/1.

<sup>619</sup> Cyril Plant, the General Secretary of the Inland Revenue and Staffs Association was the next member of the TUC General Council to visit Israel in November 1967. Plant was seen by the Israelis as an important visitor and throughout his visit he frequently urged the need for direct negotiation. He said that when Frank Cousins met with the Jordanian and Lebanese trade unions in the near future they would be urged to press their governments for direct talks with Israel. Skinner letter to MOL, 16 November 1967, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2440 and Hagai to Haring, ( Hebrew original), November 1967, PLILMR, IV-219A-3-47.

<sup>620</sup> Skinner to Oates, MOL, 6 May 1968, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2630.

<sup>621</sup> A TGWU delegation led by Frank Cousins, visited Israel as guests of the Histadrut in November, 1968. Cousins, who refused to discuss Arab-Israeli relationships or any matters arising from his visit to Egypt earlier

relationship with Israel was signified by Aharon Becker, who as Head of a Histadrut delegation to Britain, addressed the 1968 TUC Congress, saying that "the people of Israel yearn for peace and are willing to start negotiations today rather than tomorrow."<sup>622</sup> Becker used the opportunity at Congress to talk with other fraternal delegates including those from Lebanon, Tunisia, Cyprus and Turkey.<sup>623</sup> In October 1968, a Histadrut delegation visited Britain. The delegation recommended that relations with the British unions could be strengthened further by appointing a labour attaché and sending more delegations to meet with the unions. They realised that the problems of the Middle East were only a minor topic in their talks and felt that the TUC and the majority of unions had a positive attitude towards Israel. They noted that people like Hayday, insisted on taking an "objective" stand in order to be an capable mediator between the Arabs and the Israelis. But the TUC did reaffirm their support for the Histadrut and Israel's right to exist.<sup>624</sup>

Although there was no debate on the Middle East at the 1968 TUC Congress, the International committee published a report about the visits to Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt, which they hoped would eventually lead towards an improvement of relations between Israel and the Arabs. The TUC expected that these initial contacts with the Arab trade unions would eventually build into relationships similar to those which existed with the Histadrut. The report warned that the delegation had discovered that in all three Arab countries there was a general and deep-rooted opposition to direct negotiations with Israel, although the suggestion that they should recognise and accept the existence of the State of Israel was not totally rejected.<sup>625</sup>

### **The Histadrut moves its European office to Brussels**

The relationship between the Histadrut and the Israeli government has always been a complex one. Before 1948 the Histadrut played a major role in the organisation and economic

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in the year, emphasised that he had "no political mission whatsoever" in coming to Israel and had come as a trade union leader to maintain the friendship and co-operation which already existed between the Histadrut and the British trades union movement. Skinner letter to Oates, MOL, 27 November 1968, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2590.

<sup>622</sup> Address by Becker to the TUC Congress, 2 September 1968, LMU, TUC Congress report 1968, pp.82-3.

<sup>623</sup> 'Becker reports on TUC Conference', *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 September 1968.

<sup>624</sup> Report of the visit of Histadrut delegation to Britain, 27 October 1968, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-208 -1-14407 and Lehman to Haring, 5 November 1968, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-14.

<sup>625</sup> LMU, TUC Congress report 1968, pp.288-9.

expansion of the Yishuv in addition to its role as a trade union movement. After independence the relationship between the Histadrut's institutions, the state and its leadership, and the government were widely discussed. Eventually, the Government and Mapai, as the governing party, gained the upper hand and took control of the Histadrut's institutions; with all major political decisions and policy relating to the Histadrut made by the Mapai leadership who were also the government.

As long as Mapai remained in government, they both shared a common ideology and history, as well as the same loyalty to State of Israel and a mutual desire for Mapai to remain in government. There was however a conflict between them regarding the right of the Histadrut to act independently when it came to domestic economic matters.<sup>626</sup> The tenth Congress of the Histadrut in 1965 resolved that "the Executive Committee will act to guarantee cooperation between the Government and the Histadrut, while safeguarding the Histadrut's independence and authority. ...This cooperation is essential for the realisation of the national and social missions of the entire nation."<sup>627</sup>

There was however no such conflict when it came to the Histadrut's international role, which was to be a loyal partner of the State. Its function in international affairs "was to aid it to the extent of its power and relations, strengthen the State's position, as well as to support the state in its struggles and to make friends, sympathisers and supporters amongst the workers movements of the world."<sup>628</sup> The interests of the State were uppermost and transcended party politics. The Mapai leadership - which included the General Secretary of the Histadrut, who was also member of that government - made the decisions relating to the international role of the Histadrut. These lines were subsequently approved by Histadrut's executive committee. Mapai and not the Histadrut decided when, for example, the Histadrut should resign from the WFTU or when it should join the ICFTU.

The Histadrut's main role in Europe was to maintain and develop direct ties with trade unions, promote friendly relations and information exchange through delegations and support

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<sup>626</sup> For more information on the political relationship between Mapai the Histadrut see: Peter Y. Medding, *Mapai in Israel: Political Organisation and Government in a New Society*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972) or Myron J. Aronoff, *Power and Ritual in the Israel Labor Party*, (Armonk:Sharpe,1993).

<sup>627</sup> Adam Daniel, "*Labor Enterprises in Israel: The Institutional Economy, Volume 2*", (New Jersey: Transaction,1976).

<sup>628</sup> Reuven Barkatt as Head of the Histadrut's International Department presented a review of the last 10 years of Histadrut international activity to the Histadrut Executive Committee, Histadrut Executive Committee meeting minutes, fourth meeting, 4 March 1958, (Hebrew original) pp.161-74.



Israel's membership of international organisations. Their London representative had proved to be very good in this role, especially when it came to building good relations with the TUC. In 1962 the Histadrut opened their European office in London. The Histadrut's European office was opened in London in 1962 in order to develop this work as well as strengthen the then loose ties with the TUC and the unions. By February 1968, Marx considered that this initial objective had been achieved and that he was now spending 70% of his time in Europe rather than London. Marx told Haring that he didn't think that a single European representative could work efficiently in France, West Germany, Italy, and Scandinavia and urged that a labour attaché should be based in each country. Britain, he said, needed its own fulltime representative or a labour attaché. He urged them not to undervalue "the importance of an independent European Histadrut representative, who was not under a diplomatic stricture, and his independent status let him work and penetrate places and circles that are closed to diplomatic officials. The presence of labour attachés in several of the European capitals could only help the Histadrut representative."<sup>629</sup>

In April 1968, the Histadrut decided to relocate the office to mainland Europe because they realised that the EEC would become increasingly important to Israel and the Histadrut in the years to come. Alternative locations including Amsterdam and Paris were considered but the Histadrut chose Brussels, as it was centrally located and many of the organisations such as the ICFTU, the ILO, and the International Trade Secretariats were already based there.<sup>630</sup> Hans Lehmann, Marx's replacement was given the responsibility for not only maintaining relations with the UK unions but also for building relationships with the German, French, and Scandinavian unions. Woodcock said he understood the motives for the move and the Foreign Office regretted that they would no longer be in regular contact with the Histadrut representative.<sup>631</sup>

While at the 1968 TUC Congress, Becker told Lehman that the leadership of the TUC, the unions and the Labour Party was changing because the incumbents were getting older and he had warned his colleagues that the Histadrut needed to build relationships with the younger

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<sup>629</sup> Marx letter to Haring, 6 March 1968, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-30.

<sup>630</sup> When the Histadrut opened their international office in 1962 they were worried that they if they had chosen Brussels then the Histadrut may have been too closely identified with the ICFTU. Ibid

<sup>631</sup> Marx to Morratt, 25 April 1968, PLILMR, IV-219A-3-41 and Oates File note MOL, 2 May 1968, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2673.

generation who would eventually replace them.<sup>632</sup> Despite his admonition, the building of long term relationships with the next generation of leaders suffered because their European representative could only meet with them once a month.

The Histadrut's move to Brussels, whilst making perfect sense in terms of their relations with the international labour movement, had not by 1972 seriously affected their relations with the TUC. Even though Jones had replaced Hayday as chairman of the International committee, the Histadrut failed to grasp that it made no sense to close their London office when relations with the TUC were at an all time high and attitudes towards Israel were starting to change. With their representative based in Brussels now flying into London only for a short visit once or twice a month the opportunity to build long-term relationships with the next generation of leaders suffered. What happened was very similar to what had taken place in the early 1950s after Bar-Tal, the Israeli Labour attaché based in London had returned to Israel; connections were no longer as strong, with greater reliance, once again being placed on the Israeli embassy. The consequence was that the excellent relationship between the Histadrut, the TUC and the unions that had taken years to achieve started to breakdown.

For the moment, however, relations between the British trade union movement and the Histadrut continued to be close and friendly.<sup>633</sup> Feather, who attended the 50th anniversary Histadrut Convention in December 1969, told delegates that the closest links between Histadrut and the TUC were in the international field.<sup>634</sup> Feather returned to Israel, six months later, as part of the first ever British trade mission to Israel. Feather met with Golda Meir, the Foreign Minister, who gave him a "scathing rendering of her views on the UN and the British Governments role in New York" and their general attitude to Israel.<sup>635</sup>

The Histadrut delegation which came to Britain in May 1970, as guests of the GMWU, AEF and TGWU was a return visit for a British delegation that went to Israel the year before. They

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<sup>632</sup> This was not the first time that the Mapai leadership had been warned that they were losing contact with influential figures in Britain. Moshe Sharett gave a similar warning in 1934 which was promptly acted on. Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, p.179 and author's interview with Hanan Lehman, Histadrut European representative 1968-71, Tel Aviv, 22 October 2004.

<sup>633</sup> In September 1969, the 12th Congress of the International Federation of Building and Woodworkers was held in Tel Aviv which was the first time it had met outside Europe. Delegates came from seventeen different countries including Britain. Skinner report for 1969 to the DEP, 3 February 1970, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2180.

<sup>634</sup> Skinner report to Department of Productivity, 29 December 1969, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2673.

<sup>635</sup> Skinner letter to Rylands DEP, 12 June 1970, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2673. Details of Feather visit to Israel 5-8 June 1970, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9/1. British Embassy report of visit, 9 June 1970, TNA:PRO, FCO17/1343.

met with the TUC and the Labour party and the visit was deemed to be very effective in terms of Israeli propaganda. The Israeli embassy reported that the success of the next Histadrut visit in December 1971 had been due entirely to the combined efforts of "our friend" Jack Jones and Marx, who now worked for the TGWU. While praising the advantages of exchange visits between Histadrut and the British unions, they commented that without a permanent Histadrut mission in London, the effectiveness of the embassy in the labour field was limited and could only be fundamentally improved in future by appointing a labour attaché.<sup>636</sup> A similar plea had been made fifteen years earlier with the same message, if you want to keep the British unions on your side then you need a permanent representative based in Britain.

### **Afro-Asian Institute**

The British government continued to receive from their labour attaché in Israel regular updates on the Afro-Asian Institute<sup>637</sup> and the Histadrut's overseas aid programmes.<sup>638</sup> The government's own advisory committee on trade union courses were so impressed that they recommended that they look at the Institute's programme of studies because of the relevance of its content to their own courses.<sup>639</sup>

In March 1972, the TUC ended its association with the Afro-Asian Institute when the General Council approved its final scholarship grant. They withdrew their support as the original reason for backing the Institute was no longer valid. In 1964 sponsorship of the Institute was seen as a means of building a relationship with the Histadrut and direct relations between the two organisations over the next eight years became a lot closer. In addition, the General

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<sup>636</sup> Letter from the Israel embassy in London to Israeli Foreign Ministry, 10 December 1971, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-4-7A.

<sup>637</sup>The Histadrut provided 60 % of the funding for the Institute with the rest coming from the Israeli government, the AFL-CIO, European trade unions, UN agencies and foundations dealing with Africa. Between 1959 and 1967 a total of 682 students from African and Asian countries had taken part in thirteen regular international courses and thirteen special courses for French speaking African countries. The Histadrut also provided experts for Israeli government aid programmes, which in 1970 were running in twenty-seven African States, these included ten Commonwealth countries and fifteen former French colonies. Skinner to MOL, 14 April 1967, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2440 and the draft report on Afro-Asian Institute, 23 November 1967, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2006.

<sup>638</sup> The Histadrut had also provided experts for Israeli government aid programmes which in 1970 were running in twenty-seven African States, these included ten Commonwealth countries and fifteen former French colonies. *Israel in the Third World*, ed. by Michael Curtis and Susan Aurelia Gitelson, (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1976), pp. 392-7.

<sup>639</sup> Unsigned file notes, 15 March 1967, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2006.

Council were told that the Institute itself now had access to more sources of funding than previously.<sup>640</sup> Yagol, the new Histadrut European representative, on his next visit to London asked Feather if they would reconsider the matter, but by then it was too late.<sup>641</sup> If the Histadrut had still been based in London then Yagol might have been able to intervene before the decision had been taken. This episode was a perfect example of how the Histadrut's relationship with the TUC and unions had suffered because of the move to Brussels. Another measure of the loosening of ties was that Yagol sent the Histadrut fewer reports about Britain compared to his predecessors. By 1972, with the TUC now controlled by the Left, many of the original supporters of the Institute were no longer members of either the General Council or the International committee and had been replaced by people who had other priorities. The TUC's attitude to foreign aid programmes and its relationship with the developing countries in the Commonwealth had also altered and although it was working with the Foreign Office, its focus was changing from global issues to European ones.

### **The TUC, the Histadrut and terrorism**

Arab terrorism towards Israel had a global impact in 1968, when Palestinian groups launched a terror campaign based on the hijacking of passenger aircraft. Between 1968 and 1977 their organisations hijacked or attempted to hijack twenty-nine aircraft.<sup>642</sup> The hijacking campaign, which peaked in 1972-3 impacted on the ICFTU and the TUC as they came under pressure to ensure the safety of aviation workers.

One course of action that has always been taken by the Histadrut, when either the State of Israel or any of its population comes under threat, is to appeal to its friends for help and support. One such threat was the hijacking, in July 1968, of an El Al Boeing 707 by Arab terrorists, which was flown to Algeria.<sup>643</sup> The Histadrut immediately sent a telegram to the ICFTU and the International Transport Secretariat (ITS) asking them urgently to do everything they could to obtain the immediate release of the aircraft, its crew and passengers by Algerian authorities.<sup>644</sup> Both the ICFTU and the ITS responded without delay as did

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<sup>640</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 21 March 1972, MRC, MSS.292D/901/3.

<sup>641</sup> Yagol to Ben Aharon, 12 June 1972, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-5-17.

<sup>642</sup> Morris, *Righteous Victims a History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2000*, p.377.

<sup>643</sup> "France puts Israeli plea for El Al passengers", *The Guardian*, 26 July 1968, p.10.

<sup>644</sup> Haring to Buitter, 24 July 1968, ISSH:ICFTU, 3520.

several major affiliates because this was primarily a problem for the civil aviation industry and not directly related to the politics of the Middle East.<sup>645</sup> Although the Algerian government had released all the non-Israeli passengers almost immediately they refused to release the Israeli passengers, the crew and the airplane. The Histadrut was concerned that apart from the German trade union organisation, the DGB, all their "friends" in Europe including the TUC had remained silent over the matter. As well as sending telegrams asking for assistance to Woodcock and Cousins, Lehmann, the Histadrut European representative, contacted the transport unions in Scandinavia and the Benelux countries urging them to "enthusiastically" implement the ITF's Congress resolution on the matter.<sup>646</sup>

The TUC, however, had their own reasons for not taking any action, as revealed in a memo to Woodcock from Kolarz which presented him with two alternatives. The TUC could either send telegrams to the Algerian Government and the Algerian transport union demanding the release of the plane and the passengers as the Histadrut had asked them to do or make a formal approach to the government asking them to intervene. The problem was that in the past, the TUC had almost always avoided becoming involved in sending messages of protest about particular incidents. Woodcock was also advised to take some action in anticipation of questions being asked at the forthcoming TUC Congress in September.<sup>647</sup> The TUC also discussed the matter with the British Airline Pilots Association, the Civil Aviation authority and the government, because they were concerned about the implications for workers in civil aviation. Two weeks passed before the International committee discussed the incident and decided to write to the Algerian trade union centre rather than Algerian government. The Committee saw little value in protesting to the government given that it might lead to the TUC being asked in future to protest to foreign governments on other matters.<sup>648</sup> By agreeing on this course of action, the TUC had bypassed the need for a public statement on the matter. The letter which Woodcock wrote on behalf of the General Council was weak and said very little apart from noting that the TUC "deplored incidents of this kind" and that "the adverse

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<sup>645</sup> ICFTU press release, 30 July 1968 and ITF Congress resolution meeting in Wiesbaden, 28 July-3 August 1968. Affiliates who responded include; AFL-CIO to the ICFTU, 26 July 1968, Canadian unions to the ICFTU, 29 July 1968, the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions to the Histadrut, 29 July 1968 and the Colombian trade unions to the ICFTU, 14 August 1968, all ISSH:ICFTU, 3520.

<sup>646</sup> Haring to Lehmann, 9 August 1968, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-14.

<sup>647</sup> Kolarz to Woodcock, 7 August 1968, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9/2

<sup>648</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 20 August 1968, MRC, MSS.292B/901/9.

repercussions of this incident are bound to have (an effect) on public opinion in this country and others regarding the situation generally in the Middle East." But he failed to ask the Algerians to take action to obtain the release the hostages and the plane.<sup>649</sup> It seems that although Woodcock and several members of the committee were friends of Israel, they had to put their personal feelings to one side, as they had agreed with the advice they had received, as well as their concern for those working in the civil aviation industry. When, a few days later on 1 September, the Israeli hostages were released in exchange for sixteen convicted Arab terrorists, the Histadrut wrote only to the ICFTU and no one else thanking them for their support and prompt action.<sup>650</sup>

How seriously the TUC now took its role as potential peacemaker in the Middle East was illustrated by their reaction to a series of events which started with the next Palestinian terrorist attack on an Israeli airliner in Athens on 26 December 1968.<sup>651</sup> The outcome may not have been to the Histadrut's satisfaction, but the TUC certainly did what they thought was best for them. Israel's response the following night was to destroy thirteen passenger airplanes at Beirut airport.<sup>652</sup> Victor Feather,<sup>653</sup> who had just succeeded Woodcock as TUC General Secretary met with Lehmann, the Histadrut European representative, on 20 January to discuss recent developments including the Israeli operation at Beirut Airport, which had just been condemned by the UN Security Council.<sup>654</sup> Support the UN was very important for the TUC and was a key part of their international policy.<sup>655</sup> Lehmann explained the Histadrut's concerns, including their fears about an enforced settlement in the Middle East and asked for a statement or a letter from the TUC expressing solidarity which would reiterate their policy regarding a direct settlement between both sides in the conflict. Feather explained that despite their friendship with the Histadrut, the atmosphere at the General

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<sup>649</sup> Woodcock to the Union Generale des Travailleurs Algeriens, 27 August 1968, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9/1.

<sup>650</sup> Histadrut to ICFTU, 1 September 1968, ISSH:ICFTU, 3520.

<sup>651</sup> '2 Arab Terrorists Attack Israeli Jetliner in Athens; Arab Terrorists Attack an Israeli Jet in Athens', *New York Times*, 26 December 1968, p.1.

<sup>652</sup> 'Israelis attack Beirut airport; wreck 13 planes,' *New York Times*, 29 December 1968, p.1.

<sup>653</sup> For more information about Victor Feather see: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31098>, accessed 11 Feb 2013].

<sup>654</sup> "Israelis attack censured by UN, vote unanimous," *New York Times*, 1 January 1969, p.1.

<sup>655</sup> Author's interview with Mike Walsh, TUC International Department 1966- 99, London, 29 November 2012.

Council was hostile to the Histadrut following the Beirut action, and it therefore would not be wise to ask the Council at this time for a decision on a letter. He went on to say that a pro-Israel statement from the TUC now would damage their ability to put pressure on the Arabs. Their "robust" discussion on the matter lasted more than two hours and ended with Lehmann refusing to accept the TUC's position.<sup>656</sup> Feather's reaction was not totally unexpected as Lehmann already knew that Israel's Beirut action had produced a negative response from other European unions.<sup>657</sup>

At the beginning of February 1969, news came through that nine Jews had been publically hanged in Baghdad after being convicted of espionage.<sup>658</sup> The immediate reaction of the Histadrut was to ask the TUC, the ICFTU and other affiliates, to protest at the hangings and to demand no further killings, the release of detainees and that the remaining Jews be allowed to leave Iraq.<sup>659</sup> The ICFTU action to circularise their affiliates brought an immediate sympathetic response.<sup>660</sup> Hargreaves prepared a summary of the situation in the Middle East which discussed the Histadrut request and international response to the Iraqi hangings, the four power talks which were about to begin in New York and Palestinian terrorist activity.<sup>661</sup> Hargreaves advised Feather that the General Council would back his judgment if he decided to take immediate action on the Histadrut's request. Feather, who at the time had only just been appointed acting General Secretary, decided not to take any action and wait until the next International committee meeting three weeks later. By then of course the need for a public condemnation would have passed and he would also have known that the TUC had not made public statements of that nature in the past.

At their meeting, the International committee were informed of the Histadrut's request and of the telegrams that had been received from the International Confederation of Arab Trade

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<sup>656</sup> Lehmann to Haring, 20 January 1969, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-15.

<sup>657</sup> Lehmann to Haring, 4 February 1969, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-3-15.

<sup>658</sup> "Iraq Hangs 16, Including 10 Jews, as Israeli spies," *New York Times*, 27 January 1969, p.1.

<sup>659</sup> Histadrut to TUC, 4 February 1969, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9.3 and Histadrut to ICFTU 28 January 1969 ISSH:ICFTU, 3522.

<sup>660</sup> The Histadrut the received sympathetic responses from unions in Greece, Turkey, Argentina, Denmark, Mexico and the ICFTU offices in Asia and Latin America, ICFTU to the UN, 28 January 1969, and ICFTU circular No.1 (1969) to all affiliates, ISSH:ICFTU, 3522.

<sup>661</sup> "Jarring to meet big 4 aides here," *New York Times*, 25 January 1969, p.1. and Hargreaves to Feather, 6 February 1969, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9.3

Unions (ICATU ) and the Arab Federation of Petroleum Workers (AFPW) asking the TUC to protest to the British Government against the supply of arms to Israel. They were also advised of a terrorist attack on a civilian aircraft at Zurich which the International Transport Federation (ITF) had condemned. The minutes of the meeting record that the committee discussed at length the four power talks and the likelihood of a settlement being reached. During the discussion Hayday reaffirmed that the committee's role was to bring together both the Israeli and Arab organisations in order to bring about a settlement between them.<sup>662</sup>

The minutes do not show if there was any discussion of the Histadrut's request for a letter of protest to the Iraqi authorities nor if a letter was written. The most likely scenario is that International Committee did not take any action because Cousins and Hayday were in regular contact with both sides in the Arab-Israeli dispute and wanted to avoid being seen as taking sides if they just responded to the Histadrut's request. Because there were now a number of issues involved the Committee decided instead to advise the General Council to seek a meeting with the Foreign Secretary to discuss the situation and the means of reaching a settlement. At the meeting with the Foreign Secretary, Cyril Plant, a friend of the Histadrut and a member of the TUC delegation asked the Minister "what could be done to prevent such incidents as the hangings of Jews and others which had taken place in Iraq." The Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, replied "that representations had been made to the Iraqi Government even before the first of these incidents. The disapproval of world opinion had been to some extent effective, particularly since other Arab governments had made it clear that they thought the actions of the Iraqi Government were unwise."<sup>663</sup>

The International Department had prepared detailed briefing notes for the delegation on the situation in the Middle East and what questions to ask the Minister relating to arms supply to the region, the possible imposition of an interim settlement, and the refugee problem.<sup>664</sup> The General Council were told that the Foreign Secretary had broadly agreed with the TUC's

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<sup>662</sup> TUC General Council minutes, 25 February 1969, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9.3 and MSS.292B/901/10.

<sup>663</sup> TUC General Council minutes, 25 February 1969, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9.3 and MSS.292B/901/10.

<sup>664</sup> The delegation were advised to make the following points to the Foreign Secretary;

- a. The anxiety of the TUC in the light of increased tension caused by localised conflicts and terrorist activities.
  - b. The dangers of retaliatory action by both sides and the possibility of a renewed general conflict.
  - c. Indications that an independent and uncontrolled Palestine nationalist movement has gained strength on Arab territory as well as in occupied territory.
  - d. That the UN has failed to create the conditions needed for negotiations leading to a permanent settlement.
- TUC briefing notes, 17 March 1969, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9.3.



views and that government policy was based on support for UN resolution 242, which had set down guidelines for a permanent settlement. There was also agreement that the problem could not be solved "without sustained efforts over a period and flexibility of attitudes on both sides." The TUC then sent identical letters to the Histadrut, ICATU and the AFPW informing them of their meeting with the Foreign Secretary.<sup>665</sup>

The worldwide increase in the hijacking of aircraft during this period resulted in two meetings between the British government the TUC in February and March 1970. Various measures were discussed to improve security including the suggestion, that crews be permitted to decline flights to some countries in the Middle East if they wished. Neither Israel nor the Arab states were condemned as their main concern was for the safety of airline workers, and the travelling public.<sup>666</sup> In January 1971, the TUC asked the government to ratify the Hague convention on hijacking and sought assurances regarding their concerns.<sup>667</sup>

The British government, the Labour Party and the TUC, along with the majority of the British population were horrified by the attack on Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. News of the kidnapping was received whilst the TUC Congress was in session and Yagol, the Histadrut representative, put pressure on the leadership to condemn the attack whilst the hostages were still alive. Initially the TUC was reluctant to agree to his request, but eventually agreed to send a telegram to the Foreign Office, which condemned the "horror at Arab banditry and murder in Munich" and called on the government to make representations to all Arab governments to immediately bring these activities to an end.<sup>668</sup> The Foreign Secretary replied saying that the Government had repeatedly condemned such acts.<sup>669</sup> When the news of the deaths arrived, the next morning's session opened with a minute of silence followed by an emotional statement from the TUC President.<sup>670</sup> Harold Wilson, the Prime Minister, condemned the murderous attack on the Israeli team and the Labour Party sent telegrams to Mrs. Meir, the Israeli Prime Minister and to the Israeli Labour Party expressing

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<sup>665</sup> The report of the meeting with the Foreign Secretary, 18 March 1969, IC6/3, TUC Press release, 19 March 1969, TUC International Committee minutes, 25 March 1969, all MRC, MSS.292B/956.9.3.

<sup>666</sup> TUC reports "Protection of Civil aircraft", IC6/3 and IC6/2, TUC General Council minutes, 24 March 1970, TUC International Committee minutes, 9 and 24 March 1970, all MRC, MSS.292B/901/12.

<sup>667</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 26 January 1971, MRC, MSS.292D/901/1.

<sup>668</sup> Feather to Foreign Office, 5 September 1972, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1.

<sup>669</sup> LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1972, pp.505-6.

<sup>670</sup> Yagol to Ben Aharon, 14 September 1972, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-5-17.

“deepest sympathy” and that the crime would be condemned “by the whole civilised world.”<sup>671</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The Six-Day War provided the TUC with the opportunity to play its part on the world stage to try and bring peace to the Middle East. Ironically if it had not played safe by not issuing a statement in support of Israel at the beginning of June, it is unlikely that any of Cousins and Hayday's missions to Israel and the Arab States would have taken place. The Histadrut who were disappointed by the TUC's response to the war, originally invited Woodcock who was unable to go. His replacements, Hayday and Cousins, then took full advantage of the situation to use the international trade union movement as a force for peace. Cousins, who was very strong on international affairs and had serious conversations with both the Israelis and the Egyptians to bring about cooperation between them. The TUC's efforts have not been given the recognition they deserve. The two men's plans, as well as the success of the pro-Israel lobby at the TUC, caused alarm at the Foreign Office, who openly admitted that it wanted to reduce the influence of the Histadrut on the TUC General Council. The TUC's efforts failed for a number of reasons, but mainly because both the Arab and Israeli trade unions movements were very closely allied to their respective governments and were unable to deviate from their government decisions and policies. The ICFTU similarly suffered as it was used for political purposes by both sides. The Foreign Office, which formed the OLCC to assist in rebuilding British interests in the region, brought the TUC on board with the hope of emulating the successful Israeli, German and American overseas aid and training programmes. These plans never succeeded, because the TUC were never given the necessary resources or funding.

The Histadrut never took advantage of this "golden" period in relations and squandered most of this goodwill, by not only moving their Europe base from London to Brussels, but also by changing their representative at the same time. They may have had good political reasons for moving to Brussels but relations between them and the TUC and the Foreign Office labour advisor were never the same again. The warning signs for the future, especially with the deterioration in Anglo-Israel relations and move towards the Left at the TUC, could never

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<sup>671</sup> "Wilson: Labour outraged", *The Guardian*, 6 September 1972, p.2.

be fully covered by monthly visits to London. As a result the excellent relationship between the TUC and the Histadrut started to unravel.

## **Chapter 4            1973-1982**

If the 1960s were the golden years for TUC-Histadrut cooperation, then the 1970s brought about a move towards increased support for the Palestinians by the TUC which was matched by a falling away in support for Israel. The various factors that brought about this change included the growing influence of the political Left both at grassroots and leadership level within the Labour Party and the trade unions, calls for the recognition of the PLO, support for a Palestinian homeland and the election in 1977 of a Right wing Likud government in Israel. At the same time there was a rapid decline in influence and power of the Histadrut in Israel, as well as the retirement of Israel's friends within the British labour movement. A contributory factor was Anglo-Jewry's lack of interest in the trade union movement and their move away from the Labour party to the Conservatives.

The signs of change were already apparent in 1973 with the TUC's response to the Yom Kippur war. Their reaction this time was even more muted than their reaction to the 1967 Six-Day War. The culmination of grassroots support for the Palestinian cause came in 1982 with Israel's invasion of Lebanon. It provided the Left with the opportunity to change both TUC and Labour Party policy with both organisations adopting resolutions which criticised Israel's military action as well as recognising the Palestinian right to their own homeland. The TUC's approval of this resolution marked the final collapse of the pro-Israel consensus within the labour movement. It had a dramatic effect on the TUC-Histadrut relations and marked the end of nearly 25 years of unquestioned support for Israel and the Histadrut. The key element which determined the TUC's attitude towards Israel and the Histadrut, and certainly applied to each of the decades in this study were the views of six biggest unions, especially the TGWU, and the attitude of their leaders, Bevin, Deakin, Cousins and Evans. The smaller unions were only able to promote successful motions at Congress if they had the support of the large unions as happened in 1982. Even without the opportunity presented by Israel's invasion of Lebanon it was more than likely that a motion critical of Israel and supportive of the Palestinians would have been adopted by Congress within the next few years.

The TUC's own priorities also changed during the 1970s. It became a main policy goal to cooperate more closely with their European colleagues and build links with its Eastern

European counterparts. The two leading Left wingers at the TUC, Hugh Scanlon<sup>672</sup>, the President of the AEU, and Jack Jones, General Secretary of the TGWU, were behind the move towards a closer relationship with the Russian and Eastern bloc. In order to achieve this, Jones, who succeeded Hayday as Chairman of the TUC International committee in 1972, avoided political problems by focusing on the issue of international trade unionism. On international human rights, Jones took a 'trade union point of view' by supporting protests and sanctions against government policy on trade unions in Bolivia, Chile, South Africa and Spain. He considered that trade union rights were the proper concern of trade union leaders but not human rights, which, were a matter for Amnesty International.<sup>673</sup>

Jones who had fought for the International Brigade in Spain was a lifelong supporter of the Left and Russia. He always gave the impression that he had never been a member of the CPGB even though he had been a member from 1932-41 and was reported to have left the party in 1949. Jones resumed contact with the CPGB 15 years later and during the 1960s passed confidential Labour Party documents to the Russians.<sup>674</sup> He was someone with whom the Communists felt comfortable with and with their help was elected TGWU General Secretary. However because of his long-term connections with the Russians and his desire for the TUC to normalise relations with the Russians, Jones opposed all moves for the TUC to support the public campaign to allow Soviet Jews to emigrate to Israel. Yet behind the scenes the TUC worked for the release of individual Russian Jews. The Histadrut were in regular contact with him as chairman of the International committee and saw him as a friend of Israel, which he was. Jones told this author that his friendly attitude and sympathy towards the Jews and Israel was conditioned by his mother who had a high regard for Jewish people.<sup>675</sup> Jones nevertheless opposed all moves for the TUC to support the public campaign to allow Soviet Jews to emigrate to Israel. He also opposed Arab attempts to bring Middle East politics to the international trade union movement.<sup>676</sup> Although he was personally

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<sup>672</sup> For more information about Hugh Scanlon see the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Jan 2008; online edn, Jan 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/93157>, accessed 11 Feb 2013]

<sup>673</sup> Minkin, *The Labour Party Conference : a study in the politics of intra-party democracy*, pp.175-6.

<sup>674</sup> Christopher Andrew, *The defence of the realm : the authorized history of MI5*, (London : Allen Lane , 2009).pp.535-6.

<sup>675</sup> Author's interview with Jack Jones, London, 11 January 2005.

<sup>676</sup> For more information about Jack Jones see the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Jan 2013 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/101871>, accessed 11 Feb 2013] and Jack Jones, *Union*

horrified at the politicisation of the ILO, the TUC supported the compromise regarding the recognition of the PLO. Behind the scenes however the TUC worked with the ICFTU to build up relations between the Histadrut and the Palestinian unions.<sup>677</sup>

The Histadrut's stock along with that of its partner in government, the Israeli Labour Alignment gradually declined throughout the 1970s. Although the Alignment managed to hold onto power until 1977, the Histadrut was by then in need of radical reorganisation having lost influence and prestige.<sup>678</sup> That year the political landscape in Israel dramatically changed with Likud's election victory and policies for a "Greater Israel". Anglo-Israel relations suffered as well as those with the British Labour party, making it easier for the Left to give their support to the Palestinian cause. By this time Histadrut-TUC relations had also declined and Begin's election gave no reason for them to improve. The result was that by the time of Israel's invasion of the Lebanon in 1982, the Histadrut appeared to have made no attempt to lobby the TUC as it had in 1967 and 1973.

### **Anglo-Israel relations**

Between 1973 and 1982, a period during which Britain had three Prime Ministers, two of whom, Wilson and Thatcher were seen as pro-Israel, Anglo-Israel relations were not easy. In 1976, when Callaghan replaced Wilson, the Foreign Office began to reappraise its relationship with Israel, with the result that Britain took a more a much more critical line with Israel over actions while at the same time moving towards becoming part of any EU initiative or statement.<sup>679</sup> One issue which the British government saw as a serious threat to the peace process was the rapid expansion after 1977 of the settlements in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. Although successive Israeli governments since the 1967 war had all supported the building of settlements, it was the Begin government's settlement drive that was seen by both Thatcher and Callaghan as an obstacle to any future peace agreement.<sup>680</sup>

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*man : the autobiography of Jack Jones*, (London : Collins, 1986) and Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party*, (London: John Murray, 1995), pp.158 and 175.

<sup>677</sup> Authors interview with John Vanderveken, ICFTU General Secretary 1982-92, Brussels, 7 April 2011 and Mike Walsh, Head of TUC International Department, 1980-99.

<sup>678</sup> See the memorandum on the history and functions of the Histadrut "The Israeli trade union federation; decline of a triple pillar of the State," from the British Ambassador to the Foreign Secretary, 25 April 1977, TNA:PRO, FCO 93/1178.

<sup>679</sup> Lochery, *Loaded Dice; The Foreign Office and Israel*, pp.173-5.

<sup>680</sup> For more information on the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories see Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*, pp.141-6 and Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp.466-7 and pp.546-8

The Venice Declaration of June 1980 was an attempt by the nine members of the EU, including Britain, to formalise the rights of the Palestinians in the peace process.<sup>681</sup> As well as calling for the acceptance of the Palestinians' right to self-government and the PLO's right to be involved in any peace initiative, the EU also called on Israel to end the occupation of territories it had held since 1967. Although the Camp David accords were mentioned in the TUC committee minutes, the Venice agreement was not.

The settlements were never a key issue for either the TUC's International Committee or the General Council, nor did they ever differentiate between the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>682</sup> While they were always aware of the issue, their priority from 1978 onwards was to try and bring the Histadrut and the Egyptian trade unions closer together. Both Len Murray and Tom Jackson, who succeeded Len Jones as chairman of the International Committee, knew that the Histadrut was opposed to the building of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories as well as direct contact with the PLO.<sup>683</sup> The two men ensured that there was little public criticism of Israel's actions by the TUC and worked behind the scenes with the ICFTU who put out public statements when necessary. The Left's main concern was not the settlements but building support for the recognition of the PLO and a Palestinian homeland. The situation changed after 1982, by which time the TUC was fully committed to supporting the Palestinians' right to self-determination. The 1983 TUC Congress defeated a motion proposed by the EETPU which was an attempt by friends of Israel to regain some of the lost ground. The motion, which acknowledged the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, called for the recognition of the achievements of the Histadrut called on the General Council to increase bilateral contacts with the Histadrut. Supporters of the Palestinians made the point in the debate that the Histadrut owned "the construction sites that were being illegally built on the occupied parts of the West Bank" and that "to declare solidarity with

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<sup>681</sup> see Lochery, *Loaded Dice: The Foreign Office and Israel*, pp.185-6.

<sup>682</sup> The TUC Congress report for 1981 noted that the 1980 ILO conference had adopted a resolution which "expressed concern at the establishment of settlements in Palestine and the occupied territories, and their economic and social consequences for the Arab labour force. The resolution called on all states not to provide Israel with any assistance in connection with the settlements and asked the governing body to provide help to Arab citizens in the territories." ILO Conference, TUC Congress report 1981.

<sup>683</sup> The only mention of the Palestinians in the report of the TUC visit to Egypt and Israel in 1980 was when discussing the Histadrut's commitment to the survival of Israel that while the Histadrut was critical of the Government's settlement policies in the occupied territories and was not itself active there, the Histadrut was opposed to any dealings with the PLO unless the PLO was willing to accept the right of Israel to exist. The report also noted that the Histadrut also laid great store on the normalisation of relations with Egypt, and was very anxious to develop cooperative relations at the trade union level."Visit to Israel and Egypt 13-23 November 1980, Report I C 4/4 January 12, 1981

Histadrut at the very moment when Arab lands are being seized;...and illegal settlements built" condoned acts that had been denounced by the UN.<sup>684</sup>

Throughout this period, which started with the Yom Kippur war and ended with the Lebanon war, Britain continued its gradual move away from Israeli positions and towards support for the Arab and Palestinian view. Although Britain continued to support Israeli interests which included the blocking of the "Zionism is racism" issue at the UN and opposition to both the creeping legitimisation of the PLO and the Arab boycott, the Foreign Office had unofficial contacts with the PLO. Both Mrs. Thatcher and the Foreign Office believed that pressure had to be put on Israel to make concessions using the 'land for peace' formula and were irritated by the lack of progress in the peace process. She also used her position as a friend of Israel to criticise actions of the Begin government, such as Israel's bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981 and the Knesset vote to annex the Golan Heights which were seen as having the potential to lead to renewed fighting. Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 only added to British concerns and frustration.<sup>685</sup>

### **The Left and the TUC**

The final two years of the 1960s were momentous years both in Britain and abroad. There were the anti-war movement protests against the Vietnam war and the worldwide 1968 student revolution,<sup>686</sup> while in Britain in 1969, the government issued its white paper "*In Place of Strife*" aimed at curbing trade union "power" which had dominated the industrial scene for most of the decade. There was a direct link between the Far Left's involvement in the "1968 student revolution" and the change in the attitude of the Labour Party and the unions towards Israel during the next decade.<sup>687</sup>

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<sup>684</sup> Debate on the Middle East, TUC Congress report 1983, pp.555-8.

<sup>685</sup> For more detailed information about Anglo-Israel relations between 1973-82, see Lochery, *Loaded Dice; The Foreign Office and Israel*, pp.132-88.

<sup>686</sup> For a general overview of the 1968 student revolution see: Nick Thomas, *University of Nottingham 'Challenging Myths of the 1960s: The Case of Student Protest in Britain'*, in *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2002, pp. 277-297, Sandbrook, *White Heat*, pp.492-515 and Ronald Fraser, *1968: a student generation in revolt*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988). For the Labour Government's reaction see: Paul Corthorn and Jonathan Davis, eds, *The British Labour Party and the wider world: domestic politics, internationalism and foreign policy*, (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008), pp.168-189.

<sup>687</sup> For more detailed information on the rise of the Left in Britain in the 1970s, see Shindler, *Israel and the European Left between Solidarity and Delegitimisation*, pp.243-56 and Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism History of a Divorce.*, pp.151-75.



The 1968 student revolution, which caused much upheaval and bloodshed in France and the United States, was by comparison small and muted in Britain. Although the media portrayed this period as the age of student revolution, the British student movement protests were much less radical and less violent than elsewhere, focussing mainly on reforms to the governance of the universities, teaching methods and student living conditions.<sup>688</sup> Nevertheless, the student protests elsewhere in the world provided a minority of revolutionary students and Far Left Trotskyist groups with the opportunity to enthuse the majority of British students, who were not politically motivated, to join them in similar demonstrations against the authorities.<sup>689</sup> The result was that Trotskyist groups such as the International Marxist Group (IMG) and International Socialists (IS) were very active in the protests and played a central role in organising many of the demonstrations and sit-ins. The University administrations in Britain, unlike their colleagues in France and Italy who were heavy-handed in the way that they dealt with the student protests, took a more low key approach when dealing with the sit-ins and demonstrations. Although there was some over reaction, namely at the LSE, which was understandable given the media hype surrounding the protests.

In 1968, American involvement in the Vietnam war was an emotive issue amongst young people and students. The Far Left once again took full advantage of the situation. The Vietnam Solidarity Committee, which comprised of a variety of groups with different political aims including the IMG, IS, Young Liberals and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), organised a series of increasingly violent demonstrations, all of which resulted in conflicts with the police and arrests.<sup>690</sup> The largest demonstration with 100,000 marchers took place on 27 October 1968. It attracted unprecedented media attention and is remembered for the clashes with the police outside the American embassy in Grosvenor Square, which resulted in 43 arrests and 50 injuries. The Government, concerned that the

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<sup>688</sup> The students used sit-ins as their main vehicle for protest, the most notable being those at the LSE, the universities of, Liverpool, Leeds, Bristol, Keele, Leicester, Manchester, Birmingham and Hornsey College of Art.

<sup>689</sup> "The majority of students seem to have identified with either the Labour Party or the Conservative Party.....a survey of Liverpool University students in October 1969 found that 28 per cent supported the Conservatives, 27.5 per cent supported Labour, while only 1 per cent identified with the left. Only 6 per cent identified with what was termed the 'extreme left' in a survey of Manchester University students in February 1969. This is hardly surprising, since the far-left organizations only had very small memberships. One estimate has suggested that International Socialism (IS) had between 450 and 500 members in 1968, while the other main force in the student left, the International Marxist Group (IMG), had a mere forty members in early 1968." Thomas, *University of Nottingham 'Challenging Myths of the 1960s: The Case of Student Protest in Britain'*, p.283.

<sup>690</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 287-90.

student demonstrators might copy the violence in Europe, monitored events and dealt firmly with the Grosvenor Square protesters. Civil servants estimated that there were only around 1000 revolutionary students in Britain in 1968 out of a student population of 450,000.<sup>691</sup> Although student demonstrations continued into the 1970s, they never again reached the heights of 1968.

The "power" of the unions and Left wing shop floor militancy were widely blamed for Britain's economic decline throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The Wilson government attempted to solve the country's industrial and economic problems by confronting the TUC and the unions over 'excessive' wage demands and lack of productivity. The unions rejected the proposals. The government's 1969 white paper attempted to use the law to reduce the power of the unions especially in relation to unofficial strikes. The proposals never passed into law and were replaced in the 1970s by a voluntary agreement brokered by the TUC. By 1969 the leadership of the TUC was controlled by Left wing trade union leaders<sup>692</sup> who led the confrontation with the government. This also affected the political alignment of the block vote at the Labour Party conference which would in time impact on any Israel-related conference motions. The change only came to influence the TUC's relationship with Israel during the next decade. The move to the Left in the unions occurred because the Wilson government, had continued to move the Labour party away from traditional socialism in order to solve the country's economic problems, and also attempted to capture the middle ground of national politics. The two most influential Left wingers were Hugh Scanlon, President of the AEU, and Jack Jones who, in 1969, succeeded Frank Cousins as General Secretary of the TGWU. Jones was seen by the Histadrut as a friend of Israel who opposed Arab attempts to mix Middle East politics with international trade union issues. The two men tried to change Cold War alignments, in particular the divided international trade union movement and achieving unilateral nuclear disarmament. When Jones succeeded Hayday as Chairman of the TUC International committee in 1972, he attempted to build new relationships with unions outside the ICFTU including the Russian trade unions which was to

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<sup>691</sup> Paul Corthorn and Jonathan Davis, eds, *The British Labour Party and the wider world: domestic politics, internationalism and foreign policy*, p.186.

<sup>692</sup> By 1969 four of the five largest affiliated unions had Left wing union leaders who were Hugh Scanlon, President of the AEU (elected 1967); Lawrence Daly, General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (elected 1968); Richard Seabrook, President of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (elected 1968); and Jack Jones, General Secretary of the TGWU (elected 1969). Minkin, *The Labour Party Conference : a study in the politics of intra-party democracy*, pp.114-5.

affect the TUC's position on human rights and Soviet Jewry.<sup>693</sup> Although Cousins, Hayday and Jones held the line against the Left who were becoming anti-Israel, when they retired they were replaced by a new cadre, who had been ignored by the Histadrut, and saw Israel in a different light. This move to the Left both within the Labour party and the unions meant that by 1972, Labour's traditional support for Israel was being questioned by grass roots Left wing activists who were beginning to show an active interest in foreign affairs and the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular.

### **Labour's support for Israel**

One of the many changes that took place in Britain in the 1970s was that support for Israel was no longer guaranteed within the Labour movement. It was replaced by grassroots support for the Palestinians, built up by the activism of the generation that became involved in politics of the New Left. There were several reasons for this change which resulted in the Labour Party, like the TUC, breaking with tradition in 1982 and adopting for the first time motions critical of Israel and support for Palestinian nationalism.

The move to the Left amongst the leadership of the larger trade unions and the TUC General Council at the end of the 1960s committed the Labour Party NEC to socialist economic policies, but this shift to the Left did not immediately affect the Party's policy on the Middle East, which remained pro-Israel. The situation started to change around the time of the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Although the Parliamentary Labour Party supported Wilson's pro-Israel stance, local constituency parties did not, with three times as many constituency parties adopting a pro-Arab rather than pro-Israel line. The "old" Labour Left was not critical of Israel but called for a ban on all arms sales to the Middle East<sup>694</sup>

The activists of 1968 soon moved on to other causes. These former students from the two main Trotskyist groups, Militant and Socialist Organiser, which grew out of the IMG, infiltrated the Labour Party constituency organisations with the aim of influencing Labour policies and the Left's politics. They were at the heart of the change of attitude towards Israel within the Party that took place after the 1973 war. As had happened in 1968, it only took a

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<sup>693</sup> Minkin, *The Labour Party Conference : a study in the politics of intra-party democracy*, pp.175-6.

<sup>694</sup> The local constituency parties included Paisley, Newcastle-upon-Tyne West, Croydon Central, Harlow, Chelsea, and Bradford. They passed resolutions calling for Israel to withdraw to its pre-1967 boundaries and for Palestinians to be included in peace negotiations. June Edmunds, 'The Evolution of British Labour Party Policy on Israel from 1967 to the Intifada', p. 30.

small number of activists to instigate change. Because older members of the constituency Labour parties in the early 1970s were more concerned about local issues and economic policies and ignored the Middle East, the Far Left activists were successful in raising awareness about Palestinian nationalism.<sup>695</sup>

By the early 1980s Militant supporters were well established within the Labour Party and two unions in particular, the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) and The Post Office Engineering Union (POEU).<sup>696</sup> Socialist Organiser, associated itself with leading figures on the Left of the Party, such as Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, leader the Greater London Council (GLC), and Ted Knight, leader of Lambeth Council. Far left activists such as Knight, refused to recognise Israel and proposed instead the establishment of a democratic, secular state. Others espoused anti-Zionist themes, equating Zionism with Nazism or racism.<sup>697</sup> Their support for anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist policies identified Israel with Britain's colonial past. They supported the PLO which was seen as a "third world" independence movement.

The International Socialists(IS) concentrated on infiltrating the unions. By the 1970s IS had a strong industrial base having built its up membership by supporting workplace disputes. In 1977 the IS transformed itself into a political party, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). With 4000 members it was the largest Trotskyist party in Britain.<sup>698</sup> The SWP was virulently anti-Zionist, a position that stemmed from its leader Tony Cliff. He was Jewish and born in Palestine, but turned into a notorious anti-Zionist. Cliff produced an SWP booklet in which he set out the conspiracy theory of Zionism. He accused the Zionist leadership in Palestine of collaborating with the Nazis in the destruction of the Jews.<sup>699</sup> The SWP insisted that it was not antisemitic, only anti-Zionist: it denied that the Jews were a nation and characterised them as primarily a religious group. Consequently they advocated dismantling the State of

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<sup>695</sup> In the eight Labour Party annual conferences from 1974 to 1981 of the over 3,400 resolutions submitted only three were on the Middle East and two of those came from Poale Zion. Paul Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism History of a divorce*, p167.

<sup>696</sup> John Lloyd, "The Far Left: the reality behind the noise", *the Financial Times*, 18 August 1983.

<sup>697</sup> Paul Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism History of a divorce*, p167-8.

<sup>698</sup> For an overview of the work of the activism of the IS and the SWP in British industry the 1960s and 70s see Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and John McIlroy eds., *British trade unions and industrial politics 64 - Vol. 2. The high tide of trade unionism, 1964-79*, (Aldershot : Ashgate, 1999), pp.259-96.

<sup>699</sup> Jacob Gewitz, "The Anti-Nazi League the case for the Board", *the Jewish Chronicle* , 28 October 1978.

Israel, which they described as a racist state.<sup>700</sup> The CPGB, which was the largest communist party with around 20,000 members, was also anti-Zionist (although it never advocated destruction of the State of Israel). It had not been allowed to affiliate to the Labour Party and, like the SWP, concentrated on infiltrating and influencing the unions.

Support for Israel within the Labour Party and the unions had also waned due to the retirement of the generation of MPs, party members and trade unionists who had witnessed the plight of the Jews during the Second World War and sympathised with the establishment of the State of Israel. They had been replaced by a number of MPs and local activists for whom the problems of the Palestinians were more important than Labour's traditional identification with the Jews and Israel. Nor did it help that British Jews who in the 1930s and '40s had been natural supporters of the Labour Party had by the 1970s also moved away from the Party. The electoral significance of Jewish voters was taken over by the Afro-Caribbean immigrant population who were more receptive to supporting third world movements like the PLO.

The stunning victory of the right-wing Likud party in Israel's 1977 general election<sup>701</sup> also had an effect on the remaining friends of Israel in the Labour ranks. As a result of the Labour Alignment's defeat and the advent of a right wing government that rejected socialism, many on the Left of the Labour party questioned their continuing support for Israel. Furthermore, the election of Menachem Begin as Prime Minister brought back memories of the 1946-48 when he led the terrorist group Irgun Zvai Leumi against British rule in Palestine.

### **The pro-Arab lobby in Britain**

Another factor in the change was the work of pro-Arab political groups in Britain to counter the influence of the pro-Israel lobby. Two of the largest and oldest organisations were the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding (CAABU) established in 1967 and the Labour Middle East Council (LMEC) formed in 1969. CAABU's aim was to foster "mutual understanding and sympathy between the people of Britain and the people of the Arab world.....(and to express) sympathy for the aspirations, achievements and rights of the Arab peoples, especially the Arabs of Palestine, for whose administration Britain was

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<sup>700</sup> The Institute of Jewish Affairs, 'The Pro-Arab Lobby in Britain', pp.14-6.

<sup>701</sup> For more information on Menachim Begin and Likud's victory see Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*, pp.147-50 and Tessler *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, p.499-507.

responsible until 1948, and whose case must not be permitted to go by default." Its General Committee included current MPs, former government ministers, former British ambassadors to Arab states, journalists and academics.<sup>702</sup> LMEC was a pro-Arab pressure group which operated mainly within Parliament and was not affiliated to the Labour Party. LMEC submitted a memorandum to the Labour Party in April 1973 which attacked the Party's pro-Israel views, "double standards" on Palestinian rights and called for the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242, calling for Arab recognition of Israel and Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories.<sup>703</sup> The success gained on university campuses during the 1970s as a result of a coalition between Palestinian,<sup>704</sup> Arab and Left-wing British students was, as we shall see, repeated within the trade union movement during the early 1980s, with the British anti-Zionist trade unionists as the driving force in the Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPP).

By 1970 the PLO had links with the Labour Party, thanks to connections made by CAABU and LMEC and fringe Palestinian groups that had attended several of the party's annual conferences. Over the next decade, the PLO was accepted by several European Socialist governments as the official representatives of the Palestinian people.<sup>705</sup> Meanwhile, Israel's position as the sole representative of the Middle East at the Socialist International ended in the late 1960s when the International built links with third world organisations such as the PLO and Arab socialist groups.<sup>706</sup>

Although change was starting to happening at the grass roots in both the Labour Party and the unions at the beginning of the 1980s, the pro-Arab lobby in Britain had not yet succeeded in influencing British public opinion and nor did it have the support of a major political party or the trade unions. Other than CAABU and LMEC the lobby consisted of a number of mainly

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<sup>702</sup> The Institute of Jewish Affairs, 'The Pro-Arab Lobby in Britain', pp.2-3.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid, pp.12-13 and the memorandum to the Labour Party by the Labour Middle East Council, 10th April. 1973, LHM, LP/ID 1973 Middle East, Palestine, Israel.

<sup>704</sup> The General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) was established in 1969 and was considered to be "front" for the PLO The Institute of Jewish Affairs, 'The Pro-Arab Lobby in Britain', pp.3-5

<sup>705</sup> Yasser Arafat , Chairman of the PLO scored several diplomatic victories in Europe during 1979-80 notably in Austria and West Germany which resulted in the PLO being recognised as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people. For more information, Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp.535-8.

<sup>706</sup> For more information about Israel's relationship with the Socialist International see; Yoram Peri, 'The fall from favour : Israel and the Socialist International', *Institute of Jewish Affairs research report*, 21 and 22, 1980. pp.1-20.

small organisations often founded by the same people which had the effect of spreading their propaganda net as wide as possible to ensure they attracted a wide range of people including trade unionists, students and politicians. These organisations in the pro-Arab lobby included the London Friends of Palestine (LFP), the Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFU), the National Organization of Labour Students, the Universities Education Fund for Palestinian Refugees (UNIPAL), the British Anti-Zionist Organization (BAZO) and the SWP. LMEC also provided an umbrella under which Palestinian or Arab activists could come together. For example, its Honorary Secretary in 1981, was Ernie Ross MP, who was also chairman of the TUFU and a leading mover of the twinning of Dundee with Nablus. In many cases, these groups with the exception of the SWP were very small and were able to call on the resources of the PLO if necessary.<sup>707</sup> The TUFU operated from the same offices as CAABU and had close links with the PLO and their trade union arm the Palestine Trade Unions Federation (PTUF), who also operated from the same address as the Arab League. .

### **TUC reaction to the 1973 War**

It was debatable whether the cycle of violence and reprisal in the Middle East which had frequently dominated the headlines during 1972, and included the massacre at Lod airport, the killing of Israel athletes during the Olympic Games at Munich, and Israeli attacks on Fedayeen bases, increased or decreased public support for Israel in the West. The TUC, like the ICFTU now only issued statements which were dependent on the seriousness of the incident, such as when a Libyan airliner on a scheduled flight with 113 people on board became lost due to a combination of bad weather and equipment failure over northern Egypt and was shot down by Israeli fighter jets. The TUC followed the lead of the ITF<sup>708</sup> and the ICFTU<sup>709</sup> by issuing its own statement.<sup>710</sup>

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<sup>707</sup> For more information about the pro-Arab lobby in Britain see; The Institute of Jewish Affairs, 'The Pro-Arab Lobby in Britain', *The Institute of Jewish Affairs Research Reports*, 22 & 23, (1981), pp.1-18.

<sup>708</sup> ITF statement on the Libyan -Arab airliner disaster, 22 February 1973, MRC,MSS.292D/956/511/1.

<sup>709</sup> ICFTU press release, 23 February 1973, ISSH:ICFTU, 3517.

<sup>710</sup> The TUC, which had already received correspondence from Arab trade unions condemning the incident, sent a copy of its statement to the British government and asked about the proposed international convention against aviation terrorism. The Government replied saying that they were trying to obtain further international cooperation on this matter and strongly supported the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) call to investigate the attack on the airliner. Egyptian Federation of Labour to the TUC, 23 February 1973, Arab Federation of Petroleum Workers to TUC, 27 February 1973, TUC statement on the Middle East air disaster, 27

The British Ambassador to Israel reported in January 1973 that "the Israelis are none too happy with our approach to the Arab-Israel dispute. They think they have detected a tendency on our part to make a slight shift towards the Arab positions. They recognise we have wide interests in the Arab world which cannot be put at risk for their sake."<sup>711</sup> Both countries were concerned about the impact of Britain's recent entry into the EEC and how it would affect them.<sup>712</sup> The key domestic issue for the majority of Israeli trade unionists at the start of 1973 was the same as for their counterparts in Britain - the economy and the rising cost of living.<sup>713</sup> The work of the Histadrut in Europe and Britain had continued much as before. It included lobbying for curbs on aviation terrorism and support for Israel's formal application for permanent observer status at the recently formed European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).<sup>714</sup> Yagol, the Histadrut's European representative, warned that some European trade union leaders had voiced their concerns that because of the Histadrut's close relations with the American unions, any extra involvement by the Histadrut in the ETUC would assist the American unions with their plans for the African and Mediterranean areas, which went against the European's interest.<sup>715</sup> Yagol reported that the TUC's long term aim was to build a

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February 1973, Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to Feather, 13 March 1973, all MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1.

<sup>711</sup> The British Ambassador to Israel, Annual review for 1972, 1 January 1973, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2728, p.5.

<sup>712</sup> For more information on Israel's economic situation and her relationship with the EEC see Mordechai E. Kreinin, 'Israel and the European Economic Community', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 82, No. 2 (May, 1968), pp. 297-312, Richard W.T. Pomfret and Benjamin Toren, *Israel and the European Common Market : an appraisal of the 1975 free trade agreement*, (Tübingen : Mohr, 1980), pp.22-32, Sachar, *A History of Israel: from the Rise of Zionism to our time*, pp.742-4, and The British Ambassador to Israel, Annual review for 1972, 1 January 1973, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2728. For information on Britain's economic situation and the government's relationship with the unions in 1973 see; Edward Heath, *Course of my life*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), pp.396-419, David Childs, *Britain since 1945: a political history*, (London: Benn, 1979), pp.163-6.

<sup>713</sup> The MOL noted that "By 1973, the Histadrut had failed to keep pace with the changes in Israeli society and had lost much of its influence. There was still respect and support for the British labour movement and there were many "curious resemblances" between the industrial relations scene in Israel and Britain, such as the interference by the Government in the fixing of wages." Morgan File note, 17 April 1973, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2736.

<sup>714</sup> The growing importance of the European Economic Community and the challenge of multinational corporations from the mid-1960's onwards highlighted a need for a more focused European trade union approach. The outcome was the ETUC which although linked to the ICFTU was a wholly independent organisation. The ETUC had an open door policy to non-ICFTU unions. The TUC became a key member of the ETUC, even though during the 1970s and 1980s Congress regularly adopted motions hostile to British membership of the European Economic Community as well as policy proposals or directives from Brussels. For more information on the ETUC, see Denis MacShane, *British Unions in Europe in Trade Unions in British Politics: the first 250 years*, (London: Longman, 1991), pp.286-306 and Carew, *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*, pp.353-57.

<sup>715</sup> "The Histadrut's adjustments to the changes in the European labour movement" Yagol to Ben Aharon (Hebrew original), 23 January 1973, PLILMR, IV-219A-5-1.



strong European organisation of unions (The ETUC) as well as rebuild relations with the Communist bloc. He noted that this change of direction could seriously harm both Israel's and the Histadrut's position in the international labour movement especially as the Histadrut had recently failed to achieve official ETUC recognition. Their application had been refused even though Jones, and Len Murray,<sup>716</sup> the incoming General Secretary of the TUC, had both indicated that they had supported the Histadrut's plans. Feather had previously indicated to the Histadrut that the ETUC would not allow any non-European organisation official status. He also stressed the contradiction between the Histadrut joining an Asian organisation and its desire to attach itself to the European one.<sup>717</sup>

On October 6, 1973, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the holiest day in the Jewish religious calendar, Egypt and Syria simultaneously launched a surprise attack against Israel. Egyptian forces crossed ceasefire lines to enter the Israeli held Sinai peninsula and the Syrian Army moved into the Golan Heights, which had been occupied by Israel since the 1967 war. Within a week the Israelis had successfully counterattacked and the war ended on 24 October when both sides agreed to a UN brokered truce.<sup>718</sup>

The Histadrut sent telegrams to the ICFTU and its leading affiliates, including the TUC, saying that Israel had been attacked on the holiest Jewish holiday and that Israel would drive back the aggressor beyond the agreed cease-fire lines. They called on the workers of the world irrespective of their political opinions and trade union affiliation to demand that the aggressor withdraw his forces and resume peaceful negotiations.<sup>719</sup> The same day, Murray received a separate telegram from the Histadrut asking for a "public expression of solidarity with Israel."<sup>720</sup>

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<sup>716</sup> For more information about Len Murray see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Jan 2008; online edn, Jan 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/93772>, accessed 11 Feb 2013]

<sup>717</sup> Lehmann to Gat, 6 January 1973, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-4-7A, Yagol to Ben Aharon, (Hebrew original), 19 February 1973, ISA,6738/18, Histadrut to ETUC, 1 April 1973 and ETUC to Histadrut, 19 April, ISSH:ETUC, 1452, ETUC to Histadrut, 28 May 1973, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-4-149.

<sup>718</sup> For more information about the 1973 war and its aftermath see Morris, *Righteous Victims a History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2000*, pp.387-443 and Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp.474-81.

<sup>719</sup> Histadrut to the ICFTU, a copy of which went to the TUC, 8 October 1973, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1.

<sup>720</sup> Yagol to TUC, 8 October 1973, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1.

The Labour Party, like the TUC decided to keep a low profile during the crisis, but unlike the TUC were willing to help behind the scenes if necessary.<sup>721</sup> Once again, as in 1956 and 1967, the Party leaders were briefed on the latest developments by Israeli diplomats.<sup>722</sup> The Histadrut were now, however, paying the price for moving to Brussels as Murray and Yagol did not have the close personal relations that had existed in 1967 between Woodcock and Marx. Yagol's difficulties were illustrated by what happened on 19 October when he was told that it was unlikely that Murray would be unable to get back to him for several days. Yagol left a message for Murray asking if the TUC would supply material support for workers in Israel who were victims of the war and that all ETUC affiliates had been approached. He added that the Dutch, Belgian, Austrian and West German unions had agreed either to make direct financial contributions or donations such as medical supplies, ambulances or similar equipment.<sup>723</sup>

In preparation for the TUC International committee meeting on 23 October, Alexandra Kolarz, wrote a well informed briefing document which discussed the action taken by the four powers and whether Britain should impose an arms embargo on the Middle East but it did not advise the Committee on which course of action to follow.<sup>724</sup> The Committee appear to have been divided over the Histadrut request for aid which some members thought committed the European trade union movement to providing aid to only one side rather than both sides in the conflict. They eventually agreed to provide assistance through the Red Cross after being told that it had been the long established policy of the TUC to provide assistance through internationally recognised bodies such as the Red Cross. Feather then wrote to Yagol explaining why they were unable to agree to the Histadrut's request.<sup>725</sup> The TUC issued a 'neutral' statement on 23 October, which welcomed the announcement of a ceasefire in the Middle East and appealed to trade union organisations in those countries involved to call on

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<sup>721</sup> On 7 October, Harold Wilson, the leader of the Labour party who had been contacted by the Israeli ambassador immediately published an announcement condemning the attack. Comay to the Israeli Foreign Office, (Hebrew original), 7 October 1973, ISA, HZ6738/1.

<sup>722</sup> Comay to the Israeli Foreign Office, (Hebrew original), 10 October 1973, ISA, HZ6738/1.

<sup>723</sup> TUC briefing on the Middle East, 22 October 1973, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid.

<sup>725</sup> The General Council offered to explain their attitude on this matter to ETUC affiliates and to ask if the ICFTU could be of any assistance. TUC International Committee minutes, 23 October 1973, MRC, MSS.292D/901/6, TUC General Council minutes, 24 October 1973, Feather to Yagol, 26 October 1973 and Murray to Kersten, 30 October 1973. The Red Cross sent the TUC details of their operations in the region, Red Cross to the TUC, 1 November 1973, all MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1.

their governments to respect the ceasefire agreement in order to reopen peace talks.<sup>726</sup> By comparison, the AFL-CIO emphasised its support for Israel and condemned the actions of the Soviet authorities in the Middle East.<sup>727</sup> The Labour Party, however, was not concerned about British policy and condemned Israel's' attackers and "the British Government's pro-Arab bias." Their statement, which included their correspondence with the Israeli Labour Party noted that the majority of the Labour MP's had voted against the Government's embargo policy.<sup>728</sup> Given that both the TUC and the Labour Party were part of the same British labour movement, the willingness on behalf of the Parliamentary Party to openly back Israel was in complete contrast to the TUC response reflecting the different positions between the party leadership and grassroots activists support. An example of this grass roots support from within the trade union movement came from the Ealing Trades Council which supported the return of the Palestinians to their homeland and the creation of a secular Palestinian state. They also called on the TUC to organise a boycott of all Israeli imports and to oppose any arms deals with Israel.<sup>729</sup> The TUC's decision to do nothing until the next General Council meeting, was either intended to support UN efforts and back the government's neutral position or a deliberate move by Jones and Scanlon to support the Russians and the Palestinians at Israel's expense. Yagol believed it was the latter and was in no doubt that the TUC's position on the war as the most anti-Israel in Western Europe with the exception of Italy and France.<sup>730</sup> It was even more remarkable when compared to the Labour Party's position, which constantly criticised the Conservative government about Israel. This disengagement from Israel, Yagol believed, had come as the result of the TUC's move towards Europe and their desire to work more closely with the Russians. He noted that the personal friendship shown by Feather, Jones and Scanlon towards the Histadrut had only made it easier for them to accept a conciliatory position. The hostility of the Council towards the Histadrut had been aided by accusations that Israel had started the war and an anti-American attitude. He was also convinced that the TUC's neutral position as well as their

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<sup>726</sup> The statement failed to mention the combatants by name, apportion blame for starting the war, or criticise the Government arms embargo. TUC statement on the Middle East, 23 October 1973, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1.

<sup>727</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 27 November 1973, MRC, MSS.292D/901/6.

<sup>728</sup> Labour Party News Release, 24 October 1973, LHM, LP/ID 1973 Middle East, Palestine, Israel.

<sup>729</sup> The motion was moved in December by the West London Branch of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs union (ASTMS). Ealing Trades Council to TUC, 2 December 1973, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1.

<sup>730</sup> Yagol to Ben- Aharon 6 November 1973, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-5-17.

silence on the Arab aggression was intended to ensure that they would continue to be able to play an active role in the future. Alan Hargreaves, the Head of the International Department, told Yagol that "you will need us and our intervention. You won't be able to manage without any intervention and coercion from outside." It was well known at the time that Hargreaves was very much a Foreign Office man and it was rumoured that he had been placed in his post by the Foreign Office.<sup>731</sup> Although he was the TUC's chief advisor on the Arab -Israel conflict he never visited Israel. Yagol observed that "It is noticeable that in the past he was offended by something we did, either real or imagined" and that "Hargreaves continues to follow Foreign Office policy" and will never do or say anything without first getting "guidance."<sup>732</sup> The TUC had also tried to play down their disagreement with the Histadrut by explaining that their statement was limited only to one issue, the implementation of the ceasefire and the ending of hostilities, adding that they "will soon look for an opportunity to circulate their connection to the Histadrut and Israel." Murray, Hargreaves and Jones had all told Yagol that they had not been surprised by the Arab attack as, in their view, it had been expected due to the lack of progress in peace negotiations.<sup>733</sup> It was therefore no surprise that the Histadrut's request for material aid was refused and replaced with a token donation of £250 to the Red Cross.<sup>734</sup> Yagol also advised that the Histadrut should ignore the "warm and emotional attitude" shown by "some of our British friends" and that the Histadrut should review its relationship and connections with the European unions' especially in Britain. He thought that Murray, who had been recently appointed TUC General Secretary, had not yet got to grips with his new job.<sup>735</sup> Israel Gat, who represented the Israeli Labour Party in London, was so concerned by the TUC's lack of solidarity towards Israel both during and after the war, that he wrote to the Histadrut saying that it was impossible to deal satisfactorily from Brussels with an organisation the size and importance the TUC. He urged the Histadrut to take action before it was too late by appointing a Histadrut representative in London as well as a labour attaché at the London embassy.<sup>736</sup>

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<sup>731</sup> Author's interview with Geoffrey Goodman, London, 11 November 2007

<sup>732</sup> Yagol to Meshel, 26 December 1973, (Hebrew original), ISA, HZ6740/5.

<sup>733</sup> Ibid.

<sup>734</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 27 November 1973, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1.

<sup>735</sup> Yagol to Ben- Aharon 6 November 1973, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-5-17.

<sup>736</sup> Israel Gat to Bahat, 3 December 1973, PLILMR, IV-219A-4 - 7B. Shmuel Bahat coordinated the Histadrut's international work with the International Department of the Israel Labour Party and where his friend Michael

The purpose of Yagol's next visit in December was to examine and find ways to improve relations with TUC leaders, in the light of the "hesitation" shown during the recent war. He reported that Murray told him that he was looking forward to the possibility of visiting Israel for the first time during the next Histadrut conference and was also willing to host visitors from the Histadrut. Murray also expressed a complete understanding of the difficulties facing Israel and the Histadrut over the forthcoming Israeli-Arab peace conference. It appears that Yagol was being told what he wanted to hear, but it is not clear if Yagol was aware that of Murray's predecessors as General Secretary, only Woodcock had shown a real personal affection and understanding towards Israel and the Histadrut. Nor does he appear to distinguish between Murray's personal beliefs and those of his role of managing the diverse views within the General Council, which ranged from support for Russia, the Arabs and the Palestinians, to opposition to American involvement and Communism as well as support for the British government and Israel. Whereas Woodcock had shown his support for Israel several years before the 1967 war and knew how to manage the Council at important moments, Murray, had only just been appointed General Secretary and had yet to make his mark on the council. With his economics background, he was new to international affairs, not known to the Histadrut and had never been to Israel. Yagol wrote that Jones blamed Hargreaves influence for the recent unfriendly decision but stressed the importance of visiting Egypt in order to try and make connections between the Egyptian unions and the Histadrut.<sup>737</sup> What is clear is that the TUC lacked strong leadership on this issue and with no consensus on the Council it allowed Hargreaves to present a viable alternative that everyone could support.

Since its move to Brussels five years earlier, the Histadrut's priority had been the ICFTU and they had realised that with Cousins retirement, the TUC were no longer playing the lead European role in the ICFTU and had been replaced by the Germans and the Scandinavians who were very supportive of Israel.<sup>738</sup> The TUC's focus was now the ETUC and improving links with Russia. The Histadrut's change of priority also meant that they no longer attempted

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Harish was in charge. In countries, where the Israeli Labour Party had good relations with the government or their counterpart such as in Britain it was decided that the Labour Party's representative in London could also look after the Histadrut's interests. This was the role of Israel Gat, the Israeli Labour Party representative in London and his replacement Benny Shiloh. Author's interview with Shmuel Bahat, Director and Deputy Chairman of the Histadrut International Department 1969-83, 10 October 2012, London.

<sup>737</sup> Yagol to Meshel, 26 December 1973, (Hebrew original), ISA, HZ6740/5.

<sup>738</sup> Author's interview with Shmuel Bahat, Director and Deputy Chairman of the Histadrut International Department 1969-83, 10 October 2012, London.

to seriously lobby the TUC and had no one to blame but themselves for the TUC's response to the war.

Since the Six-Day War both the Histadrut and the Arab unions had used the ICFTU to campaign for support and once the fighting had stopped, the lobbying restarted. The Histadrut were unhappy with what they saw as the ICFTU's lack of support during the recent hostilities. Yagol wrote that a "general and hypocritical formula had taken over, saying "don't worry we will not abandon Israel's existence, but behind it there's even less real political and protective substance than in the Rogers peace plan."<sup>739</sup> He reported that Kersten, the ICFTU General Secretary, and his friends had wanted to repair the "shocking impression their former declarations made, but the general attitude is superficial, evasive and insincere."<sup>740</sup> Yagol also referred to both the West German DGB and the TUC when highlighting his concerns that the rise in the anti-Israeli and anti-Histadrut attitudes in Europe had been in some part due to the Europeans strengthening their connections with the Soviet bloc. He was concerned that many European trade unionists, mainly in Belgium, had avoided meetings and discussions with him because they were unwilling to commit support for the Histadrut and the TUC's "general and elusive statement focussing on humanitarian aid" was an example of this practice.<sup>741</sup>

### **British Government action**

The Foreign Office decided that in order to save costs Israeli labour issues would be covered in future by the labour attaché based in Athens, who would visit Israel at regular intervals.<sup>742</sup> The problems that had beset the Histadrut when they moved to Brussels were about to be repeated and the Foreign Office soon would discover that long-term personal relationships and understanding that had been built up over time could not be maintained by spending a few days in Israel every few months. How Corcoran, the new labour attaché, would deal with

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<sup>739</sup> The Rogers peace plan of October 1973 called for a settlement in which Israeli forces would return to the international border between Egypt and Israel. See Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp.447-49.

<sup>740</sup> Yagol to Meshel, 26 December 1973, (Hebrew original), ISA, HZ6740/5.

<sup>741</sup> Yagol to Ben-Aharon, 6, 9 and 30 November 1973, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-5-17.

<sup>742</sup> The post had been created in 1950, when the Histadrut was a powerful and important organisation and partner of the Israeli government. The reason given was the lack of funding available for specialists which meant that the Foreign Office had to reduce the number of labour attaché posts at British embassies from twenty-two to nine. Barnes FCO, to Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Labour, 19 July 1973, TNA:PRO, LAB13/2215.

the role which the Histadrut might play in any new political crisis in the Middle East, while based in Athens had yet to be resolved. What would definitely be missing in future would be the in-depth reports that had been prepared by his predecessors.

In March 1974, the Histadrut held its 12th national convention which provided an opportunity for the international trade union movement to show solidarity with the Histadrut. Whereas the French, the Germans, the Belgians and the Dutch immediately accepted, the TUC once again declined their invitation. Murray rejected the invitation on the grounds of pressure of work even though he had previously given Yagol the impression that he might attend. When Yagol asked him to reconsider, Murray was told by Hargreaves that "in the present circumstances given the General Council's strict impartiality with regard to the Middle East conflict it might be wise if we avoided accepting invitations in that area."<sup>743</sup> The International committee decided however that although the TUC had not previously attended the convention in order to not to appear to take sides in the conflict, a refusal this time could be misunderstood. They decided to send Hugh Scanlon, a senior member of the General Council, who would be able to explain the TUC's approach to the conflict.<sup>744</sup> After informing the Histadrut that Scanlon would attend, Scanlon withdrew. As they were unable to find a replacement the General Council once again limited itself to sending fraternal greetings.<sup>745</sup> Although it appeared that the TUC had wanted to do the right thing, Scanlon, a powerful personality within the TUC who had been to Israel before, knew that it was politically expedient for him to turn down the invitation. Add to this the anti-Israel feelings on the General Council and it is hardly surprising that no replacement for Scanlon was found. Although their decision not to attend the convention could have been calculated not offend their Arab friends, the General Council decided to invite the Histadrut to attend their next Congress and resolved that Murray should

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<sup>743</sup> The advice noted that Feather had attended the 1969 Histadrut Convention, fraternal greetings had been sent to the 1966 Convention and that a General Council delegation had visited Israel in 1964 following a visit by the Histadrut to the UK. A Histadrut delegation came to the UK in 1968, and the Histadrut had been represented at the TUC Congress in 1965, 1968 and 1970. TUC memo to Walsh, 1 February 1974, MRC, MSS.292D/901/6.

<sup>744</sup> International Committee minutes, 4 February 1974, also TUC memo to Murray, 4 February 1974, both MRC, MSS.292D/901/6.

<sup>745</sup> The fraternal greetings included an "indication that although the General Council had decided to send a fraternal delegate the very serious political and economic situation facing this country prevented them from doing so ", TUC Finance and General Purposes Committee minutes, 4 March 1974. Also TUC memos to Murray, 13 February and 1 and 6 March 1974, Telex to the Histadrut, 5 March 1974, and Murray to Meshel, 13 March 1974, all MRC, MSS.292D/901/6.

visit Israel during the next twelve months. The Histadrut were well aware of his unfamiliarity with the Arab-Israeli conflict and that there was an urgent need for Murray to go to Israel.<sup>746</sup>

As a reaction to the Ma'alot massacre of 22 children on 15 May 1974, the Histadrut wrote to the TUC insisting that they unequivocally condemn this atrocity and actively support the Histadrut's demand to immediately convene the ICFTU Executive Board. The incident, which had enraged the Histadrut had started when three armed Palestinian terrorists held 105 children and 10 adults hostage at a school in a town in Northern Israel. Hargreaves advised Murray that there was no need for independent TUC action as the ICFTU Executive Board would be meeting at the end of May and the TUC would be associated with their statement.<sup>747</sup> Although the ICFTU had condemned the terrorist act at the time, the Executive Board took no further action on the incident.<sup>748</sup>

Yagol spent two weeks in Britain in December 1974 talking to leading members of the General Council about the rumours regarding a downturn in support for the Histadrut. He concluded that despite the warm welcome which he had received, a real threat to relations came from the PLO and the TUC's improving relations with the communist bloc.<sup>749</sup> Once again he stressed the importance of arranging visits for British union leaders to Israel in order to show solidarity with Israel.<sup>750</sup> He noted that the Miner's union executive with the exception of their President, Joe Gormley and General Secretary, Lawrence Daly, were all on the political Left and recommended that the Histadrut should strengthen ties with them.<sup>751</sup>

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<sup>746</sup> TUC General Council minutes, 1 April 1974, MRC, MSS.292D/901/6 and Yagol to Meshel, 24 April 1974, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-4-149B.

<sup>747</sup> Hargreaves also reported that retaliatory action by the Israelis had resulted in heavy Palestinian casualties in refugee camps in the Lebanon. He wrote that "both sides are at fault and the most constructive and charitable approach" would be to hope that Kissinger's peacemaking attempts succeed. He concluded by saying "this is the line which we should try to impress on the ICFTU." TUC memo to Murray from Hargreaves, 21 May 1974 and the Histadrut to the TUC, 20 May 1974, both MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1.

<sup>748</sup> Histadrut to the ICFTU 14 April 1974, ISSH:ICFTU, 1452, item 62EB/2, The Ma'alot massacre, ICFTU Executive Board minutes, 30-31 May 1974, ISSH:ICFTU, 192 and TUC General Council minutes, 1 June 1974, MRC, MSS.292D/901/6.

<sup>749</sup> Yagol to Meshel 21 December 1974, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-4 - 149B.

<sup>750</sup> Yagol noted that British trade unionists continued to visit Israel in 1974 with a Miners union delegation in August and in November the General Secretary of the National Union of Seaman (NUS) made a short visit. On his return to Britain, the NUS Executive adopted a resolution which looked forward to the reopening of the Suez Canal which it hoped would help to restore and maintain peace in the Middle East. Yagol to Meshel, 11 January 1975, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-4-149B.

<sup>751</sup> Yagol to Meshel, 11 January 1975, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-4-149B.



The Labour Friends of Israel (LFI) was founded in 1956, in the wake of the Suez crisis, to promote support for Israel throughout the British labour movement and to strengthen the links between the British Labour Party, the trade unions and the Israeli Labour Party. In order to try and fill the void left by the Histadrut move to Brussels, the LFI concentrated its efforts on building support amongst the leadership of trade unions by taking study missions to Israel for both Labour MP's and trade union officials. Although it succeeded in building good relations with many trade union leaders, it was unable to repeat that success with the TUC. Union leaders who supported the LFI during the 1970's included Joe Gormley, Gavin Laird (AEWU), Clive Jenkins and Doug Hoyle MP (ASTMS) and Geoffrey Drain (NALGO).

In 1975, the LFI wrote to the Histadrut pointing out the "deterioration in the day to day relationship" with the unions and the TUC and urged them to appoint an UK Histadrut representative. They also warned of the strenuous efforts being made by the pro-Arab activists which made the situation worse.<sup>752</sup> The work of the LFI with regard to the unions was described as a holding operation, because, although it had the leadership of many of the unions on its side during the late 1970's and up to the Lebanon war, it had by that time lost grassroots union support for Israel.<sup>753</sup> A 1978 confidential LFI report noted that they were unsuccessful in building support for Israel "in the group that will provide the next generation of trade union leadership".<sup>754</sup> In order to formalise the LFI's work within the trade union movement, the Trade Union Friends of Israel (TUFU) was formed in September 1983.<sup>755</sup>

The LFI reported, in January 1975, that six Labour MPs had met with Yasser Arafat, the PLO leader and had made plans for PLO "trade unionists" to meet with their British counterparts.<sup>756</sup> Both Murray and Hargreaves reassured Yagol that they had no intention of inviting Arafat's "unions." Murray also told him of his intention to visit Israel and Syria later

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<sup>752</sup> Cohen to Meshel, 31 January 1975, PLILMR, IV-219A-7-132. In 1983 the Histadrut appointed a UK representative who worked under the guidance of the European office of the Israel Labour party.

<sup>753</sup> Author's interview with Lady Valerie Cocks, Executive Director of TUFU, 1983-90, London, 6 October 2005.

<sup>754</sup> LFI internal report 1978 quoted in Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism History of a Divorce*, p.169.

<sup>755</sup> "Unionists to promote Israel's case", *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 December 1982.

<sup>756</sup> LFI to Histadrut, 31 January 1975, PLILMR, IV-219A-7-132.

in the year and hoped this visit would bring the Histadrut and the Arab unions closer together.<sup>757</sup>

After the Yom Kippur war, Britain reassessed its policy towards Israel because of the Arab threat to use oil as a weapon and the threat to cut supplies to the UK. This revised policy was illustrated by the 'Craigium Dictum'. Its proponent, James Craig, argued that, while Israel's security should not be compromised, Britain's extensive interests in the Arab world required that foreign policy had to be more sensitive to Arab attitudes than Israeli ones. Another factor for the change of policy was a sense that many Arab states had some justice to their grievance when they blamed Britain for the establishment of the State of Israel due to the Balfour declaration and the decision to hand back the mandate to the UN in 1947.<sup>758</sup>

In June 1975, the General Council, which preferred to have their own meetings with the Foreign Secretary rather than work through the Labour Party, discussed the situation in the Middle East with James Callaghan, the Foreign Secretary.<sup>759</sup> Callaghan's comments reflected the Craigium Dictum: he told the TUC that Britain could help both sides by remaining non-aligned in the conflict and while attempts were being made to re-establish links with Egypt and other Arab states without alienating Israel. The TUC also adhered to the Craigium Dictum and was encouraged by the Foreign Office to express this by rebuilding relations with the Arab trade unions. The TUC suggested that in order to reach a peaceful settlement in the Middle East the Government should try to counteract the impression that Britain was favouring Israel. Callaghan answered by saying that the Labour Party had made no secret of their close friendship with Israel or their desire to maintain those close relationships but also had made it clear that they wanted closer relations with the Arab States.<sup>760</sup> Although the TUC-Histadrut relations had been very warm during the 1960s, they now had a much more critical and cooler relationship.

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<sup>757</sup> When Yagol met with Murray in March 1975, Murray confirmed that there had been no change in their attitude to unions connected with the PLO. Yagol to Meshel, 2 February 1975, 20 March 1975, (Hebrew original), both PLILMR, IV-219A-4-149B, TUC International Committee minutes, 3 February 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/901/7.

<sup>758</sup> Lochery, *Loaded Dice; The Foreign Office and Israel*, pp.149-50.

<sup>759</sup> In July 1974, the Foreign Secretary, told the TUC that the Government had maintained a non-aligned approach to the conflict in order to help both sides. The TUC replied saying that it had taken a similar position in order to re-establish contact with the Arab trade unions whilst maintaining the friendship of the Histadrut. TUC report "meeting with the Foreign Secretary", IC10/3, 5 August 1974, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1. Also author's interview with M. Walsh, TUC International Department 1966- 99.

<sup>760</sup> TUC General Council minutes, 7 July 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/901/8.

Murray's long awaited visit to Israel took place in August 1975.<sup>761</sup> He was given briefing notes by the Foreign Office which included the Government's view on the conflict, the PLO, the moves to expel Israel from the UN, and the Arab boycott.<sup>762</sup> Prior to his departure the International committee had recommended that the General Council approve their statement opposing moves to expel Israel from the UN. The declaration, which was issued after Murray's return, made it clear that they did not approve of the decision taken by UNESCO (*in 1974*) to exclude Israel from membership of any regional organisation and would resist any attempt to limit Israeli participation or to exclude Israel from any other UN organisations including the ILO.<sup>763</sup> On his arrival in Israel, Murray said that the proposal to suspend Israel from the UN would be a grave error and that "the TUC has a clear stand on attempts to suspend Israel...and we have given our opinion to the British government and to any organisations that have asked us about it."<sup>764</sup> He was also reported as saying that that Britain's unions supported Israel's right to exist.<sup>765</sup> Murray's three day visit, included a one hour meeting with Prime Minister Rabin, in which they discussed both political and economic issues.<sup>766</sup> He returned to London with a much greater understanding of both Israel and its problems. Barnea, the Histadrut European representative, thought that his meeting with Rabin had "fundamentally changed how he thought of the conflict" and had a profound influence on him which shaped his view of the PLO for years to come.<sup>767</sup>

Shortly after Murray had returned to London, the *Jerusalem Post* wrote that traditional trade union friendship for Israel was threatened as the younger union leaders had very little contact with Israel and that the Histadrut had not devoted enough time to the TUC since moving to

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<sup>761</sup> Arrangements were made for Murray to have a special travel document which allowed him to enter Israel without having his passport stamped. Israel Embassy letter to Israeli Foreign Ministry, 13 August 1975, (Hebrew original), ISA, HZ6739/3.

<sup>762</sup> Murray was also given a speech written by the International Department which failed to mention the TUC's long links with the Histadrut. TUC memos to Murray, 15 and 19 August 1975, both MRC, MSS.292D/956.9/1.

<sup>763</sup> The TUC sent a copy of their statement to the Foreign Office who replied saying that the Government "will oppose any attempt to deny Israel representation in UN organisations or to exclude Israel from participation in UN activities" Murray to the Foreign Secretary, 28 August 1975, General Council Statement, 29 August 1975, MRC, both MSS.292D/956.9/1, FCO to TUC, 8 September 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/956.9/2.

<sup>764</sup> "TUC Secretary-General meets Rabin," *Haaretz*, (Hebrew original), 22 August 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/956.9/2.

<sup>765</sup> "Murray supports Israel's existence," *Haaretz*, (Hebrew original), 22 August 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/956.9/2.

<sup>766</sup> Author's interview with Aaron Barnea, European Histadrut representative, 1975-8, 28 October 2004. Israel.

<sup>767</sup> *Ibid.*

Brussels. The article warned that TUC continued to be "a dominant element in British life and its millions of members influence the Labour Government through its bloc votes. The fact of Histadrut neglect in fostering valuable ties here is something that needs immediate rectification."<sup>768</sup>

### **The UN adopts its 'Zionism is Racism' resolution**

Matters came to a head at the UN on 10 November 1975, when the UN General Assembly adopted an Arab backed resolution by 72 votes to 35 with 32 abstentions, which stated that "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination." The Histadrut immediately wrote to the ICFTU and the TUC calling on them to demonstrate solidarity with the Histadrut and to publicise their views. The following day Barnea requested a meeting with Murray.<sup>769</sup> The ICFTU statement declared that "the UN decision will hinder the establishment of peaceful relations in the Middle East and that it is morally and historically wrong to equate Zionism with racism."<sup>770</sup> The ETUC also published a statement saying that the resolution showed "an alarming lack of responsibility on the part of the UN."<sup>771</sup> Murray did nothing for two weeks until after the next General Council meeting even though he had previously spoken out about the TUC's position on Israel and the UN. After the meeting Murray wrote to the Histadrut informing them of the TUC's backing for the ETUC statement explaining that they had raised the matter with the Foreign Secretary.<sup>772</sup>

### **The TUC goes to Syria**

In September 1975, immediately after the TUC Congress, Murray and Jones went to Syria for a short visit. Most of their discussions related to the Arab-Israeli conflict and they told their trade union hosts that the TUC supported the UN resolution 242 and the need to work for a secure and lasting peace for every state in the Middle East. They were concerned that the threats to expel Israel from the UN had been initiated by Syria and made it clear that the TUC was not aligned with either side in the conflict as their only concern had been to promote a

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<sup>768</sup> Mark Segal, "The need to make friends in Britain," *Jerusalem Post*, 29 August 1975.

<sup>769</sup> It is not known if this meeting took place. TUC memo to Murray, 13 November 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/956.9/2.

<sup>770</sup> TUC memo to Murray, 1 December 1975, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9/1.

<sup>771</sup> The ETUC appealed to governments to recognise that "a majority decision of the General Assembly requires a sense of responsibility which does not put national interest before collective responsibility to the world." ETUC statement, 14 November 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/956.9/2.

<sup>772</sup> Murray to Meshel, 15 December 1975, MRC, MSS.292B/956.9/1.

peaceful negotiated settlement. They did not receive a positive response from the Syrians when they offered to assist in promoting discussions at trade union level. The Syrian reply reflected the hard-line of their Government, that there could be no solution of the conflict without the total withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied territory, the creation of a Palestine state, and a ban on further emigration into Israel. They did however accept that "the issue was the provision of suitable guarantees of security to Israel and to the new Palestinian State." The two organisations agreed to develop further contacts in the future.<sup>773</sup> Jones and Murray reported that the Syrians "had shown some willingness to reach agreement on the basis that a secular state should replace the present state of Israel" which was not acceptable either to Israel or the General Council which had always believed "it should give a guarantee to Israel of her continued existence as an independent state."<sup>774</sup> It was noticeable that while Jones and Murray submitted a report on their visit to the General Council, Murray did not present either a written or verbal report on his visit to Israel. Jones spoke at the 1976 TUC Congress about their visit to Syria and asked delegates to support their aim of developing contact between the trade unions of the Arab countries and Israel. He told Congress that "You may say that is a dream, but we are still going to work for it. We do not believe that it is beyond the bounds of human ingenuity to find a peaceful and a just solution to problems of the Middle East."<sup>775</sup>

### **The TUC and the campaign to allow Soviet Jewry to emigrate to Israel**

International relations between East and West improved during the 1970s because of the policy of detente between America, Russia and China, which culminated in the signing, in 1975, of the Helsinki Accords which committed the 35 signatories, including Russia to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of their citizens.<sup>776</sup> The improvement in diplomatic relations between London and Moscow during this period helped Jones and Scanlon rebuild links with the Russian trade unions. The effect of the burgeoning cooperation meant that Jones vehemently opposed moves for the TUC to support the international protest movement on behalf of Soviet Jewry, which were given a boost after the signing of the

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<sup>773</sup> Report of the visit of the TUC delegation to Syria, TUC International Committee minutes, 6 October 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/901/9.

<sup>774</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 5 January 1976, MRC, MSS.292D/901/9.

<sup>775</sup> LMU, TUC Congress report 1976, p.556.

<sup>776</sup> For more information about the Helsinki Accords see Tony Judt, *Postwar: a history of Europe since 1945*, (London : William Heinemann, 2005), pp.501-3.

Helsinki Accords.<sup>777</sup> Jones believed that trade union leaders should be concerned about international trade union rights but not human rights, which he thought were a matter for Amnesty International.<sup>778</sup> Even so this did not stop Jones, agreeing to become a spokesman for the Histadrut when dealing with the Russians.<sup>779</sup>

The campaign by Jewish communities in America and Europe, which started during the 1960s, aimed to persuade the USSR to allow Jews to peacefully practice their religion within Russia, and to leave the country if they so wished.<sup>780</sup> Although Stalin had supported the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, between 1949-53 Russian Jewry experienced extreme antisemitism and discrimination in religion, culture, and education. Overseas travel was prevented. The 1953 "Doctors plot", an alleged conspiracy to kill leading government and party officials was intended by Stalin to be the beginning of a new purge against the Jews. Stalin's death that year may have saved the Jews from pogroms and deportation but did not save them from both "popular" and official government antisemitism. Nor was there any change in Soviet policy regarding the recognition of Jews as a national group, which would have given them similar status to other minorities. When Stalin's successor, Khrushchev denounced Stalin in 1956 he said nothing about Stalin's anti-Jewish policies. Antisemitism in Russia continued under Khrushchev's leadership. His policies towards the Jews, which were moderate when compared to Stalin, were still harsh and based on "popular" antisemitism that rested on envy, suspicion and hatred. Khrushchev, who was personally prejudiced against Jews, introduced between 1957 and 1964 a series of measures which discriminated against Jews in government, education and employment and were aimed at stamping out the Jewish religion

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<sup>777</sup> For more information about the international campaign for the release of Soviet Jewry see: the archive of the Jewish Aliyah movement in the USSR; [http://www.angelfire.com/sc3/soviet\\_jews\\_exodus/English/index.shtml](http://www.angelfire.com/sc3/soviet_jews_exodus/English/index.shtml) ,

Robert B. Cullen, 'Soviet Jewry', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Winter, 1986), pp. 252-266, George Perkovich, 'Soviet Jewry and American Foreign Policy', *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Summer, 1988), pp. 435-467. For information about the campaign in Britain and the British 35s Women's Campaign for Soviet Jewry (the 35s) see: Daphne Gerlis, *Those Wonderful Women in Black*, (London: Minerva Press, 1996).

<sup>778</sup> Minkin, *The Labour Party Conference : a study in the politics of intra-party democracy*, pp.175-6.

<sup>779</sup> Yagol to Meshel, 26 December 1973, (Hebrew original), ISA, HZ6740/5.

<sup>780</sup> The Board of Deputies of British Jews (BOD), the representative body for Anglo Jewry, wrote to British government in February 1970 calling on them to make representations to the Soviet Government on behalf of certain Soviet Jewish families who wish to emigrate to Israel. Foreign Office memo, 24 February 1970, The Foreign Secretary who met with Greville Janner MP, in September 1970, told him that " The British Ambassador in Moscow has on occasion urged the Soviet authorities to allow individual Soviet citizens to leave the USSR but such representations have only been made on the basis of the individual's family connections in this country. It would clearly be counter-productive to seek to intercede with the Russians on behalf of individual Jews as such." Briefing notes for the Secretary of State for his meeting, 16 September 1970, both TNA:PRO, FCO28/1161.

and Jewish culture. After he was replaced in 1964 there was no real change in the Governments policies towards the Jews. However Israel's success in the Six-Day War sparked a revival of Jewish pride and interest in Israel amongst some Russian Jews and Soviet support for the Arabs led to a new crackdown which resulted in increased antisemitism.<sup>781</sup>

The Government of Israel had been trying since 1948 to persuade the Soviet Union to allow its Jewish community to emigrate to Israel and used every opportunity to raise the issue. On the eve of Khrushchev's visit to Britain in 1956, the Israeli ambassador to Britain reported that issues that would be raised include "Russian Jewry, Israel and the Middle East and the Labour Party and Israel" He also noted that almost all the British press including *the Times*, *Spectator*, *Manchester Guardian* and *Tribune* had written about these issues and had called for a more liberal attitude to the Jews in the USSR.<sup>782</sup> In Harold Wilson, the leader of the Labour party and future Prime Minister of Britain, the Israelis had someone who was very supportive and could be relied upon. On his return to London in the autumn of 1963, after his eleventh visit to Russia, Wilson told Ne'eman, the Histadrut London representative, that he had not been impressed by the authorities' treatment of the Jews in Russia, as every time he raised the issue the officials avoided getting into a discussion. Wilson admitted that he had only been able to achieve the confirmation of a few exit visas and thought that the situation would only get better if the Russians ever needed American government support.<sup>783</sup>

The international trade union movement first became involved in the Soviet Jewry campaign in the autumn of 1972 when the ICFTU circulated the Histadrut's appeal for support for the campaign to allow Jewish emigration from Russia. Although many unions throughout Europe sent telegrams to their Russian counterparts it is not clear if any came from Britain.<sup>784</sup> Yagol

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<sup>781</sup> For information about the treatment of Jews in Russia see; Benjamin Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union : the history of a national minority*, (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1987), Petrus Buwalda, *They did not dwell alone : Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union, 1967-1990*, (Washington: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) and Lionel Kochan, ed, *The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

<sup>782</sup> Gershon Avner, London Embassy to the Israel Foreign Office, 27 April 1956, (Hebrew original), ISA, HZ329/8.

<sup>783</sup> Ne'eman to Simchoni, 11 November 1963, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-1-106.

<sup>784</sup> Unions contacted in Britain included, the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, the National Union of Railway men and the National Union of Vehicle Builders. Histadrut International Department report, 5 October 1972, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219 -7-97.

reported that Feather had discussed Jewish emigration when he met the leaders of the Russian trade union movement (AUCCTU) during his visit to Moscow in December 1972.<sup>785</sup>

Between 1973 and 1977, Frank Chapple, the General Secretary of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union (EETPU), who had left the Communist party over Hungary in 1956, regularly raised the issues of Soviet Jewry and human rights in Russia at both the International committee and the General Council. Along with Joe Gormley<sup>786</sup> of the NUM, he was one of the first trade unionists to support the British 35s Women's Campaign for Soviet Jewry (the 35s) for the release of Jews who had been imprisoned in the USSR for applying to emigrate to Israel. The unions on the Left, which were led by communists or communist sympathisers had nothing to do with the 35s, whereas those unions on the Right supported them.<sup>787</sup>

In March 1973, in response to Chapple's campaigning, the International department prepared a briefing document "Minorities in the Soviet Union" which examined the position of all minorities in the USSR but focused mainly on the problems facing Soviet Jewry. Antisemitism was mentioned but not discussed in any detail. Whilst the USSR recognised national and ethnic groups, it did not recognise religious groups. Jews were therefore registered a national group and while individual Jews had the right to practice their religion they did not have the right to teach it. According to the report, the Soviet authorities had exerted pressure on Jews who they suspected had dual loyalties to the USSR and Israel. Zionism was seen as an international anti-Soviet movement which supported Israel and American foreign policy. Although it was not against the law to emigrate, various difficulties, which were not seen as discriminatory by the government, had been placed in the way of those Jews who had applied to emigrate to Israel.<sup>788</sup> In the light of Jones and Feather's forthcoming visit to Moscow in July 1973<sup>789</sup> and the temporary suspension of the education

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<sup>785</sup> Feather offered to raise the matter again when the TUC went to Moscow in 1973. Yagol to Ben Aharon, 10 January 1973, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-4-149 and TUC International Committee minutes, 27 March 1973, MRC, MSS.292D/901/4.

<sup>786</sup> Although Joe Gormley, like Len Jones was a Left -winger and President of the NUM , he was very pro-Israel and became chairman of the Labour Friends of Israel . He was very helpful with the 35s campaign.

<sup>787</sup> The EETPU and NALGO affiliated to the 35s group, other unions which supported their Campaign included the AEU, the AEUW and the TGWU. Gerlis, "*Those Wonderful Women in Black*", pp.122-3.

<sup>788</sup> Report no: IC6/2, "Minorities in the Soviet Union," TUC International Committee minutes, 23 January 1973, MRC, MSS.292D/901/4 and, LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1973, pp.235-6.

<sup>789</sup> Jones wrote "I raised the question of Jews wishing to emigrate from the Soviet Union, explaining that there was much interest in the subject in Britain. Their President (*of the AUCCTU*) had obviously been fully briefed



tax levied on Jewish emigrants due to world opinion, the International committee decided to discuss the issues with the Foreign Office.<sup>790</sup>

Yagol, who attended the 1973 TUC Congress, reported that the TUC wanted to achieve international unity amongst the European unions which he felt would lead to more contact with Russian and Eastern bloc unions and have implications for Israel and the Jews. When Jones was asked, at the Congress, by a journalist about the persecution of Jews, he attempted to justify the persecution by quoting the President of the AUCCTU who had told him that anti-Semitism was forbidden by law.<sup>791</sup> Yagol's fears were confirmed, in November, when Murray announced an agreement between TUC and the AUCCTU that emphasised the importance of cooperation between the TUC and AUCCTU and between ICFTU and the Communist unions.<sup>792</sup>

Chapple continued to press the TUC to discuss civil liberties in the USSR. In September 1973, his letter to the General Council was sent directly to the Soviet Ambassador in London, whose reply in January 1974 was forwarded to the EETPU.<sup>793</sup> Chapple did not consider this a proper course of action and wrote again to the Council asking why they had not discussed the issue of Soviet dissidents.<sup>794</sup> At their April meeting, the International committee were told that the General Council would only protest in cases of Soviet dissidents that involved trade unionists or trade union matters and not political cases. It was made clear that "dissidents in the Soviet Union were either individuals seeking greater freedom of expression or minorities, such as Jews who wanted to go to Israel, but that trade union freedoms were not at issue in these cases." This view allowed the TUC to ignore the issue of Soviet emigration to Israel

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and provided a lot of information. He said that 97 per cent of applications from Jewish people to emigrate had been granted, but there were reservations over people in possession of secret information or with high scientific or academic qualifications. He went to great pains to assure us that they were not antisemitic, and that many Jewish people occupied important positions." Jack Jones, *Union man : the autobiography of Jack Jones*, (London: Collins, 1986), pp.270-2. and Report IC11/3, "Visit to the Soviet Union", TUC International Committee minutes, 21 August 1973, MRC, MSS.292D/901/5.

<sup>790</sup> TUC International committee minutes, 27 March 1973, MRC, MSS.292D/901/4.

<sup>791</sup> Yagol to Ben Aharon, 10 September 1973, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-4-7B.

<sup>792</sup> Yagol to Ben Aharon, 6 November 1973, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-4-149.

<sup>793</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 23 January 1974, MRC, MSS.292D/901/6.

<sup>794</sup> Robert Taylor, *The fifth estate : Britain's unions in the modern world*, (London : Routledge, 1978), pp.149-50.

and the committee took no further action on the matter.<sup>795</sup> Not disheartened, Chapple wrote again in June asking the committee to reconsider their decision as he had found it "difficult to understand how individual liberties could be separated from trade union liberties" and suggested they recommend to the General Council "that they should protest strongly against the continued suppression of liberty in the Soviet Union."<sup>796</sup> It was made it clear to Chapple that the General Council position "regarding different regimes might not appear even handed but that situations varied from country to country" and "that in some cases persuasion was far more effective than public denunciation."<sup>797</sup>

At the end of March 1975, a delegation from the Soviet All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU), led by Alexander Shelepin, their Chairman and Politburo member, arrived in Britain as a guests of the TUC. The visit, which was a return visit for the TUC's trip to Russia two years earlier, was very controversial. Even before Shelepin arrived in London questions were asked in Parliament by MP's on both sides of the house as to why as the former head of the KGB who had been accused of complicity in the assassination in West Germany of two exiled Ukrainian leaders was being allowed to enter Britain.<sup>798</sup> Wherever he went he was met by noisy demonstrations organised by the Women's Campaign for Soviet Jewry(the 35s), as well as Ukrainians, Lithuanians and other ethnic minorities in Britain whose homelands were, they felt, under Soviet occupation. Many politicians and trade unionists could not understand why the TUC had invited him, nor the TUC's indifference to the plight of the persecuted minorities in the Soviet Union. The Russians were so embarrassed by the strength of the demonstrations that they cut short the visit from four to two days and left the general impression that the visit was a fiasco, especially for the TUC. Shelepin blamed the "Zionists" for the demonstrations against him.<sup>799</sup>

Prior to Shelepin's visit the Histadrut arranged for their friends, such as Scanlon to ask the Soviet delegation questions about Israel's borders, the Histadrut and Soviet Jewry. Yagol reported that Shelepin was "empathic and supported the international promise of Israel's 1967

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<sup>795</sup> Chapple did not consider the forwarding of his letter a proper course of action so he wrote again to the Council in January 1974 asking why they had not discussed the matter. TUC International Committee minutes, 1 April 1974, MRC, MSS.292D/901/6.

<sup>796</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 17 July 1974, MRC, MSS.292D/901/6.

<sup>797</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 5 August 1974, MRC, MSS.292D/901/6.

<sup>798</sup> Shelepin visa called "affront to people" *The Guardian*, 18 March 1975.

<sup>799</sup> Zionists "hired protesters" *The Guardian*, 3 April 1975.

borders". His answers about Soviet Jewry were "shorter and standard", nor did he rule out meeting with the Histadrut's General Secretary in the future.<sup>800</sup>

Chapple asked the General Council, in February 1976, if it would be willing to deliver to the Soviet Ambassador in London a petition, organised by the 35s campaign, for onward transmission to the AUCCTU, because the Soviet Embassy had refused to accept it. The petition, which had been signed by General Council members and many TUC Congress delegates, called on the AUCCTU to investigate the arbitrary dismissal from work of Soviet trade unionists who had applied to emigrate to Israel. Chapple also asked if the Council would approach the AUCCTU for information about a Soviet Jew, Sender Levison a metalworker, who had recently been sentenced to seven years imprisonment for "parasitism."<sup>801</sup> The General Council decided instead to ask the Soviet Ambassador for details of their emigration policy and about the cases to which the EETPU had referred.<sup>802</sup> The Embassy's reply denied that Soviet Jews who had wished to emigrate had been dismissed from work adding that only those applicants who had access to State secrets or who had been convicted of crimes had been refused permission to leave. Two months later, the General Council told the EEPTU that they would not forward the petition because the TUC should not become involved in campaigns organised by non-trade union organisations and particularly on sectarian issues when the facts in contention had not been clearly established. They advised the EETPU that it might be better to raise individual cases on an informal basis rather than by making official representations.<sup>803</sup>

The EEPTU raised the matter of Soviet dissidents once again at the 1976 TUC Congress stressing that they would continue to press the General Council to take action on behalf of workers in the Soviet Union who were being arbitrary dismissed because they were Jewish.<sup>804</sup> In January 1977, Chapple once again asked the General Council to protest to the Soviet Government about the persecution of individuals and minority groups in the Soviet Union. Their letter commented that "it was difficult to understand how individual liberties could be separated from trade union liberties and that the General Council protested in every way

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<sup>800</sup> Yagol to Meshel, 20 March and 10 April 1975, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, both IV-219A -4 -149B.

<sup>801</sup> Gerlis, *"Those Wonderful Women in Black"*, pp.122-3.

<sup>802</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 2 February 1976, MRC, MSS.292D/901/9.

<sup>803</sup> Paragraph 298, "Soviet Dissents," International Committee report, LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1976, pp.246-7 and TUC International Committee minutes, 5 April 1976, MRC, MSS.292D/901/10.

<sup>804</sup> LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1976, pp.561-2.

possible on matters affecting such countries as Spain or South Africa but did not act in a like manner with regard to the Soviet Union." The following month, the Council decided to continue with their existing policy of raising such cases informally. Chapple then requested that the General Council publish a statement in support of the Labour Party resolution protesting against unfair trial of Yuri Orlov, a non-Jewish Soviet dissident, who founded the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group and was sentenced to 10 years penal detention in 1978. The request was refused on the grounds that it was not a trade union issue and therefore not covered by the TUC's policy on human rights.<sup>805</sup>

The 1977 TUC Congress debated two motions relating to human rights. The first, which was adopted, condemned the gross violations of human rights that continued to take place throughout the world and asked member unions to support campaigns on behalf of imprisoned and tortured trade unionists conducted by Amnesty International.<sup>806</sup> Congress, rejected the second motion which criticised the lack of credibility in the TUC's response to the suppression of freedom of speech and human rights in the USSR and the Eastern Bloc. Jones, opposed the motion arguing that the TUC supported detente between East and West and if adopted this resolution would not help as "we look for ways to open doors, to create opportunities to change, not to close doors or to create continued division."<sup>807</sup>

During 1978, Chapple notified the General Council of several instances of job dismissals in the Soviet Union, but once again was told that they could only act on behalf of dissidents if they were members of a trade union. The EEPTU did successfully move a motion on human rights at the 1978 Congress which called for the TUC to actively support a charter for basic human rights in all countries. Chapple told delegates that they had only brought this matter to Congress because of the General Council's narrowly defined interpretation of human rights when they applied it to communist states which concerned itself purely with trade union rights and ignored the upsurge in demand for civil liberties in the Soviet Union.<sup>808</sup> The adoption of this resolution allowed the TUC over the next decade to become more flexible in

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<sup>805</sup> Paragraph 278, "Soviet Minorities," LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1976, p.190.

<sup>806</sup> LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1977, p.258.

<sup>807</sup> The EEPTU, which had seconded this motion, spoke about the plight of Soviet Jewry. LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1977, pp.507-10.

<sup>808</sup> LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1978, pp.591-2.

their dealings with Soviet Jewry which was helped by the ending of the Cold War and the Gorbachov reforms in Russia.

Frank Chapple and his union were very much the flag bearers in 1970s when it came to speaking out for human rights and Soviet Jewry, especially at Congress. There was however intense rivalry between Chapple and Jones which was partly due to domestic industrial rivalry between the EEPTU and TGWU, their views on the USSR, as well as a very strong personal dislike between them.<sup>809</sup>

The reluctance of the TUC to become involved can be explained by the strong influence of the Left on the General Council and the leadership skills of Jones who ensured that the TUC did not criticise Russia over human rights, or acknowledge officially the plight of Soviet Jewry.<sup>810</sup> Jones, who had led the TUC's drive for detente with the Soviet Union, used every possible tactic to not become involved with the Soviet Jewry campaign. This included the argument that the Jews were not members of trade unions, or that British trade unions did not have the full facts or that they were only following government policy.<sup>811</sup> It is also possible that Jones, although not a Communist, behaved as he did because of the support he had received from the communists when he was elected as General Secretary of the TGWU.<sup>812</sup> Whatever the reason, the TUC were out of step with the Labour Party, who were much more flexible and frequently gave their support to the 35s. The TUC, which had denounced antisemitism and discrimination against the Jews in the 1940s, accepted without question the denial by the Russian authorities that antisemitism existed in the Soviet Union. Jones in particular seemed to have made no connection between Soviet Jewry and his friendship with the Histadrut, Israel. He kept each one separate, and because of his position on human rights

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<sup>809</sup> Author's Interview with Mike Walsh, Head of TUC International Department, 1980-99.

<sup>810</sup> In a letter dated 24 December 1973, a union secretary who disliked the criticisms of the USSR made by the EETPU, wrote "that persons in the Soviet Union are not persecuted for their opinions and convictions" and "persons have been convicted because they were engaged in illegal activities which defamed the Soviet State and its social system." LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1975, p.493.

<sup>811</sup> British Government policy in the 1970s used quiet diplomacy to achieve their aims. Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the Foreign Secretary told the Conference of Security and Co-operation in Europe meeting in Helsinki, July 1973; "Co-operation on the Human rights field is, in my judgment, the most important item of our business.... then it is necessary that we do something to remove the barriers which inhibit the movement of people and ideas.... this is why the United Kingdom will continue to press for a practical approach." quoted in Gerlis, *Those Wonderful Women in Black*, p.118. This policy was continued by the Labour Government with Harold Wilson taking a personal interest in the matter. Wilson to Fisher, Board of Deputies of British Jews, 4 April 1975, TNA:PRO, PREM16/1815.

<sup>812</sup> Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party*, p.158.

and the desire to normalise relations with the Russians, Jones opposed all moves for the TUC to support the public campaign to allow Soviet Jewry to emigrate to Israel.

With the TUC moving closer to Europe and Russia, the TUC became less of a priority for the Histadrut once Cousins had retired. The Histadrut concentrated instead on building links with the German and Scandinavian unions.<sup>813</sup> This explains why the Histadrut, who were very active in mobilising support for Soviet Jewry with the ICFTU and trade unions in the USA and Europe, only raised the issue of Soviet Jewry with the TUC during the early 1970s. Yagol, their European representative, however, helped the 35s build their own links with several British trade unions.<sup>814</sup>

### **The International Labour Organisation ( ILO)**

During the 1970s the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) tried to obtain international diplomatic and political recognition for the Palestinians. In February 1975, they applied to the ILO, which was part of the UN, for observer status at all future meetings. The application was made on the grounds that they had already been given consultative status in other UN organisations and had been recognised as the sole spokesman of the Palestinian people. The national liberation organisations in the Portuguese African territories had been allowed to attend ILO African region meetings as observers because they were responsible in part for the internal administration in their territories, a status the PLO had yet to achieve.

The TUC International department discussed the matter with the German DGB union and advised the General Council that the PLO's application was bound to divide the ILO.<sup>815</sup> Yagol wrote to Murray saying that they were concerned about the application and that regardless of the outcome they expected the TUC to support the Histadrut. He urged the TUC to enforce "measures aimed at the preservation of the constitution and future of the ILO."

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<sup>813</sup> Author's discussions with Shmuel Bahat, the Director of the Histadrut International Department, 1968-74, and the Deputy Chairman until 1983, London, 10 October 2012.

<sup>814</sup> For the 35s links with the unions see Gerlis, *Those Wonderful Women in Black*, pp.121-9. The 35s received very little assistance from the BOD. The Prime Minister discussed Soviet Jewry with the BOD on 19 September 1973, 7 April 1975 and 24 May 1977. TNA:PRO, PREM15/1853 and PREM16/1815.

<sup>815</sup>The TUC had abstained in June 1974 at the ILO meeting which had adopted a resolution condemning the Israeli policy of discrimination, racism, and violation of trade union freedoms against the Arab workers in the occupied territories. Memo for TUC/DGB Meeting, 14 December 1974, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1, TUC General Council minutes, 5 August 1974, MRC, MSS.292D/901/6 and LMU, item 278, ILO conference, TUC Congress report 1974, p.196.

Murray answered by saying that the "General Council will take your views into consideration."<sup>816</sup>

As no decision on the application was made at the February 1975 meeting, the PLO were invited to attend the next ILO meeting in June.<sup>817</sup> Yagol was reassured by both Murray and Jones that the TUC would continue support the Histadrut.<sup>818</sup> The debates at the June meeting were at times highly contentious, with an emphasis more on political issues rather than the work of the ILO, as illustrated by the Algerian delegate's comments "We must give the PLO observer status as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people who are waging a just struggle against Zionism, imperialism and the imperialists' agents to gain their freedom and dignity."<sup>819</sup> Although the TUC supported an unsuccessful Australian amendment, the meeting agreed to allow the PLO to attend general and regional ILO conferences.<sup>820</sup> Later when the PLO delegate addressed the meeting, both the Israeli and American delegations walked out.<sup>821</sup> Consequently, the US House of Representatives decided to suspend US financial contributions to ILO and the American Government gave notice to leave the ILO.<sup>822</sup> As well as contacting the Foreign Office, the TUC issued a statement emphasizing their opposition to attempts to exclude Israeli participation in UN organisations.<sup>823</sup> Jones, told the 1975 TUC Congress that the ILO was the only forum where all the trade union movements of the world met and was split, "not industrially, but politically." He explained that the move to allow the PLO to attend meetings had been opposed by the General Council, because the

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<sup>816</sup> Yagol to Murray, 23 January 1975 and Murray to Yagol, 29 January 1975, both MRC, MSS.292D/956.9/1.

<sup>817</sup> A majority of unions including the TUC, had wanted to postpone the proposal to allow the PLO to attend the June conference. TUC International Committee minutes 7, April 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/901/8.

<sup>818</sup> Yagol to Meshel, 20 March 1975, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-4-149B and Meshel to Murray, 15 April 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/956.9/2.

<sup>819</sup> Yves Beigbeder, "The United States' Withdrawal from the International Labor Organization," *Industrial Relations*, vol.34, no.2, 1979, p.227.

<sup>820</sup> The Australian amendment wanted to ensure that all liberation movements admitted to ILO meetings fully recognised the principles of the ILO, its constitution and the right of all member states to continue in existence. *Ibid*, p227.

<sup>821</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 7 July 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/901/8.

<sup>822</sup> The United States eventually rejoined the ILO in 1980. Beigbeder, "The United States' Withdrawal from the International Labor Organization", p.228.

<sup>823</sup> The TUC wrote to the Foreign Secretary who concurred with the TUC's opinion on the matter. TUC International Committee minutes, 4 August 1975, TUC General Council Statement, 29 August 1975, Murray to Foreign Office, 28 August 1975, Foreign Office reply 8 September 1975, all MRC, MSS.292D/956.9/1.

PLO was not a country nor an established trade union movement.<sup>824</sup> Both Jones and the TUC had been true to their word and had backed the Histadrut.

### **Arms to Egypt**

In June 1975 Egypt announced that they were negotiating with Britain for the supply of arms and equipment, a move which angered Israel. Britain argued that it did not wish to upset the balance of power in the Middle East but it was important that Egypt was not totally dependent on Russia.<sup>825</sup> Although no arms were ever supplied, the issue strained Anglo-Israel relations. The importance of this issue was that it took place at the same time as Israel negotiating with Egypt over the future of the Sinai. Gormley wrote to Murray in December to ask that the International committee discuss the Egyptian arms deal which he believed might lead to increased British involvement in any future conflict. To reinforce his concerns he included with his letter a short paper on the negative aspects of the proposed sales.<sup>826</sup> It not known who provided Gormley with the detailed information for his analysis attached to his letter, but because of his support for Israel for it seems likely it came from an Israeli source.<sup>827</sup> The Foreign Office then provided a briefing paper for the International committee which stated that the Government would be willing to consider requests for arms from Middle East countries which in their opinion would not endanger "the achievement of a just and lasting solution of the dispute between the Arabs and Israel."<sup>828</sup> Reports of an arms deal with Egypt were "speculative," but if the Egyptians were to ask for arms, their request would be given a sympathetic hearing as long as Egypt was seen to be seeking a negotiated political settlement for the Middle East. The Committee agreed that the government's aim should be to promote negotiations for a peace settlement and the expansion of trade links, other than the trade in arms, with both sides in the conflict. They agreed to forward their views to the Gormley and the Foreign Secretary.<sup>829</sup> After reading about the TUC's attitude to arms sales,

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<sup>824</sup> LMU, International debate, TUC Congress 1975 report, p.490.

<sup>825</sup> For more information on Anglo-Israel relations during this period see Lochery, *Loaded Dice; The Foreign Office and Israel*, pp.161-63.

<sup>826</sup> Gormley letter and report to Murray, 22 December 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1.

<sup>827</sup> Gormley was an active supporter of both the Histadrut and the LFI.

<sup>828</sup> TUC Memo to Murray, 30 December 1975, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/1.

<sup>829</sup> TUC Memo to Murray, 5 January 1976, TUC International Committee minutes, 5 January 1976, Murray to Gormley, 14 January 1976, Murray to the Foreign Secretary, 6 February 1976, Foreign Office reply to Murray, 18 February 1976, all MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.



Barnea wrote to Murray about what he described as "the impartial approach of the TUC regarding Israel and Egypt." He explained that "a weak Israel is a danger to peace and could encourage its neighbours to launch a war against it." Barnea ended by asking Murray the question, if Israel was "the sole working democracy in the Middle East, why should the TUC support the weakening of Israel?" Murray made no attempt to answer his questions and once again replied by saying we "have noted your views."<sup>830</sup>

### **The Arab Boycott of Israel**

In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur war, while bilateral relations between the UK and Israel had improved, British companies became increasingly reluctant to trade with Israel due to the fear of a potential boycott that would affect their trade with the Arabs.<sup>831</sup> When, in 1976, Israel urged the British Government to adopt similar anti-boycott measures to those planned by the Americans, the Foreign Office advised the Prime Minister, James Callaghan, that "with the possible exception of the United States, we do not think it is true to say that there are any major trading countries whose attitude to the boycott is more helpful to Israel than ours."<sup>832</sup> Nor did the Foreign Office hide the fact that trade with the Arab States was worth far more to Britain than trade with Israel.<sup>833</sup> The nub of the matter was that the Arab boycott had caused problems for the British Government's policy which was to maintain friendship with both Israel and the Arab states in order to promote trade as well as back international initiatives for a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In February 1977, Gormley asked the TUC to discuss the case of the Metal Box company which had been threatened with the loss of substantial business in the Middle East unless it disposed of a 25 year old investment in an Israeli canning company. As a result of informal discussions with the International committee, the TUC decided to leave matters to the unions

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<sup>830</sup> Barnea to Murray, 26 February 1976 , TUC reply, 8 April 1976, both MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

<sup>831</sup> The British Ambassador to Israel, annual review for 1974, 8 January 1975, TNA:PRO, FCO93/704 and annual review for 1976, 10 January 1977, TNA:PRO, FCO93/1146. For more information about the actions of British Companies towards the boycott during the 1970s. Prittie, *The economic war against the Jews*, pp.120-36.

<sup>832</sup> The Israel Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Prime Minister, 2 January 1976, Foreign Office to the Prime Minister's Office, 15 January 1976, TNA:PRO, PREM16/1473

<sup>833</sup> In 1975 the UK's trade with the Arabs increased by 75% to a figure of about £1.4 billion. Trade with Israel grew by 8% to £0.24 billion. Ibid.

concerned in the company.<sup>834</sup> The TGWU did approach Metal Box to discuss the matter as they had been told that any closure of the Israeli company could result in substantial job losses.<sup>835</sup> The Government also expressed its concern, but refused to intervene saying that "the decision is purely commercial and must be taken by the companies concerned."<sup>836</sup> Metal Box subsequently decided to surrender to the boycotters demands and sold off its investment.

On his return to Israel after the 1977 TUC Congress, Meshel, the Histadrut General secretary, asked the TUC to intervene on the Arab boycott which he said had affected unemployment in some sectors in Israel and asked Murray "in the name of workers solidarity to do everything in your power to prevent British firms from giving in to the Arab boycott"<sup>837</sup> This appears to be the last time until 1983 that the matter of a boycott was raised with the TUC. In 1978 the Government ignored the recommendations of a report of the House of Lords Select Committee on anti-boycott legislation, preferring instead to support what it called "European Community initiatives" to combat boycotts but continued to discuss the effects of the Arab boycott with the BOD and the Israel embassy.<sup>838</sup>

### **Israeli Politics move to the Right**

Three weeks before the Israeli general election in May 1977, Mason, the British Ambassador to Israel wrote a report on the decline of the Histadrut, which he described as one of the triple pillars of the State. Once a great and powerful institution, it now had little influence and prestige. Mason noted that even with all its problems, the Histadrut was the second largest employer in Israel, employing some 70,000 workers in its various economic enterprises and provided medical services for nearly 70 per cent of the population. In order to reverse its'

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<sup>834</sup> Murray to Gormley, 15 February 1977, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2. See also Prittie, *The economic war against the Jews*, pp.127-8.

<sup>835</sup> Israeli metalworkers to TGWU, 22 February 1977 and TGWU reply, 24 February 1977, PLILMR, IV-208-1-18965.

<sup>836</sup> Malcolm Brown, 'Arab blacklist warning forces Metal Box to look at Israel holdings', *The Times*, 1 September 1977, p.17. Even though the Government had made it clear on many occasions that it opposed primary and secondary boycotts, the Board of Trade provided advice and support to companies in order to try and circumvent the threat of a boycott.

<sup>837</sup> Meshel to Murray, 6 October 1977, MRC, MSS.292D/956.9/2.

<sup>838</sup> In March 1979 the Department of Trade issued new guidelines on the Arab boycott which set out the Government's policy in order to "help remove misunderstandings and unnecessary anxieties among British businessmen about the operation of the Arab Boycott of Israel as it affects British firms". The guidance given did "not imply any recognition of the boycott by HM Government nor any willingness on the part of the Government to further its objectives by giving publicity to it." Department of Trade guidelines "the Arab boycott of Israel, March 1979, TNA:PRO, FCO93/2365.

decline and restore its authority, Mason wrote, "the Histadrut may need radical re-organisation, including electoral reform, and perhaps to hive off some of its activities to the Government or the private sector." He concluded that the Histadrut's future depends on future Government policies and the Israeli economy. "It will survive, but in what form and with what influence is uncertain."<sup>839</sup>

When the Labour Party lost the Israeli general election it was much more than just a change of government, it was a political earthquake. The socialist and Zionist ideals of Ben Gurion and Mapai which had controlled the political scene for over 35 years were replaced by the Likud movement led by Menachim Begin, which was a mixture of Revisionist Zionism, the supporters of Jabotinsky and the land of Israel movement.<sup>840</sup> Members of the British government were deeply suspicious of the new Prime Minister, who they saw as an ex-Irgun terrorist and the natural successor to Jabotinsky who championed a Greater Israel stretching from the Jordan to the Mediterranean. The Labour Left, led by Mapai, had dominated the political scene from 1935 onwards, firstly in the Yishuv, the Jewish community in Palestine, from 1930s until 1948 and had formed every government since independence. In 1965 Mapai merged with Ahdut HaAvoda, its main rival on the Left, to form the Alignment and three years later Rafi joined with the Alignment to form the Israel Labour Party. Mapai also controlled the Histadrut which had administered the Yishuv. The General Secretary of the Histadrut was always been a senior party member, a member of the Knesset (Parliament) and frequently a Government Minister, an arrangement which allowed the Histadrut to work very closely on international issues with the Labour Party.

Mike Walsh, the former head of TUC International department, described the special relationship that existed between the Israeli Government and the Histadrut: "In the first half of the 1970s and the 1980s, Israel was denied diplomatic recognition in large parts of the world and that made the significance of Histadrut very much greater, because it was Histadrut through its trade union credentials that could get a presence for Israel in all sorts of countries in the Middle East and Africa. This was why we supported the work of their Afro-Asian Institute. During the 1980s the Histadrut became diplomatically less significant because as

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<sup>839</sup> Memorandum on the history and functions of the Histadrut "The Israeli trade union federation; decline of a triple pillar of the State," from the British Ambassador to the Foreign Secretary, 25 April 1977, TNA:PRO, FCO 93/1178.

<sup>840</sup> For more information about Likud's victory in the 1977 election see; Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp.499-507 and Shindler, *The Land Beyond Promise, Israel, Likud and the Zionist dream*, (London: Tauris, 2002).

things developed, with greater diplomatic recognition, the Israeli presence through Histadrut became less and less important. It was the face of Israel in many countries. It was really important, not just to Histadrut but to the whole Israeli state to be represented on the governing bodies of the ILO and the ICFTU.”<sup>841</sup>

Soon after the election, Mason, met with the Histadrut to discuss future Histadrut relations with the new Right wing government.<sup>842</sup> He reported that the Histadrut were prepared to wait and see what the new government had to offer but their first task was to rebuild the Labour Party and the Histadrut type of Zionism on which the state was founded.<sup>843</sup> Mason also reported that Meshel had been invited to attend the TUC Congress in September. He recommended that a meeting be arranged between Meshel and Judd, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, because "Meshel is currently the most powerful Labour Party figure in Israel because he is the only one with a power base and is a sensible and shrewd observer of the Israeli scene."<sup>844</sup> During their discussions Judd told Meshel that, although the PLO had said and done some quite unacceptable things there could be no lasting settlement which did not take account of their views. He confirmed that the government's position of not recognising the PLO had not changed.<sup>845</sup> While in Britain, Meshel invited the TUC to attend the Histadrut Convention which took place in November 1977. Once again they declined the invitation on grounds of "unavoidable domestic commitments " for all their senior General Council members.<sup>846</sup>

Shortly after the UN had adopted a mandatory arms embargo on South Africa in November 1977, the TUC met with the Secretary of State at the Foreign Office. As a supporter of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the TUC told him of their concern about the reports of Israeli military cooperation with South Africa. The Minister replied saying that "Israeli military cooperation with South Africa was a matter of international concern to be raised with

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<sup>841</sup> Author's interview with Mike Walsh, TUC International Department , 1966-99, 6 November 2007, London.

<sup>842</sup> For more information on the Histadrut's relationship with Likud see: Shmuel Tzabag, 'Co-operation in the Shadow of a Power Struggle: Israel: The Likud Governments and the Histadrut 1977-84', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.31, No.4, Israel (Oct., 1995), pp. 849-888.

<sup>843</sup> Mason to the FCO, 13 July 1977, TNA:PRO, FCO 93/1178.

<sup>844</sup> Memo to FCO, 25 August 1977, TNA:PRO, FCO93/1178.

<sup>845</sup> FCO to British Embassy in Israel, 13 September 1977, TNA:PRO, FCO93/1178.

<sup>846</sup> Overseas Labour Advisor to the labour attaché based in Athens, 14 November 1977, TNA:PRO, FCO93/1178.

the Israeli government at an early opportunity and he added that an approach at trade union level might also be helpful."<sup>847</sup> Israel's economic alliance with South Africa, which flowed from secret negotiations by Shimon Peres, Israel's Foreign Minister, had by 1977 resulted in South Africa being Israel's single largest customer for arms. The new Begin government, rather than being opposed to arms sales to South Africa was "more than happy to violate the UN embargo."<sup>848</sup> It was therefore no surprise that Histadrut replied that "they had been formally notified by the Israeli Foreign Ministry that Israel abided fully by the UN resolution banning arms sales to South Africa."<sup>849</sup> There is no record of the TUC taking any further action on this matter.

Between the 1973 war and Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the ICFTU kept a watching brief on the situation in the Middle East and only discussed matters or issued statements when tension in the region rose or when serious incidents justified a response.<sup>850</sup> The Histadrut continued to be an active participant in ICFTU but from 1977 onwards its actions were limited as the Labour Alignment, of which it was part, no longer governed Israel. There was also limited contact with the TUC as well as very little discussion of Israel-Arab conflict either by the General Council or the International committee, for example there is no record of any discussion of the 1978 Camp David accords. The only mention of them is in the report of the 1979 ICFTU World Congress which adopted a resolution welcoming the Camp David agreement.<sup>851</sup> The result was that the TUC made very few interventions with the Histadrut over PLO terror attacks on Northern Israel, preferring instead to support ICFTU actions.<sup>852</sup>

### **The TUC starts to move away from Israel and towards support for the Palestinians**

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<sup>847</sup> TUC International Committee Minutes, 5 December 1977, MRC,MSS.292D/901/12.

<sup>848</sup> For more information about Israel's military alliance with South Africa see Sasha Polakow-Suransky, *The unspoken alliance: Israel's secret relationship with apartheid South Africa*, ( New York : Pantheon Books, 2010), pp.75-106.

<sup>849</sup> TUC International Committee Minutes, 9 January 1978, MRC,MSS.292D/901/12.

<sup>850</sup> Both the Israelis and the Arabs used the ICFTU Executive Board meetings to defend themselves or attack each other such as happened at the meetings in May 1979 and July 1980. TUC International Committee minutes, 4 June 1979, MRC,MSS.292D/901/15 and 3 August 1981, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

<sup>851</sup> TUC International Committee minutes December 1979, TUC, MSS.292D/901/14.

<sup>852</sup> One of the most serious PLO terror attacks was the killing of 38 Israeli civilians on the 11 March 1978. In response to the attack, Israeli forces launched Operation Litani against PLO bases in South Lebanon which resulted in the deaths of 300 Palestinians and led to the creation of the UNIFIL peacekeeping force in Southern Lebanon. The ICFTU denounced the violence aimed at disrupting the peace talks and called for all terrorist bases to be dismantled and foreign armies to be withdrawn from Lebanon. ICFTU Circular No.19 (1978) to affiliates, 20 March 1978, MRC,MSS.292D/956.9/2.

A series of events took place at the time of the 1979 TUC Congress which appear to be the beginning of a serious effort by grassroots activists to gain TUC support for the Palestinian cause. In August, Len Murray received what appeared at the time an unsolicited letter from the Beirut based Palestine Trade Unions Federation (PTUF), the trade union wing of the PLO which drew attention to the problems of the Israeli occupation and called for TUC support.<sup>853</sup> As it turned out it was the first move in a campaign to promote Palestinian trade union rights in Britain. A few weeks later, a petition calling for the recognition of Arab trade unions in the West Bank and Gaza was circulated at Congress by the UK Palestine Coordination (UKPC) committee. The aim of UKPC which worked under the LMEC umbrella and had PLO support, was to play a pivotal role in promoting the UK campaign for Palestinian rights, as well as coordinating and supporting Palestinian solidarity groups and activists on campus and in the trade unions.<sup>854</sup>

One of the first actions of the UKPC was to circulate a petition at the 1979 TUC Congress calling for the recognition of Arab trade unions in the occupied West Bank and Gaza and the release of a jailed trade activist. The petition, which was signed by 250 trade unionists - including "General Secretaries and shop stewards" - was sent to the Israeli Minister of Defence, who was responsible for the administration of the the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>855</sup> The signing of this petition by such a large number of delegates is significant as it shows that already in 1979 there was a groundswell of support at grassroots level for Palestinian rights.

In October UKPC approached Moss Evans, the General Secretary of the TGWU who wrote to Murray asking for information about TUC and ICFTU policy towards the UKPC. Murray replied saying that they had no information about UKPC but had made inquiries with the ICFTU.<sup>856</sup> The TUC also received a letter from the UKPC saying that they were arranging for a PTUF delegation to visit to the Britain in November and had requested a meeting with the TUC. On the advice of the TUC international Department in order to hear the views of the PTUF, Murray arranged for the PTUF to meet with a member of the International

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<sup>853</sup> The Lebanon branch of the PTUF to Murray, 20 August 1979, MRC, MSS.292D/956/9/2.

<sup>854</sup> The chairman of LMEC, David Watkins MP, was a sponsor of UKPC. UKPC's postal address was that of Housmans bookshop which supported radical left-wing groups.

<sup>855</sup> UKPC to TUC, 24 September 1979, MRC, MSS.292D/956/9/2.

<sup>856</sup> Evans letter to Murray, 21 October 1979, Murray reply, 24 October 1979, Murray letter to Kersten, 24 October 1979, all MRC, MSS292D/956.9/2.

department.<sup>857</sup> The ICFTU then told the TUC that the ICFTU had no contact with the PTUF and that "the PTUF is generally considered to be a tool to promote the Palestinian cause in the Middle East conflict amongst trade union organisations at international level rather than a real trade union body."<sup>858</sup> Shortly after receiving this reply the PTUF's visit to London was cancelled due to "visa difficulties."<sup>859</sup>

Murray had not arranged to meet with the PTUF himself because, according to Mike Walsh, "Murray was very resistant to the International department opening up any contact with the Palestinian Trade Unions, but it did happen towards the end of his time as General Secretary."<sup>860</sup> Aaron Barnea, the Histadrut European representative, thought that this was because Murray had "fundamentally changed how he thought of the conflict" after his discussions in August 1975 with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.<sup>861</sup> Murray had been persuaded to arrange a meeting with the PTUF after reading a very detailed memo prepared by Hargreaves, the Head of the International department, who had very close links with the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office permitted informal contact with the PLO even though the official Government's policy was not to have any formal contacts until the PLO renounced violence.<sup>862</sup> Murray, did not want to meet the PTUF himself because, at that time, he was opposed to having contact with the Palestinian trade unions.<sup>863</sup>

Over the next 12 months the Histadrut became increasingly concerned about the growing support for the PLO within the European trade unions. It noted the increasing support for the

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<sup>857</sup> UKPC letter to Murray, 22 October 1979, TUC Memo to Murray, 26 October 1979, Murray letter to the UKPC, 30 October 1979, all MRC, MSS292D/956.9/2.

<sup>858</sup> ICFTU letter to Len Murray, 6 November 1979, MRC, MS 292D/956/9/2.

<sup>859</sup> UKPC letter to TUC, 20 November 1979, MRC, MSS292D/956.9/2.

<sup>860</sup> Author's interview with Mike Walsh, TUC International Department, 1966-99, 6 November 2007, London. At the time of the PTUF approach he had been seconded from the TUC International department to work as Deputy Overseas Labour Advisor in the Foreign Office.

<sup>861</sup> Authors Interview with Aaron Barnea, Histadrut European representative in Brussels 1975-80, 23 March 2005, Hod Hasharon.

<sup>862</sup> The Foreign Office wrote; "We have for some years maintained occasional and informal contacts with the PLO at official level, but Ministers have taken the line that they find it difficult to meet PLO representatives while the Organisation continues to have links with terrorism and has not accepted Israel's right to exist. The advantage of this formulation is that the Government's freedom of action is not thereby unduly restricted should a higher level of dialogue with the PLO seem likely to contribute to a comprehensive peace." FCO to the Prime Minister, TNA:PRO, 27 February, 1980, PREM19/295. See also John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher, The Iron Lady Vol.2*, (London: Cape, 2003), p.334 and Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street years*, (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p.90.

<sup>863</sup> Author's interview with Mike Walsh, TUC International Department, 1966-99, 6 November 2007, London.

pro-Palestinian activists within the Labour Party, although they had not yet made an impact on the TUC. However, in February 1981 the Histadrut highlighted their concerns in a report to the Israel Foreign Ministry which outlined their plans to send delegations to six European countries including Britain for three weeks in order to challenge PLO propaganda.<sup>864</sup> These plans do not appear to have come to fruition.

### **TUC visit to Israel and Egypt**

Cousins, Hayday and Jones who all believed that the trade union movement had a role to play in any settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, failed to bring together the Arabs and the Histadrut. It was the Americans, the AFL-CIO, at their 1977 annual convention who succeeded, when they brought together the Histadrut General Secretary and the President of the Egyptian Federation of trade unions, when they shook hands on the platform in the manner of Sadat and Begin.

Frank Cousins and Fred Hayday, whose attempts to try and bring about direct contact between the Histadrut and the Egyptian trade union movement after the 1967 Six-Day war failed mainly because the political situation in the Middle East in the aftermath of the war worked against them. To their credit they never gave up, even though they found it difficult playing the role of honest broker when the TUC was perceived by the Arabs as a pro-Israel organisation. It fell to the Americans, ten years later, in the wake of President Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem to bring together the Histadrut General Secretary and the President of the Egyptian Federation of trade unions, at the 1977 AFL-CIO annual convention when they shook hands on the platform in the manner of Sadat and Begin. Following the meeting the Histadrut issued a formal invitation to the Egyptians to visit Israel telling the ICFTU that "any settlement should be with all Arab countries" and that they would be willing to host delegations from other Arab countries.<sup>865</sup> The following year, Aaron Barnea, the Histadrut European representative asked Britain's union leaders who had contacts with Arab trade unions to tell them of the Histadrut's desire to establish links with the Arab unions.<sup>866</sup>

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<sup>864</sup> Alon letter to the Israel Foreign Office, 1 February 1981, (Hebrew Original), PLILMR, IV-219A-7-326.

<sup>865</sup> Overseas Labour Advisor to the TUC, 29 December 1977, MRC,/956/511/2 and Meshel letter to Murray, 27 March 1978, MRC,MSS.292D/956.9/2 and TUC International Committee minutes, 9 January 1977, MRC,MSS.292D/901/12.

<sup>866</sup> "TUC asked to be mediator" *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 September 1978.



Three years later, as a result of this initiative and improving contacts between Israel and Egypt, a TUC delegation went to both countries in November 1980.<sup>867</sup> The report of their visit made it clear that the Histadrut was critical of the Israeli Government's settlement policies and were not involved in trade union activity in the occupied territories. The Histadrut were however, like many Israelis, opposed to any contact with the PLO until the PLO had accepted Israel's right to exist. The TUC delegation told the Egyptian Federation of Labour (EFL) that the Histadrut were committed to Israel's survival as well as the peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict and wanted to establish closer links with them. The EFL, who were reluctant to improve its links with Histadrut in case they caused embarrassment to their Government, told the delegation that although Egypt accepted Israel's right to exist and supported the peace treaty with Israel, any lasting resolution of the Arab-Israel conflict would have to involve the PLO and all the countries of the region, not just Israel and Egypt. The TUC representatives replied saying that they "understood the need for care and the importance of timing, and that if at any time it appeared that the TUC might be of help in fostering better relations it would be glad to assist."<sup>868</sup>

The Israeli Air force's successful strike on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor on 7 June 1981 ensured Menachem Begin's re-election as Prime Minister in Israel's general election at the end of June. On the 10 July the IDF resumed its attacks on Palestinian targets in Southern Lebanon which culminated in the bombing of PLO buildings in downtown Beirut on 17 July which killed as many as 300 people. The international outcry that followed led to worldwide condemnation of Israel's actions, and a temporary embargo on the export of US aircraft to Israel.<sup>869</sup> It was therefore no surprise that the ICFTU reacted to events by issuing a statement on 23 July which not only condemned the PLO attacks and the disproportionate response the Israeli army, and also called on affiliates to bring pressure on their governments to bring about a ceasefire.<sup>870</sup> The General Council agreed to Len Murray's suggestion that TUC send a

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<sup>867</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, 3 March 1980, MRC, MSS.292D/901/16. An EFL delegation came to Britain in September 1980 as guests of the General Council and met with representatives of the government, industry and the TUC and discussed various matter including trade union, economic, and social policy issues. LMU, "Contacts with the Egyptian Federation of Labour," TUC Congress 1981 International committee report, Section 307, p.237.

<sup>868</sup> Report IC4/4 "visit to Israel and Egypt," TUC International Committee minutes, 12 January 1981, MRC, MSS.292D/901/18.

<sup>869</sup> For more details of this Israel's concerns over the PLO in Lebanon during this period see Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims a History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2000*, pp.502-10.

<sup>870</sup> ICFTU press release, 23 July 1981, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

telegram to the Histadrut which expressed their concern "at the increasingly dangerous situation in the Middle East and its repercussions for world peace."<sup>871</sup> This was an unusual step for the TUC because in recent years they had been happy to back the ICFTU in these type of situations and there had been very little direct contact with the Histadrut on political matters even though a TUC delegation had visited Israel the previous year. It is not clear who raised the matter but it was probably a Left-wing member of the council and a supporter of the Palestinians. The Histadrut's reply to the ICFTU, which was also sent to the TUC, noted that a ceasefire was now in place which had put an end to "the senseless killing of innocent civilians on both sides of the border". The letter pointed out that the tension had been caused by the Syrian army presence in Lebanon and that Israel had "no dispute with the government or the people of the Lebanon."<sup>872</sup> The conflict was discussed again at the next Council meeting when it was suggested that Arab trade union organisations should also be asked for their views on recent developments. Accordingly, Murray wrote to the Federation of Petroleum Trade Unions (FPTU) in Lebanon in October to ask for their views on how the international trade union movement could help to bring about a peaceful solution to the situation.<sup>873</sup> This appeared to be a strange move for the TUC as they had not had any direct contact with the Lebanese unions for several years. However, in view of increasing support amongst trade unions for the Palestinians, both at grass roots and at the TUC, Murray was obviously aware of the need to do something.

The Norwegian Federation of Trade Unions, who had been in contact with the Palestine General Federation of Workers and the Histadrut, wrote to the TUC in July saying that they had asked the ICFTU to lead a campaign for a peace settlement in the Middle East. The ICFTU statement on the violence which condemned the PLO attacks and the disproportionate response of the Israeli army, also called on affiliates to bring pressure on their governments to bring about a ceasefire.<sup>874</sup> The TUC told the Norwegians that although they supported their efforts they did yet not have any direct contact with the Palestinians.<sup>875</sup> The following

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<sup>871</sup> Murray to Meshel, 23 July 1981, TUC memo to Murray, 3 August 1981, both MRC, MSS.292D/956/51

<sup>872</sup> Histadrut to the ICFTU, 26 July 1981, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2

<sup>873</sup> Murray to the Federation of Petroleum Trade Unions in Lebanon, 14 October 1981, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

<sup>874</sup> ICFTU press release, 23 July 1981, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

<sup>875</sup> Norwegian Federation of Trade Unions to the TUC, 24 July 1981, TUC reply, 5 August 1981, both MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

January after their meeting with the Foreign Office, the TUC pledged to use their contacts, including those with the Histadrut, to urge negotiations for a lasting and just peace agreement<sup>876</sup> and invited the Histadrut as an official guest to the 1982 TUC Congress.<sup>877</sup>

## **The Lebanon War**

The 1982 Lebanon War began on 6 June when Israel invaded southern Lebanon ostensibly to remove the PLO from the area in order to protect northern Israel from terrorist attacks.<sup>878</sup> However it was soon evident that the military operation which had been masterminded by Defence Minister Sharon had more far reaching ambitions to occupy all of Lebanon up to Beirut and the surrounding areas and eliminate the PLO rather than just clear a 40 kilometre area on Israel's northern border.

The incident which triggered the invasion took place in London rather than Israel or Lebanon. On 3 June 1982, Palestinian gunmen belonging to the Abu Nidal group shot and seriously wounded Shlomo Argov, Israel's Ambassador to Britain. Abu Nidal, whose group had broken away from Fatah and the PLO in 1974, had carried out the assassination attempt in order to provoke the Israelis into military action against the PLO.

The June meeting of the ETUC, which was held within days of the invasion, was used by the TUC and others to express their concerns. A proposal to issue a ETUC statement was turned down on the grounds that any ETUC action duplicated the work of the ICFTU.<sup>879</sup> The TUC then received a copy of the Histadrut's telegram to the ICFTU which said that invasion had been carried out in self-defence in order to prevent attacks on Israel from Southern Lebanon. The Histadrut had also endorsed a statement made by the Israeli Labour Party calling on the Israeli army to stick to its original plan of only venturing 40 kilometres inside Lebanon, "supporting the establishment of an effective international force to guarantee peace and stability in the Lebanon and calling for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the

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<sup>876</sup> TUC press release, 5 January 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/3.

<sup>877</sup> TUC International Committee minutes, March 30<sup>th</sup> 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/901/21.

<sup>878</sup> In the preceding eleven months since July 1981, the PLO had directed 240 terrorist actions against Israeli targets. For more information about Israel's invasion of Lebanon see: Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp.568-90 and Morris, *Righteous Victims a History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2000*, pp.494-552.

<sup>879</sup> Report of the June 1982 ETUC meeting, International Committee minutes, 5 July 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

Lebanon." They also called for negotiations to be started leading to the re-establishment of an independent Lebanon with which Israel would live in peaceful co-existence and that the Israeli army should not occupy Beirut.<sup>880</sup> The statement issued by the Tunisian ICFTU affiliate, the UGTT, which was circulated by the ICFTU, reflected the Arab point of view. The ICFTU called for a strict observance of the ceasefire, the withdrawal of both Israeli forces and armed Palestinian groups from Lebanon and for negotiations in which both the Israelis and the Palestinians would recognise the other's right to exist.<sup>881</sup> When the TUC International committee met on 5 July it decided against publishing its own statement even though a draft statement had been prepared which highlighted the suffering amongst civilians and supported the ICFTU call instead.<sup>882</sup>

On 16 August, Murray wrote to both the Histadrut and FPTU to ask for their views on the situation. Murray made it very clear to the Lebanese that he thought that the Israeli invasion was "impossible to justify on the grounds that it is necessary to secure Israel against terrorist attacks on Israel by the PLO" and that the force they had used in Beirut was disproportionate.<sup>883</sup> His letter to the Histadrut was more forthright, saying that "the prolonged shelling and bombing of Beirut and the killing of Lebanese civilians and the destruction of their homes as a result appears to go far beyond action necessary to protect Israel against terrorist attacks." Murray then compared the IRA's terrorist attacks in London to the Israeli armed forces whose actions had been "on a scale which is not justified on the grounds that it is aimed at combating terrorism." He concluded by asking if the Histadrut had condemned the destruction of Beirut and the killing of Lebanese civilians and whether it had taken the issue up with the Government.<sup>884</sup>

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<sup>880</sup> TUC memo to Murray from Walsh 5 July 1982, MRC, MSS292D/956/511/2

<sup>881</sup> ICFTU Press release, 14 June 1982 and ICFTU Circular No.32 (1982), 11 August 1982, all MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

<sup>882</sup> The draft statement prepared read: "The International Committee read today expressed deep concern about the suffering inflicted on the Lebanese people by the conflict of foreign forces on their territory, and about the dangers to world peace posed by the conflict. They associated themselves with the call of the ICFTU for strict observance of the ceasefire and the withdrawal of all foreign armed forces from Lebanon and for the opening of negotiations for a peaceful and lasting settlement to the conflict in the Middle East, the necessary basis for which must be acknowledgement by Israelis and Palestinians of each other's right to exist." TUC memo to Murray, 5 July 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

<sup>883</sup> Murray to the Federation of Petroleum Trade Unions, 16 August 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

<sup>884</sup> Murray to Meshel, 16 August 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

## **The Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPP)**

Scotland has always had a tradition of independence and no more so than in Scottish Labour movement which created the TUFPP which was to play a major role at the TUC regarding support for the Palestinians. The Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), which was formed in 1897 to protect workers' rights in Scotland, is an independent trade union centre for Scotland and is not connected in any way with the TUC. It first became interested in the Arab-Israeli conflict in the early 1970s.<sup>885</sup> In October 1975 the STUC adopted a resolution which described the situation in the Middle East as a threat to world peace but also recognised both Israel's right to exist as well as the rights of the Palestinian people.<sup>886</sup> Copies of their resolution were sent to the Egyptian and Israeli Ambassadors in Britain. Benny Shiloh, the labour attaché at the embassy, met with the STUC General Secretary to discuss the resolution. Shiloh was told that founding of the State of Israel had been a mistake and that the Histadrut had declined a visit by the STUC because they had wanted to visit neighbouring Arab countries.<sup>887</sup> Shiloh concluded after several meetings with the STUC that they were dominated by communists which explained their unfavourable position towards Israel. He recommended that the STUC General Secretary should be invited to visit Israel in order to prevent future STUC anti-Israeli actions.<sup>888</sup>

Elsewhere in Scotland, Dundee became from 1969 onwards, a centre of grassroots support for the Palestinian cause amongst the local Labour Party,<sup>889</sup> and trade union activists and students at Dundee University.<sup>890</sup> The TUFPP was established in Dundee in June 1980 to promote support for a Palestinian homeland within the trade union movement. The founders

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<sup>885</sup> Authors interview with Bill Spiers, General Secretary of the STUC 1998-2006, Edinburgh, April 2005.

<sup>886</sup> STUC to the Israel Embassy, 25 October 1975, PLILMR, IV-277-4.

<sup>887</sup> The allegation turned out to be groundless as there had been no evidence that Yagol had refused the visit on those grounds. Shiloh to Barnea, 14 February 1976, Barnea to Shiloh, 24 February 1976, both (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-7-132.

<sup>888</sup> It is not known if this advice was acted upon. Shiloh to Barnea, 10 March 1976, (Hebrew original), PLILMR, IV-219A-7-132.

<sup>889</sup> The Dundee Labour party been committed in the past to the anti-apartheid movement and various anti-imperialist movements. Edmunds, June, *The Left and Israel, party policy change and internal democracy*, p.98.

<sup>890</sup> Dundee District Council decided in November 1980 to twin Dundee with the Palestinian town of Nablus and shortly afterwards their decision to raise PLO flag over the Council chambers caused a national outrage. For more information the part played by Dundee in the pro-Palestinian campaign see Nathan Abrams, "Jute, Journalism, Jam and Jews: the anomalous survival of the Dundee Hebrew Congregation," Northern Scotland; Vol.3 No.1 May 2012, pp.86-97.

included George Galloway, then a local Labour Party activist, Yousef Allen, a Palestinian postgraduate student at Dundee University and Dundee MP, Ernie Ross. They all understood that in order to gain Labour Party support for the Palestinian cause, they first needed to gain the backing of the trade unions and the TUC because the block voting system used at Labour Party conferences gave the trade unions disproportionate power and influence over Labour Party policy decisions.<sup>891</sup> By September 1982 the TUFPP, which had been backed by Allen's links with the PLO, could count on support from activists from both wings of the Labour Party. Support from the Left included the General Secretaries of the Fire Brigades union (FBU), the Engineers (AUEW) and the Railway union ASLEF as well as officers from the General and Municipal Workers union (GMWU), the TGWU and the Scottish Miners. David Warburton, a senior Officer of the GMB Union, who was a member of the LMEC, brought with him the right wing of the trade union movement when he joined the TUFPP, which previously had only been supported by the Left.<sup>892</sup>

Israel's invasion of Lebanon provided the TUFPP with the opportunity to change TUC policy. In September 1982 at the TUC Congress, Ken Cameron, General Secretary of the FBU and member of TUFPP, tabled an emergency motion, written by Galloway, which condemned Israel's invasion of Lebanon and recognised "the national rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination within an independent sovereign state."<sup>893</sup> The TUC International department recommended to the General Council that they should support the emergency motion but with reservations as it differed in certain aspects from existing TUC policy and the TUC had never before dissociated themselves from the call for negotiations based on UN resolution 242. The emergency motion went further than resolution 242 because "242 does not refer to the Palestinians by name and only affirms the necessity for achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem." The Council were warned that if the emergency motion were adopted without any reservations, it would rule out other "possible ways in which Palestinian aspirations might be satisfied" and it was thought that the FBU would not want to

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<sup>891</sup> Author's interviews with George Galloway, Secretary of the TUFPP 1980-83, London, 19 October 2011 and Mike Walsh, TUC International Department, 1966-99, 6 November 2007, London. Walsh described the work of Yousef Allen, who became the British representative of the PTUF during the 1980s as "although not part of the PLO office in London, he did have an influence on the unions and the TUC because of the access he had to Palestinian sources."

<sup>892</sup> LMU, TUFPP Newsletter, September 1982 and author's interview with George Galloway, Secretary of the TUFPP, 1980-83.

<sup>893</sup> LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1982, International Committee debate, pp 615-7 and author's interview with George Galloway, Secretary of the TUFPP 1980-83.

stand in the way of any settlement that was acceptable to Palestinians. The Council were also advised that if the motion was adopted, any influence the TUC had with the Histadrut might be reduced.<sup>894</sup>

In the three days leading up the debate there were lengthy discussions between the FBU and the General Council. The unions appeared to be divided as the FBU were supported by the TGWU and the GMB and the General Council by NALGO and the AEUW. Cameron was put under a lot of pressure by the General Council who promised that if he withdrew the motion it would be considered by the International committee.<sup>895</sup> On the advice of colleagues, Cameron refused their requests which gave the General Council no alternative but to oppose the motion.

Opening the debate, on the last day of Congress, Cameron said that "this motion in fact points the real direction for peace and security for all the states, including Israel" and he found it strange that the General Council were opposed to this motion as he had not been trying to be divisive in any way. He told delegates that they could not let the crisis in the Lebanon pass without making a statement on the matter and made the point that "If the General Council cannot go along with the policy of the British Labour Party, then there is something wrong with the General Council in their attitude towards this motion."<sup>896</sup> Opposing the motion, Tom Jackson, the Chairman of the International committee, speaking on behalf of the General Council informed delegates that they did not have to pass this motion in order to record their dislike of what had happened in Lebanon or ensure that UN resolution 242 was upheld because the TUC had already endorsed the ICFTU statement on the matter. He then told the Congress that "You do not need to pass this motion because of your understandable feeling for the need to have a homeland for the

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<sup>894</sup> The memo noted that the TUC had in the past used its influence and contacts with the Histadrut, and the unions in Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Algeria to try and bring about an agreed solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict which had included the Palestinians. It is not known who the author was, but it was probably Michael Walsh, Hargreaves successor as Head of the department. Memo to the General Council "Emergency resolution on the Middle East," 6 September 1982, MRC,MSS.292D/956/511/2

<sup>895</sup> Referring a motion back was a tactic favoured by the General Council when they did not want to debate a subject at Congress. Author's interviews with Ken Cameron, General Secretary of the FBU, 1980-2000, Edinburgh April 2005 and David Warburton, Senior Officer for the GMB Union, 1970-95, Amersham, May2005.

<sup>896</sup> The Labour Party NEC issued a foreign policy statement on the Middle East on 8 June 1982; "The Labour Party is gravely disturbed by the situation in the Middle East and the rapidly escalating level of conflict. We are horrified by the attempted assassination of Shlomo Argov, Israeli Ambassador to Britain, which we condemn as a barbaric terrorist act. But we also condemn the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, which has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians and threatens to drag the region into a full scale war. The UN Security Council has called for an immediate ceasefire. We endorse their call and demand the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from the Lebanon." Report of the NEC to the 1982 annual conference of the Labour Party, LSE JN1129.L3.

Palestinian people. That too is the policy of the General Council." This was technically not true as this was not General Council policy. TUC policy was to support the ICFTU statement which only referred to the rights of the Palestinian people but not that the only way that their rights can secured was through an independent state.<sup>897</sup> Jackson urged delegates to oppose the motion because the Council believed it was wrong at this crucial and important stage of developments in the Middle East and had said to Cameron " let us not divide ourselves. Let us see what will be the result of the discussions that are taking place." He continued "We are in an extremely important and delicate stage of Middle Eastern politics and this is not the moment for us in Brighton, with all the troubles that we have got, to go muddying the waters still further."<sup>898</sup> His appeal to Congress was in vain, as the motion was carried, on a show of hands, by a very substantial majority with no need for a card vote. Jackson who was considered to be pro-Israel and due to retire after Congress took the defeat personally as he believed it reflected on his chairmanship of the International committee.<sup>899</sup> Cameron told this author that the main purpose had been to debate the subject and he had been surprised by the overwhelming support he received for the motion. Galloway, on the other hand, who had been lobbying at Congress, had always felt confident of success.<sup>900</sup>

The TUFPP, rather than one of the more established groups had succeeded, not only because they were in the right place at the right time, but because the TUFPP had brought together young ambitious Left-wing Labour party politicians and union activists as well as having a direct connection with Palestinians and the PLO.<sup>901</sup> Their connection with Dundee and the local University had also contributed to their success because the city's identification with the Palestinian cause during the 1970s had been driven by the many Arab students that had been studying there. The TUFPP continued to build on its success at the TUC over the next few years and its supporters included the General Secretaries of ASLEF, FBU, AUEW-TASS, the Tobacco Workers union and SOGAT, several of whom were members of the TUC General Council. It was active within many unions including the AUT, AUEW-TASS, NATFHE, ACTT, SOGAT, NUPE, NUM,

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<sup>897</sup> ICFTU Press release circular 27, 14 June 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2

<sup>898</sup> LMU, TUC Congress proceedings 1982, International Committee debate, p 615-7

<sup>899</sup> Author's interviews with Ken Cameron, General Secretary of the FBU, 1980-2000 and David Warburton, Senior Officer for the GMB Union, 1970-95.

<sup>900</sup> Author's interviews with Ken Cameron General Secretary of the FBU, 1980-2000, and George Galloway, Secretary of the TUFPP 1980-83.

<sup>901</sup> Ibid.



NUJ, NALGO, the TGWU and the Scottish TUC. The TUFPP campaigned for the disaffiliation of the Histadrut from the ILO and a boycott of Israeli goods and services.

A week after the TUC Congress, the National Union of Miners (NUM) which had been very supportive of Israel and the Histadrut in the past, passed an emergency resolution on Lebanon which condemned "the brutal attack by Israel on the Lebanon in pursuit of what appears to be their "final solution" of the Palestinian problem."<sup>902</sup>

Ken Cameron, the General Secretary of the FBU, told this author that Israel's invasion of Lebanon and the intense media coverage of the bombing of Beirut had helped bring about increased support for the Palestinians in both the unions and the Labour Party because the reports on TV news bulletins every night had helped change opinions.<sup>903</sup> The TUC received many letters from all over the world as well as local Trades Councils and union branches calling on them to condemn the Israeli invasion and give recognition to the PLO and endorse the creation of a Palestinian state.<sup>904</sup> Ernie Ross MP, one of the founders of the Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPP) invited the TUC to join an ad-hoc committee against the Israeli invasion which had been formed in support of the Palestinian people.<sup>905</sup> The only previous time that the TUC had received so many letters regarding the Arab-Israel conflict was in 1948, when American unions wrote to the TUC calling on them to support the newly declared State of Israel.<sup>906</sup>

Support for the Palestinians within the Labour Party at constituency level, especially in London and Scotland, illustrated the successful infiltration of the Trotskyist activists and the influence of the Left.<sup>907</sup> Their opposition and anger against Israel's invasion of Lebanon

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<sup>902</sup> NUM letter to TUC, 16 September 1982, MSS292D/956/511/2.

<sup>903</sup> Author's interview with Ken Cameron, General Secretary of the FBU, 1980-2000, Edinburgh, April 2005.

<sup>904</sup> Three examples of protests received by the TUC are; Runcorn and Widnes Trades Council to the TUC, 25 June and 2 August 1982, the Leicester Trades Council to the TUC, 12 August 1982 and the TGWU Dundee branch letter to the TUC, 13 August 1982. In their reply the TUC enclosed a copy of the ICFTU statement, all MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

<sup>905</sup> The response of the TUC was that 'we shouldn't be involved.' Ross to the TUC, 21 June 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

<sup>906</sup> In 1948, the TUC received 8 letters from American unions and in 1982 the TUC received 24 protest letters from British and unions in the Middle East.

<sup>907</sup> Pro-Palestinian constituency parties in London were: Hackney North and Stoke Newington, Brent South, Paddington, and St Pancras North and Aberdeen South, Dundee East, Dundee West, and West Renfrewshire in

played an important part in changing the Party's position on Israel. In August the *Jewish Chronicle* reported that the Labour Party conference scheduled for the end of September had received two resolutions on the Middle East, both of which were anti-Israel, one condemning the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the other advocating support for an independent Palestinian State. Yet by the beginning of September, no less than 46 emergency motions had been submitted to the Labour Party's conference. The FBU's motion urged that "Her Majesty's Government should insist in the strongest possible terms that America cease to support the Zionist fascists in the present Israeli Government."<sup>908</sup> The invasion also brought about a significant reaction from the Parliamentary Labour Party. Between April and June 1982 there were three Labour-sponsored pro-Palestinian EDMs, while there was not a single Labour-sponsored pro-Israel EDM. In June 1982 Michael Foot sponsored an EDM which condemned Israel's invasion of Lebanon and endorsed the UN Security Council's call for an immediate cease-fire and the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Lebanon.<sup>909</sup> Following the successful TUC Congress motion, the Labour Party NEC presented to a resolution their annual conference which was critical of Israel. The resolution, which was unanimously approved, condemned the massacre in the Beirut refugee camps and the complicity of the Begin government as well as calling for the establishment of a Palestinian State, with the PLO to be involved in negotiations.<sup>910</sup> The conference also adopted very two "hostile" anti-Israel motions, which were narrowly approved due to trade union support.<sup>911</sup> These resolutions marked the final collapse of the pro-Israel consensus within the labour movement and provided an opportunity for Labour grassroots condemnation of Israeli policy. It showed how far TUC and Labour Party activists had moved towards the Palestinian nationalist cause since 1967.

During the 1960s Bert Ramelson, the CPGB's industrial organiser, abandoned the previous strategy of working for change primarily at grass roots level and instituted a new approach

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Scotland. Dundee Labour Party was especially active because of its connection with George Galloway and the TUFU. June Edmunds, 'The Evolution of British Labour Party Policy on Israel from 1967 to the Intifada', p.31.

<sup>908</sup> 'TUC congress calls for a Palestinian State', *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 September 1982, p.6.

<sup>909</sup> June Edmunds, 'The Evolution of British Labour Party Policy on Israel from 1967 to the Intifada', p.32.

<sup>910</sup> "Labour to unravel Middle East Policy Jumble", *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 October 1982, P.4 and Labour Party NEC resolution, 29th September 1982, ISA, HZ 8977/6.

<sup>911</sup> Denis Healey was told immediately after the vote that the Israelis had reservations about the NEC statement and not to worry about the other two resolutions which the NEC had opposed. Telex to Shimon Peres from Haim Zadok, 30 September 1982, ISA, HZ 8977/6.

which was to put his own people in leading positions in the unions in order influence union policy.<sup>912</sup> A new approach was necessary because the Party had been in a gradual decline since the late 1940s because of the Cold War and the refusal by the Labour Party to allow the CPGB affiliate. By the late 1970s, Ramelson's new strategy had given the CPGB considerable power and influence within the trade union movement, as many leading unions had either communist, or communist supported members on their executive committees. At the end of each year Ramelson would send a list of policies to his members within the unions which the CPGB wanted the trade unions to take up. This ensured that the most important of these polices would appear on the agenda of the TUC Congress the following September. All Communist delegates would meet before Congress and discuss tactics to ensure success for Communist polices and election of their candidates.<sup>913</sup> Along with the three communists who sat on the TUC General Council in 1982, Ken Gill, General Secretary of TASS, George Guy, General Secretary of the Sheet Metal Workers union and Mick McGahey, vice-president of the Mineworkers, there were other Left wingers who frequently voted with them, whilst not communists themselves, felt comfortable with Communist policies and were also members of the caucus that Ramelson had organised.<sup>914</sup> The result was that the CPGB was able to influence decisions made by the General Council and TUC and Labour Party policy.<sup>915</sup> Even though the CPGB were supportive of the Russian pro-Arab policy on the Middle East and the Palestinian right to their own homeland, they were not involved in any way with the FBU motion. Their support for the FBU motion had been both coincidental and advantageous as it ensured that a resolution condemning Israel had been adopted, something which had never previously been achieved.<sup>916</sup>

### **The killings at the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps**

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<sup>912</sup> Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party*, p.158

<sup>913</sup> Ibid, p.176

<sup>914</sup> The group included Hugh Scanlon of the AEUW, the Public Employees union leader, Rodney Bickerstaffe, the Seaman's union leader, Jim Slater, Print union leader, Bill Keys, Alan Sapper of the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT), Doug Grieve of the Tobacco Workers and Ken Cameron of the Fire Brigades union (FBU), Ibid, p.182.

<sup>915</sup> Ramelson claimed in December 1973 that "We have more influence now on the Labour movement than at any time in the life of our party" and "We can float an idea early in the year and it can be official Labour policy by the autumn". Robert Taylor, *The TUC from the General Strike to New Unionism*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p.231.

<sup>916</sup> Author's interview with George Galloway, Secretary of the TUFPU 1980-83, London, 19 October 2011.

If the invasion of Lebanon harmed Israel's support and international reputation, the killing of 800 Palestinian and Lebanese civilians which took place between 16-18 September by Lebanese Phalangist militia in the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut caused anger and outrage throughout the world and no more so than at the TUC and the ICFTU. The killings were blamed on the Israelis as they had controlled access to the camps.<sup>917</sup> These events marked a profound shift in the attitude of the TUC and the unions to the problems of the Middle East. Two days after the massacre, the TUC issued a statement which expressed their horror and outrage at the brutal murder of civilian refugees in Beirut.<sup>918</sup> It was followed by a call for an independent international inquiry into the killings.<sup>919</sup> The ICFTU sent affiliates copies of their statement as well as those from the Histadrut and the UGTT. The ICFTU, as well as being "shocked and disgusted by the barbaric massacres" once again repeated the call for the fundamental rights both of Israel and the Palestinians to be recognised on the basis of UN resolution 242.<sup>920</sup> The UGTT blamed the massacres on the "bloodthirsty Zionists and their allies," comparing the killings to the acts of the Nazis saying that Israel was "a colonialist and racist state and an aggressor."<sup>921</sup> The Histadrut expressed their "revulsion and profound shock at the massacres" and called for the resignation of the Prime Minister and Defence Minister, the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from Beirut and for a judicial enquiry into the killings.<sup>922</sup>

The TGWU called on the TUC to impose a boycott on all Israeli ships and aircraft until they withdrew their troops from the Lebanon.<sup>923</sup> The International department advised that for a boycott to be effective, international agreement and support would be needed, which had not been forthcoming when they had canvassed the ICFTU and other national trade union bodies.

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<sup>917</sup> For more information about Sabra and Shatila see: Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp.590-9 and Morris, *Righteous Victims a History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2000*, pp.543-9.

<sup>918</sup> TUC Finance and General Purposes Committee statement, 20 September 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

<sup>919</sup> TUC General Council minutes, 22 September 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/20/16 and TUC General Council statement, 22 September 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

<sup>920</sup> ICFTU Press release, 21 September 1982 and ICFTU letter to Murray, 22 September 1982, both MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2. TUC International Committee report, IC1/8, 4 October 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/901/23.

<sup>921</sup> Kersten letter to LM 22 September 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2

<sup>922</sup> Histadrut statement 20 September 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2

<sup>923</sup> TGWU letter to TUC, 20 September 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

Their memo revealed that "It would be unprecedented for the General Council to boycott another country's vessels and aircraft to force political decisions by it" and that the TUC stood a much better chance of influencing Israel through the Histadrut "even though so strong is the feeling" within unions movement for a boycott. The proposal for a boycott was not adopted by the General Council.<sup>924</sup> In Israel the "Peace Now" movement held a rally in Tel Aviv on 25 September 1982 attended by 400,000 Israelis. It called for the establishment of a commission to investigate the massacres, as well as the resignation of the Defence Minister Sharon.<sup>925</sup> Although the demands expressed by this rally and the statement issued by the Histadrut were similar to the TUC's own demands there was no acknowledgement of this fact by the TUC.

Copies of the Congress resolution were sent to the Foreign Secretary, the Labour Party, the ICFTU, the Histadrut, the FPTU, the Israeli and Lebanese Ambassadors, and the UN. They only received replies from the Labour Party,<sup>926</sup> the Foreign Secretary<sup>927</sup> and the Israel Embassy. The Israeli response was that "Israeli military operations against terrorists in the Lebanon had been designed to bring an end to the death, destruction, and terrorism initiated by the PLO against Israel and its citizens *and that they constituted a legitimate exercise of the right to self defence.*"<sup>928</sup> The International committee report to the 1983 Congress omitted the words in italics

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<sup>924</sup> Walsh memo to Murray, International Department paper IC1/8 on the Middle East, International Committee minutes, all 4 October 1982 and MRC,MSS.292D/956/511/2, General Council minutes, 4 October 1982, MRC,MSS.292D/956/511/3.

<sup>925</sup> "The Lebanon War", *Ynet news*, 8 January 2006. Retrieved 4 May 2014.

<sup>926</sup> The Labour Party reply said that they supported a peaceful permanent settlement which guaranteed national self-determination for everyone within secure and internationally recognised borders and called on the both the PLO and the State of Israel to recognise each other's legitimate claims to statehood. Labour Party to the TUC, 3 December 1982, MRC,MSS.292D/956/511/3 also TUC International Committee minutes, 10 January 1983, MRC,MSS.292D/901/2.

<sup>927</sup> The International committee considered that the Foreign Secretary's general comments were not sympathetic to those of the TUC, but noted that he had said that the Congress resolution was close to the view taken by the European Community and the British Government. They only differed regarding the creation of Palestinian state which the Government believed had to be decided by all the parties directly concerned. The TUC then asked Francis Pym, the Foreign Secretary, for his comments on their call for independent inquiry into the killings. He replied saying that he doubted "whether a further investigation at this stage would serve much purpose". TUC International Committee minutes, 1 November 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/901/23, Foreign Secretary to Murray,4 October 1982, Murray to Foreign Secretary, 29 October 1982 and Foreign Office reply,12 November 1982, all MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2.

<sup>928</sup> The words in italics were omitted from the LMU, the International Committee report, TUC Congress proceedings 1983, p.216, but were reported in full in the TUC International Committee minutes, 1 November 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/901/2.

which had been Israel's justification for her invasion of Lebanon.<sup>929</sup> This omission showed bias against Israel, which reflected the attitude to Israel within the unions and the General Council.

Meshel replied on behalf of the Histadrut saying that they were disappointed that the TUC resolution only demanded the withdrawal of the Israeli armed forces and not the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon. He wrote that "as far as the establishment of an independent, sovereign state for the Palestinian people, which your resolution advocates, I am sure that far from bringing peace and security, such a separate state is a certain recipe for constant tension and more war and bloodshed."<sup>930</sup>

The Palestine Trade Unions Federation (PTUF), based in Syria, thanked the TUC for their support and asked for a meeting with the TUC. Murray was advised that the PTUF were affiliated to the communist WFTU and replied that they were only interested in making contact with unions that were independent and representative of their members.<sup>931</sup> The TUC also received letters from local Trades Councils detailing resolutions that had been adopted regarding the recognition of the PLO,<sup>932</sup> the establishment of a Palestinian homeland,<sup>933</sup> a boycott of Israel<sup>934</sup> and one which compared Israeli actions in Beirut with the Nazis extermination of the Jews.<sup>935</sup>

On the 11 January 1983, representatives of the General Council met with a Histadrut delegation in London. This discussion provided an ideal opportunity for both groups to

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<sup>929</sup> The Charge de Affaires also explained that Israeli forces would leave the Lebanon as soon as agreement had been reached on the withdrawal of all foreign forces and that Israel rejected the idea of an independent Palestinian state but recognised the rights of Palestinians according to the Camp David agreement. In further correspondence with the TUC, the Embassy wrote that Israel deplored and condemned the murder of Palestinians but flatly rejected "accusations of direct or indirect complicity" and had established a judicial inquiry committee. TUC to Israel Embassy, 30 September 1982, Israel Embassy to the TUC, 5 October 1982 both MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/2, Israeli Embassy to the TUC, 8 November 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/3.

<sup>930</sup> Meshel added that the Histadrut supported the position of the Israeli Labour Party, that a just solution to the Palestinian problem can only be found "on the basis of territorial compromise with Jordan whose Palestinian citizens account for over 60% of the Jordanian population." Their letter also reminded the TUC of the death and destruction caused by the eight year old Lebanon civil war which had involved the PLO and the Syrian army. Meshel to Murray, 21 December 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/3.

<sup>931</sup> PTUF to the TUC, 3 October 1982, Walsh memo to Murray, 15 October 1982, TUC reply to PTUF, 28 October 1982, all MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/3

<sup>932</sup> Portsmouth Trades Council to the TUC, 15 October 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/3.

<sup>933</sup> Harwich Trades Council to the TUC, 19 October 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/3.

<sup>934</sup> Southampton Trades Council to the TUC, 25 October 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/3.

<sup>935</sup> Runcorn Trades Council to the TUC, 1 November 1982, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/3.

explain their respective positions. The meeting was probably arranged by Eli Marx, the Histadrut's former European representative who was now working for the International department of the TGWU. In their opening remarks, the TUC made it clear that even though there was a long history of friendly relations between both countries, many people in Britain had reassessed their attitude to Israel as a result of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, their "brutal, protracted, bombardment of Beirut" and the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. These events had resulted in increased support for the Palestinian people. The Histadrut responded by making clear that they had opposed the Lebanon invasion, the bombing of Beirut, and advocated the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. But in their opinion, the PLO had been liable for much of the suffering in Lebanon and most Israelis believed that the PLO would refuse to recognise and negotiate with Israel.<sup>936</sup>

The Histadrut also said that they opposed the policy of settlements in the occupied territories and supported discussions with the Palestinian people, but would not accept the PLO as their representative. The delegation were told then that if a peaceful solution were to be found, Israel would have to reach an understanding with representatives of the Palestinian people and it seemed that most of the Palestinians accepted the PLO as their representatives. The Histadrut were also asked if they had any contact with the Palestinians or any of the Arab trade unions in the Middle East. They confirmed that they did not have any contact with the PLO as they controlled the GFPTU which they did not regard as a proper trade union organisation. They added that, although, they were prepared to meet without any preconditions representatives of any Arab trade unions, this would not happen unless their government's had given them permission to do so. When asked "if the TUC could be an intermediary," the Histadrut replied that they already had links with Egyptian trade unions. and the TUC should understand that a precondition of any contact with Arab trade unions, was that they should first recognise Israel and at present dialogue was not possible as they unreservedly supported the PLO. The Histadrut added, that it was difficult to see how the TUC could help in the circumstances. In conclusion, the Histadrut asked for the understanding of the TUC of "the obstacles which other countries in the region put in the way of peace" and the political constraints on its position as "many Israeli working people supported the aggressive nationalistic policies of the Begin Government and had criticised the

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<sup>936</sup> TUC report of the meeting with representatives of the Histadrut, report, IC5/2, 11 January 1983, MRC, 292D/956/511/3.

Histadrut for its condemnation of the invasion of Lebanon, the bombardment of Beirut, and for its call for an inquiry into the massacres." The meeting closed with a TUC representative reminding everyone that as tensions had been rising in the occupied territories "it was essential that there should be negotiations between the Israeli authorities and genuine representatives of the Palestinians." and that the "TUC hoped that the Histadrut, would in turn understand the concerns of working people outside the Middle East region and take any opportunity to contribute to a dialogue which could lead to a just and lasting peace."<sup>937</sup>

The Histadrut's feelings about the meeting are not recorded. Apart from receiving the comprehensive TUC report of the meeting, the minutes of the International committee indicate very little as regards to future TUC thinking. The committee noted the Histadrut's rejection of the TUC's offer to help and suggested that the TUC should continue to build links with Arab trade unions in the hope that trade union involvement in any future peace settlement might be useful. They also discussed the National Union of Teachers (NUT) proposal to send a TUC delegation to the Lebanon and the occupied territories to investigate the position of Palestinian working people. The committee were advised that although the Histadrut supported a visit, the Israeli authorities would not allow the delegation to have contact with Palestinian representatives in the West Bank and in Beirut. Under the circumstances they agreed not to go ahead with the visit.<sup>938</sup> Although Murray did not allow the TUC to have any official contacts with the PLO during the early 1980s, he was aware that Mike Walsh, the Head of the International department had made informal contact with the PLO through Yousef Allen at the TUFU. At this time Walsh had already been in contact with the General Federation of Palestinian Trade Unions (GFPTU) and hoped to speak with a Palestinian trade unionist who was visiting Britain at the end of January 1983.<sup>939</sup>

## **Conclusion**

From 1945 onwards the Histadrut had put a lot of time and effort into lobbying the TUC especially at key moments, in order to gain TUC support for Israel. The result was that the TUC rarely took the initiative and only discussed Israel related issues at the Histadrut's

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<sup>937</sup> The Histadrut had come to London at the invitation of the TGWU. Their visit was organised by Eli Marx, their former representative, who now worked for the TGWU. Ibid.

<sup>938</sup> International Committee minutes, 7 February 1983, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/3.

<sup>939</sup> Walsh memo Murray, 7 February 1983, MRC, MSS.292D/956/511/3 and author's interview with Mike Walsh, Head of TUC International Department 1980-99.



request except when events such as the 1956 and 1967 wars impacted on Britain. Consequently, the overall effect was that over the years, the TUC was like 'the dog that didn't bite,' it made a lot of noise to very little effect. However from the 1973 war onwards, the TUC became proactive rather than reactive to events in the Middle East. This was because the Left, who were in control of the TUC, felt confident enough to take their concerns about Israel's actions and her behaviour towards the Palestinians directly to the Histadrut. Their support for the Palestinian cause was welcomed by grassroots activists in both the unions and the Labour Party.

The outcome of this move away from Israel resulted in the 1982 TUC Congress resolution which was the first time the TUC had adopted a motion critical of Israel. Why had the Histadrut allowed this to happen? Firstly, the Histadrut's importance in Israel had declined in the 1970s as had its international role supporting the Israeli government in world affairs. Its international and domestic influence declined even further with the Likud victory in Israel's general election of 1977. Secondly, the Histadrut leadership had decided in the early 1970's that because the TUC's main focus was now Europe and Russia, their priority was the ICFTU and the German and Scandinavian unions rather than the TUC. Although they maintained contact with the British unions and the TUC, the bulk of the lobbying was carried out by the Israeli embassy, TUFU and the 35s. Consequently they lacked the contacts and leverage to avoid the passage of a hostile motion.

Could the Histadrut have done more? - Certainly. The decision to move to Brussels in 1968 took place at the wrong time, when changes were taking place in Britain within the labour movement and they were frequently told afterwards that they had made a mistake and missed an opportunity. But the Histadrut, like the TUC, had limited resources for overseas programmes and were never able to build the necessary links to identify and educate future British union leaders about Israel. This lack of resources meant that whilst they concentrated on the leadership of the unions they had no answer to the changes that were taking place at grassroots level. Another factor which affected the outcome was the wrong emphasis placed on visits to Israel by prominent figures from the unions and the TUC. These trips have always been and still are a top priority for the Israelis and the Histadrut, but too much effort was concentrated on making these guests into friends and not political allies. The visitors throughout this period were always shown the work and achievements of the Histadrut along with a bit of tourism so that on their return to Britain, they praised Israel. Only on a few occasions was any attempt made to incorporate into their itinerary serious political

discussions in order for them to understand Israel's position in the Middle East, so that in times of trouble their friendship hopefully could be turned into sympathy and support.

## Conclusion

The main purpose of this study has been to explore and explain the attitude of the British trade union movement towards Israel and discover if it has changed. This question, which has never been properly investigated before is important because from the 1960s onwards, the Israel-Palestine conflict has become an increasingly contentious and divisive issue especially for the trade union movement.

The most surprising discovery has been that although the Labour Party was established as the political wing of the trade union movement, the TUC had a totally different attitude when it came to public support for Israel. Apart from 1945-50 the Labour Party has been one of Israel's staunchest supporters, whilst the TUC only really engaged with Israel between 1962-73. It is often assumed that because both the Histadrut and the TUC have frequently referred to the friendship between them which stretches back to the 1920s, the TUC, have always, like their partners in the British labour movement,<sup>940</sup> the Labour Party, identified themselves with Israel.

Why was this was so? It was due to a number of factors, including the Labour Party's involvement in international politics and its longstanding support for a Jewish homeland as well as its relationship with the British electorate and the Jewish community. While some Israelis remained bitter towards Britain due to the events of the 1930s and 40s many Mapai and Histadrut members, because of their European background, identified themselves with Britain and the British labour movement and made connections with the British Labour party through the Socialist International.

The trade unions and the TUC have not had that same close relationship with the Jewish community as the Labour Party and the CPGB. The majority of Britain's Jews who joined the Labour and Communist Parties in the 1930s, had left their trade union roots behind them after the Second World War when they moved into the middle classes. From then on, Anglo-Jewry's support for Israel in Britain was directed towards the political parties and Parliament and not the trade unions, which no longer had a large number of Jewish members to put pressure on them.

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<sup>940</sup> The TUC is not affiliated to the Labour Party along with many unions who are affiliated to the TUC. The TUC represents both affiliated and non-affiliated trade unions.

Whilst it has not been a problem for Jews to be Labour members of Parliament, only a handful of few Jews have become union leaders. The only Jewish trade unionist who spoke up for Israel in the period of this study was Solomon Lever of the London Jewish Bakers union, who represented his union at TUC Congress in the 1940s and 50s. The move towards the Left within the unions in the late 1960s and 70s saw three Jewish left-wingers, hold prominent positions, Laurie Sapper, General Secretary of the Association of University Teachers (AUT), his brother, Alan Sapper, General Secretary of the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT) and John Tuchfeld, Assistant General Secretary of TASS, all of whom were silent on Israel. Both Alan Sapper and Tuchfeld were members of the CPGB and associates of Bert Ramelson, the industrial organiser for the CPGB. Throughout the study there have been a number of trade union leaders, who stood up for Israel, the most prominent being Sam Watson, Frank Cousins, Fred Hayday, Jack Jones and George Woodcock, none of whom had any Jewish connections.

Anti-Zionism has been a feature of the CPGB's Middle East policy since 1945 apart from a short period when the State of Israel was established. At that time Jewish members of the CPGB did not have a problem in identifying themselves as Jews and Communists but many left the Party in the 1950s over the revelations of antisemitism in the Soviet Union. Since then the majority of Jews who remained in the CPGB such as Bert Ramelson were anti-Zionists.

When it came to international politics, the TUC under Tewson rigidly followed, not only the Bevin doctrine towards Israel but also Foreign Office advice to promote Britain's influence in the Middle East. Understandably, the TUC's priority in the international field was the ICFTU and Israel/Palestine was only one of a number of issues relating to international politics and the Cold War. Whereas the Labour Party were never afraid of giving their public support to Israel, it was only towards the end of this study that the Parliamentary Party's public support for Israel started to wane.

The lack of contact between the international affairs departments of the TUC and the Labour Party, came about because each organisation had different priorities. Whereas of the Labour Party was concerned with the political dimension of international matters, the TUC's only requirement for their involvement was that there had to be a trade union element. For example, in the 1960s the TUC worked with the emerging unions in South Africa and not the political, anti-apartheid movement. They did not become involved with the campaign for

Soviet Jewry until the mid-1980s because of the lack of a trade union connection. If involvement demanded them linking up with a political movement such as the African National Congress (ANC) or the PLO and their trade union affiliates, then the TUC always said no. When the Labour Party was in power, however, it was important for the TUC to have contact with the Party and the government. The TUC worked very closely with the Attlee government and had regular meetings with the Foreign Office during the Wilson and Callaghan administrations. When the Labour Party was not in power, the TUC considered that the Party did not have much to contribute on the international issues and was often of little use to the TUC, as they could be an embarrassment to the TUC's work both domestically and internationally. This was especially true, when the Trotskyists had a big influence on the Labour Party during Michael Foot's time as leader of the Labour Party in the 1980s. Michael Walsh, the Head of the TUC International department, had very little contact during this period with his opposite number at the Labour Party because he did not trust her or her advisors.<sup>941</sup>

Between 1945 and 1982, Histadrut-TUC relations tended to reflect the state of Anglo-Israel relations. The TUC's reaction to incidents or crises in the Middle East throughout this study was invariably low key and non-committal. Frequently, the TUC only committed itself long after an incident or crisis had passed. The exceptions were the public support for Israel when the UN adopted its infamous 'Zionism is racism' resolution in 1975, and their condemnation of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Although the TUC were horrified, in 1975, by the AFL-CIO's withdrawal from the ILO over the recognition of the PLO (*as it would radically effect the work of the ILO*), the TUC refused to publically support the Israelis and the Histadrut.

All of Tewson's successors as TUC General Secretary, including George Woodcock, Vic Feather and Len Murray were supportive of Israel, yet they all preferred to work, whenever necessary, behind the scenes especially at the ICFTU and TUC General Council. Even though the TUC worked closely with the Labour party in many areas, international issues was not one of them. This lack of contact and interaction between the international departments of the Labour party and the TUC certainly affected the TUC's understanding of the Arab-Israel conflict.

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<sup>941</sup> Author's Interview with Mike Walsh, Head of TUC International Department, 1980-99, London, 14 December 2013.

The Labour Party had a long record of adopting pro-Israel motions at its annual conference, yet the trade union movement only once used its dominant "block vote" at the Labour Party conference to make a significant impact on the Arab-Israel conflict. This was in 1982, when the Labour Party adopted a similar resolution to one which the TUC had approved a few weeks earlier.

The attitude of the TUC towards the Histadrut and Israel between 1945 and 1982 can be split into three distinct periods, the first period from 1945 to 1962 was one of indifference, which was followed by the eleven years of engagement until around the time of the 1973 Yom Kippur war, the last period from 1973 to 1982 saw a gradual transformation of attitudes within the TUC into active hostility against the Histadrut.

As chapters one and two show, after 1948, no matter how hard the Histadrut tried to rebuild relations with the British labour movement, the TUC always held back when it came to political support for Israel. This was of course in complete contrast to the Labour party who had successfully re-engaged with Israel in the 1950s. Anglo-Israel relations started to improve from 1958, so that by 1966 they were at an all-time high. In contrast TUC relations lagged behind and only improved due to the efforts of Frank Cousins and the new TUC General Secretary, George Woodcock. It was a similar story with the Histadrut development programmes in Africa and their Afro-Asian Institute, which impressed the Foreign Office, several years before they had TUC approval.

The 1967 Six-Day War provided Frank Cousins and Fred Hayday with the opportunity for the trade union movement to play their part in bringing peace to the Middle East. As shown in chapters two and three, their efforts failed, but not before causing anxiety at the Foreign Office who were also concerned about the Histadrut's successful lobbying of the TUC General Council. The Histadrut never took advantage of this "golden" period in relations and by moving their Europe base from London to Brussels most of the goodwill generated was wasted.

The final chapter covers the period of growing hostility towards the Histadrut. With the Left in charge both at grassroots and leadership level the TUC and the unions moved closer to the Palestinians. By 1982, the move away from Israel was complete with the TUC's adoption of its first resolution in support of the Palestinian right to their own homeland, along with criticism of Israel's invasion of Lebanon.

Unlike the American or even the German trade unions, who often gave their unconditional support to Israel, the Histadrut always had to work hard to try and gain the TUC's backing. The TUC always did the best it could but it was rarely what the Histadrut had hoped for. However the one thread which runs right through this study, is that the Histadrut was always trying to build friendly relations with the TUC in order to gain their support at times of crisis yet the TUC was often indifferent in its response to the Histadrut's overtures.

From 1945 onwards the TUC always gave priority to their own interests and those of the British government which frequently meant that any support given to Israel and the Histadrut was given behind the scenes. The TUC's response to major international events and issues has been always determined by either the attitude of the main unions or the TUC General Secretary, but never the Labour Party. The advice on these matters offered by the International department to the General Secretary and the International committee often came from the Foreign Office. Bevin, the Foreign Secretary and former TUC President, was a very powerful and influential figure who was never challenged from within the TUC over his policies on Palestine and Israel. Even after his death in 1951, nothing changed as the TUC continued to follow his opinions and attitudes. TUC-Histadrut relations were poor whilst Tewson was General Secretary, for not only did he support Foreign Office policies but he also opposed the Histadrut's international aid programmes as he saw them as an ally of his arch rivals the AFL-CIO. Although after Suez, Barkatt realised that the TUC and the unions were not the friends that the Histadrut had thought they were, he tried unsuccessfully to make connections. Nothing really changed, however, until after Tewson and the old guard had retired, when a new generation of leaders came onto the scene. Frank Cousins led a revival of interest in international affairs within the unions taking a stronger, more radical political line.

Why, one asks would the TUC continually rebuff the Histadrut which was the most powerful trade union organisation in the Middle East and a member of the ICFTU executive, in favour of an Arab trade union movement which, with one of two exceptions, such as Tunisia and Lebanon, were ineffective, and state controlled and political in nature.<sup>942</sup> The answer is the

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<sup>942</sup> The Labour attaché in Beirut wrote that by 1970, the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (ICATU) had labour affiliates in all Arab countries, except Tunisia. However, the significance of ICATU "lies more in the labour-political sphere than in industrial relations" as since 1967, ICATU's main concern has been to mobilise Arab labour support for the Palestinian cause, and "the gaining of international labour sympathy for it" Labour attaché Beirut, "Trade unions in the Arab world", TNA:PRO, November 1971, LAB13/268.

politics of Middle East and the British Foreign Office, which seems to have influenced the TUC International department and especially Tewson into following government policy which resulted in an unwillingness to offend the Arabs at the expense of Israel, as well as the promotion of links with the Arab unions, in order to reduce the influence of the Histadrut.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the TUC were engaged in a battle with the AFL-CIO, for the leadership of the ICFTU. The Histadrut became a pawn in that battle when Tewson opposed the Histadrut's nomination for the executive committee in 1953. They clashed again over the Histadrut's aid programmes for African and Asian states which received substantial financial support from the Americans. The Histadrut spent fifteen years, between 1948 and 1963 lobbying the TUC before they made the breakthrough with Tewson's successor, George Woodcock who thought that international projects should be left to others to manage, such as the ICFTU. This was the start of a "golden" period in relations, with Cousins, Hayday, Feather and Woodcock leading the TUC's engagement with Israel and the Histadrut. Sometime after the 1967 war, the TUC stopped issuing their own statements and press releases and gave their backing instead to the ICFTU's pronouncements on the Middle East. The Labour Party, unlike the TUC, made it clear that their friendship and support for Israel would not stop them making statements critical of the actions of the Arab States.

During the 1960s and 70s, when Britain and Israel had similar economic problems and were both ruled by Labour Governments, British civil servants regularly monitored how Israel dealt with prices and incomes, inflation and industrial disputes, which did not appear to interest the TUC. Although the Foreign Office admired the success of the Histadrut's Afro-Asian Institute in the developing countries in Africa and Asia, they were unable to persuade the TUC to play a bigger role in international development projects, probably because Woodcock was the General Secretary and the TUC did not have the necessary resources to send specialists abroad.

Cousins' attempt after the 1967 war to use the unions to bring peace to the Middle East was certainly a genuine effort on his part, but it ultimately failed because the Foreign Office took control of his initiative in order to help restore British links with the Arab world. Once reality had set in, after Israel's stunning victory in the 1967 Six-Day War and the Histadrut had moved its office to Brussels, support for Israel began to wane. This coincided with rising interest by the grassroots labour movement in the Palestinians and the PLO. During this period delegations regularly shuttled backwards and forwards between Israel and the UK, a



pattern which only came to an end in the 1980s when support for Israel could no longer be guaranteed.

The 1970s saw Jones and Scanlon lead the TUC's re-engagement with Russia and Eastern Europe and a move away from the rest of the world in order to work more closely with European trade union movement. Although Jones, as a friend of Israel, managed to contain any criticism of Israel, he used every excuse in order not to become involved in the Soviet Jewry campaign which he saw as counterproductive to their plans for improving links with the Russian and Eastern bloc unions. The TUC's response to the Histadrut's request for support after the 1973 war can be seen as the start of the period of re-evaluation of attitudes towards Israel within the trade union movement which led to hostility towards Israel and the Histadrut and, finally the 1982 Congress resolution. Amongst these changes was the discussion, by Congress of the concept the human rights. Whilst Jack Jones was in charge of the International Committee, the TUC stood firm and would only consider human rights issues when they had a trade union connection. With his retirement in 1978, Congress passed a resolution which allowed the TUC more flexibility in its interpretation of human rights.<sup>943</sup> This was a big step for the TUC as it opened the door for them to openly support non-trade union political issues in future. The coming together of the human rights dimension in political matters coupled with the changes in the social and political landscape in the 1970s, ensured the successful landmark vote at the 1982 Congress in favour a Palestinian homeland.

The need for an international political matter to have a trade union connection seems so have been introduced into the TUC's mindset by Tewson in 1940. Previously both the TUC General Council and International committee had regularly discussed events in Palestine without mention of the need for a trade union connection. The TUC was also a member of the National Council of Labour and had taken a leading role in international matters in the 1930s. During the first half of the 1950s, the TUC consistently followed an international policy based on support of the UN and rearmament for the defence of peace with the wish that every opportunity should be used for negotiations to end the state of tension.<sup>944</sup> Again this had no specific trade union linkage. It appears, therefore, that this practice was used by the TUC

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<sup>943</sup> Congress debate on motion on human rights, LMU, 1978 TUC Congress report, pp.591-2.

<sup>944</sup> International policy document submitted to the 1954 TUC Congress, IC 6/5, 22 July 1954, MRC, MSS292/9101/11.

leadership to stop discussion of what they considered to be an embarrassing subject only when all other avenues had failed. The general acceptance of the concept of human rights in the 1970s put an end to this practice.

With nobody able to fill the void once Jones had retired, international policy was usually left to Murray, TUC General Secretary, who became very critical of Israel's policies towards Lebanon. At the same time, the International Department, with Murray's tacit support started to make contact with the PLO and Palestinian trade unionists. Opposition towards Israel became more open in 1977 with the political upheaval in Israel when Likud came to power and the Histadrut were no longer part of the Israeli government. The TUC now started to take political positions on the conflict, whereas only a few years earlier it had restricted itself to involvement only if there was a trade union connection. The culmination of the period of hostility towards Israel came with the 1982 TUC Congress and the passage of a resolution which for the first time criticised the actions of the Israeli government in Lebanon and publically backed Palestinian claims for statehood. This action by Congress began the process of transforming the attitude of the TUC and the unions towards Israel and the Palestinians. When Anglo Jewry realised in the 1970s that they needed to be proactive within the Labour movement in order to rebuild support for Israel it was too late. Their belief that the LFI and TUFU could fill the gap left by the departure of the Histadrut was also mistake because they concentrated on recruiting support for Israel from union leaders whilst the Left built support for the Palestinians at the grass roots.

From 1945 until 1977, the Histadrut was always clear that its international role was to support the Israeli government in whatever way it could. After 1977, with the Israeli Labour Party in opposition, the Histadrut was no longer sure of its international role. Labour's defeat confirmed the Histadrut's loss of influence and power in Israel. By then also there had been a similar decline in the influence of the international labour movement in world affairs. In Britain, the Histadrut's biggest mistake was the move to Brussels which unfortunately coincided with the upsurge in interest in the Palestinian cause. It is not clear if the Histadrut ever really understood the motives and priorities of the TUC. Their most powerful weapon in the battle for hearts and minds was and still is, to take people to Israel in order to better understand Israel's problems and the political situation. These efforts more often than not failed because of the Histadrut's inability in most cases to convert friends into political allies. It is also clear that once the Histadrut realised in the 1970s that the TUC's main focus was

Europe and the Eastern Bloc, the Histadrut turned its back on Britain and gave priority to its European friends.

In the 1920's shortly after the Histadrut had been formed Ben Gurion and his colleagues decided to lobby both the American and British Labour movements for support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The results of their efforts had startlingly different outcomes. Between 1930 and 1948 the Histadrut received the active backing for Zionist efforts from leading American trade unionists such as George Meany, William Green and David Dubinsky who promoted the immigration of Jewish refugees to Palestine and the establishment an independent homeland for the Jews there.<sup>945</sup> After 1948 they continued to actively and publically support the Histadrut and Israel. In Britain however it was a different story as the priority for Dov Hoz and Berl Locker who represented the Zionist leadership in London in the 1930s and 1940s was to gain the support of the Labour Party leadership, which they did. Yet, despite their best efforts, the TUC consistently declined to adopt an independent stand on Zionism and Jewish affairs. All appeals for support made to them were rejected and passed onto the Labour Party.<sup>946</sup> It took the two emissaries more than 10 years to reach this conclusion.

Bevin had a good working relationship with Citrine who became General Secretary in 1934, the same year Bevin was first elected to the General Council. Even though Citrine and Bevin often agreed on policy it is not known why Citrine and the TUC were out of step with Bevin over Palestine before 1945 and were unwilling to publically support the Histadrut in their own right, or when they first adopted the policy of leaving Palestine issues to the Labour Party. We do know, however, that when they became General Secretary both Tewson and Woodcock continued with Citrine's non-committal course of action. In 1940 Tewson, presumably on the orders of Citrine, told Hoz that the TUC could not become directly involved in political matters and that although Congress had made declarations in regard to Palestine before it had only done so at the at the request of the Jewish Labour Movement.<sup>947</sup>

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<sup>945</sup> For more information about the US unions support for the Histadrut and Israel see: Peter Hahn, "The influence of organized labor on U.S. policy toward Israel, 1945-1967", in *Empire and revolution : the United States and the Third World since 1945*, (Columbus : Ohio State University, 2001), pp.154-77 and A.M. Howard, "Sowing the Seeds of Statehood: Garment Unions , American Labor, and the establishment of the State of Israel 1917-1952", (unpublished Doctor of Philosophy thesis, University of Florida, 2003).

<sup>946</sup> Locker to Mapai Central Committee, 6 October 1943, Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, p.190.

<sup>947</sup> Memo of meeting between Tewson and Dov Hoz, 4 March 1940, MRC, MSS292/956.9/3.

Three years later Locker included Citrine as a member of the group of Labour Cabinet Ministers who thought it advisable to "water down" any pro-Zionist proposals.<sup>948</sup>

When Tewson became General Secretary he extended this policy to include not taking any action if there was not a trade union connection nor to favour one side over the other. It is not clear either whether the leaders of Mapai and Histadrut have recognised the crucial differences between their labour movement and their British counterpart and understood why the TUC acted as it did. Whereas Mapai has always controlled the actions of the Histadrut, the Labour Party and TUC were and still are two independent organisations each with a separate leadership with no overlap or connection other than as part of the same labour movement. Locker and Ben Gurion certainly understood the differences as well as the motivation of the TUC, whereas their successors including Barkatt may not have.

If the Histadrut knew that the TUC would never challenge the Labour Party over Palestine, why then did they continue to lobby them, even though they knew it was a thankless task? Firstly, because Britain was the ruling power in Palestine. Secondly, because the TUC worked closely with Churchill's wartime government and was a key partner in Attlee's Labour administration. Thirdly, because the TUC was the driving force behind the WFTU and the Histadrut used the WFTU to pressurise the TUC. Throughout this period the trade union movement was very influential in terms of world politics in Britain, the USSR and the USA. Consequently the Histadrut had no alternative but to adopt the role of supporting the drive for a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

The archives show that between 1945 and 1948 the Histadrut failed to recruit any leading British trade unionist to their cause which meant that at such a crucial moment the Zionist point of view was not heard by the General Council. Thus the Histadrut's contact with the TUC during this period was mainly by telegram and letter which was unhelpful. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that their inability, before the war, to gain support from the unions contributed to the TUC's ambivalence towards the problems of Jewish refugees fleeing from Nazi Germany.

Whereas Ben Gurion could depend on Harold Laski or Richard Crossman and others in the Labour Party to raise their concerns with the Labour Government, the Histadrut had no one to

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<sup>948</sup> Gorny, *The British Labour Movement and Zionism 1917-1948*, p.178.

contact until after Sam Watson had been to Israel in 1950. Even then Watson, the General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (Durham Area) and a leading member of the Labour Party National Executive Committee, had difficulty in influencing the TUC, because he was not a member of either the General Council or the International Committee. The first Israeli labour attaché in Britain, Moshe Bar-Tal who had actively lobbied the International Department and the leaders of the main unions did not have any more success than his predecessors because Deakin and his colleagues, ex-colleagues of Bevin, controlled the General Council. By contrast, the 1960s were a golden period in relations because the Histadrut had gained the support of George Woodcock, Fred Hayday and Frank Cousins.

After the war the American unions lobbied both the American and British governments saying that after all the pain and persecution that the Jews had suffered during the war Palestine was the Jewish national homeland and that all the Jews in the displaced persons camps should be allowed to emigrate there. They gained the support of their own government but not the Labour government or the TUC. Most of the time the American trade unionists wrote directly to either Attlee or Bevin rather than the TUC, which they knew was a lost cause. They also spoke out on behalf of the Jews on many occasions at rallies and fundraisers. Compared to the Americans, British trade unionists did virtually nothing on behalf the Jews in Europe or Palestine. The record shows that the TUC was silent, letting the Labour Party speak on their behalf. Bevin's presidential address in 1937 was only one of three times the unfolding tragedy of the Jews in Europe and their efforts in Palestine were mentioned at TUC Congresses during the 1930s. The news of the murder of tens of thousands of Jews in Poland in 1942 resulted in the passing of notes of regret by the General Council and was never discussed again. The only time the Holocaust and the murder of 6 million Jews by the Nazis was ever mentioned at the TUC Congress both during and after the war was in 1943 in the address given to congress by Isidore Nagler, the AFL fraternal delegate.<sup>949</sup> After 1945 the TUC defended the actions of its partner, the Labour government. Could Hoz and Locker have done more in the 1930s and 1940s to build links with the TUC? - Probably, but the outcome would have been the same. Their primary target was always the Labour Party and its leadership, not the TUC.

Their successful lobbying of the Labour Party in the 1930s laid the groundwork for the support given to Israel by the Labour Party after 1948. The TUC, however, was a different

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<sup>949</sup> MRC, the TUC annual report for 1943, p. 271.

story as they were unable to persuade either Citrine, Tewson and Deakin to speak out on the Jews behalf. While the leadership of the TUC, unlike the Americans, appears not to have been motivated by the Holocaust to mobilise the unions behind the Jewish claim for a homeland in Palestine, the reality was that they had had fewer Jewish members, there were almost no Jewish leaders, their focus was habitually domestic –and they just didn't care enough.

The Histadrut or Mapai did not appear to have known that the attitude of the TUC towards the Histadrut was vigorously influenced by the leadership's close rapport and involvement with the wartime government which had continued well into the 1950s resulting in the TUC giving priority to supporting Britain's interests elsewhere in the Middle East. That there was no support for Israel on the General Council just made it easier for Deakin, Roberts and Tewson. What did not help the Histadrut throughout the period of this study was a general ignorance within the general population in Britain and especially the trade unions of the Zionist movement, Jews, Israel and the Holocaust. This lack of knowledge about Israel's achievements and the threats she faced was commented on many times over the years by several Histadrut representatives.

The TUC became involved with the Israel-Palestine conflict due to circumstances rather than choice. As a leading member of the WFTU, the TUC leadership had to defend the actions of the Labour Government in Palestine whereas at the ICFTU in the 1950s, they supported the government's pro-Arab initiatives. The General Council was advised by the International Department who produced briefing papers whenever necessary.<sup>950</sup> The TUC never had a policy on relations with Israel, as the Middle East was never a priority for them. Its approach at any moment in time was decided by the Chairman of the International committee and the General Secretary. In the 1950s Deakin, Roberts and Tewson supported the government's pro-Arab policies, whereas in the 1960s Woodcock, Hayday, Cousins were pro-Israel. In the first half of the 1970s Jones, a Left winger and Feather ensured that the TUC remained pro-Israel. Their successors Jackson and Murray continued to support Israel but they found it increasingly hard to do so at a time when the General Council had started to question Israel's policies towards Palestinians.

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<sup>950</sup> The main briefing papers produced by the International department were about developments in Palestine 1947-8, Suez, Soviet Jewry and the 1982 Lebanon invasion. They did not produce anything for the 1967 Six Day war or the 1973 Yom Kippur war.

Whereas the Labour Party was always able to issue a statement in support of the Israel at times of crisis even when they were in Government, the TUC never once backed the Histadrut and Israel publically. When it did issue a statement, such as in 1967, it was very careful not to take sides, unlike its American or German counterparts who made it quite clear that they supported Israel. It seems this reluctance to make public statements led, in the late 1960s, to the TUC deciding, as a matter of policy, to endorse the ICFTU's actions. Why did they continue with this position which was first used by Tewson in 1940? Woodcock told the Histadrut in 1963 that the TUC would only make political statements in the most extraordinary matters, such as Cuban missile crisis and in 1968 the International Committee decided not to make a protest to the Algerian government on the Histadrut's behalf as it might lead to the TUC being asked in future to protest to foreign governments on other matters. In the 1950s when the TUC had no real ties with Israel, unlike the Labour Party, Tewson found there was no need to alter this policy. When Woodcock replaced Tewson, he naturally continued with this policy. But we do not know the real reason why the TUC took this stance in the first place. However, towards the end of this study, once support for human rights issues had become part of the political agenda and support for the Palestinians within the labour movement was on the increase, only then did the TUC move away from not taking sides and started to question Israel's actions.

In 1945, the Histadrut was busy lobbying the TUC to intercede with the British government on behalf of Jews in Palestine and relations between the two bodies were best described as cold, mainly because Bevin was Foreign Secretary and Tewson, did not want to take sides. This study ends in 1982, but this time it was the TUC who were lobbying the Histadrut on behalf of the Palestinians. Relations between the Histadrut and the TUC were once again poor. The thesis has shown an oscillating relationship, situations changed, men changed, but after four wars and 37 years, the lobbying still goes on.

## Appendix 1

### **List of Organisations and Personnel**

#### **British Legation / British Embassy in Israel – Ambassador**

1948-49	No representation
1949-51	Sir Alexander Knox Helm
1951-54	Sir Francis Evans
1954-57	Sir John Walter Nicholls
1957-59	Sir Francis Brian Anthony Rundall
1959-63	Sir Patrick Hancock
1963-65	Sir John Greville Stanley Beith
1965-69	Sir Michael Reginald Hadow
1969-72	Sir Ernest John Ward Barnes
1972-75	Sir Bernard Ledwidge
1975-76	Thomas Anthony Keith Elliott
1976-80	Sir John Mason
1980-81	John Robinson
1981-84	Sir Patrick Moberly

#### **British Legation / British Embassy in Israel – Labour Attaché**

1950-53	Ivor Thomas
1953-55	William Poulson
1955-57	William Harry Marsh
1958-61	John Parker
1962-67	Cyril Marshall
1967-70	O. John Skinner
1970-73	T. Spence
1973-78	S.T. Corcoran (Resident in Athens)



1978-80 R. J. Ross (Resident in Athens)

**Foreign Office labour advisor on international labour questions**

1949-51 H Gee

1952-53 J.A. Diack F.C. Mason - assistant

1954-55 D.C Barnes O. Kemp- assistant

1956-58 G.F. Bulmer O. Kemp- assistant

1959-63 W.A Treganowan

1963-76 G. Foggon (Job title now FCO Overseas labour advisor)

1977-79 H. Hurst (M. Walsh seconded to FCO from TUC for two years)

1980-81 H. Hurst

1982-83 E. Toms

**Histadrut -General Secretary**

1944-49 Yosef Sprinzak

1949-50 Pinchas Lavon

1950-56 Moredchai Namir

1956-61 Pinchas Lavon

1961-69 Aharon Becker

1969-73 Yitzhak Ben-Aharon

1973-84 Yeruham Meshel

**Histadrut - International Department**

1948-56 Reuven Barkatt Director

1956 -60 Reuven Barkatt Chairman, Ezra Hayut Director

1960-64 Yehudit Simchoni Chairman, Ezra Hayut Director

1964-67 Yehudit Simchoni Chairman, Zeev Levin Director

1967-68 Zeev Haring Chairman, Hugo Morratt Director

1968-69 Zeev Haring Chairman, Shmuel Bahat Director

1969-74 The Histadrut General Secretary, Yitzhak Ben-Aharon, was the Chairman of

the International Department with Shmuel Bahat as the Director.

1974-83 The Histadrut General Secretary, Yeruham Meshel, was the Chairman of the International Department with Shmuel Bahat as Deputy Chairman of the International Department and Avraham Alon as the Director

#### **Histadrut / Jewish Agency / Palestine Labour Political Committee / Poale Zion - London**

1945-48 Berl Locker

1948-70 Schneier Levenberg

#### **Histadrut representative based in London**

1960-64 Gideon Ne'eman

1964-68 Eli Marx

#### **Histadrut European representative based in Brussels**

1968-71 Hanan Lehmann

1971-75 Yonah Yagol

1975-78 Aaron Barnea

1978-81 Yachov Hadassi

1981-86 Michael Ziff

#### **ICFTU – President**

1949–53 Sir Vincent Tewson

#### **ICFTU – General Secretary**

1949-60 J. H. Oldenbroek

1960-67 Omer Becu

1967-72 Harm G. Buiters

1972-82 Otto Kersten

1982-92 John Vanderveken

**Israel Legation / Embassy – Ambassador**

1948-49	Joseph Linton
1949-50	Mordechai Eliash
1950-50	Mordechai Kidron
1950-59	Eliahu Elath
1959-65	Arthur Lourie
1965-70	Aharon Remez
1970-73	Michael Comay
1974-77	Gideon Rafael
1977-79	Abraham Kidron
1979-82	Sholmo Argov

**Israel Legation / Embassy – Labour Attaché**

1952-53	Moshe Bar-Tal
1974-77	Benny Shiloh

**Israel Labour Party representative in London**

1972-74	Israel Gat
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**Ministry Of Labour**

The main contact for the labour attaché

1950-58	A. Greenhough
1958-63	A. Gordon Wallis DFC
1964-65	A. G Read
1966-68	J Oates

Responsibility transferred to the Department of Employment and Productivity

1969	J. Oates
1970-73	Miss E.R. Rylands , J.E.D. Slater

**TUC - General Secretary**

1926-46	Sir Walter Citrine
1946-60	Sir Vincent Tewson
1960-69	George Woodcock
1969-73	Vic Feather
1973-84	Len Murray

**TUC - Chairman of the International Committee**

1945-47	Sir Joseph Hallsworth
1948-55	Arthur Deakin
1955-57	Sir Charles Geddes
1957-63	Sir Alfred Roberts
1963-72	Sir Frederick Hayday
1972-78	Jack Jones
1978-82	Tom Jackson
1982-85	Moss Evans

**TUC - Head of International Department**

1946-52	Ernest Bell
1952-59	Donald Bowers
1960-79	Alan Hargreaves
1980-99	Michael Walsh

**WFTU – President**

1946	Sir Walter Citrine
1946-49	Arthur Deakin

## **Appendix 2**

### **The Histadrut**

This 1977 report on the history and functions of the Histadrut was appended to the memorandum from the British Ambassador in Tel Aviv to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which was titled "The Israeli trade union federation; decline of a triple pillar of the State," Unfortunately the last few pages of this restricted circulation report are missing, TNA: PRO, 25 April 1977, FCO93/1178.

1. The Histadrut (its official title in English is "General Federation of Labour in Israel"), is a unique and powerful organisation. Until the establishment of the State of Israel there were only two important institutions of the Jewish community in Palestine: the Jewish Agency, for political affairs and the Histadrut, responsible for economic, labour, social, education affairs and many other public services and amenities too. Since 1948 the Histadrut has yielded formal responsibility in some of these fields to the Government. But at all levels its involvement in the economic life of the country is so great that it is often dubbed "a government within a government". It represents some 85% of wage and salary earners, and is also the second largest employer in the country (after the Government), employing some 70,000 workers in the economic enterprises which it directly owns, and three times this number in enterprises in which it has an interest. Its mass membership embraces 65% of all Israeli adults. It provides medical services to nearly 70% of the population. This memorandum which in its earlier paragraphs draws on a study prepared in 1975 by the U.S. Labour Attaché, in close consultation with Histadrut leaders, examines what the Histadrut is, and the influence it exerts on Israel's economic and political life.

#### History

2. The word socialism was hardly mentioned at the First Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897. But over the next two decades "socialist Zionism" became the strongest political force in the movement for Jewish national renaissance. This was due in large measure to the origins and background of the young men and women who came to Palestine from Russia in the Second Aliyah (wave of immigration) of 1904-6. Like other early Zionists they were then beginning to circulate. But it was only on arriving in Palestine that they succeeded in welding their socialist and Zionist thinking into a practical programme. The early settlers organized

themselves into two Zionist groups, both established in 1905: one (Workers of Zion) and a second (The Young Worker) which was rather more pragmatic. The two groups maintained a bitter rivalry, preventing the emergence of a unified labour movement.

3. Towards the end of the First World War, when the hardships of everyday life put the survival of the early collective settlements at risk, help came in the form of a new wave of immigration, chiefly from Russia and Poland, and inspired by the Balfour Declaration and the granting of the Palestine Mandate to Britain. Between 1919 and 1923 some 37,000 new immigrants arrived in Palestine. The existing formations did not necessarily correspond to the requirements or aspirations of these new settlers. In 1919 a new socialist party called Union of Labour was created, and Workers of Zion merged with it. The new party was intended to become a trade union federation embracing all existing Labour Zionist groups: this ambition receded when the Young Worker faction refused to join. This finally brought home to the parties that their competition was weakening the common purpose. While there was a place for several political factions to represent different ideologies, surely practical and non-political activities such as trade-unionism, sick funds etc could be jointly undertaken, avoiding a wasteful duplication? In 1920 a convention representing the various political affiliations finally succeeded in reaching agreement, and in December of that year the Histadrut was formed. Its constitution stated that: "The Histadrut unites all workers in the country living on the fruits of their own toil without exploiting the labour of others". Thus began the first unified labour movement in Israel.

4. The first Secretary-General (1920-35) was David Ben-Gurion. With the other early leaders his aim was to achieve through the Histadrut his life dream of building a Jewish state based on socialist (not necessarily Marxist) principles. This objective, together with the unique conditions of Palestine, caused the organisation to develop in a very different way from trade unionism elsewhere. The first major task of the Histadrut was to foster economic development and to provide employment to new settlers. To facilitate this in 1923 it established a holding company (Hevrat Haovdim). In the absence of adequate state-provided social services for Jewish immigrants during the Mandate it developed a universal sick fund (Kupat Holim). The organisation established a network of schools; it operated labour exchanges; it ran cultural centres and sports teams; it published its own newspaper Davar (still one of the leading dailies); and maintained its own publishing company. To protect Jewish life and property from Arab attacks, the Haganah (defence) was placed under the Histadrut's control.

5. With the establishment of the State in 1948 the Histadrut ceased to be the main source of authority in the economic life of the Jewish community. Many of its top leaders went into the Government and became the decisive force in Mapai (Labour Party of Israel), which controlled both the Histadrut and the newly- established Government. The Haganah was converted into the Israel Defence Forces. While the Histadrut retained its sick fund and certain other welfare activities, the Government assumed principal responsibility for health, education and welfare matters, as well as for the promotion of economic growth. But the Histadrut's direct participation in the economy as a major employer and trader, and its intricate involvement in Governmental and Party decision making, survived and developed further.

### Membership

6. Members of the Histadrut belong to the central organisation, to whose central treasury they pay all fees; only then do they become assigned to a national or craft trade union. This gives the central organisation considerable more authority than might be the case in other labour movements. One does not have to be a wage-earner in the direct sense of the term to join the Histadrut. "Workers who live by the fruits of their own toil without exploiting the labour of others" is interpreted as including all men and women of 18 years or more, apart (usually) from people who employ three or more workers. Thus professional people, supervisory and managerial personnel and housewives (who are deemed to work at home) may be full members of the Histadrut, having full voting and other rights.

7. In January 1977 the Histadrut claimed 1.3 million members two-thirds of the adult population. Roughly half the membership is female: and of this group half are housewives. More than 8% of the total membership are Arabs. In addition the youth and student organisation has 28,000 paid-up members aged 14-18.

All members of kibbutzim (a) fully collective settlements) and moshavim (b) cooperative settlements, with shared marketing arrangements but privately-owned capital and profits, are automatically members of the Histadrut.

### Structure

8. The Histadrut officially translates its name into English as the General Federation of Labour in Israel, but in fact it is not a federation like the TUC. It is a centralised organ-

isation. Its national, industrial and craft unions are subordinate to the central authority of the Histadrut, as are its local and Regional Councils and 15,000 Works Committees,

9. The Histadrut governs itself as a parliamentary democracy. Its highest authority is its Convention which is held every 4 years and decides basic policy. The Convention elects a Council of 501 members which is the supreme authority between Conventions. The Council elects an Executive Committee of 167 members, which in turn elects an Executive Bureau (22 members). This last body meets weekly, usually on Sunday, the same day as the Israel Cabinet, and it is in fact quite similar in operation to the Cabinet. Its members head the two dozen or so departments (e.g. Trades Union Department, Social Insurance Centre, Cultural and Educational Centre, International Affairs Department etc) which handle day-to-day business. The chief executive officer is the Secretary-General, elected by the Executive Committee.

10. The Secretary-General has an important political role; he must try to coordinate, by direct contacts with the Party and the Cabinet, the Histadrut policies with those of the political leadership. Circumstances, as well as personalities play a part in determining how successful he will be in this; but it is fair to say that the task has become much more difficult in recent years.

11. Organizationally the structure outlined above is similar to that of the Israel Labour Party (indeed the Labour Party copied the Histadrut pattern); but elections to the Histadrut Convention are comparable rather to those for general elections to the Knesset (Parliament). Just as for Knesset elections, each political party selects (usually through a nominating committee) a list of candidates to serve as delegates to the Convention. On polling day the whole membership may vote for the list of the national party of their choice; representation at the Convention is then determined by the same system of proportional representation as governs Knesset elections. The party balance among delegates to the Convention is in effect carried over to all other institutions of the Histadrut too. Until now the most important officials of the Histadrut, like those of the Government, have always been from the ex-Mapai wing of the Labour Party. This "arrangement" had to be formalised when Mapai merged with other factions in 1969 to form the Labour Party; and again shortly afterwards when Mapam decided to join the Labour Party in a formal Alignment. Under the terms of these two agreements, a precise key was fixed to determine the allocation of seats on the Executive Bureau and Histadrut governing bodies, namely: ex-Mapai 47%, ex-Achdut Avoda 19%, ex-



Rafi 15% and Mapam 19%. In some cases the coalition agreement forming the Cabinet of the Government of Israel may also specify that a coalition partner should receive seats on the Histadrut Executive Bureau; for instance the Independent Liberal Party currently has two seats (but the National Religious Party, which is affiliated to an entirely separate labour movement, has none).

### Political Control

12. From this it can be seen that the Histadrut Executive closely mirrors the political balance in the Government. (In the early days of the State, some would say, it was the other way round: the Government mirrored the composition of the Histadrut Executive). The chief feature has been the traditional dominance of Mapai, and although this is now breaking down with the merging of the former factions in the Labour Party, the power of ex-Mapai is still evident.

13. Since its formation in 1969 the Labour/Mapam Alignment has lost ground in successive elections over the combined share of the poll which its constituent parties had won in the 1965 Knesset and Histadrut elections. Nevertheless at the last Histadrut elections in 1973, the nadir to date of the Alignment's strength, it still polled 58% to the 23% of Likud (centre-right opposition). For the foreseeable future the centre-left is likely to continue to be far and away the most important powerbase in the Histadrut's political makeup.

### Histadrut/Government Relations

14. The Histadrut and the Government have been controlled by the same political alignment since the foundation of the State in 1948. Not surprisingly, therefore, they tend to keep generally in step. There could be no question of constant and fundamental disagreement, because the leaders of both Histadrut and Government owe allegiance to the same body, the Labour Party, which has the ultimate right to dismiss them. But because of the nature of their roles, differences have always existed and particularly in the fields of wage and tax policy. Histadrut leaders have traditionally advocated policies which they conceive as promoting members' interests, whereas the Government has been guided rather by its general priorities for national economic stability and growth. As early as 1949 these differences of approach led to clashes and they have persisted more or less sharply ever since. It could be argued that coordination of policy between Party and Histadrut began to weaken after the resignation of Ben-Gurion, a former Histadrut Secretary-General, from the Premiership.

## Collective Bargaining

15. Collective bargaining is in theory the Histadrut's most important function. Unlike procedures elsewhere, it is the Histadrut itself rather than individual unions which has responsibility for national and inter-industry negotiations. The task is handled by the Trade Union Department, whose primary role is to set wage policy guidelines and to negotiate national agreements covering uniform increases of wages, cost of living allowances and minimum rates. The Department is headed by a Chairman elected by the Histadrut Executive Bureau. His role is an important one, particularly in a period when unions are attempting to gain 'leapfrog' advantages over each other, and disturb the delicate system of differentials. Policy decisions adopted by the Trade Union Department must be confirmed by the Executive Committee or a sub-group of it, and thus every wage agreement approved by the Trade Union Department has the backing of the Histadrut as a whole. In addition to the Trade Union Department there are Permanent Committees for production, transportation and service workers, whose functions are advisory rather than executive. Two special Departments are responsible for negotiations on behalf of workers with academic qualifications, and on behalf of teachers; otherwise all national wage negotiation is coordinated through the Trade Union Department.

16. Of course not all wage bargaining is national; many wage contracts are signed at the local level, where the counterpart of the Trade Union Department is the local labour council. It is the local labour council structure which saves the Histadrut from the charge of being over-centralised and out of touch with the worker. For most members, daily contacts on matters such as medical and social services, welfare, pensions, legal, cultural or educational questions are with the local labour council rather than either the union branch or the Histadrut central headquarters. It is responsible for a wide range of social activities, and most Histadrut members, which is to say most of the population, benefit regularly from one or other of the services of institutions administered by the local labour council. But in addition to these services the local labour council resolves the vast majority of industrial disputes not immediately settled at the shop-floor level. Indeed, except in the case of large scale multi-plant enterprises where national negotiating mechanisms are specifically laid down, no "official" industrial action can be taken locally without the prior sanction of the local labour council. Furthermore, the negotiation of collective agreements with local enterprises, on the basis of the national agreements negotiated by the Trade Union Department on behalf of the whole industry, is the responsibility of the local labour council, not of the trade union

concerned. The system works because the labour council is itself staffed by representatives of the union. Specialised trade union officials, who may often represent several unions, are attached to the labour council and maintain the liaison between the local branches of the union and its national representatives in Tel Aviv (just as they link the local members with the Histadrut's own national headquarters). Elections to the local labour council take place every four years at the same time as elections to the Histadrut headquarters and the turnout is almost as high as at Parliamentary elections. The existence of this local tier of the Histadrut, which is largely ignored in public discussion of the organisation, ensures that it never becomes too dangerously cut off from the views of the membership. Indeed it has been argued that, whatever decline in influence the Histadrut's central institutions may suffer, the grass-roots activities will be able to continue indefinitely so long as they offer facilities for their members which could not conveniently be provided by any alternative body.

17. At the level of the individual enterprise collective bargaining is handled by works committees. Most enterprises have at least two: for industrial personnel, and for white-collar staff. In a few enterprises there are additional works committees representing particular skills and groups. Sometimes ad-hoc works committees are established in order to exert pressure on the Histadrut over specific issues. Within factories the authority of works committees is often quite substantial, including matters of hiring, firing and promotion, and the negotiation of 'supplements' to national wage agreements. These supplements, awarded on the grounds of special local conditions, and which in cash terms may be of considerable value, are in reality often determined by the strength or militancy of the works committee, as well as its assessment of the profitability of the enterprise and hence what the employer could afford to pay. Works committees have in recent years become an increasingly powerful factor in collective bargaining, often acting without Histadrut authority. During 1974 about 70% of full and partial strikes in Israel, generally instigated by works committees, were called without the required local or national Histadrut approval. The pattern continued through 1975 and 1976.

18. If the local labour council is responsible for all collective bargaining which is not handled by the works committee on the shop floor or by the Trade Union Department at the national level, what role is left for the 35 national trade unions and their network of local branches? In theory, their role is purely advisory. Historically, the unions developed very late, emerging only in the third decade of the Histadrut's development. Histadrut leaders have always tended to concentrate on the national interests of its membership, rather than allow particular

sectional interests to develop and acquire disproportionate strength and bargaining power: for example, the interests of housewives and children should be protected as much as those of steel workers. In recent years this theory has tended to break down, as more multi-plant enterprises have developed. It has become increasingly difficult for example, to isolate labour disputes in the Ashdod port from the port of Haifa, and the possibilities for leapfrogging gains have been exploited by the local union leaders who have been prepared to forego Histadrut authorisation, and even to break the law, in order to pursue sectional interests. This has led to an increase in the number of labour disputes which, although 'unofficial', have nevertheless had the backing of the whole work-force in the enterprises concerned. The effect of this development is a dilution of the authority of the official organisation, whether the local labour council or the Trade Union Department. It thereby weakens the structure of the Histadrut as a whole.

19. The Trade Union Department of the Histadrut has a difficult task in reconciling these various forces. It finds itself increasingly caught between its own broad national objectives in wage policy, and the militant thrust of strong local councils, competing unions and ad-hoc works committees. Confrontations are complicated by entrenched traditional wage differentials: any increase gained by one group, for whatever valid special reason, is at once demanded by other groups who claim "linkage". The chain reaction ensures that a special bonus for one small group is often won within a few months by an entire industrial sector, regardless of economic considerations.

### The Labour Economy

20. Another factor distinguishing the Histadrut from other labour movements is its ownership of a large slice of the nation's productive capacity and of financial and marketing services. Hevrat Ovdim (the industrial and economic arm of the Histadrut) or rather the enterprises grouped under its ultimate control, produces an output amounting to 25% of the gross national product. The enterprises employ over 300,000 persons in kibbutzim and moshavim, manufacturing industry, service, transportation and marketing cooperatives and non-profit enterprises. In agriculture it is especially strong, producing 65-70% of national output. Obviously the businesses within Hevrat Ovdim have to be managed in a way not significantly different from a normal profit-making enterprise. Dependent largely on capital from overseas for development, much of it private investment, considerations of profitability and efficiency determine policy to an extent which the early Histadrut leaders might have found alarming.

With this 'capitalist' outlook it is perhaps not surprising that Hevrat Ovdim has on the whole failed to create a sense of ownership - either among its own employees or generally among Histadrut members (who are automatically members of Hevrat Ovdim). Efforts at labour participation in management have borne little fruit; Histadrut-owned enterprises are in practice not much different from private ones in this respect, despite various formal arrangements for worker participation. The ideological goal of "self-labour", whereby cooperatives should do all manual and other work rather than hire outside labour, has long been eroded in practice. Moshavim and even industrial kibbutzim have increasingly engaged unskilled paid labour; and the cooperatives have been reluctant to share their new prosperity by admitting additional members, preferring to hire outside workers instead.

21. As a large employer, the Histadrut obviously has to face its own problems in labour relations. One of the problems of the labour-movement ownership of enterprises is labour relations. Workers are represented through works committees, local councils and unions just as in the private sector, and labour agreements closely resemble those of the private sector. One area in which the Hevrat Ovdim companies do still to some extent set the pace for the rest of the labour market is in fringe benefits; pay may be higher on occasion in the private sector, but arrangements for pensions, training and welfare benefits generally run higher in the Histadrut-owned enterprises, and job-security is probably greater. But even in these fields conditions have evened out across the labour market in recent years, and it is doubtful whether a worker in the private sector would now be significantly less rewarded than his counterpart in a Histadrut enterprise, taking all factors into consideration.

22. A corollary of this is that labour problems have also begun to emerge in Hevrat Ovdim. There were nine strikes, and three times as many partial stoppages, in 1974; figures have not been published for 1975 or 1976 but the evidence suggests that the number of disputes and workers involved have both risen.

### Arab Membership

In 1925 a separate union for Arabs was set up on the grounds that the economic and social gap between Jewish and Arab workers needed to be bridged for the good of both sides. But at this stage the Arab organisation did not have full rights in Histadrut-decision making, and it was not until 1959 that Arabs were accorded full membership rights including the right to vote. Considering that Arabs now account for some 8 to 9 per cent of the total, membership, they are under-represented in the governing bodies of the Histadrut. No Arab has ever been

elected to the 22 member Executive Bureau. Of the 167 members of the Executive Committee only 5 are Arabs. The most senior positions held by Arabs in the Histadrut include the Secretary of the Nazareth Labour Council and two deputy-Chairmen of the Arab Affairs department.

24. The Arabs have always supported the Alignment in the Histadrut; in 1973 62% voted for the Alignment, but it may be significant that there were no less than 27% who voted for the Communist Rakah. Nevertheless evidence suggests that increasing integration of Arabs into Histadrut organisations is a fact and services to Arab members have increased considerably: some would argue, not before time.

### International Affairs

25. The Histadrut has always been active internationally. It was a founding member of the World Federation of Trades Unions. It left the WFTU in 1950 when communist domination of that body was well established, and in 1953 joined the International Confederation of Free Trades Unions. In the years which followed, its contacts with overseas labour movements, particularly in countries with social democratic governments, were expanded. During the 1960s the Histadrut helped build up the labour movements of several African countries. These links survive and even prosper. In 1960, with financial help from the ILO, AFL-CIO and other sources, the Histadrut established an Afro-Asian Institute for Labour Studies and Cooperation. Since its inception this institute has provided training for some 5,000 labour officials, either through training courses in Israel or special seminars conducted abroad. In the years since 1973 the institute has provided an important link to Black Africa and more than half of the students now studying there are from countries with which Israel has no formal diplomatic relations. The Histadrut also maintains extensive bilateral relations, with representatives in New York, Oslo, Rome and Buenos Aires, covering USA, Canada, Western Europe, Scandinavia and all of Latin America. The representative in Brussels promotes its relations with international trade unions.

### Finances

26. The Histadrut's main source of income is its membership subscriptions. These now run at more than IL550 million (£35 million) but over half of this is from sick-fund dues, most of which is expended on medical services. About one-quarter of subscriptions collected are put towards the Histadrut's general operating budget of some IL180 million (£12 million). The

balance is made up from government grants, international assistance and transfers from Histadrut economic enterprises.

27. On the expenditure side, about half of the general operating budget is allocated to local councils; of the remainder a large part goes to the Trade Union Department, including funds for the national unions. A lot is spent on staff. The Histadrut employs some 3,500 people including 20% in headquarters, and 40% in the local councils.

28. The Histadrut maintains a strike fund of around IL80 million. This may seem small: but it is a characteristic of Israel labour relations that Histadrut strike pay is seldom necessary: strikes have traditionally been short, and when they are concluded with a new wage agreement they tend to be backdated to include the period of the strike. Thus the fund has never been seriously run down.

### Recent Developments

29. The difficulties which the Histadrut has faced in recent years have been those of Israel as a whole. The economic boom and blossoming self-confidence which characterized the years of 1967-72 brought prosperity to wage-earners; when the boom began to falter the expectations of continuing wage increases contributed to inflation, labour instability and a centrifugal tendency within the labour movement. The 1973 war, with its great strains on economic resources, compounded these genuine difficulties; but with it came an erosion of confidence in the future, and a decline in the public's faith in its traditional political leaders. There was an outbreak of wildcat strikes which the Histadrut opposed but was unable to control. As individual unions, and even breakaway works committees in individual factories, grew ever stronger and more militant the Histadrut leadership found itself in danger of being by-passed. In order not to lose grip entirely with its members it had to compromise with them, usually after a bitter confrontation, and underwrite wages demands for particular groups which it had previously opposed on grounds of national interest. This led to leapfrogging, at an increasing pace. Coordination of financial and fiscal policy with the Government became increasingly difficult. In 1976 the Government gave way to several groups of public workers who withdrew or interrupted their labour, to embarrassment of the Histadrut which would have preferred the Government to stand firm. At the same time the Histadrut resisted the Government's policies of reductions (in real terms) of social welfare payments and subsidies on basic products. The public squabble at that moment between the Secretary-General and the Government was as sharp as at any time in recent years. To the

general public, while both sides appeared indecisive, the Histadrut looked the more feeble of the two with serious challenges to its authority.

### Problems and Challenges

30. With many of its early functions taken over by the State, the Histadrut has groped for a new function in a changing society and economy. Its leaders continue to argue that the Histadrut should do more than fight for more pay or better working conditions for its members: that it should still serve as a dynamic, pioneering element in the development of the State and economy. They maintain that they continue to hold important cards.....

The remainder of the memorandum was not in the file.



## **Appendix 3**

### **The structure of the TUC**

The purpose of this appendix is to explain the structure and working of the TUC for the period of this thesis.

The TUC is the representative body for Britain's trade union movement, and is responsible for looking after workers and union interests in Great Britain. Its work involves lobbying the Government and campaigning on economic and social issues. The TUC is the oldest national, independent trade union organisation in the world. The first TUC Congress was held in 1868 and since then the annual Congress has been held at the beginning of September every year, when delegates from affiliated unions meet to discuss the major issues of the day. The leadership and the policies of the TUC have always reflected the views of the member unions and their relationship with the Labour Party.

TUC policy is set by Congress each year, but between Congresses, the General Council, which is elected by Congress, is responsible for the management of the TUC's programmes and policies. The TUC President, who is also elected by Congress, chairs General Council meetings and is consulted by the General Secretary on all major issues. The General Secretary is responsible for every aspect of the TUC's work and operation.

Each year at its first post-Congress meeting, the General Council elects, from amongst its own members, the member of the International committee. This committee which met every month had the power to implement and develop policy and deal with any urgent business. The International committee, as a sub-Committee of the Council, was supported by a team of permanent staff led by the Head of the International department. The role of the International department was to provide information and advice on international affairs to the TUC General Council and the International committee as well as maintaining contact with trade unions of other countries and various international bodies including, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

Trade union membership in Great Britain, which in 1945 was 6.5 million continued to increase and peaked in 1979 at 12.6 million members before falling to 11 million in 1982. The number of unions affiliated to the TUC over the same period fell from 191 to 105.

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Dolly Gerasi, Histadrut International Department, 1965- 95  
Nawaf Massalha, MK 1988-2003, Member of the Central Committee of the Histadrut  
Benny Shiloh, Labour attaché at Israel embassy, London 1974-77

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