

New Jewish Politics for an American Labor Leader: Sidney Hillman, 1942–1946

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In 1984, when Canadian-born May Bere Maron recalled Sidney Hillman from the days of World War II, she referred to him as one of the “Promised Land People.” She was then eighty-nine years old, long retired from the Socialist world of Zionist politics of Palestine in which she and her Polish-born husband, Israel Mereminski, had engaged for so many years. Between 1939 and 1945 he was the American Representative of the Histadrut, with an office in Manhattan, and its constant link to Hillman and other American Jewish labor leaders.¹ Her expression purposefully invoked Promised Land, the title and theme of Mary Antin’s remarkable autobiography from 1912 in which she portrayed her young Russian Jewish embrace of Boston’s public Christian culture. For May Bere, the book epitomized the kind of national commitment which she thought monopolized the patriotic devotions of most Jews in the United States and in Western Europe: They had all been reared to unchanging forms of aggressive German, French, English, or American national patriotisms. These excluded their own Jewish cultures from “official” national culture and discourse—public school curricula and calendars did not acknowledge their presence and ignored their past.²

This simplistic perception of Hillman, the assimilated American im-

1. Dr. May Bere Maron (Mereminski), interview by author, 26 January 1984, Tel Aviv, Israel. Mereminski’s Papers; including a looseleaf diary for 1940–1945, in the El Al Archives, in Israel, are full of entries reporting on conversations and recording messages to and from his many contacts, including American labor leaders. Hereafter this collection is cited as Mereminski Papers. See also A. Manor, *Commitment: Israel Mereminski-Maron* (Tel-Aviv, 1978).

2. *The Promised Land* (Boston, 1912); Moses Rischin, *Promised City: New York’s Jews, 1870–1914* (Cambridge, 1962); Arthur Goren, *The Kehillah: Experiment and the Quest for Community, 1908–1922* (New York, 1970); Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770–1870* (New York, 1978), pp. 190–219; Michael Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation: A Study of the French Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (New York, 1971); Fritz Stern, *Dream and Delusions* (New York, 1987), pp. 6–12, 97–114; George L. Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York, 1980), pp. 249–315; Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics, and Ideology in the Second Reich* (Ithaca, 1975).

migrant who had consciously turned away from Jewish national patriotic devotions, foreshadowed the judgments of modern historians. Indeed, Stephen Fraser, his latest and finest biographer, invoked the language of radical assimilation when he insisted that young Hillman "remade himself in the . . . cosmopolitan image of the democratic, decracinated citizen." His Lithuanian Yiddish accented English notwithstanding, "in public Hillman increasingly appeared neither Jewish nor socialist, while repudiating neither. Surrounded on all sides by a flood tide of nationalist sentiments originating in the Jewish working class and middle class alike, sentiments inflamed by the war-time and post war crises of East European Jewry, Hillman managed, almost by an act of will, to escape its orbit almost entirely into a desacrilized political culture that deliberately sought to transcend the boundaries of class, ethnicity, and religion."³

The problem with such assessments is that they are too rigid. Among the Mereminskis and their social democratic contemporaries, including Hillman, rigidity flowed from expectations about the decay of militant nationalism and ethnicity derived from nineteenth-century rational visions which had energized so many European anticlerical liberals and socialists.⁴ Among historians the sources for that kind of rigidity are surely more complicated. John Higham recently has called attention to the importance of discrete historical periods in determining the complex ways class and ethnicity shaped changing collective identities in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America. I have made a related argument about the changing nature of mid-twentieth-century American nationalism and American Jewish collective identity in particular.⁵ But forty years after Matthew Josephson sensed the change in Hillman under the impact of events in Europe and Palestine, historians, who have written about the complex labor leader of the dramatic Zionist times in which he lived his last years, are still being too rigid about Hillman's

3. Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (New York, 1991), pp. 18-19, 77-79, 93-94.

4. For a brilliant discussion of this tradition in political terms see Carl Schorske's *Fin de Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1980).

5. John Higham, "From Process to Structure: Formulations of American Immigration History," in *American Immigrants and Their Generation: Studies and Commentaries on the Hansen Thesis after Fifty Years* eds. Peter Kivisto and Dag Blanck (Urbana and Chicago, 1988[?]), pp. 11-41; Gerd Korman, "Ethnic Democracy and Its Ambiguities: The Case of the Needle Trade Unions," *American Jewish History* 75 (Spring, 1986): 405-426.

Jewish identity; they do not allow for profound change as he responded to Jewry's grave crisis in mid-twentieth century.⁶

This paper argues that in the Holocaust years the public Hillman, the labor leader, trapped in the tribal fires of his own modernity, stopped acting as a "deracinated citizen." Between 1942 and 1946, he used his prestige and influence to facilitate the Zionist cause, without having it interfere with his other efforts on behalf of an anticolonial new world order led by an American-Soviet alliance.

Hillman was like other American Jews, whether or not their loved ones died in German-occupied Europe, who had to reevaluate fundamental assumptions about the nature of their engagement with nationalist Jewish sentiments and politics. In the very moment when Allied permanent victories west of Cairo assured Palestine Jewry's security, Jews began to digest the awful truth of the war: Hitler's state terror against the Jews of Germany had turned into acts of mass destruction of Jews in European lands occupied by the German army. As those acts had the acquiescence or active support of most of the citizens Germans had occupied, Jews in Europe also began to transform their Jewish patriotism toward the European nations of those citizens. Between 1939 and 1943 all secular non-Zionist and anti-Zionist approaches to public Jewish identities crumbled, and in the next few years,

6. No doubt, among the reasons for that failure is the fact that Hillman died in 1946, and that most of the evidence for Hillman's change is not in American archives or collections; at least I have not found any in the archives of the ILGWU and the ACWA—respectively, these include the papers of David Dubinsky and Charles Zimmerman, and besides those of Sidney Hillman, the papers of John Abt, Bessie Hillman, Frank Rosenblum, and Joseph Schlossberg—in the Zaritzky Papers, Tamiment Library, N.Y.U. (hereafter Zaritzky Papers), or in some of the other collections cited in this paper. Joseph Schlossberg's Journals happen to be in the Lessin Archive in Tel Aviv because Schlossberg wanted them housed in Israel (hereafter these journals are cited as Schlossberg Journals); of course he kept the Journal in the United States. The rest of his papers are in the ACWA Archives. For Matthew Josephson's remarks see his *Sidney Hillman: Statesman of American Labor* (New York, 1952), pp. 641-2, 657. Samuel Halperin, a political scientist, in *The Political World of American Zionism* (Detroit, 1961), 157-175 devotes a chapter to "Zionism and Jewish Labor." On Hillman he follows Josephson in *ibid.*, 370, note 30. Joseph Brandes, "From Sweatshop to Stability," in ed. Ezra Mendelsohn *YIVO Annual of Social Science, XVI: Essays on the American Jewish Labor Movement* (New York, 1976) pp. 129-131, 148-149 on these points follows Josephson and Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A. 1914-1952*, 2 vols., (New York, 1953). All these authors base their judgments on newspaper accounts, union proceedings, and presumably interviews. The following do not discuss American Jewish labor or Hillman in relation to Zionism: Ben Halperin, *The Idea of the Jewish State* (Cambridge, 1961); Melvin Urofsky, *We Are One: American Jewry and Israel* (Garden City, NJ, 1978); Naomi Cohen, *American Jews and the Zionist Idea* (New York, 1975).

even though some tried to pursue Bundism and Communism as solutions for the Jewish question in Europe, it became obvious that they were beyond revitalization. After all, in liberated Poland the anti-Semitic pogroms, the murder of Jews, and then the Communist rejection of cultural pluralism demonstrated to all but a few diehards that Communist Europe was no place for Jews who rejected Communism. In the awful presence of that new knowledge it was also becoming obvious to millions of Jews that the fate of world Jewry after the war could only be assured with the success of the Zionist movement; for without it, Jewry's future could no longer be entrusted to liberal rational politicians of Christian societies in the United States and in the lands of its Allies. To be sure, Jews in America had accepted, indeed had supported, the policy of Roosevelt and of other Allied leaders—the war effort cannot be deflected from its main goal of defeating Germany—as a justification for not developing a special policy to help the Jews of Europe. But during 1942 and afterward news of the carnage strained that trust in victory on those terms. (In time Jews would also have to live with the fact that when the doors to Palestine remained closed, Congress joined other post-war countries in adopting policies that kept most of Europe's Jewish survivors out of their respective territories.) Under the impact of these events a rapidly growing number of Jews in the United States embraced the Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine, not as a land of settlement for themselves but so that Jews rejected by the United States would have a homeland that welcomed them.⁷ Within that emerging consensus, Hillman became part of a significant group which developed its strategies and tactics based on the continuity of wartime alliances in the postwar world. Usually participants in antifascist coalitions during the days of the Popular Front, they now marshaled their forces for a Jewish Com-

7. Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945* (New York, 1986); Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York, 1982); Henry L. Feingold, "The Government Response," in *The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy and Genocide* eds. Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton (Millwood, New York, 1980), pp. 245-259, and Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick, 1970); John M. Blum, *V Was For Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York, 1976); David S. Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945* (New York, 1984); Yehuda Bauer, *Out of the Ashes* (New York, 1991), pp. 167, 196. In 1944-45 this change also affected the American Communist Party, even as it was taking its lead from the Soviet Union in supporting a Jewish National Home in Palestine; by 1947 the Jewish Labor Committee, until then still reflecting Bundist influences, finally shifted from neutrality to outright support for a Jewish state. Halperin, *Political World*, 169, 173.

monwealth as part of an anticolonial and antiimperialist campaign. Although appealing to some of America's foreign policy ideals, this approach also coincided with Soviet interests in the Middle East.

Even as his activities remained embedded in a well-established public life, Hillman's response to the Jewish catastrophe was dramatic. For years Hillman had retained some links to Jewish public affairs. Besides remaining responsive to the sentiments and politics of Jewish members through his Executive Board at the Amalgamated, he declared himself a Non-Zionist in the 1920s, and publicly worked "for the relief of our brother Jews in Germany . . ." with Jewish organizations fighting anti-Semitism after Hitler came to power.⁸ But after Hillman left FDR's senior officer corps in Washington and while he was recuperating from his heart attack, he turned toward an emerging new Jewish politics. He met with Mereminski on several occasions. At one of these meetings, Mereminski recalled five years later, "He asked my forgiveness" for not giving his full support to the Zionist Histadrut, which he recognized as the only remaining Jewish labor movement. "What now" he asked and then agreed with Mereminski to establish, with Amalgamated funds, an "Amal" vocational school network in Palestine under the auspices of the Histadrut.⁹

For Mereminski it was a poignant moment of triumph, for both men

8. One early and insightful interpretation of his responsiveness is in the writings of fellow immigrant and Bundist Selig Perlman, in Selig Perlman and Philip Taft, *History of Labor in the United States, 1896-1932* (New York, 1935), pp. 289-299, 554, 622, including footnote 1. See also Perlman's two articles on the subject of Jews and organized labor in the United States: "Jewish-American Unionism: Its Birth Pangs and Contribution to the General American Labor Movement," *Publication of the Jewish Historical Society* 41 (1952): 297-338 and "America and the Jewish Labor Movement: A Case of Mutual Illumination," *ibid.*, 44 (1957): 221-232. On Hillman and the American Jewish Congress in 1933 see Fraser, *Hillman*, 359. See also Jerome I Udell to Hillman, 30 January 1936, and Hillman to Udell, 4 February 1936, in Hillman Papers, Amalgamated Archives, Box 75/13.

9. Manor, *Mereminski-Maron*, xxi; Mereminski in Histadrut Protocols, 2 July 1947, 5-6, Lessin Archives, Tel Aviv (hereafter Histadrut Protocols), and Golda Myerson to Mereminski, 2 February 1943, in Mereminski Papers. In Box 74 of the Hillman Papers there are some letters from Jewish leaders but little more than pro forma responses from Hillman. One of the few references in these papers to Mereminski is in brief exchanges between Isaac Hamlin, Hillman, or his secretary. In 1952 Hillman's widow, Bessie Abramovitz Hillman went to Israel to help dedicate the Hillman Museum of the Amal School in Jerusalem. See some notes about this visit in Hillman Papers, 5619/Box 115, Folder 10. Mereminski developed a cordial relationship with Dubinsky and there are some letters in the ILG collection; the first letter between Mereminski and Dubinsky appears to be from 19 April 1942 in /2/254/1B.

were then reeling under the impact of tragic family news from Nazi-occupied Poland and Lithuania and about the general destruction of Jewish life in Europe. Hillman, who long before recognized that the Jewish Labor Movement had no future in the United States, acknowledged that the Jewish future from labor's European past now rested in the hands of the Histadrut. The Amal schools would be the bridge between the two men and their worlds. Mereminski had chosen "Amal" carefully: Amal for Amalgamated and "Amal" for work, in Hebrew, the language of Zionist Jews in Palestine. Soon after, within the framework of his American devotions and loyalty to FDR, Hillman gave political meaning to that Amal bridge. In November 1944, in Chicago, the CIO for the first time passed a resolution endorsing the Zionist campaign by calling for the "ultimate establishment of a Palestinian Jewish Commonwealth in accordance with the principles of democratic action." According to the Abraham Miller, Secretary Treasurer of the Amalgamated's New York Joint Board and also Treasurer of the American Jewish Trade Union Committee for Palestine—he had introduced that resolution in Chicago—Hillman instructed the Chairman of the Resolutions Committee "to clear everything relating to Palestine with Abe. . . ." Mereminski was ecstatic. He thanked Hillman profusely for that resolution and for what he considered his general efforts on behalf of Palestine's Zionists: "Be blessed you and all your assistants."¹⁰ Around the same time apparently, Hillman decided to work with the Histadrut for a similar resolution in an international forum where the Soviets had a mighty voice.

He was uniquely well positioned for his new role as an advocate for a Jewish political campaign in a setting where he had never before played it. Since the Bolshevik Revolution Hillman had retained his basic attitudes toward the Soviet Union and its Communist Party in the

10. *Proceedings of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, 1944*; Abraham Miller, in *Proceedings of the National Labor Palestine Committee, 1947*, 132; James B. Carey, Secretary-Treasurer, CIO to Harold Laski, Chairman, British Labour Party, 6 August 1945, in Zaritsky Papers. Mereminski to Hillman, 26 November 1944, 3 December 1942, and 14 December 1942 where he records a message to Remez which started with "Happy report first time possibility enlisting Hillman cooperation. . . ." Mereminski Papers. On December 14, 1948, Schlossberg noted in his Journal that at CIO conventions of earlier years Lee Pressman, the "Jewish authority" on the Resolutions Committee censored his drafts of "the text for the Jewish resolution." In 1948, "however, with Pressman no longer there, I had the gratification of seeing the resolution adopted by the convention as I wrote it. I read it in the printed proceedings." On this and related issues see Mereminski Papers, 2, 4, 12 November 1943, Josephson, *Hillman*, pp. 468-586, and Fraser, *Hillman*, 664, note 16.

United States. He had been head of the union that had arranged special economic connections with the new Bolshevik regime and had developed a unique relationship with the Party among clothing industry unions. He was the labor leader who, as one of the most powerful figures in the CIO, was prepared to work with the Party in local New York politics in the late-1930s and again in the midst of war. And in 1943, in the name of the war effort, he had been singularly silent when Jewish labor leaders expressed their outrage at the Kremlin for having ordered, on the grounds of collaboration with the Germans, the executions of Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter, two great leaders of the same Jewish social democratic Bund which had earlier nurtured Hillman.¹¹ Considering the requirements of the Roosevelt Administration vis-à-vis Russia as a wartime ally participating in decisions shaping the postwar world, Hillman's record would stand him in good stead in negotiation with Russian representatives involving the formation of a new international labor organization, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

The WFTU was conceived during World War II in the passion of pre-war turmoil in labor circles. Anticommunism, in the ranks of most American and English trade unionists, collided with the dream, in the minds of a minority, including Hillman, to build a future international labor organization which would include the unions of the Soviet Union. The roots of these passions were anchored in the international traditions and separate organizations of socialists, anarchists, and trade unionists in America and Europe, and after the Russian Revolution, also of communists active on both sides of the Atlantic. In the inter-war years, when many more international organizations than ever before competed for influence and support, the American Federation of Labor rejected ideological demands for trade union subordination to larger visions of transformation. Between 1921 and 1937 its preoccupation with domestic problems, and its commitment to the principle of

11. Brandes, "From Sweatshop to Stability," 47-95. On Hillman and New York politics see Schlossberg Journal, 15 September 1943, 28, 29, 30, 31 January, 10 March 1944. Hillman's position about the execution of Adler and Ehrlich sounded similar to W. M. Citrine's statement as president of the IFTU and in 1943 Chair of the April 1943 meeting of the Emergency International Trade Union Council: "Those who knew Alter and Ehrlich cannot believe the accusation and we think that they were executed wrongly. The Executive Committee of the IFTU thought that . . . [a] statement had to be made, though the words were carefully chosen in order to create the least amount of friction among the allied nations engaged in this common war." 19 April 1943, Walter Schevenels Papers in the Hoover Archives, Stanford University, Box 13 (hereafter Schevenels Papers). See also Epstein, *Jewish Labor*, II, 297-298, and Fraser, *Hillman*, 517-523.

complete autonomy for each free national trade union federation, kept the AFL out of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), an organization it had joined in 1910, seven years after its founding in Dublin. When the AFL did rejoin, the constitution of the IFTU made it impossible for another organization to represent the United States. That meant Hillman and the just emerging Congress for Industrial Organizations, so resented by AFL leaders, and so engaged with the Stalinist politics of the Popular Front, had no access to the IFTU.

Hillman and other leaders of the CIO found another way to participate in an international organization which would include the Soviet Union. The first step was taken in London's Transport House, headquarters of the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), and by the summer of 1940, landlord of the IFTU's headquarter staff. A few months after Germany's invasion of Russia, the TUC at its annual conference in Edinborough called for the creation of a joint War Committee with the Soviets, along the lines it had formed with French labor. The new Anglo-Russian Trade Union Council was based on the assumption that each constituent body would be responsible for its own internal policy and organization. The TUC's efforts to bring the AFL, the CIO, and the independent Railroad Brotherhoods into that Council failed because the AFL opposed any type of cooperation with Communist trade unions and refused to share representation rights with the CIO or the Brotherhoods. But the larger purpose of the TUC did start to take shape by the fall of 1943, albeit without the AFL. The CIO outflanked the AFL by using the Soviet Union, long opposed to the IFTU, to intensify its own pressure on the TUC, the old organizational friend of the AFL. In September the TUC, in order to reorganize the IFTU in the spirit of the Allied antifascist coalition, set in motion the administrative procedures for convening "a World Conference of the representatives of the organized workers of all countries as soon as war conditions permit . . ." ¹²

12. John P. Windmuller, *American Labor and the International Labor Movement 1940-1953* (Ithaca, 1954), 1-35; quotation on page 31. See also Lewis L. Lorwin, *The International Labor Movement: History, Policies, Outlook* (New York, 1953), pp. 200-205; Fraser, *Hillman*, 540-557, 663, note 8; *Economist* 21 August 1948, crediting "largely on British initiative" the first world trade union conference held in London; Schevenels to David Dubinsky, 18 August 1941, reflecting cordiality of the relationship between Dubinsky and Schevenels, the General Secretary of the International Federation of Trade Unions, Report on Activities 1940-1941 of the International Federation of Trade Unions in Transport House, London, mimeo copy in Schevenels to W. Green, 14 January 1944 in which Schevenels enthusiastically endorses the TUC initiative for calling for a World Trade Union Conference with the Russians. R. L. Nosworthy to Schevenels, 21

As he pursued his policy within the sensitive webs of unions in England and in the United States, Hillman also supported the Histadrut's campaign for a national home. During 1944 Hillman had other Zionist choices available to him. In Palestine the Histadrut had badly split over the direction of the Zionist movement and this split was reflected in discussions over the makeup of the delegation and its instructions to the forthcoming World Trade Union Conference, the organizational meeting preceding the formation of the World Federation of Trade Unions. Opponents of Ben Gurion marshaled almost as many votes as the majority, and this coalition of minority interests opposed identifying the Balfour Declaration phrase "a national home for Jews" in Palestine with Ben Gurion's May 1942 call for a Jewish Commonwealth. Some feared that such a call would lead to partition; others favored a binational state for Jews and Arabs living between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Hillman did not associate himself with the position of some in this minority coalition even though those members looked to the Soviet Union rather than to Western democracies as the primary source of their socialist ideologies. Together with other future anti-Cold War warriors, he accepted the majority position which by the summer of 1944 meant that the phrases "a national home for Jews" and "Jewish national home" had for practical purposes become synonymous.¹³

November 1944, Lord Citrine to H. V. Tawson, 7 February 1950, Boxes 1-3, 12-13, Schevenels Papers; Victor Riesel to Dubinsky 3 December 1941, ILG Archives, 259/30.

13. Elkana Margalit, *The Anatomy of the Left: The Left Po' Alei-Zion in Eretz-Israel, 1919-1946* (Tel-Aviv, 1976), pp. 349-355; Anita Shapira, *Berl: The Biography of a Social Zionist* (New York, 1984), pp. 331-339; Mereminski to Remez, 14 June 1943, to Robert Szold, 18 July 1944, and to Berl Locker, 14 December 1944, Mereminski Papers. I. F. Stone's *Underground to Palestine and Reflections Thirty Years Later* (New York, 1978), pp. 222, 232-234, 257, provides one American Jewish contemporary and retrospective view of this issue in a book originally published by this anti-Cold War journalist in 1946. Nation Associates defrayed \$1500 of his expenses. That money came to him by way of Meyer Weisgal, a member of the Jewish Agency, and Freda Kirshwey, a friend of Weisgal and editor of *Nation*: Weisgal to Kirshwey, 9 November 1945, and Kirshwey to Weisgal, 21 November 1945 in Z5/1045, Zionist Archives, Jerusalem. Recent biographers of Stone and Kirshwey have been silent about this link. Robert C. Cottrell, *Izzy: A Biography of I. F. Stone* (New Brunswick, 1922), pp. 112-134, 333-335; Sara Alpern, *Freda Kirshwey: A Woman of The Nation* (Harvard, 1987), pp. 128-202. Hillman's support for Ben Gurion at this time perhaps can be explained by Hillman's fundamental attitude toward power, at least as he had expressed it concerning the Bolshevik party in the summer of 1921: "If I can find out that it can hold power, I don't care very much what you are telling this man about his party. I am not interested in his party. But if it can't hold power even if the party is perfect, what use do I have for it." Fraser, *Hillman*, 184.

The Histadrut approached the Conference from the vantage of the only legitimate labor organization in Palestine and as a major public Socialist Zionist institution. It had good reason to be suspicious about the future policies of the United States and Great Britain toward Jewish survivors and toward the establishment of a Jewish Commonwealth. FDR and his party had gone on record favoring a Jewish national home, but since the election in November the president appeared reticent to committing himself on the subject. The Histadrut also had good reasons for assuming that Russia would remain hostile toward Zionism. Under such circumstances of insecurity and fear it was of crucial importance for the Histadrut to find as many international opportunities as possible for obtaining statements on the public record which supported Commonwealth resolutions. The Histadrut wanted such support for the right kind of resolution from the World Trade Union Conference and if possible to get it without the opposition from the Soviet Union. In practice that meant support for the kinds of resolutions that had been adopted earlier by the American Federation of Labor, the CIO, the British Trades Union Congress, and the Mexican Federation of Labor. It was an important moment, for if, in the face of ominous signals from the Soviet Union about the Zionist campaign, the Conference would in fact adopt a positive resolution about a Jewish Commonwealth or national home in Palestine without Soviet opposition, then there would be reason for optimism about Russia's future intentions about a Jewish state.¹⁴

The Histadrut learned quickly what Mereminski had appreciated all along: In the event of a conflict of interests with Hillman it would have to find a way to allow Hillman to help within the framework of his larger agenda at the conference, namely to "complement" the Allies' unity spirit of the Yalta Conference.¹⁵ Hillman came as Roosevelt's man and as the head of the powerful CIO delegation which included James

14. On 16 January 1945 Nachum Goldman wrote Berl Locker about information "from Washington emanating from a very high source" which worried the Jewish Agency about Russia's "rather negative" attitude toward a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine. See also Goldman's cable of 20 February 1945 to Locker asking if the Soviets voted for the "Palestine Resolution" at the WTUC, in Goldman Papers, Z5/83 in Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter Goldman Papers).

15. After his return Hillman told the World Unity Rally in Madison Square Garden, "In a very real sense, these two historic conferences complement each other." Mimeo Copy of Address in Vol XI of the ACWA Scrapbook, 1945-1946, 45. Mereminski told Schlossberg that just before Hillman left for London, Hillman told him "that there were bigger things to be done, and that he could not afford to 'bother' with 140,000 people (The Histadrut)." Schlossberg Journal, 17 March 1945.

Carey, the CIO's Secretary Treasurer, and a Communist contingent.¹⁶ An early problem set the pattern. The British Trade Union Congress had given delegate and observer status to an Arab delegation from Palestine which the Histadrut argued did not represent a bona fide expression of free Arab labor in the Holy Land. To the Histadrut the decision of the British was especially irksome because from its perspective the English government had formed those unions to fight the Histadrut and because the Arab unions associated with the Histadrut or cooperating with the Histadrut were given only observer status. Tel Aviv asked Mereminski to get Hillman's help in appealing the ruling, but Hillman had no intention of being sucked into a controversy. He did not object to the Histadrut's argument nor did he underestimate the importance of the representation issue; for he was worried that the Soviets might use the opportunity for denying the Histadrut's claim as sole representative of Palestinian labor. Locker thought there might be a chance to move Hillman if there was "real proof" that the invited Arab union from Palestine was not a bona fide free union. And Hillman did inform Mereminski that he wished that he had known about this problem earlier, when he had attended a preliminary planning meeting for the Conference in December 1944, perhaps because then he might have prevented CIO support of the TUC's invitation. Now it was too late for him to do anything about it.¹⁷

Without losing Hillman, Mereminski in New York, and Histadrut officials in London and Palestine found another way to resolve the representation crisis and at the same time to shelter Hillman and the CIO delegation in discussions of the resolution itself. They complained be-

16. Lee Pressman and John Abt, two influential labor lawyers close to Hillman, in the CIO and in the Amalgamated, respectively, and Len Decaux, a labor journalist, then the editor of the *CIO News*, were part of the delegation. De Caux, *Labor Radical: From the Wobbliesto CIO A Personal History* (Boston, 1970), pp. 447-469, 522-545; Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions* (Princeton, 1977), pp. 232, 233, 95, 100, 120, 145, 303; Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York, 1984), pp. 229, 233, 241, 243, 413.

17. Mereminski Papers, 13 January 1945, in which Mereminski reports on a conversation with Hillman's secretary who then served as the connection between Mereminski in New York and Hillman in London. See also Mereminski Papers, 17 January 1945, for a copy of a telegram from Berl Locker, the Jewish Agency's man in London, who reported that Hillman could not raise the representation question because CIO delegates had joined in the invitation apparently because the TUC had persuaded them "favorably about the Haifa organization"; and 23 January 1945 for copies of telegrams to Tel Aviv about other aspects of Hillman's views on the controversy and on his insistence that he "regards now his single mission intermediate BTUC USSR delegations. . . ."

fore and during the Conference but accepted the decision of the TUC on the issue of delegations, which they attributed to British foreign policy toward Palestine. They also asked leaders in the Mexican delegation to take the point on behalf of the Histadrut's Palestine resolution. As staunch supporters of the Soviet Union and well-known fierce critics of American capitalism in general and of the AFL in particular, their trusted Mexican friends would play important parts at the Conference. Vicente Lombardo Toledano, and his substitute on that committee, Alejandro Carrillo, would with Hillman serve on the important Administrative Committee of the World Trade Union Conference.¹⁸

The Palestine Resolution was part of the Conference's "Declaration on the Attitude to the Peace Settlement" which was drafted by a committee chaired by Secretary of the CIO, James Carey, and included Berl Locker, who was serving as a delegate from the Histadrut.¹⁹ The presence of these delegates, and, as Hillman told Schlossberg a few months later, Hillman's successful effort preventing Citrine and "the other leading delegates at the Conference" from getting their way, assured the Committee's adoption of Article Twenty-six. This draft was a carefully edited version, perhaps written by Mereminski, of a longer statement presented by the Histadrut. Its language, as Locker recognized, echoed resolutions adopted earlier by the major American labor federations, the British Trade Union Congress, and the Mexican Federation of Labor²⁰:

18. Aaron Rabinowitz to Mereminski, 9, 23 January 1945; Mereminski to Rabinowitz, 9, 23 January 1945, to B. Locker, 9, 23 January 1945, to Alejandro Carrillo, 23 January 1945, Mereminski Papers; Schlossberg Journal, 17 March 1945. See also Fraser, *Hillman*, 664, note 16, *Report of the World Trade Union Conference*, County Hall, London, 6 and 7 February 1945, Reported verbatim by John McIntosh and S. Ireland, *Official Reporters to British Trade Union Congress*, 147, 257, for the resolution of this issue.

19. On 27 December 1944 Berl Locker cabled Mereminski from London that Hillman had been "very friendly" in talks with Jewish Agency people and "promised full support at forthcoming Congress . . ." Mereminski Papers. A few months after the meeting Carey explained his personal conviction for enthusiastically supporting the CIO's resolution of November 1944 and the Palestine Resolution of the WTUC. Carey to Harold Laski, 6 August 1945, Zaritsky Papers.

20. Schlossberg Journal, 14 March 1945. Socialist Zionists, and Locker in particular, had for some years been well connected to the International Federation of Trade Unions. That organization kept itself informed about the status of Jews during the war and their potential for becoming immigrants after the war. See, for example, correspondence between the Histadrut and the IFTU from 1943 in folder marked "International Material" in 208/IV1/1, Lessin Archives. Locker became the Histadrut's delegate to the ILO's Emergency Council in early 1943, and he, Golda Myerson, and some others from

"This World Conference is of the opinion 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 [that is of the UN]. 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."²¹

If any delegate or observer read UN Mandate into the meaning of the resolution because it did not use the expression of "commonwealth" or "state," Locker, Carrillo, and the Arab delegate, whose status the Histadrut had challenged, clarified the language in open general meetings of the Conference. After recognizing what "democratic states" and the Soviet Union had done for Jews, Locker insisted that his people needed their own country to enjoy freedom from fear, one of the four freedoms promulgated by the Atlantic Charter. Before the war, "we used to say that for the Jew the world consists of two kinds of countries, one kind of country which drives us out and the other kind of country which does not let us in. During this war the Axis powers have killed us but the United Nations have done very little to save us." The situation had to change and the answer was obvious: "We have laid the foundation of a new home for the Jewish people in the last sixty years."

John Asfour, the Arab delegate, objected to the second part of the article so crucial to Locker. "In my submission to you I would say this, that the question of the oppression of the Jews in Europe and the question of establishing a Zionist State in Palestine are two different subjects. . . ." When Carrillo enthusiastically endorsed and amended Article Twenty-six, Asfour again took issue with the second part.

the Histadrut's Executive Committee remained in regular contact with "Comrade" Walter Schevenels, General Secretary of the IFTU and later of the World Federation of Trade Unions. Max Zaritsky, Chairman of the American Jewish Trade Union Committee for Palestine also participated in these contacts. Nathan Jackson, Jewish Socialist Labour Party, to W. Schevenels, 10 December 1941; Golda Myerson to Schevenels, 16 October 1942; Schevenels to Executive Committee, General Federation of Jewish Labour. On 28 November 1946 when Schevenels forwarded an appeal from the Histadrut for help from the British government from some 4000 Jewish refugee, displaced persons facing deportation from Haifa to Cyprus, he wrote H. V. Tewson, General Secretary of the TUC, that the "General Federation of Labour in Palestine . . . has been for many years and still is one of our most faithful trade union movements." 18 November 1946, Box 3, 12 and 13, Schevenel Papers.

21. *Proceedings of the World Trade Union Conference*, 181.

Carrillo had in fact taken the point: The Jewish people are a people without a state, and we cannot possibly see why the Atlantic Charter should make an exception of them. The Atlantic Charter calls for all peoples to organize themselves politically as they think fit, and in their own interest. Are we not going to let the Jewish people organize themselves politically and have their own state? Will they be the only people in the world who will not be given the opportunity to organize themselves politically? But to remove "any doubts about the good faith of the Labour Movement of the world" represented by the Conference, and no doubt to assure a broad basis of support, Carrillo responded to Asfour's argument in a context when Palestinian Arab nationalism, as we know it today, was not a subject of the controversy at the Conference: "Our comrades representing the Arab Labour Movement cannot tell us that this is a problem in which we cannot very well take a decision. They have several states already organized." If Arabs were in the position of Jews, Carrillo promised Asfour, "we from Latin America would come here to fight for the political rights and for the possibility of Arab States existing in the world." To protect non-Jews in Palestine, the Mexican labor leader offered an amendment to Article Twenty-six; it expressed the Conference's expectations that the Jews' National Home would respect "the legitimate interests of other national groups" and would give "equality of rights and opportunities to all of its inhabitants."

Asfour tried to get help for striking that second part of the article and for rejecting the amendment. He did gain the voice of a member of the Indian delegation who, in the form of a question, presumed to know the intention of a future sovereign Jewry in Palestine, which in light of events in Europe and Hindu-Moslem conflicts in India was fraught with special meaning in February 1945. "If Palestine is to become the National Home of the Jews, what about the other population? Are they going to be transplanted or exterminated?" But he and Asfour got nowhere. Carey's committee accepted Carrillo's amendment and so did the Conference.²² The Histadrut had its resolution with Russia on board and without it having become a major obstacle standing in Hillman's path for the World Federation of Trade Unions.²³

22. *Ibid.*, 81-83, 182-186, 188-191, 236-239. For a detailed explanation of the mechanics by which the resolution was adopted see Locker telegram to Goldman, 25 February 1945, Goldman Papers. The American Socialist Zionist journal *Jewish Frontier* covered the WTUC meetings of 1945, including one account by Ephraim Broido, one of Histadrut's consultants attached to the official delegation. *Ibid.*, 23 May 1945.

23. Locker cabled Goldman: "For internal information Russia representative peace

The Histadrut also had its hands full, at least for a moment. Among its friends in the trade union movement were friendly critics who had opposed the formation of the World Federation of Trade Unions precisely because it included Communism's captive unions. Decade-old AFL opponents of Hillman, the CIO, of Russia and American Communists, who had supported the Histadrut long before the CIO, went on record demanding explanations about events in London. Dubinsky and Green in particular cried foul: Is this the way to treat old friends? Praises for Hillman and the CIO and silence for Green? Cooperation with the Soviets and their Communist stooges in the CIO and in the American delegation in London?²⁴

The Histadrut had an obvious explanation and Dubinsky's response to it was itself a commentary of the changes among American Jewish labor leaders toward a new Jewish politics. Mereminski came to make peace. He told Dubinsky his organization had no choice in London where it was obligated to fight for the political agenda of the Jewish Agency, the governing body of the Zionist movement. In a forum where government policies were being expressed and even represented by many a delegation, the Histadrut's primary directive obligated it to get the best possible resolution. What else could its delegates do except to praise Hillman in public. In other words the Histadrut was "duty" bound to do everything possible to gain support for a Jewish Commonwealth. In February 1945, more than a year before the Jewish Agency could opt for partition, Dubinsky accepted the explanation. He understood, and so did Green and other friends in the AFL. In fact in the next few years, when tensions between them became exacerbated as a result of the Cold War, they and CIO supporters of the Histadrut found a way to cooperate with each other on behalf of a Jewish state in Palestine.²⁵

settlements committee actively support Palestine clause." 25 February 1945, Goldman Papers.

24. Box 11 in Schevenals Papers include an entire folder containing nothing but clippings about this controversy between the AFL, CIO, IFTU, and the formation of the WFTU. See also Schlossberg Journal, 5 May 1945, and Dubinsky, *A Life With Labor*, 245-249.

25. Mereminski to Bracha Haba, 6 August 1945, to Locker, 6 August 1945, to Golda, 5 August 1945, Green to Mereminski, 2 August 1945, and Green's message to Vaad Hapoel, 3 August 1945, Mereminski papers. For reports of AFL and CIO leaders sharing Labor Zionist platforms see the publications of the American Trade Union League for Palestine and Epstein, *Jewish Labor*, II, 411-412. However, the basic concern for AFL leaders about attitudes toward Russia remained. See for examples Goldman's report of a 1949 meeting which included George Meany, Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL: they could

Unfortunately, as least as far as I know, we have no documentary evidence for the days of the Conference itself, to demonstrate precisely what Hillman did on behalf of the Histadrut. Some of his work had been done a few months earlier in connection with the CIO's adoption of a Commonwealth resolution. When Hillman came home from London, he reported about the Conference to the General Executive Board of the Amalgamated where he made it appear, probably correctly, thought Schlossberg, as if he, Hillman, "was the most outstanding person" in London. Schlossberg, who usually thought that Hillman worked hard in order to inflate his reputation, did record what Hillman had told him "privately" after the Amalgamated's Executive Board meeting on 13 March: "When he approached Citrine and the other leading delegates at the Conference about the Jewish situation in Palestine he was told by them 'don't bother with it.' He said further that when he spoke to Carey . . . about the CIO resolution on Palestine, Carey told him that it was impossible to take it up with the Committee without provoking a fight. He said that he told Carey to present it to the Committee as the position of the CIO and cause no fight. Carey did so and the Jewish resolution was adopted by the committee. Hillman also said that Berl Locker was put on the Continuation Committee as representative of the entire Middle East. The implication of this statement was that Hillman was responsible for it."²⁶

From the perspective of the Histadrut Hillman did run the whole show and therefore made possible the passage of Article Twenty-six. At the least he and his delegation had protected the Histadrut and the heart of its resolution from potential British and Russian opponents. Surely, it is not unimportant to note that when Toledano was in New York in May 1946, Nahum Goldman, a senior member of the executive committee of the Jewish Agency, thought he had a promise from Toledano to take a secret memo to Moscow; Goldman was trying to establish direct personal contact between the Agency and Molotov or other senior officials in Moscow.²⁷ To be sure, within the same year the Soviets backed away from their support of 1945, but in 1947, when the Cold

not understand why Israel refused to choose between freedom and totalitarianism. Goldman to Berl Locker, 16 June 1949, Goldman Papers.

26. Schlossberg Journal, 14 March 1945.

27. Goldman to Toledano, 21 May 1946, and the memo taken by Toledano to Moscow. Goldman Papers. On 3 August, Goldman, who identified himself as being pro-Russian in the Jewish Agency, opposed a pro-Russian orientation for the Agency. In the context of Zionist politics and world power realities it would be "clumsy, naive, and dangerous." Address to Executive Committee of the Jewish Agency in Paris, *Ibid.*

War with its Mideast cockpit was well underway, the Russians changed again. By endorsing partition and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, they caused painful spasms in Anglo-American entanglements in the Near East and electrified the rest of the United Nations.²⁸ Then, and during other meetings of the Histadrut's executive committee in that year, the events of 1945 were reinvoked and Hillman's role appreciated with the advantage of hindsight. Now it was obvious; starting with those founding meetings, the American delegations had been the Histadrut's staunchest supporters.

These had been Hillman's delegations, even after he died. In 1947, Frank Rosenblum, another opponent of the Cold War and senior official from the Amalgamated, had taken his place at the head of the American delegation, first in Washington in 1946, and then in Prague, at the 1947 meeting of the World Federation of Trade Unions. The large Histadrut delegation still hardly knew him; for all intents and purposes he was an unknown. But Rosenblum soon changed that impression, here was "Hillman plus." The transcript of one of the Histadrut's executive committee meetings, which Frank Rosenblum attended in Tel Aviv, continues "And instead of that important man Hillman, who had participated in the other two meetings . . ." of the WFTU, there came to Prague "another Jew of lesser importance in the CIO than Hillman . . . He saw to it as his personal responsibility to conduct himself with the will of the man whom he had replaced. From the first moment he and the other members of the American delegation took it upon themselves to defend our position and to fight aggressively for the strongest resolution on our behalf." Indeed, together with Toledano, Rosenblum had himself taken the point in Prague.²⁹

Even when the catastrophes of war and the Holocaust swirled all about, Hillman had supported an important Zionist stream in Jewish politics at his own pace and on his own terms. He had remained a devo-

28. On 19 August 1946, Mereminski, back in Tel Aviv by then, wrote Dubinsky that the anti-Zionist policies of the British Labor government are especially satisfying to "reactionary Arabs and reactionary Communists. . . ." in ILG Archives, 12/254/1A. For Lockers comments on the changes in Russian policy, see Histadrut Protocols, 2 July 1947.

29. Mereminski in Histadrut Protocols, 2 July 1947, 5-6; WFTU, Session of the Executive Bureau, 20-24 September 1946, 2, 3, 4, 6, 47, 48, 52, 60 (In these latter pages there is ample evidence for strong anti-Cold War position in favor of Soviets, especially by Toledano.); *Proceedings of the World Federation of Trade Unions*, Meeting of the Executive Bureau, 2-5, 7, 14 June 1947, 76-83. In this instance Rosenblum and Toledano had to cope with the Chair, who fought on behalf of the policy of his British government, and with the Russian delegate who, for reasons of his own, also strove to weaken the resolution.

tee of his larger American strategies. These incorporated participation in antifascist coalitions, including opposition to the emerging Cold War and to British policy in the Mideast, especially in Palestine. But he had also participated in public as a supporter of a new Jewish politics. One can hear the change in Hillman as he addressed the Amalgamated Convention in May 1946: "My friends, there is one group that they [the Nazis and fascists] decided to destroy completely, so as not even to leave any representatives of this people even to carry water for them. They almost succeeded. They destroyed six million Jews. Those Jews are gone, but there are others in Germany today . . . [who] are required to live in camps with all their memories of the horrors of the past . . . These people want to get out of Germany and there is only one place they want to go to, and that is Palestine, and I say to you that no one has the moral right to stop them from going there. . . . We can properly demand that the Labor government of Britain act promptly to abrogate the infamous White Paper of its Tory predecessor and let down the bars of Palestinian immigration to admit at least 100,000 homeless Jewish people."³⁰

And one can hear the change even more loudly in Hillman's Amalgamated when it declared in its "Resolution on the Jewish People: Six million wracked and tortured Jewish bodies chocked the charnel houses and fired crematoriums of Nazi Europe. These six million dead are beyond tears. But the survivors of that holocaust of anti-Semitism have a special claim on the conscience of democratic mankind . . . Resolved: That the 15th Biennial Convention of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America . . . Reaffirms the decision of the 14th Biennial Convention [of 1944] in support of the establishment of Palestine as a homeland for the Jewish people."³¹

30. *Proceedings of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America*, 6-10 May 1946, 98; Josephson, *Hillman*, 612-668; Walter La Feber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War* (New York, 1980), pp. 29-48. For similar statements in support of the 100,000, or in support of Hagana resistance efforts against British authorities see *New York Sun* 11 April, 3 July 1946, *New York Daily News Record*, 28 March 1946 in ACWA Scrapbook, 543, 563.

31. *Proceedings*, 193-194. For one helpful elaboration of this position by anti-Cold War warriors in the context of the emerging hostility toward Russia in the United States, see Stone, *Underground to Palestine*, 215-224 and Cottrell, *Izzy*, 114-122. For an illustration of conflicting currents in the ranks of American Jewish labor leaders, in part perhaps because of changing events in Poland between 1947 and 1949, see the dramatic exchanges on the floor of the ILGWU as reported in the *Proceedings* of its 26th Convention, 6-22 June 1947, 478-483. See also Epstein, *Jewish Labor*, II, 401, 404-405, and Bauer, *Out of the Ashes*, 167-169.

Hillman died shortly after that convention, so one cannot know what he would have done afterward. But in his last four years he had surely acted and was perceived by others as having acted as if the central question then facing world Jewry had also become an integral part of his public posture as an American labor leader. In that respect he had joined a growing number of American Jews who were then in the process of refashioning their public Jewish identity. Fifty-nine when he died, it is difficult to conceive of him with different attitudes than those espoused after 1947-48 by other union comrades: Dubinsky who abandoned his Bundist anti-Zionism; Zaritsky, who had long supported Socialist Zionism, or for that matter Joseph Schlossberg, his old Socialist Zionist opponent in the Amalgamated. Together with those supporters of Israel who remained critical of anti-Soviet Cold War warriors, Hillman in those years would have made permanent the change he had started in 1942. (After all, in 1945 the American Communist Party had also endorsed a version of the Commonwealth resolution, and between 1947 and 1951 the same Soviet leadership which had supported such a resolution at the World Trade Union Conference played a decisive role in assuring Israel's victory in its war of independence.) Indeed, from that perspective his work at the World Trade Union Conference did more for the establishment of a Jewish state than it did on behalf of a new international labor organization.³² In the year of Israel's birth, the CIO began to leave the WFTU.

32. De Caux was convinced that Hillman's efforts for establishing the WFTU "was the highpoint" of his "high-soaring career." After the convention was over he and Hillman grabbed a bite and the two talked easily, without any agendas. "He's pleased with a good job well done. Then I stole a glance at the sharp eyes behind the glasses and above the sharp nose. Sidney Hillman was at peace with himself." De Caux, *Labor Radical*, 467-469