

JEWISH LABOUR MOVEMENT  
IN  
PALESTINE.

# THE JEWISH LABOUR MOVEMENT IN PALESTINE.

ITS AIMS AND ACHIEVEMENTS.

Submitted by the  
JEWISH SOCIALIST LABOUR CONFEDERATION POALE-ZION  
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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

## INTRODUCTION.

There was an interval of ten years between the submission by the Jewish Socialist Labour Confederation "Poale-Zion," which had been founded in 1907, of an application for affiliation to the Stuttgart Socialist Congress and its formal affiliation to the Socialist International at the Stockholm Conference in 1917. During this interval as well as during the first few years of its membership of the International, it was our duty to explain the significance of Palestine for Jewish Socialism to the Socialist Movement at large. As, however, the scope for Jewish Colonisation in Palestine under the Turkish rule had been limited, the beginnings of the Jewish Labour Movement were only of theoretical importance. Our activities were concentrated mainly on the formulation of programmes for the future and bore no relation to the present circumstances, to such a degree as to be dismissed by many as mere idle dreams. Meanwhile, however, eight years had passed since the War had brought about a revolution in the condition of the Jews in Eastern Europe and the status of Palestine.

We may characterise these years as a period of realisation, from which we derive the opportunity of laying before the Socialist Labour International a summary of the achievements of the Jewish Labour Movement in Palestine. These are such as to entitle us to claim a true significance for Socialism in the colonisation of Palestine.

Simplicity was never a characteristic of the message of the Poale-Zion brand of Jewish Socialism. Poale-Zion parties as they arose found already in existence the bourgeois Zionist Movement, whose ideas were mostly based on wrong analogies drawn from European Nationalist movements, with the yearning for Palestine as their lost home, which had animated the Jewish Nation for two thousand years, and who, besides, would have nothing to do with the Jewish revolutionary Labour Movement. On the other side there was the *Bund* movement amongst Jewish Workers who had no use for a revolutionary solution of the Jewish question. They diagnosed the present condition of Jewry as the last phase of its historical development and, after the fall of Czarism, thought that the Jewish question could be solved by securing equality of rights coupled with certain national and cultural guarantees.

It remained for the Poale-Zion policy by the use of Marxist methods to get at the root of the Jewish Question and to define a new system of characteristically Jewish Economics. We have analysed the peculiar economic strata and social divisions of Jews in those countries where they live in large masses, and have referred them to fundamental facts which had apparently been overlooked owing to their very obviousness. The result was a picture of a Nation living in economic isolation having no roots in agriculture, no share in modern industry, concentrated in commerce and trade and restricted to certain declining branches of production. During this present age of Capitalism, this economic isolation resulted in a collapse of the middle-classes which had been overtaken by the march of progress. Uprooted and thrown out of their class, they became proletarians without, however, securing an entry into the new trades and occupations. The disintegration of Jewish economic life brought about a very powerful reaction; there began the modern Jewish Emigration Movement which, within a few decades, cast out millions of Jews into other countries where they went to seek work and a new livelihood. Thus we see two powerful influences working on the life of the Jewish masses in Europe at the end of the last and the beginning of the present century: the impulse towards placing the economic structure on a new productive basis—in other words to render the de-classed masses productive, and, subsequently, the impulse to create new Jewish centres, by the migration of those whose economic basis had been undermined.

This process of transition, attacking the Jewish masses, could not remain without effect on the condition of the Jewish Workers who were deeply involved therein. It was bound to influence the class-war which the Jewish proletariat was fighting within its own people, and also its political and economic class struggles within the State. Hence it became the duty of Jewish Socialists not merely to formulate a message which would deal with the lack of political rights and cultural needs of a nation which saw itself threatened by assimilation and the loss of its own nationality. It had to supply guidance and a definite goal to the masses of Jews who had been set in motion by this peculiar economic stress.

The new Jewish liberation movement was a kind of reaction against the centrifugal forces inherent in Jewish life which were destroying its economical and political coherence. It corresponded to two basic tendencies in Jewish Realism—the struggle for a new economic life allied with territorial concentration and national self-determination. Thus arose the Palestine Movement which came to be known later on as Zionism—the Jewish National Colonisation Movement.

This conception of Jewish history, this solution of the Jewish National Question, has become the main theme of the Poale-Zion programme. Not content, however, with merely interpreting and explaining the development of Jewry, the Poale-Zion Movement soon began to build it anew.

The work confronting a Socialist Party in the process of national colonisation is admittedly not simple. First of all, there was not available any fund of experience or leadership by other parties. International Socialism has a standpoint towards all oppressed nations who are striving for emancipation, who are settled on their own soil and are fighting against the political domination or economic exploitation of foreign landowners and capitalists. But a national emancipation movement which takes the form of colonising a country and setting up a new economic and cultural community is quite a new thing and as peculiar as the whole of the Jewish problem. Nor must it be forgotten that the International Labour Movement is still without a colonisation programme. To-day people already know the difference between colonial exploitation and the settlement of new lands. So far the notion has mostly been that colonisation is an elementary process in which Labour can take no part. Not until recently, after the overthrow of Europe's economic life by the War, interest has been aroused for migration and settlement in organisations like the British Labour Party. People are slowly beginning to realise the importance of colonising and opening up new countries by means of Labour and not by Imperialist exploitation. They are beginning to feel that the settlement of backward and undeveloped countries is also an integral part of the upbuilding of a Socialist Commonwealth.

The Poale-Zion, however, had to rely on their own forces. What we were most concerned with at first was to organise Jewish Labour to defend its interests in the growing Jewish life in Palestine, with the solid backing of Jewish Labour all over the world and of the international proletariat. Our first contact with the realities of Palestinian life revealed to us new and fundamental factors and taught us that the conventional methods of class warfare were inadequate in a new and developing community. Palestine is a sparsely populated and neglected country, but not a new country. Economically it belongs to the East. On the abandoned ruins, where economic life was represented by the abject poverty of the Fellaheen and the few workers, a new Jewish Commonwealth was to arise which would ensure for its Peasants and Workers a decent existence and the maintenance at least of the civilised standards brought over from Eastern Europe. The two economic systems could not long continue

to exist side by side without mutual reactions. One would soon absorb the other, and the question was whether the Jewish Worker was to come down to the level of cheap unorganised Arab labour having no wants, or whether we were to raise them to our level. Obviously we have chosen the second alternative. The dangers which have been indicated are not purely theoretical, wherever East and West meet. Jewish private capital would be diverted from the colonising work for which it had come into the country, and go into colonial methods of exploiting cheap labour. The pre-war Jewish plantation settlements and those set up by the Rothschild administration have shown that Jewish capitalists, if left to themselves, would give no employment to Jewish labour, and would create in Palestine a class of property-owners which would introduce destructive capitalist methods in primitive Arab villages, tie Bedouins down to the soil and import cheap wage slaves from neighbouring countries. Thus there was danger that a community would arise in Palestine in which a class of Arab wage-earners would confront an upper-class of Jewish capitalists and the social cleavage would be intensified and sharpened by national distinctions.

There was still time to prevent this danger. For Jewish capital was in no hurry to make investments in Palestine. Not only under the Turkish regime, which afforded quite reasonable grounds for caution, but even after the War it was deterred by the situation in the Near East, the lack of transport and the small scale of operations. The new Jewish developments, especially in agriculture but also in industry, were built with national and semi-national capital, on which they have to depend, and are, therefore, susceptible to national and social control. This gave the possibility for systematic national colonisation, and for the influence of Labour upon it in the interests of the masses at work or looking for work.

What the Poale-Zion must be credited with above all is the formulation of a clear programme, the exposure of capitalist dangers to Zionism and the solution of the latent divergence between national interests, as properly understood, and those of private capital. What is more, it has worked out a graduated system of national colonisation which avoids the dangers of colonial degeneration.

Historic truth demands that we admit that this system was not invented by us. We have never approached our task with the idea of creating a Socialist Utopia in Palestine. Our method was not by Socialist deduction, but inductive reasoning and Proletarian criticism. Jewish Labour in Palestine has been feeling its way, making experiments and learning from failures, and together with Poale-Zion



Movement they have gathered the materials and laid the foundation for a national colonisation of Palestine by the Jews. Its main ideas are : Common ownership of the land, national capital for colonisation, every settler to work for himself with no exploitation of wage earners, participation of Workers in the economic structure of society through co-operative organisation of labour and production, working-class control of Labour contracting bodies, the organisation of the Workers into a strong class-federation which shall be recognised by employers, colonisation authorities, the Zionist organisation and the Government, the permeation of this organisation with Socialism by the Palestine Socialist Party (Ahduth Ha-Avoda) which is an organ of the World Confederation of Poale-Zion.

Ten years have elapsed since the end of the War, and about eight since Jewish colonisation in Palestine began again. A short period filled with gigantic labours. The most important things achieved in the interests of Jewish Labour were : the immigration of 100,000 Jews, bringing their number to 160,000, the growth of Jewish owned land from 400,000 to one million dunam, *i.e.*, 250,000 acres, of the agricultural population from 12,000 to 31,000, the rise of Tel-Aviv from a small suburb to a Jewish city having 40,000 inhabitants. About seven million pounds from national and social funds, and also practically the same amount of private capital was invested in building and industry. The results for Jewish Socialism were : a population of 30,000 Jewish working men and women, a membership of 25,000 for the General Labour Federation, and a net of institutions such as the Labour Bank, Palestine Workers' Fund, buying and selling Co-operative Society, Education Committee. About 3,000 agricultural workers have been settled on national land as free and independent peasants, half of whom are united in producers' Co-operatives or Agricultural Communes. There are, further, the Solelboneh Builders' Guild with 2,500 workers, and contracts for one-and-a-half million pounds to its credit, a Socialist Party controlling this organisation which is undisputably the strongest organised power in the land, and which is itself the strongest Jewish party in Palestine. A new type of Jew has come into being, a new type of Worker : Jewish agricultural workers, builders, railway men, and Jewish working women as their faithful companions. The Jewish immigrant, whether he came from working classes or from proletarianised middle classes, showed that he was capable of tackling the new forms of work, and stood the test of pioneering hardships. And whenever it was necessary to create new forms of production and new industries, the Socialist impulse of Jewish Workers has proved full of resource.

We have no desire to exaggerate these achievements. We know that quantitatively this work is only a modest beginning, both from the point of view of Jewish needs and from the international standpoint. But what we are fully conscious of is the significance for Socialism of the co-operative self-governing institutions in the new Palestine. Their fate is closely bound up with the great struggle between Capitalism and Socialism all over the world. We believe, however, that we are halfway the transitional period from the Capitalist to Socialist system, and that the co-operative cells in Palestine may be permanent. In any case Capitalism in Palestine will encounter an organised Labour movement, strong in the knowledge of its power and the tasks which lies before it.

For this reason the opposition of the bourgeoisie in Palestine and within Zionism itself to the influence exerted by Labour on the work in the country is becoming more and more intense. Whilst we are writing these lines a report has been issued by a Palestine Joint Survey Commission of which Lord Melchett was chairman. These representatives of the wealthy Jewish bourgeoisie in Great Britain and the United States have made their collaboration in the Jewish colonisation of Palestine conditional upon the surrender of the principles which Labour has brought into Zionism. They are against common ownership of land, against smallholders as the basis of colonisation, against co-operative settlements, and against democratic control. Their programme breathes undisguised hostility to Labour. The time may come when we shall have to appeal for the active help of the International. We believe that our appeal for assistance will not remain unanswered, so soon as it is realised what the Jewish Worker, filled with Socialist inspirations, has achieved in Palestine.

CHAPTER I.

**THE PALESTINE SOCIALIST PARTY.**

**“Ahduth Ha-Avoda”**

*(Solidarity of Labour).*

## THE PALESTINE SOCIALIST PARTY.

“*ANDUTH HA-AVODA*”  
(*Solidarity of Labour.*)

The Jewish Labour Movement in Palestine is intimately bound up with the idea of a Jewish mass immigration and settlement in the country. It is true that Zionism is not purely a workers' movement, but a national movement aiming at the mass settlement of Jews and the setting up of a National Home in Palestine for the Jewish people. The fact, however, that up to the present, and for a considerable time to come, the colonisation of the country will have to be mainly borne by Labour elements who alone are physically and morally capable of accomplishing the enormous task of rebuilding a nation in its Ancient Home, has made it necessary for the Labour Movement virtually to become the stronghold of the Movement in Palestine.

The foundations of the Jewish Labour Movement in Palestine were laid when the Socialist Zionist Labour Party, called “*Poale-Zion,*” first arose in parts of Europe and America, mainly in countries closely populated by Jews, such as Russia, Poland, Galicia, and the United States of America.

In the introductory chapter we have shown how this tendency of Jewish Socialism, by virtue of its Marxist analysis of the social and economic foundations of Jewish conditions, has built up a comprehensive synthesis of National and Social emancipation, concentration of Jewish working masses in one country, which is Palestine, and the Socialist renovation of society. The founders of *Poale-Zion* were the spiritual inspirers and forerunners of the Palestine Labour Movement, as shown in the introductory chapter. It is true that some ten and twenty years before the war, Jewish workers had started to immigrate into the country, and had been responsible for considerable individual achievements, but they were incapable of creating a proper Labour Movement because they did not apprehend the theoretical aspect of such a movement. With the first groups of *Poale-Zion* workers who arrived in 1904 and 1905 there came also other Radical Zionist Workers who realised that Labour was the fundamental conditions for the realisation of Zionist ideals and were ready to make every sacrifice for this cause.

They refused, however, to give recognition to the International and Socialist basis of the Movement, and were in constant danger of becoming sectional. They formed the "Hapoel Hazair" (Young Workers' Zionist Labour Party). Thus it became the historical task of the Jewish Social Democratic Labour Party in Palestine—Poale-Zion—to lay the foundation of a National and Class-conscious Labour Movement. Its leaders and men were people who had been through the first Russian Revolution, and in many cases in its front ranks. They had also, however, witnessed the frightful pogroms of those years, and came to Palestine to prepare the ground for the anticipated mass immigration which was to start sooner or later.

The Palestine Poale-Zion before the war was the only Labour Party in the country, who were united with Jewish Labour Parties outside the country, into a World Union called the Jewish Socialist Labour Confederation "Poale-Zion." They were thus in a position to carry out their practical work in the country with the active co-operation of Jewish workers all over the world. They set up the "Palestine Workers' Fund," to which Jewish workers all over the world contributed, thus sharing in the work actually done in Palestine. The beginnings of a Trade Union movement were laid down by the Party, and its members were also amongst the first to strive for the establishment of a Producers' Co-operative Movement. They generally played a leading rôle in every Labour activity in the country.

The War and its heavy blows did not leave Palestine unaffected. The Russian Revolution, which gave promise of such unlimited prospects for the emancipation of Russian workers, as well as of the oppressed Jewish masses on the one hand, and the British Declaration promising to establish a National Home in Palestine, known as the Balfour Declaration, which gave rise to such great hopes to the Jewish people throughout the world, confronted the Poale-Zion movement with big new tasks.

The Palestinian Party Poale-Zion thought that its hour had struck. It was necessary to utilize the great opportunities of this historical moment, and in the first place to create the union of all Jewish workers in Palestine, which alone would be capable of mastering the great tasks confronting it. This aim was enthusiastically supported by the workers in the country. The scheme, which has been unanimously adopted by this party, was to unite the workers into one comprehensive political and economic organisation. The Agricultural Workers' Union, the first large Trade Union, founded in 1911, voted for this proposal, with a large majority. The Unity Congress, which met soon after the Party Conferences.

and the Agricultural Workers' Conference early in 1919, decided to found the Zionist Socialist Palestine Labour Union—"Ahduth Ha-Avoda"—(*i.e.*, Solidarity of Labour). It was found impossible, however, to achieve complete unity despite the fact that 80 per cent. of Palestinian workers joined Ahduth Ha-Avoda, for the other non-Socialist Labour Party—Hapoel Hazair—remained outside the Union.

The cardinal points underlying the new Socialist Party remained the guiding lines for the Palestine Labour Movement. They are essentially as follows :—

(1) The union of all Workers in the Country according to their trades into one autonomous Trades Union authority, which directs the political, economic and educational work of the Movement.

(2) Affiliation to the Zionist Organisation and the Socialist International.

(3) Participation in the World Confederation Poale-Zion with the view ultimately to uniting all sections of the Zionist Socialist Movement throughout the world into one body.

(4) Nationalisation of land and of all natural resources so as to make them the inalienable property of the Jewish nation.

(5) The creation of a National Fund for improving the soil, establishing the necessary buildings and housing accommodation and granting credits to agricultural settlements and to factories through the intermediary of independent Labour Institutions.

(6) Facilitating the immigration of pioneers who were to prepare the land for the anticipated mass colonisation and form the Labour class in the country.

(7) The spreading of Hebrew language and culture.

The basis of the Ahduth Ha-Avoda organisation resembles the Belgian model. Till the establishment of the General Federation of Labour, at the end of 1920, the Party was at one and the same time a federation of trade unions and co-operatives which included practically all the existing and newly created trade unions and Co-operatives, and was actively engaged in co-operative agricultural settlement, co-operative undertaking in trade and industry, social aid activities, educational work as well as Socialist, political and general Zionist work. The earlier years of Ahduth Ha-Avoda (1919-1920) were significant for its growing political opposition against the attempts of the British Military Administration to undermine the British Government's responsibilities for the

establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine, attempts which were largely the cause of the well-known disturbances in Jerusalem and other towns. These attempts evoked strong protests of the Party, which demanded that the Military Administration be replaced by a Civil Administration which was ready to carry out the pledges given by the British Government.

Simultaneously the Party strove to organise and secure the recognition of autonomous rights for the Jews in all internal national matters. The Ahduth Ha-Avoda sent 71 delegates to the first Jewish National Assembly, which met in 1920, and was thus the strongest party in this Assembly. It has retained this leading position to the present day both in the Assembly and in the Jewish National Council in Palestine which is elected by the Assembly.

To achieve its aims it was of particular importance to bring about the union of all workers on the lines of the party's original programme. As a result of the incessant pressure on the part of the Ahduth Ha-Avoda and the large number of immigrants who had entered the country in 1920, neither of whom would concede that there was any necessity for separating trade union and colonisation activities, this union was finally brought about at the end of 1920. The General Labour Federation of all the Jewish workers in Palestine was founded and took over all the trade union, co-operative, educational and health functions of the Labour Movement.

Henceforth Ahduth Ha-Avoda's work consisted chiefly of its activities inside the General Labour Federation, known as the "Histadruth." The history of the Party since 1921 is essentially the history of the Histadruth. This important change turned the Ahduth Ha-Avoda into a political party, and its work as the leading party in the Federation consisted above all in leading the latter along its own lines. Complete success has accompanied its efforts in this direction. The chapters which follow illustrate the work and development of Jewish Labour in the country, and what has been said on the relation between the Party and the Federation applies to all branches of this activity. We shall have occasion further on to emphasise these relations repeatedly.

In addition to its activities within the General Labour Federation the Party was striving to achieve the union of the whole Jewish Socialist movement abroad which shares the Zionist ideals.

Through the influence exerted by Ahduth Ha-Avoda the union of the World Confederation Poale-Zion with the so-called Zionist Socialist Federation was brought about in 1925, a result which considerably strengthened the position of the Party in Palestine to which members of both sections now

united had already previously adhered. Since then, the Party has been the Palestinian branch of the United World Confederation of Poale-Zion with the Zionist Socialist Federation. Through the intermediary of the World Confederation, the Party is affiliated to the International Socialist movement. It took part also in the British Commonwealth Labour Conferences which were held in London in 1925 and 1928.

At its general conferences the Party had under consideration important political questions, such as Self-Government for Palestine, relations with Arab workers, forms of Autonomy for each of the two Palestinian Nationalities (Jews and Arabs), land reforms, taxation, workers' compensation, etc.

Together with the other parties affiliated to the World Confederation Poale-Zion, the Ahduth Ha-Avoda has been pressing its point of view before the Zionist Organisation in colonisation and immigration matters, as has already been outlined above. The Party obtained 38.6 per cent. of the 23,727 votes cast in Palestine for the Election to the last Zionist Congress held in August, 1927; with its 10 out of 17 Palestinian delegates it was the strongest Palestinian Party at the Congress, whilst the second Labour Party (Hapoel Hazair) secured 17.8 of the votes. Till the last Congress, Mr. Kaplansky, a leading member of the Party and of the World Confederation, was the managing member of the Zionist Organisation's Financial and Economic Council, and from 1924 to 1927 he was the Director of the Agricultural Colonisation Department and member of the Palestine Zionist Executive. The Anti-Labour tendencies which came to light at the last Congress drove the Poale-Zion into sharp opposition to the present Zionist Executive.

The Party has to-day 4,500 registered members, *i.e.*, over 60 per cent. of the total membership of political labour parties in Palestine. But the number of votes cast for the Party at election time is far more significant. Thus it secured 9,064 votes out of a total of 17,034 cast for the Labour Federation Elections. The Party has its own weekly paper called "Kuntres," which has taken the place of the old Poale-Zion weekly "Ahduth." In 1926 the Party founded the Young Socialist Association with the view of organising the younger generation—between the ages of 18 and 23—and preparing them for future Socialist activity, and also in order to influence the transition of the boys and girls from school to physical work. This Association is affiliated with the Young Jewish Socialist Workers' Federation, and through the latter to the Young Socialists' International. Although it has been in existence for a short time it has been successful in influencing the work of several trade unions, the "Hapoel" Workers' Sports Association and other bodies. Its membership rose



in eighteen months from 150 to 400, of which one-half is engaged in agriculture.

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The following chapters will give a concise picture of the practical work which is being done by the Palestine Labour movement. At the same time they show the road which Ahduth Ha-Avoda has been following and intends following in order to attain its Socialist and Zionist ideals. It feels that this work, despite the few years behind it, and however modest and incomplete it may appear, should be considered not only as the pioneering work of the vanguard of a much larger colonisation movement in the near future, but as entitled to stand on its own merits and as likely to prove instructive to the International Labour movement. For the work of colonising a whole nation, which is being shouldered by an organised Socialist Labour movement, deserves particular appreciation. It is in this sense that the following description of actual achievements—rather than theoretical arguments—will prove, it is hoped, the justification of the principles of the Poale-Zion movement.

CHAPTER II.

THE GENERAL FEDERATION OF  
JEWISH LABOUR IN  
PALESTINE

Organisation and Activities.

# THE GENERAL FEDERATION OF JEWISH LABOUR IN PALESTINE.

## ORGANISATION AND ACTIVITIES.

We have already alluded to the peculiarity of the historical problems facing Jewish Labour in Palestine. Its duty in the first instance was to create the new type of Jewish worker and see to it that, whilst colonisation was developing, the Jewish worker, be he agriculturist, building worker, railwayman, who can hardly be said to have existed previously, and who came into being as a result of the very colonisation process, should be assured the place which is his due. What is more, the Jewish Labour Movement had to see to it that this colonisation work should proceed along lines which would enable the Jewish worker to get employment which would secure for him a decent standard of living. Thus the political Labour Movement became intimately bound up with the colonisation work, for its mainspring is the recognition that this is only to be achieved through colonisation. Another necessity which made itself felt before the war was that of combining workers into Trade Unions. These tendencies found their expression amongst the most progressive workers, the agricultural workers. For, it was agriculture which attracted the best elements amongst the immigrants, to whom a return to the soil was a precondition to the new Jewish life, and the creation of a new type of Jewish worker. Apart from small beginnings in the printing and building trades, the movement in the towns began much later, because the town workers of those days mostly originated from the Levant, and, like the Arabs, whose cultural standards resemble their own, they have been to this very day difficult to organise.

The Agricultural Workers' Union of Judea was founded at the first Judean Agricultural Workers' Conference in 1911, and this was followed shortly after by the setting up of the Galilean Agricultural Workers' Union. At the beginning of the war, these Unions combined to form the Palestine Jewish Agricultural Workers' Union.

Despite their small number, which at the beginning of the war amounted to about 1,500, the workers realised the necessity of creating the beginnings of social institutions,

which, with the lack of even primitive provisions for social legislation under the Turkish regime, were matters of vital necessity in those days. Thus the Union established at its own initiative the first Workers' Health Fund in 1913. The "Hamashbir" Co-operative Wholesale and Retail Society was established under war conditions, when the cost of living had risen to great heights, in 1916. What was most important was the foundation of the Palestine Workers Fund by the World Poale-Zion Federation. This provided labour with means for setting up employment exchanges, worker's kitchens and other institutions. This Fund also gave credits to workers' agriculture and building co-operatives. Further information about the development of this Fund will be found further on.

Post-War political changes made it possible for fairly large number of Jews to enter the country. From 1920 to 1927, almost 100,000 Jews thus came in. Of these immigrants, the workers, both through their numbers and their significance, played a leading role. Between 1920 and 1923 alone, during which the so-called Third Immigration Wave proceeded, about 12,000 workers entered the country, and secured a foothold in all trades, such as agriculture, building, public works, transport, railways, etc. There arose new institutions, employment exchanges, immigration offices, building and public works guilds and various trade unions. The new and considerable problems which this presented to Labour, such as that of absorbing the immigrant workers, putting them to productive work, and settling them on the land, made it an urgent necessity to create a united body of all the workers. It was particularly the Ahduth Ha-Avoda which realised this necessity and used every effort to put this into effect. After overcoming numerous obstacles the unification of Palestinian Labour was completed at Haifa on December 5th, 1920.

The new Federation was called "General Federation of Jewish Labour in Palestine." Unification was achieved roughly along the following lines: The Federation includes all workers who live by their own labour without exploiting others; it regulates all matters affecting the working classes in the field of trade union activities, colonisation and education, with the end of building up a Jewish Workers' Community in Palestine. The units on which the Federation is based are the Trade Unions and the Local Labour Councils. The duties of the Trade Unions are to fix working conditions, inspect workshops, examine labour agreements, establish co-operative producing societies and co-operative labour groups, provide new immigrants with permanent work, and finally various matters which are referred to them by the

Local Labour Council. In each factory or workshop, there is a Works Council which represents locally the Trade Unions and the Labour Councils. In trades which are of more than a local importance, local unions can unite into a National Union.

Up to 1928, four Trade Unions have thus been established : (1) The Agricultural Workers' Union with 8,000 members ; (2) the Building Workers' Union, with 6,000 members, comprising also stone workers, carpenters, locksmiths, etc. ; (3) Postal, Telegraph and Railway Workers' Union with a membership of 400 ; and (4) the Clerical Workers' Union with a membership of 1,100. Apart from these, there are local unions, such as those of printers, tailors, bootmakers, bakers, hairdressers, domestic servants, etc.

Labour is united not merely on vertical lines, but, what is more important, on horizontal lines, as through Labour Councils of all workers in one locality.

The Local Labour Councils are elected by all the workers of the respective locality. They supervise the activities of each local trade union branch, and the local branches of the economic, social and educational institutions.

The highest authority within the Federation and all the Trade Unions and Institutions is the General Conference of the General Labour Federation, which is elected by all the members. It is this direct suffrage which distinguishes these elections from those which precede the Trade Union Congresses in most European countries. The Conference elects the General Council, comprising thirty-one or thirty-three members, and this council elects the Federation Executive. The Council meets every four months. This structure invests the General Conference, the General Council, and the Executive deriving from it, with great authority over all the work of the Federation. The Executive has a statutory right of enforcing its decisions in all the Federation's Institutions.

Mention may be made of the Statute's provisions dealing with the right to strike, which differ from those generally adopted in Europe. Stop or works strikes can be declared by the works council in question only with the consent of the Secretariat of the Local Labour Council. Strikes affecting a whole union in one locality require confirmation at a meeting of the local Labour Council, and a general strike of all the workers in one locality can only be declared with the consent of the Federation Executive. Here, too, we see that the tendency is to make important resolutions depend upon the decision of representatives of the whole of the Labour movement. This tendency is in consonance with the peculiar conditions and aims in which the workers in Palestine,

as already stated, require the maximum concentration under one authority.

4,433 members took part at the elections to the first General Conference, December, 1920, 6,581 to those of the second Conference in 1923, and 17,183 to the third General Conference which took place at the end of 1926. The latter figure is equivalent to 80 per cent. of all those entitled to a vote. These figures show the growing strength of the Federation within the last six years. It may be observed that Ahduth Ha-Avoda, which is a branch of the World Poale-Zion Federation, received 41.2 per cent. of the votes in 1920, 47.1 per cent. in 1923, and 53.2 per cent. in 1926.

The most important branch of the General Federation is in Tel-Aviv, which has a membership of 7,000, the one in Haifa having 2,600 members, and Jerusalem 2,400. The total number of organised workers in industry alone is about 4,000.

Now, what has been achieved by the Federation during the last seven and a-half years ?

The membership has increased to six-fold. On January 1, 1928, it was 23,000, distributed in 33 unions, as compared with about 5,000 at the time of its foundation, 7,586 in 1923, and 15,275 in 1925. Another important feature is that whilst in 1922 there were only 50 per cent., in 1927 70.8 per cent. of the total number of Jewish workers in the country were organised in unions. In many important trades, however, such as agriculture, industry and building, between 90 per cent. and 100 per cent. are now organised.

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Simultaneously with trade union developments much progress has been achieved in the field of co-operation.

The fact that the Federation is not merely a Federation of Trade Unions in the European sense, but necessarily and inseparably bound up with a huge colonising task of the country, will enable us to appreciate why co-operative activity is so vitally important.

In the following chapter we shall describe the development of agricultural co-operatives and communes ("Kvuzoth," in Hebrew) and also in undertaking work for private farmers.

As to the work in towns, the Labour movement came to realise the necessity of preventing the extensive building and public works undertakings, both private and public, which were expected to assume large proportions after the war, from falling in the usual way into the hands of private contractors. This gave rise to the Public and Building Works Guild, which later became the "Solet-Boneh," Jewish Co-operative Labour Association for Public Works Building and Manufacture, Limited. This building Guild, within the space of six years, completed work amounting to £1,500,000.

Further, there is the Co-operative Wholesale and Retail Society, called "Hamashbir," which was founded in 1916, and which supplies workers with commodities, and also disposes of the produce of the workers' agricultural settlements and industrial co-operatives. The Labour Bank, founded in 1921 with a nominal capital of £100,000, grants credits to and finances Labour undertakings and institutions.

Amongst other institutions may be mentioned the Workers' Health Fund, which to-day looks after the health of one-fifth of the total Jewish population of the country, the Educational Committee, which has its own net of schools and educational institutions, the Federation's daily paper called "Davar," and the Palestine Workers' Fund, which the Federation took over from the Poale-Zion Confederation in 1925. Apart from these there are independent institutions, such as the Workers' Loan and Savings Fund and the "Hassneh" Workers' Insurance Society.

Apart from these institutions whose work will be described in further details in the following chapters, there are a number of departments subordinated to the Federation Executive, each fulfilling special functions:—

1. The Employment Department, which looks after the supply of work throughout the country and acts as the headquarters for the various local employment exchanges.

2. The Immigration Department, with local offices situated at the ports, which look after immigrant workers until they get employment.

3. Women Workers' Council, which looks after the women workers, establishes women workers' settlements, etc.

4. A department for establishing workers' quarters in the towns.

5. Statistical Department and Archives.

\* \* \*

The above survey shows the innumerable aspects, such as trade union organisation, colonisation, social and educational, of the work which is carried out by the Federation. Political work, too, cannot be kept out of its activities. Thus it took part in the municipal elections in a number of places, with its own election programme. At its conferences it discussed workers' compensation legislation, questions of customs, tariff and taxation, political persecutions, immigration policy, etc.

On the basis of a decision passed at the second conference which took place in 1923, the General Federation of Jewish Labour is affiliated to the Amsterdam International Federa-

tion of Trades Unions, and has taken part at the Vienna Congress in 1924 and the Paris Congress in 1927.

Of the decisions adopted by the third General Conference in July, 1927, special mention must be made of the decision to found a "Palestinian International Labour League," which is to have a Jewish and Arab section and whose languages are to be Hebrew and Arabic.

In the subsequent chapters will be described one by one the several fields in which the Organisation is active.



CHAPTER III.

**THE AGRICULTURAL WORKERS AND  
THEIR COLONISING ACTIVITIES.**

## THE AGRICULTURAL WORKERS AND THEIR COLONISING ACTIVITIES.

Palestine is essentially an agricultural country and as it has neither iron nor coal or, as far as can be ascertained, any oil, agriculture will remain the foundation of its economic life. It may be assumed that with the exploitation of the Dead Sea, the construction of hydraulic works for electrical purposes, harbours and means of communication, chemical and various manufacturing industries, which have hitherto made not inconsiderable progress, such as textiles, will also acquire increasing importance. Nevertheless, the work of colonising the country will have to be grounded on agriculture.

To-day 75-80 per cent. of the population derive their livelihood from agriculture. Owing to these natural causes and also on idealistic grounds, *i.e.*, the aspiration for restoring the Jewish nation by a return to work in the staple trades, particularly in agriculture, it can easily be understood why, contrary to practically all other countries, the Jewish Labour Movement in Palestine found its origin in agriculture. The earliest immigrant workers between 1905 and 1914, who were endeavouring to gain a foothold in agriculture, attempted at the cost of a great deal of privation and sacrifice to secure work in Jewish plantation colonies which were already employing numerous wage-earners. Working and living conditions in these colonies, however, were unbearable. Competition on the part of cheap unorganised Fellahs and their wives and children, for whom work in the Jewish colonies was merely seasonable and additional to the work in their villages, whilst the Jewish worker depended entirely on this wage-paid work; the open opposition shown by the colonists themselves to employing organised intelligent workers, as long as they could rely on an unlimited supply of labourers who had few needs and could easily be exploited and domineered—all these things rendered the Jewish labourers' efforts to get work in private farms and plantations extraordinarily difficult if not almost impossible. It seemed that this attempt was doomed to fail,

The workers, however, who were confronted with no less

an alternative than either immigration or starvation, endeavoured to find a way out of this situation. The idea arose of trekking to Galilee, where the natural conditions offered better opportunities for cereal growing and mixed farming as against plantation work based on wage labour. There, too, they could lead a co-operative life without resort to any wage-paid work. Great support has been given to these efforts by the fact that the Jewish National Fund, which is the Land fund of the Zionist Organisation and whose aim it is to acquire land as the inalienable property of the Jewish people, had begun purchasing land at about that time (1907-1909). Co-operative settlement plans which were based on Professor Franz Oppenheimer's schemes and which had found much support in the Poale-Zion movement, were favourably taken up by these workers. It was thus that a series of co-operative farms arose in Galilee during the last five years before the war (Deganiah, Merhavia and Kinnereth), where some of the workers who had left the plantation colonies settled down in settlements of their own and showed what brains and devotion to work could achieve. These attempts soon formed an important item of the programme of work of the Agricultural Workers' Union. This union declared at its conferences that it was strongly in favour of all attempts at co-operative settlements, which were to become the foundation of the considerable post-war colonisation work. "National Land, Self-Work, Mutual Aid and Responsibility, Work under the Workers' Own Management"—these have been the foundations of all Workers' Colonisation work to this day.

The war interrupted these beginnings and Palestinian workers were placed in extraordinarily difficult economic conditions. Colonisation of the above nature, however, was not entirely stopped during the war and with the active help of the Palestine Workers' Fund, raised by the Poale-Zion, a number of agricultural workers' settlements in Upper Galilee were established, such as Tel-hai, Kefar-Gileadi, Ayeleth-Hashahar and Mahanayim.

The year 1921 was of utmost importance for the Labour Movement and the future development of Workers' Settlements, for it was in that year that considerable areas of land on the Emek Jezreel, which is situated between Haifa and the Jordan Valley, were bought by the Jewish National Fund and the settlement of about 500 workers' families on this area began in the following year. This raised the number of worker-settlers to fivefold within the space of a few years. In the place of about 600 settlers in 1921 their number in 1927 had risen to 3,000. The size of the undertaking which gave rein to all the moral and physical forces of the workers

enabled them to find and put into effect new social and economic forms of settlements in line with the fundamental principles indicated above.

There are essentially two main forms of settlement of Jewish workers in Palestine. These forms are: (1) The large or small agricultural co-operative settlement, that is the Commune, called "*Kvutzah*" (plural—*Kvutzoth*). (2) The individualistic settlement having a great number of pronounced co-operative features, the so-called "*Moshave-Ovdim*."

In both the larger and smaller communes the settlement is based on collective production and consumption. The land is national property. All the work, including household work, is allotted and directed by the management which is elected by all the members of the settlement. The bringing up of children from their earliest age is done in common at the cost of the community. The needs of every member are satisfied within the limits of the settlement's means.

In contrast with these collective settlements are the individualistic *Moshave-Ovdim*. Here every settler is allotted an equal area of land which he cultivates by himself. The area is delimited so as to exclude the possibility of having to engage wage-paid labour; wherever extra labour is indispensable it is provided for by mutual help amongst the members. The net profit of work goes to each individual settler, only buying and selling operations and the ownership of heavy machinery are on a co-operative basis. The principles of mutual help are very highly developed. Here, too, land is not private property but held on hereditary lease.

All settlements, be they co-operative or individualistic, are under the supervision of the Agricultural Workers' Union or "*Nir*"—the Workers' Co-operative Colonisation Association, details of which are given below. The latter's statutes aim at preserving the proletarian character of the settlement on the lines indicated above.

Apart from these settlements there are groups which are still in a preparatory or occupation stage, who have secured a part of their stock and implements; in some cases, a number of their members have already settled down and the remainder are during an interim period engaged on private farms as wage-earners.

The table on page 35 illustrates the development of Labour colonisation between 1921 and 1927. Altogether about £600,000 was spent by the Keren-Hayesod (Zionist Colonisation Fund) for settling about 1,300 families (apart from the land which is supplied by the other Fund, known as the Jewish National Fund).

Agricultural progress in settlements is best shown in the increased crop production during the last few years. Whilst, for instance, the wheat crop used to be about 35 kilogrammes per dunam, which is about  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre, they rose in many settlements to between 100 and 120 kilogrammes, and in some cases to 150 in 1927. The barley crop in some settlements was 150 and 175 kilogrammes per dunam and in others as much as 200 to 220 kilogrammes. These crops exceed those realised by the Arab Fellaheen by over 100 per cent., and on the average about 50 per cent. The same applies to dairy farming. In some Jewish settlements annual production per cow is between 2,000 and 3,000 litres, as compared with 600-800 litres in the case of the Arab. This is the result of careful breeding and feeding experiments in the settlements.

The total revenue of 12 kvutzoth (communes) amounted to £50,600 in 1925; £69,000 in 1926; and £77,600 in 1927, which makes an increase in the income per family from £100 in 1925 to £135 in 1926 and £152 in 1927.

A number of older settlements who have received all their stock and implements according to the original scheme closed the year 1926 and 1927 with a profit averaging from £150 to £500 per settlement, whereas the other settlements who have not yet been supplied with the necessary means and equipment will soon be able to balance their accounts. The settlements created before 1927 are already in a position to provide for 85 per cent. of their own needs.

In the same time changes have been proceeding in the villages worked by private capital. Thousands of workers have found work in such villages through the workers' co-operative contracting groups which undertake the cultivation of farms and orange groves on their own responsibility to the exclusion of all intermediaries, and introduce work conditions which promote an increase in the workers' real wage. This development has also been hastened owing to the pressure of unemployment in the towns. Many of these groups which were formed to contract for agricultural undertakings, partly had some husbandry of their own to fall back upon and partly were transitional and training groups aiming at a future permanent settlement, whilst many others were endeavouring to gain a footing for Jewish agricultural labourers in these private colonies.

**THE GROWTH OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS' SETTLEMENTS.  
1921 TO 1927.**

	Number of Settlements.			Number of Workers.			Total Population.			Dunams under Cultivation.			Investment to Sept., 1927.
	1921.	1923.	1927.	1921.	1923.	1927.	1921.	1923.	1927.	1921.	1923.	1927.	
Kvutzoth	13	23	24	429	1,007	1,458	429	1,101	2,011	15,557	27,532	49,591	£320,160
Moschave Ovdim....	3	6	14	135	444	1,297	135	786	2,031	2,011	11,713	49,518	£275,015
<b>Total ....</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>564</b>	<b>1,451</b>	<b>2,755</b>	<b>564</b>	<b>1,887</b>	<b>4,042</b>	<b>17,568</b>	<b>39,245</b>	<b>99,109</b>	<b>£595,175</b>

**REMARKS:—**

- (1) The number of Kvutzoth in 1927 does not include training occupation groups in Karkur, Har Kinnereth, and Tirah, nor the six girls, training farms with 163 girls.
- (2) The figures for Moschave Ovdim include 4 settlements with 200 families who do not belong to the General Labour Federation.
- (3) The area of cultivated land given above is not identical with the total area of land allotted to the workers' settlements, which amounts to about 125,000 dunams, of which an area of 14,750 dunams await cultivation under the new colonisation scheme of 1927.
- (4) The investment column does not include the moneys spent for 3 settlements in Upper Galilee which were partly granted by the French Colonisation Fund, but mostly by the Palestine Jewish Colonisation Association.

The number of workers in the plantation colonies rose from 2,000 (of which 1,000 were organised) in 1922, to 6,730 (of which 5,000 were organised) in March, 1928. The majority of the workers in the colonies, *i.e.*, 4,500, are agriculturists, the remainder being engaged in public works, building, agricultural industries, and so on. In 1927 there were 53 co-operative groups of workers in the plantation colonies, who, although engaged as individual labourers for private farmers, kept their household co-operatively, and also four women workers' co-operative settlements with 1,600 members altogether.

These figures illustrate the growing penetration of organised Jewish labour into the plantation colonies. Despite all this, however, and despite the increasing area of land under cultivation, particularly orange groves, and the growing demand for labour, the workers in these colonies are in difficulties owing to the recurring seasonal unemployment several times in the course of the year and also owing to the competition of cheap unorganised Fellaheen labour, which is naturally depressing wages. Thus the agricultural workers have to struggle on many fronts. They demand from the local authorities and the Government that public works be undertaken during unemployment periods, from the Zionist Executive that funds be provided for setting up housing accommodation and some auxiliary husbandry which would provide the workers' families with primary necessities during times of unemployment, with the ultimate view of enabling them, after they have worked for years as wage-earners, to become independent settlers. Finally, their efforts are directed towards strengthening the Agricultural Union so as to bring pressure to bear upon the employers that they may find more work for Jewish organised labour in the colonies.

One of the means for the latter is the Agricultural Contracts Office, which has been founded by the Federation for undertaking agricultural work. This office secures agricultural work from the landowners, chiefly the laying out of plantations and their further cultivation. The contracts are being undertaken by this office and carried out by co-operative groups of skilled agriculturists, under the technical and financial control and responsibility of the office. The aim of this agricultural guild is to substitute for the contractor and his administrative apparatus a co-operative organisation, whereby, without increasing the cost of planting, the contractor's profits would be used for raising wages and securing more employment for organised labour. In 1927 the Agricultural Guild has carried out work over an area of 1,700 dunams for the amount of £8,000, thus giving employment to 12 co-operatives with 200 workers. This year the amount is £16,000 and the

number of workers 250. The orange groves in Judea and the banana plantations in Genossar Plain, all planted by the Office, enjoy a very good reputation.

The agricultural Workers find in their Union an adequate and reliable instrument which leads and helps them in their struggles for the enlarging of the scope of employment for organised Jewish agriculturists and for the improving of their working conditions, as well as for extending the field of labour settlements. To-day the Union has about 3,500 members in the workers' settlements and 5,000 members in the private colonies.

In accordance with the scheme worked out by Ahduth Ha-Avoda, and later accepted by the General Federation, all Workers' settlements are affiliated with the "Nir" (Furrow) Society. All agricultural Workers must acquire member's shares of this society and are thus enabled to vote at the general meetings of the society. The Founders' Shares of the Nir Society are owned by the General Labour Federation, which entitle it to 51 per cent. of votes at all general meetings. The agriculturists have consequently a preponderating influence over the affairs of Nir. This does not, however, make it impossible to acquire private capital as there are also preference shares which have no votes but are the only shares entitled to dividend. The capital when fully issued will be made available for various purposes in the interest of the agricultural Workers and is destined to become a great factor in the labour colonisation activities in Palestine.

*Nir* has certain statutory rights which entitle it to control and supervise the settlements, particularly to safeguard their social rudiments. The Agricultural Workers' Union has a decisive voice in all questions relating to training, colonisation, the transfer of workers from urban occupations to agriculture, the improvement of the working conditions in the colonies, etc.

The Union issues a monthly paper, called "Hassadeh" (the "Field"). It has taken part in many agricultural exhibitions in the country and abroad, such as the one in Moscow in 1923, Ghent, 1924, and Vienna in 1925. It is obvious that the Union is working in collaboration with all colonising authorities as well as with the economic, social and educational institutions of the Labour movement. Without the close collaboration of the agricultural workers, their creative achievements and their fighting organisation, the task of colonising Palestine would to-day be unthinkable.



CHAPTER IV.

THE BUILDING WORKERS' UNION  
AND THE CO-OPERATIVE BUILDING  
GUILD "SOLELBONEH."

THE BUILDING WORKERS' UNION AND  
THE CO-OPERATIVE BUILDING GUILD  
"SOLELBONEH."

It is a corollary of the colonising process in town and country that public works and other building should assume great dimensions. Both urban and agricultural colonists have need of houses, roads and bridges, etc., immediately on their arrival in the country; a land which has been neglected for centuries frequently needs extensive improvement works, particularly the drainage of swamps and irrigation, as a preliminary to occupying any piece of ground. Entire cities like Tel-Aviv and numerous modern suburbs to other towns were built up in the course of a few years. For all these considerable tasks there was need of a great number of navvies and building operatives, and only a small proportion of skilled workers was available among the Jews from countries outside Palestine. Besides, Palestinian native workmen were also almost wholly ignorant of modern building methods, *e.g.*, in reinforced concrete, and of up-to-date ways of quarrying and working stone. Thus the first years after the renewal of the immigration of Jewish workers, after the war, saw a process of introducing thousands of Jewish immigrants to manual labour at this trade, involving apprenticeship and gradual training. Owing to the urgency of the public works, which were first started immediately after the war, caused the diversion of most of the immigrants to road-making. Before the foundation of the "General Federation of Jewish Labour," the Labour parties established their own contracting offices for the execution of such works. Thus the contracting office of the "Ahduth Ha-avoda" in 1920 undertook from the Government the building of a road between Zemach, Tiberias and Migdal, along the Lake of Tiberias, a task which employed hundreds of workers for many months and resulted in a net gain of £5,000. When the General Labour Federation was founded it took over all the contracting offices of the parties, and created the Office for Public and Building Works, known by the name of "Jewish Co-operative Labour Association."

This co-operative undertaking of the workers became within a short time the most important building contractor in Palestine. So soon as the large road-making works of the

Government were finished, large building operations began in all the towns in the years 1922-3, culminating in 1925 in a new building boom, particularly in Tel-Aviv, where about 650 houses were built in a year. The office for Public and Building operations fulfilled a task of prime importance in transferring Jewish workers from roadmaking to building, in training thousands of skilled craftsmen in all branches of building, in fighting to secure the employment of organised Jewish labour and the maintenance of their standard of living by establishing reasonable wage-scales and conditions; since 1925, it had been registered as a limited company under the Co-operative Companies' Ordinance, with the name of "Solelboneh." It also acted as the first line of defence in the fight against unemployment undertaking many contracts with a view mainly to prevent unemployment.

The foundation of "Solelboneh" was almost contemporary with that of the English and German Co-operative Building Guilds. It handed over all works which it undertook to smaller co-operative units to carry out on their own responsibility; the central office received a certain percentage of the proceeds and retained the technical and financial control as well as the purchase of material. "Solelboneh" was continually aiming at an extension of its operations to the processes of manufacturing building materials and succeeded in founding or absorbing a number of builders' carpentry workshops and smithies, a factory for making cement pipes and tiles as well as a number of quarries.

In its turn "Solelboneh" was made into a subsidiary of "Histadruth" (General Labour Federation), the latter holding the Founders' Shares. By these means all the Workers even though not actively employed in the workers' co-operative undertaking were secured an influence over the co-operative activities, in accordance with the principles as to the relations between trade unions and co-operative movements laid down by the "Ahduth Ha-Avoda."

Within the period of six years, "Solelboneh" succeeded in carrying out works to the value of £1,455,000. The number of buildings erected in that time was 1,481 (including 843 dwellings, 14 factories, 3 theatres, 56 public buildings, 352 stables, etc.). About 100 miles of roadway, 45 miles of railway embankment, as well as an £85,000 drainage and reclaiming contract were part of their activities.

In Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, Haifa and Tiberias, "Solelboneh" undertook the erection of whole town-quarters. Of the whole of their output during that period (£267,161), 18.4 per cent. was on Government contracts, 25.4 per cent. was for private customers, 14.6 per cent. was done for Jewish colonisation societies, 14.6 per cent. for private buildings' companies,

and 11 per cent. were buildings for the Zionist Funds and the Jerusalem University. The remainder of their work was done to the order of various institutions, including building to the value of £39,757 for the Workers' institutions. These figures demonstrate that with the passing of years there was built up an increasing confidence on the part of potential customers in the performances of "Solelboneh"—the Jewish Co-operative Building Workers' Guild—resulting in an influx of orders of all kinds from public and private sources.

The figures of the workers constantly employed by "Solelboneh" vary between a maximum of 3,077 and a minimum of 1,300. Thousands of workers were taught the building trade and allied handicrafts through the "Solelboneh," which may claim almost the sole credit for the development of a sound body of skilled Jewish building craftsmen.

However great the debt of gratitude, which the Workers' Movement and the general progress of the country owes to the "Solelboneh," it was forced by the enormous difficulties, encountered in the critical year 1927 to suspend its activities at least for the time being: Of the difficulties there may be enumerated the lack of working capital which was not entirely remedied by the transformation of the office into a limited company, the competition of private employers, particularly in Government contracts, by the use of cheap unorganised labour, made possible by the absence of any protective legislation. There was also the fact that the Jewish workers had generally to learn the building trade only after joining "Solelboneh" and the cost of training the workers, which should have been covered out of the general Trade Union Funds, were the cause of material deficit to the Co-operative Guild. This was an important item, as no less than 5,000 building workers went through the school of "Solelboneh." Lastly, the working capital, already insufficient to its needs, was tied up in various undertakings and could not be easily realised. All these causes, besides a few lesser factors, compelled the interruption of the activities of an institution which was and still is of extreme importance for the workers. Its absence is only now felt most bitterly in a period of large public works undertaken by the Government, particularly as private contractors in Palestine are nowise competent to undertake contracts of any size, and the workers are still compelled to maintain small local contracting offices for the acceptance of contracts. Such a Workers' Contracting Office on a large scale, which shall be able to compete efficiently not by exploiting the workers, but on a basis of superior technical performance is manifestly required to cope with the large works which are bound to be undertaken within the immediate future as well as in the next few decades. No further argu-

ments need here be wasted to point out the Socialist value of this effort at nationalising one of the most important trades.

Owing to the great importance which the Co-operative Movement won in the building trades after the War (about 50-75 per cent. of all the building workers were employed by it in many places), the Building Workers' Union, which was founded in the first years after the War, could not at first attain proper development. The Trade Union developed greater activity in 1925, when it became necessary to protect the building workers' interests against the danger of depressed wages and longer working hours, threatened by the competition of numerous smaller building contractors. A series of strikes culminating in a lock-out of building operatives in Tel-Aviv, lasting six weeks, secured the workers' position and compelled the employers to make agreements, while strengthening the Trade Union and its local branches. Through the great wave of unemployment among building and unskilled workers in 1926, the Trade Union was naturally weakened and crippled in its activities. For several years it was affiliated to the Building Workers' International, Hamburg, but as periods of unemployment weakened its financial resources and "Solelboneh" ceased to operate, these relations were also allowed to lapse.

Now that a period of great building activity has again begun, the Union, to which are affiliated the Carpenters, Locksmiths, House-painters, Masons and Building-material and Transport Workers, might fitly be re-organised.

CHAPTER V.

**THE UNION OF RAILWAY WORKERS  
AND RELATIONS WITH ARAB  
WORKERS.**

## THE UNION OF RAILWAY WORKERS AND RELATIONS WITH ARAB WORKERS.

The Union of Railway, Post and Telegraph Workers is one of extreme importance. This is not so much because of its numbers (the Jewish membership is barely 400), but we have here an organisation covering an industry, almost unique through the fact that it employs both Jews and Arabs, banded together, with the Government for an employer, and has thus become the focus of the problem of relations between Jew and Arab, which has been demanding urgent solution ever since the country was thrown open to immigration and large numbers of Jewish workers entered Palestine.

The supreme importance of forming one union of Jewish and Arab workers was early recognised by the General Workers' Organisation, particularly by the Majority Party "Ahduth Ha-Avodah." On the other hand, there were obvious the enormous difficulties, which handicapped the speedy solution of this problem. One great obstacle to attempts at organising Arabs together with Jews is the wide social and cultural difference between them, and the masses of Jewish immigrants who on entering Palestine sophisticated by European standards of life and ideas came into contact with the Arab masses, still at a stage below illiteracy and with practically no demands on life. There was only a small element of real proletarians, *i.e.*, those entirely supported by labour for wages, without additional income from agricultural or other sources. As against this, labour conditions in the country, and more especially the securing of adequate conditions for all workers from such an important employer as the Government, necessitate the formation of a united battle-front of all the workers.

The Union of Railway, Post and Telegraph Workers was from its formation intended to be one inclusive union of workers employed in Government industries, but it was unable to fulfil its functions without internal difficulties. On the one hand, the Communists used every effort to divide the Union and win the Arab workers for their own purposes. On the other, the Arab Effendis and Nationalists strove unceasingly and not entirely without success to gain an influence over the Arab Workers. In spite of all these obstacles and internal battles,

the Union was nevertheless successful in beginning the struggle towards achieving its proper objects—the organisation of Labour and the amelioration of bad working conditions in this industry. As a result of uninterrupted battling with the Railway Administration, the Eight-Hour Day was made effective, as well as the annual holiday of one week, which stood in danger of being abrogated. On the other hand, all the efforts of the English Labour Party and of the International Transport Workers' Union which actively supported the Union in all other questions, failed to accomplish the recognition of the Union by the Government. Officially the Union was merely informed by the Government, that no difficulties would be put in its way to prevent it from organising the workers, but official recognition was still withheld. The Union is affiliated with the International Transport Workers' Union, with which it stands in close relations.

As a result of decisions at the third General Conference of the "General Labour Federation," the activities of Railway, Post and Telegraph Workers' Union were reorganised according to definite resolutions concerning the future joint organisation of Jewish and Arab workers.

Ahduth Ha-Avodah had long ago realised that the Jewish workers' struggle for a living wage was inseparably bound up with the problem of raising the standard of living among the Arab workers; they knew that the influx of national and private Jewish capital, in furthering the economic development of the country, would also stimulate economic progress among the Arabs and create a Workers' movement among them, the seeds of which are already visible in the cities.

Ahduth Ha-Avodah had therefore from the beginning given great attention to the question of organising the Arab workers, and now the General Labour Federation of Palestine supported every attempt by the Arab workers to organise, and even took the initiative in many attempts at organisation. This was done not only on the principle of general sympathy and Socialist solidarity, but through a clear realisation that it was necessary in the interests of the Jewish workers themselves to raise the standard of Arab living and wages. It was due to the Federation's support that the determined resistance of the employers was overcome in Haifa in 1925, in strikes of Arab Tailors and Carpenters, resulting in the reduction of working-hours from 14 to 9 hours per diem. Similar struggles (of Builders and Bakers) were carried to successful conclusion in Haifa by means of joint action. In succeeding years, Jewish and Arab workers co-operated in strikes in the match factory "Nur" in Akko, which lasted



3½ months, and at a strike in 1928 in the largest bakery in Jerusalem, employing 35 hands. In Haifa, a club for Arab workers was also opened with the help of the Federation, and served for many years as the centre of attempts to organise Arab workers. An Arab workers' weekly, called "Itachad el Ammal" (Union Labour), was published by the Federation for 2½ years, under the editorship of Comrade Benzevie, being the only regular workers' journal of any kind in Arabic which appeared regularly. This weekly dealt with all subjects of political and industrial life from the Socialist point of view and particularly supported the interests of the Railway Workers. It had a circulation of 700 copies, but was recently compelled to suspend publication owing to lack of means.

The third General Conference of the "General Workers' Federation" adopted the following resolutions on the subject of the joint organisation of Jewish and Arab workers:—

(1) This Conference views as an urgent necessity a co-ordination of activities between Jewish and Arab workers in all their common interests.

(2) As a premiss of their co-operation there must be positive recognition of the great importance and full justification of Jewish immigration into Palestine.

(3) To further these joint activities, it is resolved to form an "International League of Workers in Palestine," on the principle of autonomous national sections.

(4) The official languages of this League shall be Hebrew and Arabic.

(5) All the Jewish sections shall form organic parts of the "General Federation of Jewish Labour in Palestine," which shall continue unchanged by the formation of the International Federation.

All other national sections are equally entitled to form an autonomous Workers' Federation within the International League.

The formulation of these principles, fostered by the "Ahduth Ha-Avodah," also helped to lay the foundation for the reorganisation of a Railway Workers' Union. The latter's position in all questions of common interest to Arab and Jewish workers is that of one solid Union, composed of national sections, of which the Jewish ones are affiliated to the "General Federation of Jewish Labour in Palestine." Thus is also prepared a basis for the joint organisation of Arab and Jewish workers in the other industries, without either party gaining any advantage over the other by means of an accidental or permanent majority. Owing to the great cultural differences between the Jewish and Arab workers and to the existence of special aims peculiar

to the Jewish workers, such as Immigration, the transference into new trades and the colonisation of the land, a wide measure of autonomy is indispensable for the national sections within the joint Union. It will be a task of future years to give a real content to the framework thus created—a task which, in spite of the insuperable difficulties in the way of its fulfilment, is being recognised in its true and serious import by the great majority of Jewish workers.

CHAPTER VI.

**TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES AND  
THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS.**

## TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES AND THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS.

The Trade Unions' struggle to improve the working conditions of their members, with the effective support of the General Federation, has produced in the last few years results whose importance should not be undervalued.

The following victories which the Trade Unions have won by their persistent endeavours and not without a set-back or two may be mentioned as examples of their ceaseless strivings towards development :—

(1) They have organised 70–75 per cent. of all Workers and 90–95 per cent. in a number of industries, such as Building and Agriculture. The only classes of workers who are still incompletely or not at all organised are those whom it is universally recognised as difficult to organise, such as domestic servants and operatives in small industries, etc. To these must be added certain classes of Jews, originating from Oriental countries and resembling the Arabs in their cultural and social level.

(2) *The Eight-Hour Day.*—In industry, in the Building Trade, Agriculture, Transport, the Railway Service and many handicrafts, the eight-hour day has been brought into effect, almost without exception, and has been made the basis of agreements. The eight-hour day is as universal among male as among female workers. If we except those industries which tend towards handicraft, such as Baking, where ten hours are worked, we may make the general statement that those sections where the eight-hour day is exceeded are identical with unorganised labour. The Workers' Census of 1926 supported this by proving that, while 84 per cent. of the organised workers worked an eight-hour day, only 73 per cent. did so among the unorganised workers, so that the pressure of organised labour has secured the eight-hour day to almost three-quarters of the unorganised workers.

(3) The country has, as yet, only two Ordinances for protection of Labour, one placing certain restrictions on the exploitation of child labour, the other making the employer liable for accidents to workers (without, however, compelling him to insure). In spite of this absence of Government

control, most of the more important factories, as well as a number of building contractors, planters and public institutions, participate in the workers' Health Funds, a contribution equal to that of the worker or 2½ to 3 per cent. of the worker's wage being made by the employer. This achievement is likewise only the result of gradual pressure by organised labour; it gained popularity, however, as the employer realised that he was thereby freed from the responsibility of looking after sick workers. Even the Railway Administration recognises the certificates of the Health Insurance doctors. Many employers, including the Government, have taken out Employers' Liability Policies, especially since they became legally liable for compensation.

(4) Some time ago, the Federation introduced the Union Label, the exhibition of which was to be allowed to such factories as employed trade-union labour. During the few months since its invention, several of the largest boot-making and cigarette factories have taken it into use.

(5) The hardest battles fought in Palestine concerned the recognition of "The General Workers' Federation" as such and that of Works Councils in the various industries, as well as their right to a say in the engagement and dismissal of labour. Generally speaking, employers could only be brought to recognise the Federation after severe struggles. At its last Congress, the Zionist Organisation adopted a Special Resolution to recognise the Workers' Federation as the official representative of the workers. Similar resolutions were specially adopted by employers' organisations in various trades, while in others, the Federation was given *de facto* recognition. Fierce battles have been fought and are still continuing over the claim of the "Labour Exchange" of the Workers' Organisation, which is the only one in existence, to control the engagement of labour. Now, all national institutions, as well as a number of factories recruit their staffs through no other source but this. There are, however, many employers who fight against this. Many undertakings have made written agreements to recognise the works councils and only to dismiss or engage workers with its consent. Great advances have been made in this direction by the young Labour Movement in Palestine, where they compare favourably with many European organisations, which far outstrip them in numbers.

(6) It is the constant endeavour of the Labour Federation to secure to the workers such *minimum wages* as are necessary for the satisfaction of their most primitive standard of life. This could not always be achieved, and in periods of general unemployment a fall in wages could not be prevented. Agreements establishing *scales of wages* are in existence

between most factories and the General Federation or the Trade Unions. On many occasions, the General Federation has allowed its wage-policy to be modified by special considerations in the case of newly established enterprises ; later it has called for balance-sheets and an explanation of the undertaking's position ; and if the employers' demands did not seem to be justified by the circumstances, it has not hesitated to call a strike, which has always been carried out with great energy and remarkable solidarity by all the workers. In the plantations where competition by cheap unorganised Fellaheen labour depresses the level of wages, the wages question is particularly complicated. But even in these it has been possible to bring about a slow rise in the level of wages within the last few years. The Federation is fighting for the introduction of a statutory minimum wage by the Government. To its pressure and to the co-operation of the British Labour Party is to be attributed the introduction of a " fair-wages " clause in the contracts of public works for which a loan to the Palestine Government was sanctioned (such as the Harbour Works in Haifa). It is one of the objects of the Workers' Federation to make this " fair-wages " clause an actual fact in the land in the face of any obstacles which may arise.

Altogether, it may be said that the prudent but energetic policy of the Labour Federation has won it such achievements as are rarely to be found in other Oriental countries and which may compare favourably with the victories of Labour in many European lands. These conquests will gradually have to be developed and extended in an ever greater degree to include the Arab workers also.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE WORKERS' INSTITUTIONS.

“Hamashbir,” The Workers’ Agricultural  
Produce Selling Organisation, The Workers’  
Bank, The Health Fund.

## THE WORKERS' INSTITUTIONS.

### HAMASHBIR," THE WORKERS' AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE SELLING ORGANISATION, THE WORKERS' BANK, THE HEALTH FUND.

In a colonising country like Palestine, where the immigrating workers are deprived of all protection by social legislation and are in constant danger of being displaced by cheap unorganised labour, offering itself at any price, co-operative activities by the workers become indispensable to the conquest and consolidation of a secure position for the organised worker. For that reason, we may observe the development of co-operative methods of ownership and operation in agriculture, of Workers' Co-operatives and Building Guilds in the Building Trade. A description of the institutions created for the furtherance of these activities, the "Nir" and the "Solelboneh," has been given in the course of the account of the work of the Agricultural and Building Trade Unions. This chapter shall trace in brief the growth of the other important institutions occupied with the distribution of necessaries, the sale of commodities, social services and finance.

#### (1) *The Workers' Co-operative Wholesale and Retail Society "Hamashbir."*

As previously mentioned, "Hamashbir" was founded in 1916, halfway through the War, with the original object of buying grain during the harvest, when it was relatively cheap, selling it to the workers at cost price in times of scarcity, and thus checking the growing tendency towards speculation. The Institution, which was established with the scanty means of the workers themselves, fully succeeded in its object, and as a consequence extended its activities to other articles, raising its share capital accordingly as need arose. The sudden drop in the prices of food-stuffs, consequent on the conquest of the country by the English, brought the Institution temporarily into a difficult position from which it was rescued by the sacrificing spirit of the agricultural workers, who increased its share capital sufficiently to enable it to survive its embarrassments. Two years later



all its debts were paid and it was assured a favourable and continuous development to an ever-growing expansion.

The following figures give the annual turnover of "Hamashbir" since its foundation:—

1917 ..	£640	1921 ..	£92,024	1925 ..	£179,243
1918 ..	£3,652	1922 ..	£108,864	1926 ..	£209,713
1919 ..	£55,164	1923 ..	£108,965	1927 ..	£147,395
1920 ..	£28,794	1924 ..	£131,434		

It must be pointed out that the decline in the 1927 turnover is actually not so great as appears from the above table, as in the course of that year the textile department as well as the selling department for agricultural products in Jerusalem and Haifa, were separated from the main body of "Hamashbir," so that their turnover, to the value of about £20,000, is no longer included in the 1927 figures.

In any case, it is not to be wondered at that the general unemployment and consequent lower purchasing power of the workers during the crisis of 1927, which resulted in the suspension of "Soleboneh's" operations, necessitated by the circumstances, brought about a considerable setback in the steady upward trend of development. The steady expansion in the value of "Hamashbir's" turnover was nevertheless maintained, if we omit the year 1927, although its working capital stood at the ridiculously incommensurate amount of £8,456.

It might be of interest to give a few figures concerning the profit and loss balances shown by "Hamashbir" of recent years. The 1921 accounts closed with a profit of £3,279; those of 1922 with one of £2,916, and those of 1923 with £2,021; while 1924, which, like 1927, was a year of widespread unemployment, yielded a deficit of £1,520. A profit was again shown in the years 1925-6-7 of £1,651—£244 and £82 respectively. If we except the 1924 results, such returns leave no room for despair!

In its constitution, "Hamashbir" has many points of difference from European Co-operative Supply Societies. While these commonly sprang from amalgamations of smaller local societies, "Hamashbir" was founded to meet the needs of a centralised colonising movement and immediately expanded its activities to cover the whole of the country. Hence the administration is even now predominantly centralised; the head office does most of the buying and provides the branches with most of their supplies. The branches do not yet operate as independent undertakings, have even no capital of their own, but are worked according to the directions of the central Society. Local Co-operative Societies, which should work independent branches in each town at their own

risk, are only in process of slow gradual formation by the Central Society, there being no more than two such branches in actual operation.

A factor of no less importance than the above is that owing to circumstances, peculiar to a country in process of development like Palestine, "Hamashbir" was unable to put into effect the principle of distributing and paying out its profits proportionately to the purchases of its members. Instead it was compelled frequently to use its funds in order to give credit to agricultural and urban workers' groups, a particular example being when goods were delivered to the colonists in expectation of the budget guaranteed to them by the colonising authorities. The amount of credit, however, which had to be granted to urban worker customers could appreciably be reduced, the total of such credits being on the decrease and in a process of steady reduction.

One of the most important tasks carried out by "Hamashbir" was the furtherance of the selling organisation of the produce of the agricultural workers' settlements and the industrial co-operative undertakings. In 1926, "Hamashbir's" sales of home-produced goods were £98,648—47 per cent. of its total turnover; in this figure were included products of the agricultural workers' settlements to the value of £53,000. The distribution of milk in the towns is predominantly in "Hamashbir's" hands, and preparations are being made to create for it in Tel-Aviv its own modern cooling and pasteurising establishments. Two years ago the selling department for agricultural produce was made a separate administrative and accounting body distinct from "Hamashbir," and since then also maintains its separate shops at Haifa and Jerusalem. Its sales of milk-products were £35,000 in 1925, £45,000 in 1926, and £50,000 in 1927. A similar rise is noticeable in the sales of vegetables and eggs.

Important also is the foundation of a separate company called "Hamashbir-Textile" for selling articles of apparel. This company, in which private capital is also invested, has opened large modern stores in all the towns, and represents "Hamashbir's" first attempt to attract private capital for the promotion of co-operative selling.

Two central warehouses, thirteen branches, three dairies, one kitchen, and two special departments for the sale of vegetables are now run by "Hamashbir"; beside this there are the several branches of "Hamashbir-Textile" and the department for selling agricultural produce. While in European countries the Consumers' Co-operatives are mostly of local origin and the Producers' Co-operatives are usually initiated by the central wholesale organisation, the reverse has happened in Palestine: there, distribution has entirely

been organised from the centre, while the producers' co-operatives are mainly of independent origin to "Hamashbir," which, however, is entrusted with the sale of the greater part of their output.

At general meetings of "Hamashbir" shareholders the "Histadruth" has a controlling interest of more than half of the votes through the founders' shares in its possession.

"Hamashbir" has business relations with the English C.W.S. (Co-operative Wholesale Society), buying agricultural implements, chemical manures, etc., and is granted considerable credits by that institution. Its task is one of great importance, particularly to agriculture, but its value in the cities will continue to increase with time, as it will proceed to decentralise its administration and establish local branches in full realisation on Palestinian soil of the Rochdale principles.

## (2) *The Workers' Bank.*

With the assistance of the Zionist Organisation there was founded in 1921 the Workers' Bank (Bank Hapoalim)—that is to say, almost simultaneously with the first proposals to found such Workers' banks in America, Germany and Austria for Trade Union and Co-operative objects, but having no connection with any of these European models. The creation of such a credit institution for the especial needs of the Co-operative Movement was made absolutely indispensable by the organised activities of the workers, the requirements of undertakings like "Solelboneh" and "Hamashbir," whose lack of working capital forced them to depend mainly on credit, as well as by the growing of agricultural settlements. The greatest peril to the constructive policy of organised workers, with their peculiar needs, is the menace to their institutions, caused by dependence on the usual credit agencies and capitalist banks. The truism of this generalisation was fated to be realised in the experience of the Palestinian Labour Movement.

Among the duties of the Workers' Bank in Palestine are included the constant encouragement of the increase in the number of workers in the country, the consolidation and gradual expansion of all the economic agencies of the workers and their eventual transference to the full Workers' ownership. The statutes thus describe the objects of the bank: "the rendering of all financial and other assistance to Workers' institutions, societies or groups, which may be founded for the support of their members on a co-operative basis."

The Bank carries out its object by giving credits to the co-operative institutions and undertakings of the Workers; in the case of advances to agricultural groups the budgets

granted them by the colonising authorities act as security, while loans are granted to building co-operatives on the security of their contracts with their clients. The operations of the Workers' Bank also embrace the Industrial Co-operatives, "Hamashbir," the Workers' Loan and Savings Societies, the Life Insurance Company, "Hassneh," and other institutions of similar nature. In addition, the customary banking business, remittances, etc., are transacted, but as a general rule no direct credits are granted to individuals.

In accordance with the original agreement between the Bank and the Zionist Organisation, the initial capital was £30,000, including 100 Founders' Shares. The latter are owned by the General Labour Federation and give it 50 per cent. of the votes at a general meeting and four of the seven directorships, thus also securing the Workers' control of the Bank. Besides, 14,900 members' shares and 15,000 preference shares were issued. In the first year of its working the Bank received from the Zionist Organisation a loan of £39,000; of this amount the Zionist Organisation pledged itself to convert £1,000 into preference shares for every thousand pounds in ordinary shares sold by the General Workers' Federation. After a lapse of 12 years, the whole amount of the loan was to be converted into preference shares of the Jewish Colonial Trust, Limited, and the ownership of the Bank should pass entirely to the Workers. With the help of the American "Poale-Zion" party, however, the workers succeeded in placing the full share capital of £40,000 within six years, so that this present year already sees the banks in the sole ownership of the Workers, its present share capital being £80,000.

The following table shows the total of advances granted by the Bank during the first five years of its working (1921-6).

To the Office for Public and Building operations—			
" Solelboneh "	..	..	.. £257,000
To Urban Co-operatives	..	..	.. £194,000
To Agricultural Workers' Settlements	..		.. £189,000
To Sundry Workers' Institutions (" Ham-ashbir," Health Fund, etc.)	..	..	.. £124,000
To sundry advances	..	..	.. £22,000
			£786,000
Total	..	..	.. £786,000

The total transactions of the Bank's during these five years amounted to £7½ millions, including £1,641,725 in 1926 alone.

The prudent conduct of the Bank business in granting advances only against ample security resulted in showing

a nett profit year after year, after allowing for interest on loan, general expenses, etc., as shown in the following figures:

NETT PROFIT.					
In 1922	..	£675	In 1925	..	£5,300
„ 1923	..	£2,100	„ 1926	..	£4,100
„ 1924	..	£3,100	„ 1927	..	£4,700

which were appropriated as follows:—

£9,000 to Reserve Fund.

£2,900 in Dividends to shareholders.

£2,400 for the needs of the Institutions of the General Workers' Federation.

£400 as appropriation for the Jewish National Fund.

The total deposits were as follows:—

1926	..	£26,047	1927	..	£26,737
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To-day, the Workers' Bank has struck firm roots in the Workers' economic life and its non-existence would be inconceivable. There is no institution or undertaking by the Workers which does not depend on its advances. The rapidity with which the Jewish Workers in Palestine and abroad realised the true importance of the Bank is proved by the quick sale of its shares.

### (3). *The Palestine Workers' Fund.*

However great the importance of the Workers' Bank, there can be no doubt that an institution which had to restrict itself to the granting of short-term loans could not adequately satisfy the financial needs of the Palestinian Workers in their—particularly constructive—task of colonisation. The Workers require the creation of a capital fund of their own which serves the purposes of an investment fund, finding money for the agricultural as well as social and cultural institutions of the workers and giving long-term credits. This fund might also participate in financing such projects where dividends and even interest on capital must be long deferred, as is often the case in the circumstances of a country in process of development, where the economic system has to be built up out of nothing. For these purposes the Jewish Socialist Labour Confederation Poale-Zion founded the *Palestine Workers' Fund*, before the War, its activities in Palestine beginning in 1912. At that time, comparatively small resources were placed at its disposal by the various affiliated parties of the Poale-Zion in various countries and thus the objects pursued were those of this Workers' movement which was then only in its early stages. When the General Labour Federation came into existence, a number of objects were dropped from the fund's activities, as these were taken over by

the machinery of the General Labour Federation and its various institutions. The fund was gradually put into a position to concentrate on its proper objects, the investment of capital in co-operative and other undertakings of the Workers.

As a logical conclusion to the transfer of all the Workers' industrial, colonising, social and cultural activities from the control of the Capital Parties and their consolidation in the hands of the General Labour Federation, the latter also took over from the Poale-Zion the Palestine Workers' Fund. Since 1925 the management of the Fund has been shared equally by the General Labour Federation and the "Central Committee of the Leagues for Palestine Workers."

These leagues are the organs which, in closest co-operation with the Palestine Workers' Fund, unite all the groups in other countries which strive for the cause of working-class Palestine. Of peculiar importance in this connection is the growing sympathy of the great Jewish Trades Unions in America with the pioneer development of the Palestine Labour Movement. For the first time in 1924, and similarly in 1926-7-8, successful "Drives" were organised by the American Jewish Trades Unions with the help of special delegations of representatives of the Palestinian Workers.

In the course of its existence, until January, 1928, the Palestine Workers' Fund has collected a sum of about £100,000, and made investments to a total of £107,000 in Palestine, the money being received mainly in small amounts from the Workers.

#### INCOME OF THE PALESTINE WORKERS' FUND.

In 1912 to 1917 ..	£5,750	1920 to 1923 ..	£32,432
1918 to 1919 ..	7,515	1924 to 1925 ..	10,985
1926 to 1927 ..	£7,788		

From the Trade Union campaigns in America .. £34,010.

The investments of the Palestine Workers' Fund may be classified as follows:—

	% of Total	£
<i>Agriculture</i> .. .. .	11.9	12,728
<i>Machinery</i> for agriculture and Industry (specially collected in America in 1921)	7.6	8,121
<i>Urban Industry</i> (Industrial co-operatives, technical education, etc.) ..	26.6	28,516
<i>Workers' Institutions</i> (Health fund, education and cultural work, workers' kitchens and homes, trades union and organising activities) .. .. .	32.6	34,986
<i>War Time Relief-work</i> (political, social and organising work) .. .. .	10.5	11,185
<i>Administration Expenses</i> .. .. .	10.8	11,589

The difference between income and expenditure was covered by loans. The Palestine Workers' Fund rendered particularly valuable assistance at the establishment of Co-operative Workers' Settlements in Upper Galilee, the development of industrial co-operative undertakings, the support of the early progress of the Trades Unions and many other Workers' institutions, as well as through its extensive relief work among Palestine Workers during the War.

The Fund will undoubtedly have an important place in the Workers' progress in the future. It furnishes the initial support for many pioneer attempts and for the organised activities of the Workers in Socialistic and Co-operative fields.

#### (4) *The Workers' Health Fund.*

Among the institutions founded by the Labour Movement in Palestine, the Workers' Health Fund occupies a peculiar position. In addition to its numerous other tasks Labour was forced by the absence of any provisions by the employers or any state health insurance, to undertake on its own initiative the social and sanitary work which were necessary in a newly colonised country with a warm climate and neglected sanitary conditions.

The beginnings of the Workers' Health Fund may be traced back to 1913. With the establishment of the General Labour Federation, the Fund was also taken up by the latter and has had its activities constantly extended and developed ever since.

The Health Fund is predominantly maintained by the Workers' contributions, which average 55 per cent. of its annual income. The employers, who have no legal obligation to contribute, could only be persuaded after a fierce struggle to make the proper employers' contributions. Although, however, all important employers do contribute, this amounts to but a fraction of the total budget. The discrepancy is made up by the Zionist Organisation and the medical organisation "Hadassah"; while the Government adopts an entirely passive attitude towards the Health Fund, in spite of its manifest achievements and the pioneer character of its social work.

The Fund's services include medical assistance (also visits in the patients' homes), subsidies for journeys made necessary by medical reasons, the dispensing of medicines, partial or entire support during illness, and also midwifery. Medical assistance is also extended to the dependents of a member of the Health Fund. The assistance of the Fund is granted equally to its unemployed members as it is not an independent institution but a unit of the General Federation. Payments to the Health Fund are calculated at 2-3 per cent. of the

earnings of each member, graduated according to his income. Only members of the General Labour Federation are admitted.

The expenditure of the Fund in 1927 amounted to £50,000, and was made up as follows :—

	Percentage of total.	£
Medical assistance .. .. .	60.4	30,397
Midwifery .. .. .	3.5	1,571
Assistance for convalescence .. .. .	4.0	2,000
Maintenance during illness .. .. .	9.7	4,854
Management and doctors' fees .. .. .	13.5	6,770
Chronic invalids and sundries .. .. .	8.9	4,477

The expansion of the Health Fund may be gauged by the increase in membership :

In 1921 ..	3,200	In 1924 ..	8,100
In 1922 ..	5,700	In 1925 ..	12,350
In 1923 ..	6,000	In 1926-7 ..	15,360

If one takes into consideration the fact that the Fund also serves the families of members, it will appear that about one-fifth of the country's Jewish population receives medical assistance from the Fund.

Simultaneously, there was a rapid increase in the staff employed by the Fund : from 74 employees in 1923 it rose to 85 in 1924, 110 in 1925 and 148 in the last two years. These consisted of 66 doctors, 44 dispensers, and 68 nurses and other medical staff, although certain reductions were made in 1928.

The institutions owned by the Health Fund comprise the Workers' Sanatorium, "Arza," near Mozah, and a sanatorium on the Mount Carmel, a central hospital at Ein-Harod serving the whole Emek-Jervéel, which is just being housed in a new building near Afule, a central store for medicines, three district and 49 local ambulances, three full time dispensaries, as well as various temporary hospitals and local dispensaries. The number of patients treated in the district ambulances amounted to 280,255 in 1926, whilst it was still higher in the local ambulances. The Health Fund operates in all parts of Palestine where Jewish Workers are employed. Of great importance is its service in newly colonised places, where fevers and other illnesses are more frequent.

The special requirements of its members, as well as financial and administrative considerations, have caused the Health Fund to concentrate its efforts more and more on running its own ambulances and to quite a considerable degree on its own hospitals. The Workers are proudly conscious of the fact that they have by their own strength and



initiative opened up this most important branch of social service for themselves. Their demand is, therefore, none the less insistent that the Government should at least realise its obligations towards the working population and come to the assistance of the Health Fund both by direct financial subsidies and by making contributions from the employers legally compulsory.

CHAPTER VIII.

**CO-OPERATIVE INDUSTRY.**

## CO-OPERATIVE INDUSTRY.

A much later phenomenon was the Workers' active participation in the beginnings of productive industry. There reigned among the Workers the general idea that the building up of the towns and industrialisation should for the most part be left to private capital. But just as in the building movement so did circumstances compel the urban workers to take an active part in the problem of industrialisation. For various reasons, private capitalists could not make full use of the opportunities which offered themselves in Palestine, and thus it became possible for skilled workers to establish handicraft undertakings, as well as smaller and even larger factories. The necessary working capital could only be raised by the financial participation of the Workers themselves, and thus the co-operative form was naturally found to be the most suitable for such undertakings. It is a well-known fact that Workers' movements are most reluctant to undertake co-operative production in those countries which are highly advanced in capitalist development and that, in spite of the hopes which Proudhon, Lassalle, and others placed upon such efforts, the results from them were not at all favourable. Like many other problems, however, this one is also differently circumstanced in Palestine than elsewhere. Here, we have not as yet that oppressive competition which exists in a large industry of many years' development. The problem of capital and finance was again solved in many cases by the Palestine Workers' Fund and the Workers' Bank, and thus the co-operative undertakings suffered relatively little from the capitalist banks' refusal to give credit. A suitable solution is also on the way to completion of that most difficult problem in co-operative activities, that of internal discipline; all co-operative institutions are being placed under the secure control of the whole body of Workers by definite clauses in their statutes. One thing must be kept in mind: that the policy of founding such co-operative undertakings was never in Palestine discussed abstractly. They arose in considerable numbers by the simple initiative and impulse throughout the movement of the members, and only petitioned for the assistance of the general movement after their formation.

The General Labour Federation considered as one of its

duties the furtherance of this movement, its control by active collaboration and its guidance in the right direction for the benefit of the whole community.

The first industrial co-operative undertakings arose, immediately after the Armistice, by the help of the Palestine Workers' Fund; from 1918 to 1922 there were founded altogether 11 such undertakings. These co-operative works operated at first almost without any outside assistance, with insufficient means and without expert management, and so could only have a slow development with many set-backs. Nevertheless their numbers grew steadily, and there were 17 working in 1923. A new impulse was given to the movement by the Workers' Council of Tel-Aviv, which, in 1925, appointed a special committee for the purpose of aiding the development of these undertakings by guidance, control and financial support. From that time onwards, particularly in Tel-Aviv, the expansion of the movement proceeded more rapidly, and particularly during the crisis from 1926 to 1927 a large number of new undertakings began operations.

In the spring of 1928 there were :—

In Tel-Aviv	34	co-operative undertakings of	426	members
In Haifa ..	7	" "	59	"
In Jerusalem	5	" "	50	"
In other colonies	6	" "	30	"

52 co-operative undertakings of 565 members.

In addition to the above, there are approximately 10 other co-operative undertakings in the country which are outside the control of the Central Co-operative Organisation; these include several co-operative fisheries. A rough classification of co-operative industries in Tel-Aviv will give some idea of the trades which they practise.

	No. of Undertakings.	No. of Members.
<i>In the metal trades</i> —Forges to the building trade, bedstead factories, smithies and carriage works .. .. .	5	70
<i>Manufacture of personal apparel</i> —Tailoring, boot-making, embroidery, etc. .. .. .	5	31
<i>Printing works</i> .. .. .	2	75
<i>Transport undertakings</i> .. .. .	6	175
<i>Manufacture of ploughs, brushes, brooms, soap, etc.</i> .. .. .	6	23
<i>Manufacture of building material</i> .. .. .	2	9
<i>Sundry small industries</i> —Carpenters' shops, bakeries, hairdressers, etc... .. .	8	43
Total .. .. .	34	426

Of the co-operative undertakings working in Haifa, three are carpenters' workshops, one forge, one factory of building materials, one lime kiln, and one plumber. In Jerusalem there are two plumbers, one carpenters' workshop, one boot-maker and one printer.

Many of the co-operative undertakings, such as the printers in Tel-Aviv, are among the foremost of the land; in Haifa the carpenters' workshop and the forge are some of the biggest undertakings in the town and the co-operative bedstead factory is the largest of its kind in the country. In Tel-Aviv almost the whole of the transport industry is organised on a co-operative basis.

As a result of this development in the co-operative movement as well as owing to the absence of uniform leadership and adequate working capital (the total capital of all co-operative undertakings in 1927 amounted to no more than £25,000), the Central Council of the General Labour Federation saw it opportune to elect a special "Central Committee for Co-operative Undertakings," consisting of three nominees of the General Workers' Federation and two representatives of the co-operative concerns. Besides the constant guidance and control of all co-operative undertakings, including the supervision of their accounts, the duties of this Central Committee include the creation of a co-operative fund to be used for long term credits, short term credits being provided by the Workers' Bank. The resources of this fund are to be supplied by the Palestine Workers' Fund. Every co-operative concern has its own small working capital contributed by the members. A further task of the Central Committee is the supervision of the co-operative constitution of the various concerns, and for this purpose a draft statute was worked out and approved by the Government, fixing the rights and duties of members and of the General Federation. Among the various matters regulated by this constitution are the admission and resignation of members, their obligations when resigning, or if expelled, the distribution of profits (50 per cent. of the nett profit goes as a statutory appropriation to the reserve fund, 10 per cent. to the General Labour Federation and only the balance of 40 per cent. is distributable to the members). The Central Committee has also to promote the sale of the output produced, in the first place through the agency of "Hamashbir" and "Hamashbir Textile"; it negotiates co-operative purchases, etc. The wages paid by the co-operative concerns usually follow the current market rates, but there are also a few undertakings in which equal wages are paid to every member of the staff.

Although the co-operative productive industries of Palestine are developing on more hopeful lines than their

older equivalents in Europe the Palestinian Workers are under no illusion that they are likely to become a decisive factor in Palestinian industries or that they can compare in size and importance with the co-operative undertakings in Agriculture or the Building Guilds. With these latter, however, they have one thing in common, that they facilitate and promote the entry of hundreds of Jewish Workers into new branches of production.

CHAPTER IX.

**THE WORKERS' ACTIVITIES IN THE  
EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL  
FIELDS.**

## THE WORKERS' ACTIVITIES IN THE EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL FIELDS.

Throughout the Workers' movement of the whole world, it is beginning to be universally recognised that the Workers' political and economic achievements can only serve to bring them nearer to their goal if they are accompanied by an extensive activity in the educational and cultural field. This is especially true of the Jewish Workers in Palestine. Extraordinary demands are made on the intelligence and resolution of the workers by the very difficult circumstances ruling in a country in process of being colonised and absorbing an immigrant population and by the variety and pioneering character of the work to be done. There is the remarkable fact that 4.4 per cent. of the Jewish Workers in Palestine have had a university education, and 40.4 per cent. have passed through secondary schools. These figures are typical of the radical transfer from class to class, and of the process of proletarianisation through which the young Jews from Eastern Europe are at present passing in Palestine. On the other hand, there are entering Palestine in quite considerable numbers, particularly from the surrounding oriental countries—Kourdistan, Mesopotamia, and Persia—a class of workers who resemble the native Sephardic Jews in having very little or no education at all, and being for the most part unable to read or write. This description applies particularly to the offspring of the poorest classes of these oriental or native Jews, who have had to begin working for a living at a very early age. Just as there are great differences in education among the immigrants, so there exists a farrago of languages and dialects brought from their countries of origin.

All these circumstances combine to make the duties of the cultural committee of the General Labour Federation extraordinarily complex. They must attend to the education of the children in the agricultural Workers' settlements and partly to that of the urban workers' children, no less than to the cultural development of the generation of young Workers growing up. It is their task to acquaint the adult immigrant Worker with the history, natural science and economics of



Palestine, and to give such of them as are ignorant of Hebrew the possibility of obtaining a thorough knowledge of the language. Lectures, courses, etc., are necessary to acquaint them with the history and problem of the International, the Jewish and the Palestinian Workers' Movements. Workers' clubs must be founded, and the opportunity given to the Workers of reading books; concerts and theatre performances have to be organised for the promotion of art. In addition to all these, provision has to be made for the specialist technical training of the Workers. In short, an undeveloped country like Palestine presents the cultural committee with the most difficult and intricate tasks, which have to be approached with such scanty resources as are available.

#### (a) CULTURAL WORK AMONG ADULT WORKERS.

In this section must be mentioned first of all the evening classes in which the Workers are taught the Hebrew language and literature and the history and problem of the Palestinian Workers' Movement. These classes, held in 27 localities, were visited in 1926 by 4,085 pupils; in 1927 there were 3,440 pupils at 31 schools. Workers form 75 per cent. of the attendance at the schools. Next worthy of mention are excursions to places distinguished by historical association or beautiful scenery, at which thousands of Workers take part. A further branch of activity consists of single lectures and periodical Labour Seminaries. In the course of the three years 1924-1927, there were organised by the Central Cultural Committee, in addition to local arrangements, 610 lectures on various social and literary problems attended by many thousands of students. In the towns there are held regular courses of lectures for Trade Union secretaries, and others, dealing with the problems of the Workers' Movement in Palestine and abroad. There are also held every year technical courses for Workers in the various trades (bricklayers, concrete workers, electricians, carpenters, masons, tailoresses, and seamstresses). Instruction is given in drawing, geometry, and algebra, as well as other subjects, suitable for the respective trades.

A particularly valuable asset is the central library containing 70,000 books in various languages, of which 69 per cent. are in Hebrew, 12 per cent. in German, 8 per cent. in Russian, 7 per cent. in Yiddish, and 4 per cent. in English. Half of the books have been purchased by the Cultural Committee, the other half being presents. The library has 80-90 branches, established near the labour centres, among which the books circulate to a regular circle of readers number-

ing 5,500. Reading rooms have been established by the Cultural Committee, 39 of which are in agricultural districts. In these reading rooms are placed newspapers and periodicals from all countries.

An account might here aptly be given of the publishing activities of the Workers, initiated by the General Labour Federation and the various parties.

On 1st June, 1925, the General Labour Federation began the publication of a daily paper *Davar* ("The Word") this appears in 5,000 copies and by its vivid and accurate reports on all political happenings and problems of the Workers' movement in Palestine and abroad, has become an efficient educative instrument and a useful weapon in the Workers' struggles. In addition, the various trade unions, such as the Railwaymen and Agricultural Workers, have their own publications. Weekly journals emanate from the different parties; the organ of the "Ahduth Ha-Avoda" is *Kuntress* ("The Pamphlet").

In the course of its activities, the Agricultural Committee has brought out 21 books in Hebrew within the last two years; among the works are several by Lassalle, Kropotkin, and other writers of international fame, and also books on the Palestinian Workers' Movement, technical books for various trades, etc. In addition to distributing these books, the Agricultural Committee organised a special section to allow the Workers to purchase useful books at low prices in other languages.

Among the other activities of the Committee among adult Workers, we must not neglect to mention the establishment of a Workers' theatre "Ohel" ("The Tent"), whose members are Workers, who by dint of painstaking preparations have managed to produce a Workers' theatre esteemed for its artistic efforts throughout the land. In the short time since its formation "Ohel" has produced three pieces; some one-act plays on themes composed by J. L. Perez; "The Lost Hope," by Heyermanns; and "Jacob and Rachel," by Krashminikov.

The support of the Cultural Committee has also been given to the Workers' sport movement as a factor in the physical development of the Workers. A Workers' Sports Association "Hapoel" ("The Worker") is in existence, affiliated to the Zurich Sports International, and has expanded favourably in the last few years.

#### (b) CHILDREN'S EDUCATION.

The Committee's activities amongst juveniles may be divided into two sections: the care for the Workers' children and for the juvenile workers.

School attendance is not compulsory in Palestine. The Hebrew educational system, with its 18,000 pupils, is maintained by the Jewish population with the help of the Zionist Organisation, the latter contributing about half of the total budget and administering the schools. Although the Jewish school children are 40 per cent. of all those in the country, the Government has for years treated the Jewish schools as private establishments, and has subsidised them to a maximum of 2 to 3 per cent. of their expenditure. Only last year, this subsidy was increased to approximately 15 per cent. The Hebrew educational administration recognises three autonomous pedagogic schools systems: the general non-sectarian, the religiously orthodox, and the labour schools. In the towns the Workers' children mostly go to the non-sectarian schools; only in Tel-Aviv, there exists a school for Workers' children conducted by the Cultural Committee of the General Labour Federation. As a contrast to this, the whole educational system in the Workers' settlements is controlled by the Cultural Committee and includes kindergarten schools. This is a fact of no mean import in its effect on the education of the future generation, the formation of intimate ties with the land, with agriculture, and with the Workers' movement.

The expansion of the educational system may also with interest be observed from a numerical point of view. In 1923 there were 8 kindergartens and 7 elementary schools with 153 children under 15 teachers. By 1927 the numbers had increased to 908 children in 68 kindergartens and 12 elementary schools under 61 teachers. The subjects taught have been adapted to the practical needs and circumstances of the country, and the teaching is carried out on the principles of co-educational and Workers' schools.

It was necessary to provide a thorough elementary and technical education for juveniles over the age of 12, and to combine it with a training in agriculture and handicraft. This would have been difficult to accomplish in small settlements where the number of children was relatively small, and so the committee proceeded to establish a central school in the Emek-Jezreel to carry out this important purpose. The first buildings on the hill of Kumi in the valley of Jezreel, in which this school is going to be housed, have already been begun.

Training courses in the various subjects have been provided by the committee to assure a supply of teachers for the schools. In this brief account it is naturally impossible to enter fully into the important fact that a whole generation is being brought up in the Workers' settlements in the spirit of the movement and according to the principles of modern

pedagogy although the details would have been of value and interest to the International Labour Movement.

### (c) THE ORGANISATION OF JUVENILE WORKERS.

In the welfare work among the urban juvenile Workers, who had until then been completely neglected, the activities of the committee are increasing in extent and importance. There are thousands of children in the towns, who go to work at a very early age and thus are deprived of all chances of education. Only recently a Government ordinance gave some small measure of protection against the use of child labour. Out of small beginnings consisting in the formation of clubs, educative courses, etc., the efforts of the cultural committee, as well as of the whole Workers' movement, succeeded in building up within a few years a considerable organisation of juvenile Workers. Its construction is on a trade-union model with its own trades sections affiliated to the General Trade Unions, and does good work in the fields of education, training and organisation. By means of stern fighting considerable improvements were achieved in the economic situation of the juvenile Worker by shortening his hours of labour and raising his wages, particularly in Tel-Aviv and Haifa. In all parts of the country such trade sections were established, efforts were made to arouse the Government to pass legislation for the protection of juvenile labour, to combat unemployment in its ranks and to transfer a certain number of young Workers to agriculture in groups of their own.

There is being developed an active educative effort by means of courses, lectures, technical courses and debating evenings, etc. Most localities have juvenile Workers' clubs with their own premises. All these activities for juvenile education centre in the schools for young Workers, which in 1927 were visited by 571 youths. The subjects taught comprise all branches of elementary education and go as far as technical courses, the teaching hours being in the evening after work.

To-day the organisation of juvenile Workers has 2,000 members in 19 localities; Tel-Aviv, the largest centre, has 8 trades sections. The Workers of extremely tender age belong to the boy scout movement, which is affiliated to the Young Workers' Movement and in 1927 had 614 members.

When the juveniles attain the age of 17 and leave the Juvenile Workers' Organisation for the General Labour Federation, a great number of them become members of the Association of Young Socialists, which is an organic part of the "Ahduth Ha-Avoda," and continues the educative

influence on the expressly Socialist principles maintained by the "Ahduth Ha-Avoda."

In the course of several years the Cultural Committee's budget varied between £12,000 to £16,000, and was covered by contributions from the General Labour Federation from the resources of the Palestine Workers' Fund, the Trade Union campaigns in America, by the Zionist Organisation and the People's Relief Committee in New York.

CHAPTER X.

**THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AND  
THE GOVERNMENT.**

## THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT.

In the preceding chapter, we have repeatedly demonstrated the high scale of creative activity on the part of the Workers in the field of organising, colonising and co-operative effort, and have explained that it was found impracticable to concentrate solely on the task of fighting on orthodox trade-union lines for improving the Workers' conditions. The peculiar position of this Workers' movement has also been alluded to, in that it was compelled to act as a driving force in the colonisation of a country which it found at a low stage of economic, social and political development. The inactive attitude of the Government towards social legislation and its frequently laggard and reactionary policy in the economic field, especially in Customs and Excise, in the ruthless employment of the police against the Workers in struggles on wages and economic questions, as well as through the reactionary electoral system in all the municipalities except Tel-Aviv, which deprived the workers of all influence on their administration—all these obstacles made the Workers' struggle a very difficult one, and made the removal of all these embarrassments the goal of the Palestine Workers' efforts.

As early as 1923 the Second Conference of the General Labour Federation had adopted resolutions dealing with the country's social legislation. In 1924 the executive of the General Labour Federation approached the Government with three carefully worked-out proposals for legislation which should serve as the first steps towards codifying the employers' liability for accidents, a measure of protection for women and children, and the statutory introduction into industry of the eight-hour day. An intensive propaganda was simultaneously started by the Workers in the Press and in foreign countries. In this they had the willing assistance of the British Labour Party, the International Trades' Union Federation and the International Labour Bureau in Geneva. All this combined pressure finally succeeded in breaking the apathetic attitude of the Government and putting an end to the antediluvian lack of even the most elementary legislation for the protection of labour, although the improvement was far from adequate. At the end of 1926 the Government published an ordinance governing the liability of the employer for accidents, modelled on English legislation; this compelled the employer to give compensation for accidents except in agriculture, but did not

enforce insurance. At the end of the following year there came another ordinance for the protection of women and children which, even in its present form, can only be regarded as an initial instalment and is far behind similar legislation which has long been universal in Europe. This law prohibits the use of child labour in industry up to the age of 12, and limits the working hours for juveniles between 12 and 15 years old to 8 hours. The ordinance further prohibits night work by women and children up to the age of 16. Shortly after the Government published a further ordinance which contains the first element of factory inspection.

These laws are considered by the Workers as the first step to a complete system of protective labour legislation in Palestine, but they will not be satisfied with such a scanty instalment of recognition for their just rights. The Third General Conference of the General Labour Federation, held in July, 1927, formulated the following demands for legislation :—

- (1) A law to fix a minimum wage, in the first place securing a standard of life for the Workers in all the Government and Municipal services.
- (2) The freedom of combination and the right to strike.
- (3) The recognition of the Trades Unions as the representatives of the Workers.
- (4) The statutory enactment of the Eight-hours Day.
- (5) The creation of Factory Inspectorships with the participation of Workers' representatives.
- (6) Participation by the Government in the budget of the Workers' Health Fund.

A committee of three members, one of whom was Comrade J. Benzvi, was recently appointed by the Government to go into the question of minimum wages for unskilled Workers. It has, however, become obvious that it is not intended to make any changes in present conditions, as the Government has shown itself in its own undertakings to work on the principles of cheapness and " free competition," as a champion of exploitation; its contracts are awarded only to firms which employ the very cheapest labour, including women and children.

Under the pressure of the British Labour Party, the British Government, on the occasion of the granting of a considerable loan to the Palestinian Government, of which a large part was to be used for the harbour works at Haifa and other public undertakings, made the concession that the contracts for the work carried out with this money should contain a " fair-wage " clause. It will be for the Workers to see that this concession does not remain a mere paper promise.



The employment of cheap labour and of agricultural Workers, transported during their slack season from the most distant parts of the country to the sites of Government works, goes hand-in-hand with the Government's avowed policy of backing the employers in the conflicts with the Workers and of offering every facility to the strike-breakers, who were brought into every wages dispute.

This attitude has frequently led to sanguinary interference by the police, to absolutely unprovoked baton-charges, involving numerous casualties and arrests. A special strike ordinance, besides other laws, relics of the Turkish *régime*, make it possible for the Government and the police to intervene in every industrial dispute on the employers' side. The Third General Conference made a protest against these ordinances, as well as against the primitive conditions in the prisons, where no exception is made to this day in favour of political "criminals" and arrested strikers to exempt them from compulsory labour, corporal punishment and the use of handcuffs.

The Workers were equally unable to avoid disagreement with the Fiscal Administration, which works on legislation, taken over with but few amendments from the Turkish *régime*. Until now, agriculture is very heavily burdened by the so-called "tithe" on the yield of the land, which makes no allowances for losses, or troubles to ascertain the actual nett yield obtained by the farmer from his work. In this age of radical agrarian reform in many countries of the world, the lot of the Palestinian farmer remained almost unchanged, with hundreds of thousands of acres in the hands of a small body of great landlords, while the small tenants eke out a bare existence under a burden of debt, enslavement and misery. Of recent years, the fiscal legislation was also a great obstacle to the development of numerous branches of industry, and was gravely prejudicial to the interests of the industrial Workers.

The Third General Conference of the General Labour Federation felt itself under the obligation to register its policy with regard to all the above problems. In place of the tithe, which is ruinous to agriculture, it demanded the introduction of a graduated land-tax; further, the system of taxing urban land should be altered, new settling undertakings should be exempted from taxation in the first years of their existence, etc. Definite demands were likewise advanced for the amendment of the customs and transport rates, particularly on agricultural implements and produce. The Government was also asked to hand over State lands for colonisation by Jewish settlers, in accordance with the terms of the Mandate, and to give adequate assistance to industry.

The Fourth Conference of "Ahduth Ha-Avodah in 1924 had already clearly defined the Workers' attitude towards the problems of agrarian legislation. The pressure of public opinion has even succeeded, of recent years, in obtaining improvements in some of the above directions.

One of the complicated problems, in which the Workers come into collision with the Government's obstinate opposition, is that of representative local administration, which would be a preliminary step to the extension of self-government to the whole country. Eighteen months ago the Government published an Ordinance excluding women and citizens who were not landowners from the suffrage and placing municipal rule practically in the hands of a small body of land and house proprietors. Not content with that, it even devised such a special system of elections by electoral colleges, as makes it possible for the voters of one group to influence the elections in another, and easily results in sowing dissension between the various national groups. This electoral law was condemned by the third General Conference, which demanded the introduction of the universal vote for all citizens over the age of twenty, with a system of proportional representation and the abolition of all distinctions of nationality, class or sex. Among the other demands of organised Labour, are the introduction of a progressive and equitable system of taxation, a diversion of some of the fiscal funds for the benefit of the Workers' masses and for social welfare purposes, a check to the unlimited exploitation of urban labour, the reduction of unemployment by means of public works to be undertaken by the municipalities.

In conclusion, mention may be made of the struggle which the "Histadruth" has long been waging, particularly during the crisis of 1926 and 1927, in order to compel the Government to co-operate in measures against unemployment. In spite of the proven fact that the Government benefited by the increase in the Jewish population during 1924-26, through a surplus on the budget of £1,500,000, the official attitude towards unemployment was for a long time that the relief of unemployed Workers, whose numbers rose in the summer of 1927 to 8,000 persons of both sexes, was the duty of the Workers themselves and of the Zionist Organisation. While thousands of Jewish Workers had to subsist on the scanty unemployment dole of 6s. per week (10s. per week for men with families to support), the public works, undertaken with the excess revenue, largely produced by the Jewish immigration, were pursuing a policy of ignoring the members of Jewish trade unions as if they were aliens. The Government seemed resolved to depress the Jewish Worker to the wage