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Ethnic Democracy and Its Ambiguities: The Case of the Needle Trade Unions

Abstract

[Excerpt] During the years between World War I and World War II the conduct among well-known Jewish labor leaders seems to have foreshadowed events in the history of America's nationality following the tumult of the 1960's. In the 1920's and 1930's America's elected or appointed officials still used a pecking order based on assumed inequalities of race, ethnicity, and gender in making policy decisions. They presumed that their private interests, those of the "insiders," the "leading groups," or "controlling minorities," were the only appropriate ones for determining public policy. It was then, especially in the Depression years, when the New Deal Democrats competed successful with fascists, socialists and Communists, that "ethnic democracy" in the world of organized workers began to emerge as part of a complex process. In time it would alter meanings of "private" and "public" among group relations in the changing history of America's nationality.

Keywords

ethnic democracy, labor, needle trade unions, nationality, America

Disciplines

Race and Ethnicity | Unions

Comments

Suggested Citation

Korman, G. (1986). Ethnic democracy and its ambiguities: The case of the needle trade unions [Electronic version]. *American Jewish History*, 75, 405-426.
<http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/articles/137/>

Ethnic Democracy and Its Ambiguities: The Case of the Needle Trade Unions

Gerd Korman

During the years between World War I and World War II the conduct among well-known Jewish labor leaders seems to have foreshadowed events in the history of America's nationality following the tumult of the 1960's.¹ In the 1920's and 1930's America's elected or appointed officials still used a pecking order based on assumed inequalities of race, ethnicity, and gender in making policy decisions. They presumed that their private interests, those of the "insiders," the "leading groups," or "controlling minorities," were the only appropriate ones for determining public policy.² It was then, especially in the Depression years, when New Deal Democrats competed successfully with fascists, socialists and Communists, that "ethnic democracy" in the world of organized workers began to emerge as part of a complex process.³ In time it would alter the

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- 1 On the changing nature of American nationality see David M. Potter, "The Historian's Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa," in *American Historical Review*, LXVII (July, 1962), 924-950; Merle Curti, *Roots of American Loyalty* (New York: 1968) Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundation of Nationality* (New York: 1953), pp. 70-75; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New Brunswick: 1955); idem., *Send These To Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America* (New York: 1975), 196-230; Gerd Korman, "Party Loyalties, Immigrant Traditions and Reform: Wisconsin's German American Press and the Progressive Movement, 1909-1912," in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, LXI (Spring, 1957), 161-168; idem., *Industrialization, Immigrants, and Americanizers: The View from Milwaukee, 1866-1921* (Madison: 1967), pp. 41-53, 127-194; idem., "The Holocaust in American Historical Writing," in *Societas: A Review of Social History*, II (Summer 1972), 251-270; Herbert Gutman, "Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919," *American Historical Review*, LXXVIII (June, 1973), 531-587; Paul Nagle, *This Sacred Trust: American Nationality, 1798-1898* (New York: 1976); Timothy L. Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America," *American Historical Review*, LXXXII (December, 1978), 1155-1185; Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Race, Ethnicity, and Cultural Pluralism in American History," in James B. Gardner and George R. Adams, eds., *Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History* (Nashville: 1983), pp. 23-49.
 - 2 Deutsch used "leading groups" in *Nationalism*, 75; John Morton Blum used "outsiders" in *V Was for Victory* (New York: 1970), pp. 147-200; and Fernand Braudel used "controlling minorities" in *The Wheels of Commerce* (New York: 1982), pp. 165-168, 458-601.
 - 3 Henry Wallace used the expression "ethnic democracy" in a speech reported in *The New York Times*, March 12, 1942. His meaning was not clear, in part because he had also used the expression "genetic democracy" on other occasions. John Morton Blum, ed., *The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace* (Boston: 1973), p. 35.

meanings of "private" and "public" among group relations in the changing history of America's nationality.

The phrase "ethnic democracy" seems appropriate for characterizing the distinctive feature of that process. Today presidential orders, congressional legislation, and Supreme Court decisions recognize ethnic groups as contenders in competitive struggles among American citizens. Historians rescue ethnic texts and icons because, in comparison to earlier scholars, they have a more cosmopolitan appreciation of the American past. Social scientists analyze the new phenomenon because they want to show how it has or should have affected complex relations among government officials of a sovereign state, individual citizens, and the Republic's ever changing groups, organizations, and institutions. Michael Waltzer has perhaps best expressed the full range of the phenomenon's potential impact when he advocated this public agenda:

First . . . the state should defend collective as well as individual rights; second . . . the state should expand its official celebrations, to include not only its own history but the history of all the people that make up the American people; and third . . . tax money should be fed into the ethnic communities to help in financing of bilingual and bicultural education, and of group oriented welfare services. And if all this is to be done, and fairly done, then it is necessary also that ethnic groups be given, as a matter of right, a sort of representation within the state agencies that do it.⁴

To be sure, affirmative action, quotas, and other parts of Waltzer's far reaching agenda are continually being contested. In the name of individualism, professionalism, labor unionism, industrial democracy, or class allegiance, advocates of the constitutional republic's older American nationality reject as a public good permanent ethnic groups, their loyalties and their domestic or foreign interests. But what I have chosen to designate "ethnic democracy" has since the 1960's, at least for the time being, become an integral part of America's nationality. As such the subject covers, as political democracy itself does, a continuum of positions which include at one

4 Richard Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible: Class, Race, Ethnicity in the United States Since 1938* (New York: 1980), pp. 251-292, provides a survey of America's "segmented society" after the reform years of American society of the 1960's. I read it as a survey of ethnic democracy which seems to have been foreshadowed by events discussed in this paper. For a literary evaluation of some contemporary tensions within that ethnic democracy see Alan Lelchuk, "The Death of the Jewish Novel," *The New York Times Book Review*, November 25, 1984, I, pp. 38-39. On historians see Gerd Korman's review essay about Gutman's work in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol 23, No. 4 (December, 1978), 666-674. On Waltzer see his "Pluralism: A Political Perspective," in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, p. 785.

end collective action and at the other an individual's hesitant, ambiguous response to diverse competing claims.⁵

In those earlier years of the twentieth century, unstated preconditions governed this emergent ethnic democracy. The first had to do with religious beliefs or rituals. Among Jewish socialists these had long been considered "privat Sachen," personal matters.⁶ In the 1890's, Philip Krantz, editor of the socialist *Arbeter tsaytung* had called the Yom Kippur balls "stupid and boorish . . . a coarse and undeserved slap in the face to all those Jews who are accustomed, even though often many of them are not particularly religious, to think of Yom Kippur as an exceptional day, in which many things are simply not permitted." Jewish socialists also overcame opposition to symbolic dishes associated with traditional Jewish holydays. So in regard to a delicacy associated with Passover, and appropriate authority provided the required ruling allowing even a socialist to eat matzah balls. ("Men meg essen Kneidlach.")⁷

But as leaders of Jewish immigrant workers were treating Jewry as a confession, comparable to forms of Christendom, Jews in Europe and America had started to transform collective concepts by which they identified themselves. Radicals looking for followers among Yiddish-speaking workers now included Bundists and so-

5 Adolf F. Sturmtal, "Unions and Industrial Democracy," in John P. Windmuller, ed., *Industrial Democracy in International Perspective, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 431 (May, 1977), 12-21 identifies a comparable continuum for the phrase "industrial democracy."

6 Lucy Dawidowicz, ed., *The Golden Tradition* (New York: 1967), pp. 37, 89; Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment* (New York: 1969), v. 2, p. 38 and its note 7, pp. 263-264, 385-407, 555-568; Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (New York: 1968), pp. 43-47; Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: 1972), pp. 24-51. For a comparison to race conscious non-sectarian Christian American labor unions see John Jarrett, president of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers of the United States, *Report of the Committee of the Senate upon the Relations between Labor and Capital*, New York, September 6, 1883, in Gerd Korman, ed., *Labor History Documents* (Ithaca: 1974), 1:003, pp. 73-74; Herbert Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement," in his *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: 1976), pp. 79-117; Mark Karson, *American Labor and Politics, 1900-1918* (Carbondale: 1958), pp. 212-284; and Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: 1971), pp. 221-225, 268-284.

7 Aaron Antonovsky, *The Early Jewish Labor Movement in America* (New York: 1961), p. 269; Joseph Schlossberg, "Labor and the Synagogue," (typescript, n.d.), p. 19 in Schlossberg Papers, Labor Archives, Tel Aviv (hereafter cited as Schlossberg Journals or Papers). This period has a rich literature, thanks to the work of Elias Tcherikower, and such other historians as Moses Rischin and Arthur Goren. For a recent thoughtful interpretation see Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: 1976), pp. 101-115.

cialist Zionists who declared Jewish peoplehood as constituting a permanent public good. Such an approach demanded the organization of Jewish socialist politics and institutions comparable to those established by Poles, Germans, or Americans. In an ethnically and racially conscious United States these changes made it difficult, especially among Jewish leaders, to respond to East European Jewish immigrant workers as if they were just another confessional group.⁸ In turn, "privat Sachen" could not be limited to religious persuasions as heretofore understood, for Jewish ethnicity had become as changing, and as complex as the Black and White Protestant and Catholic worlds with their patterns of religion, peoplehood, and politics.

Other preconditions had also changed, especially in the years between World War I and World War II, when the "right of self-determination" became an effective slogan among ethnic and racial groups. Belief in ethnic democracy required an attitude towards inherited characteristics that was then still unusual. It was well expressed in 1940 by Henry Wallace. "The science of genetics . . . will, I am sure, overthrow Germanic racism and serve as one basis for an enduring democracy." The well-known corn breeder, who would coin the phrase "ethnic democracy" in a visionary speech about "different races and minority groups" and their "equal opportunities" in the republic, claimed that the "genetics of the future will . . . join the Lord in appreciating the possibilities of all people of the earth." He was convinced that "on the average the children of the poor have just about the same potentialities as the children of the rich. In the same degree of latitude the people of one race," said Wallace using the term with a meaning still widespread at the time, "have just about the same inborn ability as the people of another race. The differences in tradition, in religion, in education, and in food are tremendous. The group differences in inborn characteristics are far less. . . ."⁹

8 For a recent discussion of these complex developments see Robert S. Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews: The Dilemmas of Assimilation in Germany and Austria-Hungary* (London: 1982), pp. 141-172, 299-343; Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (New York: 1981), pp. 134-257, 453-551; Arthur Goren, *The American Jews* (Cambridge: 1982), pp. 37-73; Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy*, pp. 268-284; Higham, "American Antisemitism Historically Reconsidered," in Charles Herbert Stember, et al., *Jews in the Mind of America* (New York: 1966), pp. 237-258. In time Schlossberg and others of his generation witnessed also the "innovation of daily invocation by ministers at union conventions. It is something foreign to . . . both Jews and Gentiles." Schlossberg Journal, May 8, 1946.

9 Henry A. Wallace, "Judaism and Americanism," *The Menorah Journal*, XXVIII (July-December 1940), 134.

The changing preconditions occurred inside of sovereign national unions where union members were governed by distinctive constitutions, and by organizational arrangements and policies determined by union presidents and their respective general executive boards. For one thing, the politics of self determination had international ramifications that affected the contest among competing Jewish union members, many of whom held strong working class allegiances. Socialist Zionism acquired some legitimacy within the American labor movement at large as the Balfour Declaration, and socialist Zionist efforts on behalf of the Jewish workers in Palestine, gained endorsements from influential figures and organizations. Within the year of its promulgation by the British and its acceptance by the Wilson Administration, Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor supported the Declaration and Eugene V. Debs put his stamp of approval upon socialist Zionism.¹⁰ In subsequent years the A.F. of L. slowly became a supporter of the Histadrut, socialist Zionism's complex worker organization in Palestine. (In 1928 one of its representatives brought greetings in Hebrew to the A.F. of L. convention.¹¹) Some labor leaders in the United

10 Sheila Stern Polishook, "The American Federation of Labor, Zionism and the First World War," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LX (March, 1976), 228-244; Irwin Yellowitz, "Morris Hillquit: American Socialism and Jewish Concerns," *American Jewish History*, LXVIII (December, 1978), 168-172. In 1917, Poale Zion, the political organization of main-line socialist Zionists, did not gain endorsement from Debs' American Socialist Party, in part because of the opposition of Hillquit and other anti-Zionist socialists such as Baruch C. Vladeck, Abraham Cahan, and J.B. Salutsky (later known as J.B.S. Hardman), the man Hillman reportedly credited for having prevented him from becoming a Zionist in these years (Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in the U.S.A.* (New York: 1953), v. 2, p. 395). For Debs see his letter to H. Ehrenreich, Secretary of Poale Zion in America, April 13, 1918 in Mapai Archives, A 180/64, Beth Berel, Israel: "With the work you have undertaken to organize the Jewish working class to give support to the movement for the Jewish National Restoration in Palestine I am in full and hearty sympathy and most earnestly do I hope this very praiseworthy ambition may be crowned with success." See also Zaritsky's recollection about a meeting with William Green shortly after Green succeeded Gompers as president of the A.F. of L. in Zaritsky's introduction of Green at a testimonial dinner in 1951. Zaritsky Papers, Tamiment Institute, NYU (hereafter cited as Zaritsky Papers); Anita Shapira, *Berl: The Biography of a Socialist Zionist*, translated by Haya Galai (New York: 1984), pp. 117-124; Jacob Goldstein, *The General Federation of Jewish Labor in Israel (The Histadrut) and The Workers in America* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: 1984); Epstein, *Jewish Labor*, v. 2, pp. 66, 395, 409, 411; Peter G. Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment, 1917-1933* (Cambridge: 1933), pp. 157-185; Joseph Brandes, "From Sweatshop to Stability" *YIVO Annual*, XVI (1976), 115-116, 123; Maier Byron Fox, "Labor Zionism in America: The Challenge of the 1920's" *American Jewish Archives*, XXXV (April, 1983), 53-71.

11 *A F of L Proceedings, 1928* does not mention Israel Meriminski's (later Merom)

Hebrew Trades and amongst its affiliated unions had also become more sympathetic to Zionism than they had been before 1921. At that time the Russian Revolution, the newly independent Poland, and an America without immigration restriction gave anti-Zionists grounds for remaining optimistic about the Jewish masses they had left behind. By the mid-twenties all that had changed. Now it became increasingly clear that Zionist Palestine might well become the refuge of last resort for Jews in Poland who faced a chauvinistic and anti-Semitic regime at home and closed borders throughout Europe and in the Americas. A few American Jewish labor leaders became activists on behalf of the Histadrut, and together with some rank and file started to raise funds for it. To this group belonged Joseph Schlossberg, Secretary Treasurer of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, an early convert, and Max Zaritsky, President of the United Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers Union.¹² But other Jewish radicals also had little choice than to intensify their Jewish concerns. During the interwar years disaster became more threatening for the Jewish working classes in Poland. And, beginning in 1933, the spectre of German fascism required a special response by virtue of Nazism's anti-Semitism, and a year later because of the formation of the Popular Front.¹³

message or his wife's translation, but see the resolutions about the Histadrut, *ibid.*, 152, 282, 283; A. Manor, *Commitment* (Tel Aviv: 1978), p. xv, and an interview with Dr. May Merom in Tel Aviv, January 26, 1984.

- 12 Schlossberg recalled his loneliness years later. "As I recall it Max Zuckerman, [General] Secretary of the [United Cloth Hat and] Cap Makers Union, was the only one besides myself, to sign the call for the Labor Congress for Palestine in 1918." Schlossberg Journal, 5/16/47. Zuckerman had also been alone in voting for the A.F. of L. resolution of 1917 because Schlossberg's Amalgamated did not then belong to the A.F. of L. and Zaritsky, at the time Assistant General Secretary to Zuckerman had joined the Jewish leaders in the Federation who had refused to participate in the vote endorsing the Balfour Declaration. Polishook, *op. cit.*, p. 233; Zaritsky testimonial to Schlossberg (typescript, June 1, 1955), in Zaritsky Papers. See also Epstein's recollections in *Jewish Labor*, v. 2, p. 66.
- 13 Albert Waldinger, "Abraham Cahan and Palestine," *Jewish Social Studies*, XXXIX (Winter/Spring 1971), 75, 80-83, 87-88; *Palestine Post*, January 18, 1937; Vladeck to Cordell Hull, typescript, draft in Vladeck to Schlossberg, April 9, 1936; and Tygel to Schlossberg, March 17, 1937, in Schlossberg papers in the ACWU Archives, Catherwood Library, NYSSILR, Cornell University (hereafter Schlossberg, ACWU Archives); Ben Gold and W. Weiner, President and Secretary of the Jewish People's Committee for United Action Against Fascism and Anti-Semitism, to Jacob Potofsky, January 20, 1937 in Potofsky Papers in ACWU Archives (hereafter Potofsky Papers); *The New York Times*, January 25, 1936; Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: 1984), pp. 381-383. For public conflicts between Communists and the Jewish Labor Committee and the American Jewish Congress see Moshe Gottlieb, "The Berlin Riots of 1935 and Their Repercussions in America," *American Jew-*

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For another, the year 1921 had revealed that the immigrant groups of the needle trade unions would not take their unions into the streets in order to keep open America's immigration gate. Immigrant union members, in the name of socialism, bolshevism, anarchism, or industrial democracy challenged central authority from the shop floor or competed amongst themselves for influence and power within the union. But without official union authorization, they were not prepared to fight for immigrant compatriots outside of the union.¹⁴ Each immigrant knew of the travails in Central and Southern Europe; and each knew how many in their American neighborhoods were waiting for loved ones. Life in Europe without America's open gate should have been awesome to contemplate. For Jews, the issue was still more pressing. Since 1914, war, famine, terrorism and banditry had especially stalked Jewish regions of Poland and the Ukraine. At the time Yiddish newspapers in the United States were full of the catastrophic news.¹⁵ But union members gave no indication that they wanted to move beyond relief and publicity campaigns, or beyond the resolutions and public testimony placing needle trade unions on record as opponents of the new legislation. They did not take to the streets, to strike and picket.¹⁶ Such aggressive measures would have been in direct opposition to union policies. In other words, union members accepted as axiomatic a union objective well expressed in another context by one Jewish labor leader: "Our permanent activities are in the industrial field . . .

ish Historical Quarterly, LIX (March, 1970), 313-317. For useful insights on the complexities of these and related issues see Zosa Szajkowski, "A Note on the American-Jewish Struggle Against Nazism and Communism in the 1930's," *ibid.*, 272-289. See also Will Herberg, "The Jewish Labor Movement in the United States," *American Jewish Yearbook*, 1952, 55, and Joseph Brandes, "From Sweatshop to Stability," *YIVO Annual*, xvi (1976), 118-125.

- 14 Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, pp. 309-311. On shop floor militancy and the Amalgamated see Steve Fraser, "Dress Rehearsal of the New Deal," in Michael H. Frisch and Daniel Walkowitz, eds., *Working Class America* (Urbana: 1983), pp. 228-238. One kind of ethnic tension resulted from the use of Yiddish. Among the cutters of Philadelphia, the GEB of the Amalgamated was told in 1924, the "Gentile members are antagonized by having meetings conducted in Jewish, etc. . . ." Minutes of the GEB, ACWU, May 1924, in ACWU Archives. See also Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left* (New York: 1979), pp. 272-277; and Brandes, *YIVO Annual*, 105-110.
- 15 Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919-1920* (Berkeley: 1977), pp. 166-167; *Forward* July-September, 1920; *Jewish Morning Journal*, August, 1920; *New Yorker Staats Zeitung und New Yorker Herold*, August, 1920; and *The New York Times*, 1920-1921.
- 16 See, for example, *Justice*, February 8, 14, and June 28, 1919 and the *ILGWU Proceedings*, 1919, 139. As an officer of the Amalgamated, Schlossberg testified against immigration restriction. *Schlossberg Journal*, March 11, 1947.

nothing should interfere with our industrial unity, which is our most precious asset."¹⁷

In principle then, a kind of consociationalism incorporating emergent ethnic democracy determined the governing framework of the needle trade unions.¹⁸ Jews, Italians, and other members who wanted to help kinsmen outside of the union turned to resolutions and relief drives on behalf of compatriots at home and abroad. As long as actions in the name of their kinfolk's interests did not purposefully interfere with policy decisions of the union's general executive board, union members could appeal to the executive board and especially to the joint board and union local. These last named administrative units of nationwide unions were most sensitive to demands from the many big ethnic groups living in large metropolitan areas such as New York City or Chicago.¹⁹ At the same time, within the union, Jews or Italians or Poles or Lithuanians, were not supposed to carry dual citizenship in the sense that they split their union loyalty with ethnic groups active outside of the union. In the House of Labor such an obligation was supposed to preclude anti-Semitism or other forms of discrimination. No matter what one harbored in private, no matter what one heard in passing, officially the fraternal spirit of the labor movement was supposed to rule all discussions, resolutions, and actions.

Within these constraints Jewish labor leaders by their conduct revealed the ambiguity of emerging ethnic democracy. At the 1934 International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union convention delegates

17 *ACWU Proceedings, 1936*, 389.

18 On consociationalism see Arendt Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: 1977), pp. 25-52, 143, and Theodore Hanf, "Cross-cutting Loyalties in a Deeply Divided Society: The Case of Trade Unions in Lebanon," paper delivered at the Conference on "Ethnicity, Pluralism, and Conflict in the Middle East," Tel Aviv University, May, 1984.

19 On the well-known relative importance of Jews and Italians and other non-Jews in the needle trade unions see Brandes, *YIVO Annual*, 105-107, 109-110; Epstein, *Jewish Labor*, v. 2, pp. 420-424; Irwin Yellowitz, "American Jewish Labor: Historiographical Problems and Prospects," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LXV (March, 1976), 203; idem, "Jewish Immigrants and the American Labor Movement," *American Jewish History*, LXXI (December, 1981), 188-217; Elsie Glueck, "Jewish Workers in the Trade Unions," *Jewish Frontier*, II (December, 1935), 11-15; Epstein, *Jewish Labor*, v. 2, pp. 349-350. *Jewish Frontier*, VI (April, 1939), 12-14, 29, 30, 31, a socialist Zionist organ, published a May Day greeting from many different parts of garment union organizations. For different responses by a national union's general executive board and its local union governments see ACWU, Minutes of GEB meetings, January 29, May 4 and 14, 1920, August 10-12, 1922, June 20 and 21, 1940, and David Dubinsky to Schlossberg, May 16 and June 10, 1935 in ACWU Archives. See also David Dubinsky's remark about the name United Hebrew Trades. It was, he said, traditional. *ILGWU Proceedings, 1934*, 167.

pecking order, the American facts of life, of a needle trade union whose Jewish leaders in fact considered themselves an integral part of the Jewish labor movement and of Jewish life in general. We Jews “. . . are only one step higher than you. You are ‘niggers,’ and we are ‘kikes’ and [Luigi] Antonini,” the senior Italian union official and vice president of the ILG, “is a ‘wop.’ In the eyes of the world that is blind and deaf and dumb they have us graded. . . .”²¹

Vladeck also illustrated other ambiguities of ethnic democracy, for in 1934 he discussed related issues before other union convention audiences, the A.F. of L. and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. Within the ideological structure of a socialist cosmopolite he was proud of immigrant workers. “One may dislike Irish stew, or macaroni or gefilte fish, but it is impossible to deny that workers of Irish descent laid the foundation of the American labor movement and fought many a great fight for its principles. . . .” He also told the American Federation of Labor that Jews in the needle trades had won singular achievements in the fights for shorter hours and collectively bargained contracts and that Italians among the dress makers of New York City constituted the largest single local of the A.F. of L. “So there can be no question on this floor of racial superiority or racial inferiority.”²²

He was sensitive to anti-Semitism, especially to its virulent form in the hands of Central European fascists. “You very often hear from anti-Semites that Jews don’t like to work. But in Eastern and Central Europe today at least half a million Jewish workers are anxious not only to work, but even to slave in order to maintain themselves. And in the United States,” Vladeck, as head of the recently formed anti-fascist Jewish Labor Committee, reminded the A.F. of L. delegates, “where the Jews comprise a little over 3 per cent of the population, they contribute nearly 10 per cent of your membership.”²³ However, the socialist cosmopolite, who had remained sen-

21 *ILGWU Proceedings, 1934*, 251. For one important study about white ethnic relations, including some tensions between Jews and Italians, among the people represented in the ILG and other needle trade unions see Ronald H. Baylor, *Neighbors in Conflict: The Irish, Germans, Jews and Italians of New York City, 1929-1941* (Baltimore: 1978), especially pp. 5, 20-21, 40, 79-80, 98, 418-420. On the anti-Zionist predisposition of Dubinsky see Brandes, *YIVO Annual*, 116-117. On Vladeck see some examples of his attitudes towards Zionism in Vladeck to Judah Magnes, October 6, 1937 and Cyrus Adler to Vladeck, December 9, 1937 in Vladeck Papers, Tamiment Institute, N.Y.U. (hereafter cited as Vladeck papers).

22 *A F of L Proceedings, 1934*, 443-445.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 444. In 1934 the complex Vladeck, in comparison to others concerned about Jewish persecution in Central Europe was seen at that time as responding to the persecution as part of a larger campaign against fascism. Moshe Gottlieb,

celebrated its great organizing accomplishments under the leadership of David Dubinsky, the old Bundist from Lodz who had become president in 1932. Many new members had streamed in. During the meetings of the convention they identified themselves and were all recognized, often in ethnic and racial terms, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Blacks, along with the older members who had usually come from Jewish and Italian immigrant backgrounds. "I want at this moment to say a few words about this solidarity that prevails within our organization. There was an old prejudice in existence that the Negro workers were not organizable. That prejudice," claimed Dubinsky, perhaps recalling the days when the same charge had been levelled against the Jews, "is gone as far as we are concerned, because of the actions of the Negro workers in the shop, their actions on the picket lines, their actions in the unions. We are proud of this fine spirit," said Dubinsky, "of the good material that the Negro race has given our union which is the best evidence that there is no need, no justification, for racial prejudice in the labor movement or anywhere. Its people are welcome in our parliament of labor." The ILGWU was glad "to be able to open our doors and our places in this world where you are equal . . . Both of us can work together. We can give the proper resistance against our common enemy, capitalism and the employers."²⁰

But it was Baruch Charney Vladeck who put his finger on the fact that this was after all a union dominated by Jews and Italians who, even as they were conscious of pecking orders and ethnic distinctions within the union, were trying to practice ethnic democracy within their organization. A kindred spirit of Dubinsky and highly regarded by many union members, this general manager of the *Jewish Daily Forward* and popular Jewish socialist labor politician with an anti-Zionist predisposition, revealed the nature of social relations within the needle trade unions, and their relationship to the world outside. He cheered the arrival of Black workers into the ILG but explained to them and to the convention assembled the ethnic

20 *Ibid.*, p. 125. See also *ibid.*, pp. 77, 117, 124-126, 167-168. On relations between Blacks and whites in the needle trade unions see Brandes, *YIVO Annual*, 107-110. In 1905 Carroll D. Wright, the famed labor reformer and assimilationist from Massachusetts had put Dubinsky's point in nationalistic Americanization terms. "It is true that the Americanizing [in the Amalgamated Meat Cutters' Union] is being done as rapidly as the material to work on will permit, and very well indeed . . . As the Irish in Chicago express it, 'Association together and industrial necessity have shown us that, however it may go against the grain, we must admit that common interests and brotherhood must include the Pollock and the Sheeny.'" Carroll D. Wright, "Influence of Trade Unions on Immigrants," *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor*, No. 56 (January 1905), 1-7. See also Benjamin Stolberg, *Tailor's Progress* (Garden City: 1944), pp. 125-126, 324.

sitive to charges of dual loyalty, felt compelled to justify those Jewish concerns. Why bother with the "Old World's problems?" Because, claimed Vladeck, the union member, "an Irishman, an Italian, a German or a Scandinavian or a Jew is engaged with those 'Old World' events whenever they occur. Ignore it and that involvement will be exploited on behalf of chauvinism. We tell the worker – not Germany above all, not Italy above all, not Poland above all – but Democracy and Labor rights above all!" Then why, asked Vladeck rhetorically, "do Jews persist? Why not forget that you are a Jew?" For his answer he turned to the deep past and to recent American events. "I can assure you that this is no easy burden to carry – this knowledge that the erosion of time has carved your face; that all the storms of history molded your mind; that the injustices of a thousand tyrannies have settled in your soul." The Jewish upper and middle classes had responded to this bruised condition of their people as cowards, a response unthinkable to a Bundist leader of the Jewish working class: they "tried to assimilate themselves by going back on their traditions, on their culture, and on their very religion for the sake of convenience, or profit!"²⁴

As a participant in the Jewish working class in America he provided another kind of answer, one that reflected the impact of lessons learned since World War I. There was "no reason why one, in crossing the ocean, should be required to drop everything to the bottom." He and his fellow immigrants had been wrong when they thought that all a foreign-born citizen needed to do in order to become 100 per cent American was to sound and appear as one. "We used to call this the 'melting pot'." But Vladeck now knew better. The pot has "produced more dross and ashes than precious metal. This superficial Americanism sent many of our children to jail and reformatories." Jewish workers persisted in remaining Jewish in the United States, he insisted, because in the fight to improve America "you are not as much concerned with externals as with real values."²⁵

In that spirit he returned to the ambiguity of a position derived from an emerging ethnic democracy in the labor movement of the

"The Anti-Nazi Boycott Movement in the United States: An Ideological and Sociological Appreciation," *Jewish Social Studies*, XXXV (January, 1973), 217. For brief general portraits shortly after his death see Baruch Charney Vladeck, *American Jewish Year Book, 1939*, 79–93 and *Palestine Post*, November 4, 1938. See also Epstein, *Jewish Labor*, v. 2, pp. 384–388.

24 In 1926, he had written in the *Forward* that the Zionists "are making the Jewish middle class proud of its Jewishness, just as the Bund has done for the Jewish proletariat." Vladeck quoted in Waldinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 87–88. See also Valdeck to Magnes, October 6, 1937, in Vladeck papers.

25 *A F of L Proceedings, 1934*, 443–445.

needle trades. Now “. . . I come to the most important point of all. And that is the fact that since the coming of the industrial age the Jews have been the true barometer for the Labor Movement.” He had come to the A.F. of L. for help in the Jewish labor movement’s fight against fascism and anti-Semitism. Since Jews served as a barometer, “organized Labor throughout the world, outside of sentimental reasons, is against anti-Semitism.” Vladeck spoke to current events. “I swear to you that Jewish Labor here and throughout the world will not give up, will not falter or weaken, until the last trace of tyranny is wiped from the face of the earth, and until Labor regains its unions, its cooperatives, its press, its liberty, its industrial, cultural, and political power.”²⁶

In that same spirit he explained what it meant to be a member of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. “Outside we live in a world of strife and hatred, not an hour passes before we ask ourselves, what are you? You are a Jew; you are an Italian; you are a German; you are a Pole. Wherever you go you cannot get away from things that have no relation to life, that are built on the remnants of the old world . . . I come here and say – I don’t know, and I don’t care who you are, from wherever you come . . . Your members have one brotherhood of labor, have one labor union . . .”²⁷

But sometimes “outside” smashed into “brotherhood” and then a Jewish union leader of a multi-ethnic union could also stand revealed as an emerging ethnic democrat outside of his own trade union. Max Zaritsky’s conduct in the mid-thirties is a case in point. He was then president of the United Hatters Cap and Millinery Workers and an influential labor leader in the struggle for industrial unionism. He knew that mass society had arrived, that “the individual hasn’t any value, whatsoever, except as one of a nation . . .” In spring 1935, Zaritsky put momentous questions to the General Executive Board and New York locals of the Cap and Millinery Departments of his union. “The political complexion of our country is undergoing change . . . Will it be fascism of Italy transplanted to this country? Will it be another, broader form of fascism – the so-called National Socialism of Germany? Will it be Communism? Will it be the new fangled form of fascism preached by Father Coughlin? Or will it be another form . . . preached by Huey Long?” He had no answer. All he could do was to issue a warning about the threat: “there is the danger, that something is coming upon us.” But he did have a political response to that fascist or Communist collective alternative. He embraced Roosevelt and his capitalist

26 *Ibid.*, 444.

27 *Ibid.*

Democratic Party. Together they stood between the obvious threats and the public good Zaritsky and his fellow members claimed as their own.²⁸ In the fall of 1936 at the Convention of the American Federation of Labor, Zaritsky, emergent ethnic democrat, had to step forward. Suddenly on the floor of the A.F. of L. the fraternal spirit of the labor movement was being challenged.

On Monday, November 23, Mathew Wohl, the highly respected spokesman for those members who opposed the formation of new industrial unions, on behalf of the powerful A.F. of L.'s Resolutions Committee, made a long and emotional appeal for unity in the House of Labor.²⁹ To him the old unified house was the appropriate organization with which to achieve the dream of American workers. He pleaded with deviant unionists, asking them to recall the help they had received from the American Federation of Labor. When he turned to the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union he broke the trip wire guarding the labor fraternity. "It is inconceivable that a people so charitable, so appreciative, so understanding of the suffering of labor should now question the abilities and sincerity of action of those who have struggled with them and rejoice in the attainments now secured by them." Once across, the patronizing momentum, derived from a perspective different from Zaritsky's, propelled Wohl forward, perhaps with special force because Jewish labor leaders were playing such powerful roles in the A.F. of L.'s Committee for Industrial Organization.

As for the organizations composed largely of Jewish workers, it can only be said, if we are to have the full truth, that we took them by the hand when there were few hands willing to greet them; and we have led them and builded with them, and protected them. When some of their leaders steeped in the ideas of the Old World from whence so many of them had fled in mortal terror of their lives, used our platform to preach [socialist] doctrines alien to our beliefs and convictions, we still led them and protected them. They are our equals in every respect. The story of those persecuted people is too long to tell here, too filled with the gripping emotions of a half century of affectionate relationship, of helpfulness and cooperation. Let them think it over in their hearts and in their homes.

As if to accentuate his rhetorical shift, Wohl then turned to the next union on his list in the style that had characterized most of his other remarks: "May we ask, where would be the Oil Workers, were it not

28 Minutes of the Luncheon Conference with Montreal Millinery Manufacturers, Mt. Royal Hotel, Montreal, Canada, November 5, 1934, 6; Address to Banquet for GEB and N.Y. Locals of the Cap and Millinery Department, April 13, 1935, in Zaritsky Papers.

29 *A.F. of L. Proceedings, 1936*, 500, 508-510, contains the exchange involving Zaritsky.

for the help we have given and the prestige we have helped them build?"

Zaritsky responded immediately, first to the large issue facing the Convention, the split over industrial unionism, in which he was one of the leaders opposing Wohl and his supporters. "I don't know of any sportsman," said the East European immigrant leader, "that will make new rules while the game is on. To my mind it is not cricket." Then he turned to the challenge: "Why was it necessary for you to raise the Jewish question on the floor of the most liberal movement in the world, the labor movement, the movement that knows no nationality, no race, no color, no religion?" He asked about the rest of the trade unionists in the American labor movement: "What about the Welsh membership? What about the English membership? The French, Canadian, Irish. And what about the German membership, and the membership of so many nationalities which all together comprise the most wonderful combination of human beings, the American Federation of Labor?"

He knew the answer but controlled himself. Instead he replied with innuendo, a testimony to his dedication to labor's fraternal spirit. "You had to go out of your way to bring shame, at least upon my head, not as a Jew, but as a member of the American labor movement. I protest with every fibre of my being against the injection of the Jewish question or of any racial or national question in the councils of the American labor movement . . . I do not like and do not care to use a stronger term." Then, after reminding the Convention of some Jewish labor history he implied again why he was crying shame. "These unions, which include in their membership Jewish people," he said, had responded and contributed generously, in the thousands of dollars, to textile workers, miners, and steelworkers. "They have done so because of their loyalty, their devotion to and love for the great American labor movement. That you forgot to mention," proclaimed Zaritsky, at that moment spokesman and advocate for his paragon who knew only too well that all those Jewish unions had been excluded from the A.F. of L.'s executive board until 1934.³⁰ "But you," Wohl, and others from one of those different paragons, "asked them," that is my people, "to go home and think it over! I join hands with you . . ." he said facetiously, "and I will tell these men, 'Yes, you go home and think it over'."

Within a few months after the dramatic encounter in the American Federation of Labor, Zaritsky also demonstrated that socialist

30 Robert Asher, "Jewish Unions and the American Federation of Labor Power Structure, 1903-1935," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LXV (March, 1976), 219-222.

Zionism and Vladeck's kind of public concerns about Jewish well-being constituted an integral part of his ethnic democracy. He had come to Palestine for three weeks, as part of a small delegation of American Jewish labor leaders important to the Histadrut's efforts in the United States.

In February 1937, as he sailed from Haifa to Marseilles and reflected upon what he had seen, he found himself arguing with those who had persistently denied to socialist Zionists the political right to solve their people's problems on their own terms. Zaritsky had been active on behalf of a Jewish National Home in Palestine for some years, sharing with many other socialist Zionists a hopeful expectation about Arab workers: they would "ultimately rid themselves of the poisonous influences of the Mufties and Effendies" and join hands with the organized Jewish workers for their mutual economic interests. "The things I saw still seem unbelievable to me," he wrote on the ship's stationery. "I saw a new world in the process of creation and the reformation of a people engaged in redeeming a devastated, deserted land." He waxed eloquent about Jewish urban and suburban accomplishments, but especially about the Histadrut. "It is not an ordinary labor organization in the accepted term as we know it in America. It is the builder of Palestine and the redeemer of the Jewish nation . . . [it] is the backbone and nerve center of Jewish Palestine with its 400,000 population." But most important of all he "found out that, given the opportunity and encouraged by necessity the Jew can be as good a farmer as a tailor, doctor, or 'intellectual.' I am thrilled not only because I am a Jew, but because, as a labor man and self accredited economist, I have discovered that all of our so-called 'sociologists,' 'economists,' pseudo historians, logicians, academicians and above all the so-called Jewish labor leaders do not know what they are talking about when they discuss the eternal Jewish question only in connection with the inevitable social revolution which must be universal, if the Jewish problem is to be solved." Socialist Zionism in Palestine had fused socialism and Jewish nationalism: "There you find socialism in practice and democracy in its highest form. Not a single . . . [execution] in order to maintain the socialist state." Consequently, he concluded: "The Palestinian Jew has shown an example of what he can do, even under great restrictions and limitations, to build a socialist community and simultaneously to solve the Jewish question."³¹

Subsequently, he continued to speak out on the terms of the eth-

31 Zaritsky to "Jack," February 11, 1937 and *Headgear*, September 14, 1929, in Zaritsky Papers.

nic democracy to which he was devoted. At the convention he had successfully forced Wohl to all but retract his remarks without rupturing the fraternal bonds that bound them both to the trade union movement. In fact Wohl became a reliable supporter of the Histadrut efforts in America.³² Within his union, Zaritsky as president also spoke to his multi-ethnic membership about the way their shared perspective shaped his concern about the future. In October 1938, he reported on the anti-Nazi resolution adopted by the American Federation of Labor. "You may think that because I am a Jew - a Jew who makes no bones about it, a Jew who doesn't say he is ashamed or proud of being one - my judgment may be affected or my sympathies may be aroused. It is possible. However, even in the convention I tried to be as objective on the question as possible, so as not to be led away by my own emotions. . . ." Besides, he had no doubts that his Jewish world and his world of labor were all engaged in the same struggle. He put the point this way: "It was not just a Jewish question. It was a question concerning all of human civilization, if what we may find now in the world may be termed civilization."³³

By this time emergent ethnic democracy had also affected union leaders who had thought of themselves as members of a kind of secular confession impervious to appeals from capitalist politicians. Depending upon individual unions, the process had differed, especially in its timing, but during the interwar years even the Amalgamated had been prepared to turn to a capitalist presidential candidate.³⁴ In 1924, the only presidential year when the Socialist Party supported a candidate from outside of its membership, the Amalgamated, for all intents and purposes, had given its support to Robert M. LaFollette, the veteran middle class reformer from the dairy state of Wisconsin. With the advent of the Depression and FDR's presidency, that exceptional event had turned into the norm: the Amalgamated and other needle trade unions became active campaigners for a capitalist politician and his program.

The opposition by Joseph Schlossberg to these changes within his Amalgamated illustrates some of the subtler aspects of this pro-

32 See, for example, Zaritsky's comments of appreciation about Wohl at a testimonial dinner honoring William Green on June 26, 1940 in Zaritsky Papers.

33 Zaritsky's report about the A.F. of L. Convention to a Membership meeting, Hotel Center, October 25, 1938 (typescript) in Zaritsky Papers.

34 Schlossberg noted the changes in his Journals: July 17, 1940, March 31, 1944, June 7 and November 26, 1945. For historical studies of this shift see Fraser, "Dress Rehearsal," pp. 228-238; Brandes, *YIVO Annual*, 67-68, 110-114; John Laslett, *Labor and the Left* (New York: 1970), pp. 126-136; and Liebman, *Jews on the Left*, pp. 246-252.

cess. By his own estimate, he had not become a "dictator" nor what he called a "boss" or "yes man" in the union. Instead, he said, he had always followed his "conscience." As a result he found himself in circumstances that revealed the force of union rules and unstated preconditions governing ethnic democracy; for Schlossberg by then had come to consider his ethnic attachments on a par with his working class loyalties, legitimate competing interests within the constitutional order of his union. The case in point was his relationship with Sidney Hillman, who, as president, had become the most influential figure in shaping the policies of the Amalgamated. Since the 1924 election campaign, he and Hillman had travelled away from each other for reasons that did not involve ethnic issues, although by then Schlossberg had become a socialist Zionist, a choice Hillman had rejected.³⁵ Schlossberg had refused to join Hillman and the rest of the Executive Board in supporting Robert M. LaFollette's campaign for president.³⁶ Schlossberg had insisted that he would not support a capitalist candidate even when the Socialist Party was prepared to endorse him. In 1936 Schlossberg again refused Hillman. He had not become what the "Maskilim," teachers of the Enlightenment, had told nineteenth century Jews: "Be a Jew at home and a man (Russian, German, or an American) outside."³⁷ Now he was not going to become a "Socialist at home and a man (non-Socialist) outside." As an American Jewish socialist he would remain what he had become, an American ethnic democrat prepared to fight for his people and socialist ideologies, equal among equals but knowing full well that, in a constitutional order practicing political democracy, some individuals and groups were more powerful than others and therefore more equal than others.

The moment of truth arrived on Saturday afternoon, April 18. By then two major events had occurred. After the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Amalgamated and a number

35 On La Follette see Schlossberg Journal, April 9, 1944. For needle trade unionists this election was especially complex because of their different kinds of engagements with the Soviet Union and American Communists who opposed La Follette's candidacy. Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment*, pp. 172-177; Josephson, *Hillman*, pp. 268-271; Brandes, *YIVO Annual*, 45-46, 49-60.

36 This claim is repeated by Schlossberg in his journals. See for example the entry of April 9, 1944 about the result of his vote against supporting La Follette's candidacy: "It was then that the opposition to me began . . ." In November after the election Schlossberg reported that he had repeated his opposition at a meeting of the General Executive Board. "Hillman turned to me and said: 'My mind is closed to what you say, and a little later, 'Yours is closed to what I say'." See also Minutes of ACWA GEB, May 6-20, 1924, ACWA Archives.

37 Schlossberg Journals, n.d., 1948. Irving Howe states his version of Schlossberg's 1948 comment in 1976 in *World of Our Fathers*, pp. 322-324.

of other unions, including the United Mine Workers, had known how to take advantage of the law and its administrative machinery. Many in union circles recognized that moment as the real beginning for organizing the mass production industries.³⁸ In 1935 the Supreme Court had declared NRA unconstitutional and unions quickly felt the force of employer efforts to recapture lost ground.³⁹ But in 1935 Congress passed the Wagner Act, which Roosevelt accepted as part of his program. That law and its administrative machinery, if upheld by the Court, would reshape basic legal assumptions about employer rights and about the status of labor unions. Now, in the spring of 1936 – the Supreme Court would not declare for the Act until a year later, after FDR's reelection – the Amalgamated's Executive Board was to determine its position toward the upcoming presidential campaign.⁴⁰ Hillman moved and obtained a second for endorsing the "candidacy of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt." Schlossberg responded and then the Board – the union's governing grand coalition – discussed the reasons for going with Hillman.

"Some of us," said Schlossberg, "may find ourselves in a difficult position in the present political set up. I am in the least difficult," he said, with considerable presumption. "I am not a member of any party. I do not have to please any group and have only my conscience to guide me." At age 61, his political philosophy had long been known. "I was drafted into my present position in the Amalgamated because of it. I have always favored a labor movement that would include all different opinions within it. . . ." He had started out a socialist in the 1890's, when he belonged to Daniel DeLeon's Socialist Labor Party, and had remained a socialist since then. "I have been a believer in a Labor Party – in a Labor party as distinguished from a Socialist party." He still had no reason to change his mind. "I have no candidate or party to recommend." But he did have an explanation for rejecting the motion. "If in this present unusual situation, there had been a Labor Party, and if that labor

38 On the significance of the National Industrial Recovery Act for new organizing drives by the ILG, ACW, the UMW and other unions in 1933-1934 see Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years* (Boston: 1970), pp. 37-91; Walter Galenson, *The United Brotherhood of Carpenters* (Cambridge: 1983), pp. 239-240; Brandes, *YIVO Annual*, 70-71; Josephson, *Hillman*, pp. 259-370; and Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, *John L. Lewis* (New York: 1977), pp. 181-202.

39 The impact was swift. See for example the impact upon N.Y. employers listed by Anna Rosenberg of the NRA's office in New York City. Rosenberg to Donald Richberg, June 1, 1935 in Zaritsky Papers.

40 The following exchange is reported in the Minutes of the GEB, ACWA, April 18, 1936 in Schlossberg Papers.

party would nominate for re-election a representative of one of the capitalist parties, from my own socialist point of view I would oppose it. I would," he said, as he self-servingly justified long after the fact his opposition to LaFollete, "disagree with this action, even if taken by an organized labor party. My devotion to a labor party is no less than it ever was, and it is because of that that I am unable to endorse a candidate from a party that is a capitalist party."

The reasoning of other Board members, Jews, Italians, a Czech, a Pole, who supported Hillman, is instructive because it was the reasoning of men who took for granted that emergent ethnic democracy flourished in the Amalgamated. They had tried to "keep politics out of the union" but in the past few years "had seen the benefits that have been derived from a capitalist government. . . ." Considering the crisis and the opportunity the luxury of personal commitment has to give way; if not, then, reluctantly, the Board would have to go ahead without those who disagreed. "Duty" called, demanding "support [of] this motion, if we have the fundamental interests of our people at heart." Board members feared fascism and saw Roosevelt as a bulwark. "We have this man who is not a Fascist . . . we have to support him." Some were influenced by events abroad and said so. They could not "afford to overlook what has happened in Germany or Italy, nor the tendencies that are apparent in this country. You don't have to read between the lines of the newspapers to know that we are heading for just where Germany has gone . . . this organization with its power should not overlook anything that would keep fascism out. . . ." One member admitted that it was time to acknowledge that the reasons so few fellow workers had followed the Red Banners had to do with the fact that there was something wrong with socialist ideas. In contrast, Roosevelt had "touched the problems closest to the heart of the labor movement" such as no president had ever done. "Roosevelt does not represent the labor movement, but he does represent the people of the United States and he was willing to give a little share of protection to labor. . . ." Even the Board member who was an official spokesman for the Socialist Party had to agree with those who insisted that "there is in Washington, a check upon these forces . . . pressing toward fascism."

A long-time friend on the Board spoke to Schlossberg directly. He did so with arguments which Schlossberg himself might have made, had his "principle" not blocked the way. "What is a capitalist or socialist party? . . . Where necessity compels, experience tells us that the Socialist Party makes connections with other parties. In France - how many times? In Germany? In Italy? You know, Brother Schlossberg, what happened in Germany. Do you think that

if the capitalists would work with the Socialists they would say no? . . ." Within the ethnic democracy of the Amalgamated he told Schlossberg: "You as a Jew, I as an Italian, would be put into American concentration camps . . . They prepare to send us to concentration camps and we should do nothing! Is this not a labor group Brother Schlossberg? Can we not start to build a Labor party? We are not too enthusiastic about Roosevelt but he is the best we can get . . ." His friend reminded Schlossberg about the Socialist campaign against Fiorello LaGuardia, who became mayor of New York City. "The New York Joint Board was surprised when I asked for an endorsement of LaGuardia. They then thought we must vote Socialist . . . But now the Socialists want jobs. The Socialists were against LaGuardia but he is the best mayor we ever had . . . If we had all had the scruples of a Schlossberg, we would not have LaGuardia, and our people would have to pay the price because we didn't have him." The conclusion was clear: "Endorsing and supporting Roosevelt does not mean voting Democratic or Republican, but a vote for the protection of my liberty and the liberty of my fellow workers."

But Schlossberg refused to change his mind. He cast the only "No" vote and then, at the Union's Convention, explained his opposition to Roosevelt. It was conduct designed to further infuriate Hillman, and Schlossberg knew it. On this point they had long disagreed. Just before the General Executive Board meeting Hillman had come to see him, in his room, which was in fact "a very rare event" in the relations between the two men. Schlossberg was stunned to learn that Hillman had committed himself and the Amalgamated to support FDR. "The thing itself was not surprising . . . I knew that it was bound to come," he recorded in his journal four years later. "What shocked was the statement that the Amalgamated had been committed to a policy before the matter was taken up with the General Executive Board." He replied promptly: "And I am committed to the principle of the labor party." Hillman left the room, in silence and in "great anger."⁴¹

At the Cleveland Convention Schlossberg again broke ranks. Numerous speakers had argued for the motion backing Roosevelt. "Then Schlossberg rose and went to the microphone. The delegates fell into deep silence." They understood his remarks as a plea against Roosevelt. "When he sat down," recalled one reliable observer many years later, "every person in the hall rose and applauded Schlossberg to the rafters for at least five minutes. It was a tremendous demonstration of admiration, affection, and nostal-

41 Schlossberg Journal, June 1, 1940.

gia." But then, after finishing the tribute to Schlossberg's independent spirit, and listening to Hillman's sharp criticism of Schlossberg's views, "they proceeded to vote overwhelmingly for the motion."⁴²

Schlossberg had challenged Hillman once too often. The president of the Amalgamated pursued the future, for himself, his members, the labor movement, and the republic at large, in his way, his style, on his terms. Like Dubinsky and Zaritsky, Hillman was also the head of a grand coalition governing his labor union. When he and his coalition had made Roosevelt politics as integral a part of union policy as any of its bargaining agreements with employers, violators of such decisions by the grand coalition had to be put into their place, perhaps even ostracised. "I realized at the Cleveland Convention," Schlossberg recalled four years later, "that I would be eased out of my office by means of the retirement plan as punishment for my Roosevelt stand. . . ."⁴³

But even in this controversy, that did not directly involve ethnic issues, ethnic democracy's Jewish ambiguities had affected the relationship between these union officials. The meeting in Cleveland had been in May 1936. In June, Schlossberg became a grandfather who wanted to bring the important private news to his one-time friend. "I knew he was very bitter. He avoided me when we met. But I felt such news, the birth of my first grandchild, he should get from me direct, not second hand or indirect." Instead of congratulations, Hillman attacked him on two counts. He accused him of wanting to break up the Convention, that is to say preventing Hillman and the convention from fulfilling aspirations through or with the help of Roosevelt. The other line of attack challenged the union's emergent ethnic democracy with which Schlossberg identified. Hillman accused him of marching differently to the Zionist drum roll than to Hillman's corps: at a Zionist convention Schlossberg would have sacrificed conscience for unanimity.⁴⁴

This time it was Schlossberg who left the room in silence and in anger. Hillman knew better. He had become a non-Zionist member of the Jewish Agency in 1929 and throughout these years had good contacts with the larger world of Jewish politics. He had known that in 1934 Schlossberg had stayed with the recently formed Jewish Labor Committee after the walkout of the Poale Zion delegates. They represented the American branch of the international socialist Zionist political party within the larger Zionist movement and op-

42 *ACWA Proceedings, 1936*, 388-389; Maurice Neufeld to Gerd Korman, April 18, 1984. See also Josephson, *Hillman*, pp. 393-401.

43 Schlossberg Journal, November 8, 1940.

44 *Ibid.*, June 1, 1940.

posed the anti-Zionist stance of the Committee. Schlossberg had never joined Poale Zion and fought its rigid approach towards organized Jewish workers in the United States.

The truth was that within the union, emergent ethnic democracy had not precluded such conflicts among individuals and groups belonging to the same ethnic group. As late as January 24, 1940, when German and Russian troops occupied almost all of the lands in which most Central European Jewry lived, Schlossberg also revealed that Hillman's General Executive Board still had a different public agenda from Schlossberg. He wrote in his Journal that Hillman had informed two socialist Zionist leaders that the Amalgamated national leadership refused to support the Histadrut because the union was interested in "matters American" and because Jews only constituted 15 per cent of the union's membership. For the moment Schlossberg ignored local union efforts on behalf of Jewish causes, including those in Palestine, as well as the fact that union contributions to the Joint Distribution Committee's agricultural project in Russia in the 1920's were designed to help Soviet Jews. He wanted to demonstrate that Hillman had not made the Histadrut a public cause of the General Executive Board; and so he listed approximations of union donations to other kinds of "non-American" public causes. 1920's: \$300,000 for the Russian American Industrial Corporation; \$3,000 for the German Clothing Workers' Union; \$10,000 for striking unions in the U.K.; 1930's: \$50,000 for Spain; "the other day" \$1,500 for Finland; and "now collecting a large sum for building in Lithuania." Within the year Hillman had forced Schlossberg into retirement.⁴⁵

In the meanwhile, in the nation at large, minorities represented in the needle trades remained "graded." Their public concerns were still considered private parochial ones: Palestine among Jews, Ethiopia among Blacks, and opposition to discrimination and persecution among all of the "outsiders."⁴⁶ The United States would need another thirty years in the history of its changing nationality before the needle trade union's ethnic democracy, with its ambiguities, would become integral parts of the republic's altering group relations.

45 At the GEB of June 20-21, 1940 the Histadrut was given \$2,000.00. On the forced retirement see Schlossberg Journal, July 17 and November 8, 1940.

46 On Ethiopia see John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: 1974), pp. 434-435; William R. Scott, "Black Nationalism and the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict, 1934-1936," *The Journal of Negro History*, LXII (April, 1978), 119-122; *A.F. of L. Proceedings*, 1936, 655-664, 780; *UMW Proceedings*, 1936, I, 218, 299-300; IV, 13-14; *NYSFL Proceedings*, 1935, 149; Klehr, *Communism*, pp. 342-343.