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Review:

Sewing the Fabric of Statehood: Garment Unions, American Labor, and the Establishment of the State of Israel, Adam M. Howard
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Sewing the Fabric of Statehood: Garment Unions, American Labor, and the Establishment of the State of Israel, Adam M. Howard (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), ISBN 978-0-252-04146-4, pp. 176, \$95.

When the State of Israel became a reality on 14 May 1948, New York City's Garment District was elated: the Jewish-led needle-trades unions and organizations that had urged its creation had reason to rejoice. Despite some dissent among the members, the leaders of these unions shed their earlier opposition to Zionism to unite in support of the new state. In a concise account, Adam M. Howard, the editor of the US State Department's *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, details the drift to this consensus as it occurred over several decades. He focuses not so much on developments in the Yishuv itself but primarily on the role played by the leadership of the garment unions and the American labour movement in bringing about the establishment of the state of Israel. Jewish American leaders such as Max Pine, Max Zaritsky, and David Dubinsky promoted both the consolidation of the Yishuv and subsequent Israeli statehood. They spoke for organizations that included the United Hebrew Trades, the Jewish Labor Committee, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA).

Howard covers considerable ground. He begins with the origins of the Jewish labour movement in Europe and America and ends in the 1980s. His account really begins with Great Britain's pledge of support for a Jewish national home in Palestine expressed in the Balfour Declaration of 1917. He then traces Britain's tortuous path to its implementation. Along the way, Histadrut (the General Federation of Jewish Labour) skillfully enlisted the support of American labour. Howard deftly describes that process, which featured a *Gewerkschaften* (a Yiddish term for trades unions) campaign to raise funds and make Americans aware of what was happening in Palestine. By stressing support for labour rather than a national home, even non-Zionists could be persuaded to support the Yishuv. Histadrut and the American Jewish workers maintained their relationship through the Second World War and the Holocaust. Evidence of the latter persuaded union presidents such as Dubinsky of the ILGWU and Sidney Hillman of the ACWA of the need for a Jewish state.

The American Federation of Labor (AFL) and its rival, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), likewise backed the advent of Israel. Under the leadership of Samuel Gompers, William Green, and George Meany, the AFL remained a steadfast supporter. This position hinged in no small measure on the role the ILGWU played in the AFL. Having left the AFL along with ten other unions in 1936, the ILGWU did not join the CIO when it was formed in 1938, and Dubinsky kept the organization in limbo for two years before eventually taking it back to the AFL. In June 1940, within days of France's surrender to Hitler and faced with the ongoing dramatic deterioration of the European Jews' prospects, Dubinsky abandoned his refusal to speak at events taking place under the auspices of the National Labor Committee for Palestine and gave an address at a testimonial dinner for Green, hoping to draw him further into the attempts to rescue European labour leaders from the advancing German troops. Rescue efforts continued through the Second World War as did efforts to thwart a potential postwar foe, the Soviet Union.

Howard notes Dubinsky's fierce anti-communism. Based in ILGWU headquarters, the Free Trade Union Committee (FTUC), an AFL intelligence operation established primarily to help save Western Europe from the Soviets, also helped fund Histadrut. In 1948, the FTUC was instrumental in steering France and Italy westwards and in New York State, Dubinsky's Liberal Party mobilized support both for Israel and for Truman's presidential campaign.

The author reserves some of his sharpest words for the "political chameleon" Franklin D. Roosevelt. While Howard does not acknowledge the antisemitism prevalent within the US State Department under Roosevelt, he does state that on the question of Jewish migration to Palestine during the Second World War, "Roosevelt publicly oscillated depending on the political ramifications". Roosevelt "consistently demonstrated support for the garment workers' efforts in Palestine" but these "statements were written for public consumption" and "did not represent Roosevelt's actual policy toward a Jewish homeland in Palestine". In fact, "his policy focused on maintaining Arab backing for the Allied war effort" (p. 47).

The British Prime Minister Clement Attlee and his Labour Party likewise disappointed American labour. After coming to power in 1945, Labour withdrew from its longstanding support for the Balfour Declaration and stuck to the McDonald White Paper of 1939, which severely restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine. Howard is at his best when describing

the Americans' denunciation of this policy and their endorsement of Israeli statehood following Britain's subsequent withdrawal from Palestine. His account is both lucid and effective.

There is much of value in this book. Howard's account of Histadrut's continuing cultivation of American labour on the way to the creation of a Jewish state and the process that led to the Jewish labour movement uniting behind the Yishuv and Israel is particularly fascinating. Incorporating much primary research and comprehensive in its scope, this splendid study whets our appetite for additional insight. For example, if, as Howard indicates, opposition to this course lingered within the ILGWU, it may well have persisted elsewhere as well.

Robert D. Parmet