

# Union Structure and Rank and File Revolt : The Israeli Experience

## Structure syndicale et révolte de la base : l'expérience d'Israël

Abraham Friedman

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### Résumé de l'article

Pendant les derniers dix ans, la plupart des grèves qui se produisirent en Israël n'étaient pas autorisées. C'est là le résultat des tensions entre des différents niveaux d'autorité au sein de Histadruth. L'Histadruth (la Fédération générale des travailleurs en Israël) est la seule centrale syndicale importante en ce pays. Elle compte dans ses rangs 74 pour cent de l'ensemble des salariés, alors que d'autres syndicats en groupent 8 pour cent. Ces tensions sont attribuables à la structure dualiste du mouvement ouvrier en Israël, c'est-à-dire à l'antagonisme qui existe entre les caractéristiques d'organisation des échelons supérieurs, la centrale elle-même, et celle des échelons inférieurs, les comités de travailleurs. Le type absolu de syndicalisme d'affaires convient parfaitement aux comités de travailleurs, alors que l'on peut considérer la centrale comme une organisation politique. Leurs buts et les rapports qu'ils ont avec leurs commettants et les parties politiques se contredisent. Cependant que la centrale endosse les directives de la politique économique nationale du parti travailliste, les comités de travailleurs recherchent les objectifs économiques à court terme de leurs membres au plan de l'usine. Cette divergence entre les buts des deux niveaux d'organisation favorise la multiplication des grèves non autorisées de la part des comités de travailleurs.

Les grèves non autorisées sont l'unique moyen laissé aux travailleurs d'exprimer leur opposition aux objectifs recherchés par la centrale. Historiquement, les comités de travailleurs étaient des syndicats politiques. Leurs buts ne différaient pas de ceux de la centrale. Leurs chefs étaient désignés par la direction des partis politiques. Enfin, les suffrages donnés étaient exprimés en faveur des partis politiques. Mais parce que, depuis un certain temps déjà, les travailleurs n'adhèrent plus aux syndicats pour des raisons d'ordre politique, mais en vue d'améliorer leurs conditions économiques, il s'exerce beaucoup de pressions à la fois sur l'Histadruth et les comités de travailleurs pour modifier les objectifs du syndicalisme. Ces pressions se sont manifestées à l'usine par l'établissement de comités d'action institués par les travailleurs partout où les comités de travailleurs ont adopté la politique salariale de l'Histadruth. Dans les usines où les comités de travailleurs sont devenus sensibles aux revendications de leurs commettants, comme ils n'ont pas le droit de participer aux négociations collectives, ils ont manifesté leur force en essayant d'intervenir dans l'aménagement des processus de fabrication ou autres domaines connexes qui étaient auparavant considérés comme des chasse gardée de la direction. Ainsi pouvaient-ils, du moins partiellement, servir la cause de leurs membres. Le résultat concret de ces tactiques qu'on acceptait comme des tensions « normales » entre employés et dirigeants d'usine se sont-elles graduellement transposées en tensions « contre nature » entre le travailleur et son syndicat.

Au cours des deux dernières décennies, la plupart des comités de travailleurs ont changé d'objectifs. Malheureusement, ceci ne fut pas suivi d'un examen formel et d'une définition nouvelle de leurs rôles, de leurs obligations et de leur autorité. La centrale resta centralisée, du moins théoriquement, n'assignant aucun rôle aux comités de travailleurs dans la négociation collective. La seule issue qui était laissée aux comités de travailleurs, c'était de s'engager officiellement dans la négociation collective, c'est-à-dire de débattre avec les employeurs salaires et conditions de travail au-delà des accords conclus entre la centrale et le patronat. À l'occasion de nombre de ces négociations officielles, les comités de travailleurs furent forcés de déclencher une grève qui, dans les circonstances, n'était pas autorisée par la centrale.

Cet exposé nous incite à conclure qu'il s'impose d'une manière urgente de changer les structures de la centrale. Et le seul changement qui puisse être acceptable pour la base syndicale, c'est que l'Histadruth soit plus réceptive à leurs revendications, en augmentant le rôle et l'autorité des comités de travailleurs dans le processus des négociations collectives et en formulant une politique salariale indépendante. Plusieurs de ces modifications furent réalisées au cours des dernières années. On peut ainsi les énumérer: la démocratisation des centrales, principalement en ce qui concerne la tenue des élections aux échelons supérieurs, l'établissement par la centrale d'un comité spécial chargé d'étudier les questions qui se rattachent à la structure de la centrale et la mise au point d'une politique salariale plus indépendante que celle qui fut adoptée par l'ancien secrétaire et le secrétaire général actuel de l'Histadruth. C'étaient là autant de pas dans la bonne voie. Mais il est encore besoin de changements plus radicaux en vue de transformer la structure de l'Histadruth de façon qu'elle devienne une véritable centrale syndicale plus qu'une organisation politique.

# Union Structure and Rank and File Revolt

## The Israeli Experience

**Abraham Friedman**

*The high rate of unauthorized strikes in Israel can be attributed to the structural dualism of the largest and most important trade union in Israel — the Histadruth. In structural dualism a reference is made to the incompatibility between the organizational characteristics of the upper echelons of the union, i.e., the trade union department and those of the lower echelons, i.e. the workers' committees. Their goals and relationship with their constituency and political parties are incongruous. While the trade union department adheres to the prescriptions of the national economic policies as put forward by the Labor Alignment party, workers' committees are committed to the short run economic goals of their members at the shop level.*

Several scholars have suggested that there are a limited number of ways by which the rank and file of a trade union can express its dissatisfaction with the top union leadership.<sup>1</sup> Weber discusses the following four methods which can be used by the union membership to show its discontent with leadership:

- a) they can engage in an unauthorized strike,
- b) they can fail to ratify contracts negotiated and agreed upon by the union leadership,

FRIEDMAN, A., Senior Lecturer, School of Business Administration, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel.

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\* This paper was written while the author was a fellow of the Levi Eshkol Institute for Economic, Social and Political Research. The author is grateful for the helpful comments of Albert Blum and Myron Roomkin.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Derek C. BOK and John T. DUNLOP, *Labor and the American Community*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1970, pp. 78-79; John T. DUNLOP, «The Function of the Strike.» in John T. DUNLOP and Neil W. CHAMBERLAIN (Eds.), *Frontiers of Collective Bargaining*. New York; Harper and Row Publishers, 1967, p. 108; Arnold R. WEBER, «Stability and Change in the Structure of Collective Bargaining,» in Lloyd ULMAN (Ed.), *Challenges to Collective Bargaining*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall Inc., 1967, pp. 30-32.

- c) they can oust the leaders of the union,
- d) they can leave the union and join another trade union — a defection from the parent union usually done by dissenting locals.<sup>2</sup>

Of these, only the first one is available to the Israeli trade union rank and file. In the Collective Agreement Act (1957), there is no requirement for membership ratification of collective agreements negotiated and signed by the central union leadership and in practice only on rare occasions are they ratified by rank and file. Nomination of individuals for leadership positions in the national union is conducted by the relevant organs of the different political parties that participate in the union. The election is a political one, i.e., the member votes for a political party thus electing the candidates nominated by the party. Rank and file have no voice in the selection of candidates for central union positions. Histadruth (the General Federation of Workers in Israel) is the single important general union in Israel, as it comprises 74% of Israeli wage earners, and another 8% are members of other unions.<sup>3</sup> A rival general union, National Labor Federation, is structured similarly to the Histadruth and follows the Histadruth pattern in collective agreements.<sup>4</sup> All other unions are relatively small and encompass only a few related occupations; the only rival union of relative importance is the independent union of high school teachers. Thus, the possibilities of local defections are very remote. As a result, the only effective method available to Israeli workers to show their discontent with their leaders is participation in unauthorized strikes.

Table 1 presents statistics on strikes in Israel during the period 1960-1973.

In the last thirteen years the majority of strikes that took place in Israel were unauthorized strikes.<sup>5</sup> If work days lost are considered, a similar trend is observable: a substantial portion of work days lost in strikes were lost in unauthorized strikes. The relatively high intensity of unauthorized strikes is one of the special characteristics of collective bargaining in Israel. A similar high rate of unauthorized strikes can be

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<sup>2</sup> Arnold R. WEBER, «Stability and Change in the Structure of Collective Bargaining,» *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Abraham BRONSTEIN, *Histadruth Society on Its Anniversary* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: The Executive Committee, Histadruth, 1970, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> See description in Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor Law and Practice in Israel*, Report No. 315, Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Labor, 1967, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> Government Statistics on strikes in Israel are available only since 1960.

**TABLE 1**  
**Strike Statistics — Israel — 1960-72**

	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
<i>Strikes:</i>														
Number	135	128	146	127	138	277	286	142	100	114	163	169	165	93
Workdays Lost	49,368	141,142	342,699	129,000	102,212	203,670	147,846	58,286	71,789	102,162	390,344	178,612	233,816	375,020
<i>Percent Unauthorized</i>														
Number of Strikes	26.2	43.0	61.6	55.3	65.2	79.6	56.7	44.7	52.1	56.4	54.0	53.1	67.9	63.3
Workdays Lost	41.3	61.7	92.1	89.6	68.0	88.6	57.0	40.4	38.1	47.1	18.9	45.9	46.7	22.5
<i>Partial Strikes:</i>														
Number	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	64	57	92	54
<i>Lock-Outs:</i>														
Number	5	7	8	4	6	2	18	10	4	4	8	9	3	3
Workdays Lost	13,216	73,248	7,605	4,728	9,628	218	16,546	5,327	1,972	1,221	15,824	24,678	1,242	6,452

SOURCES: Institute for Social and Economic Research, Histadruth: *Strikes and Lock-outs, 1960-1965* (Hebrew), Tel-Aviv: Executive Committee, Histadruth, 1965. Institute for Social and Economic Research, Histadruth: *Strikes and Lock-outs, 1967-1969* (Hebrew), Tel-Aviv: Executive Committee, Histadruth, 1970. Ministry of Labor, Department for Industrial Relations: *Strikes, Lock-outs, and Labor Conflicts in 1968-1971* (Hebrew), Jerusalem: Ministry of Labor, 1972. Ministry of Labor, Department for Industrial Relations, *Strikes, Lock-outs and Labor Conflicts in 1972-1973* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Ministry of Labor, 1974.

found in a few other countries, e.g., Britain, though the characteristics and causes of these strikes are different in different countries.<sup>6</sup>

The high rate of unauthorized strikes in Israel is the result of intraorganizational tensions within the Histadruth. These tensions are attributed to the structural dualism of the Israeli labor movement. It will be shown here that while the upper echelons can be characterized as a political union, the lower ones resemble a business union.<sup>7</sup> As these two types of unions differ in their goals, functions, tactics, organizational structure, membership, leadership and relations with political parties, there exist two different organizational structures within the trade union department of the Histadruth.

#### THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE HISTADRUTH

The Histadruth is a unique trade union inasmuch as in addition to being an "ordinary" trade union, it is also a large employer, the second largest in Israel — the first being the State itself; the largest supplier of health care and health insurance programs in Israel, it maintains and administers large pension and welfare funds; it is very active in the educational and cultural arena and it extends an elaborate and complex network of international relations.<sup>8</sup> In order to fulfill all of its roles, the Histadruth has developed a highly complex organizational structure. Chart I presents the unique organizational structure of the Histadruth. Some of the structural relationships between the different organizational units were formally defined by the Histadruth constitution, others developed informally.

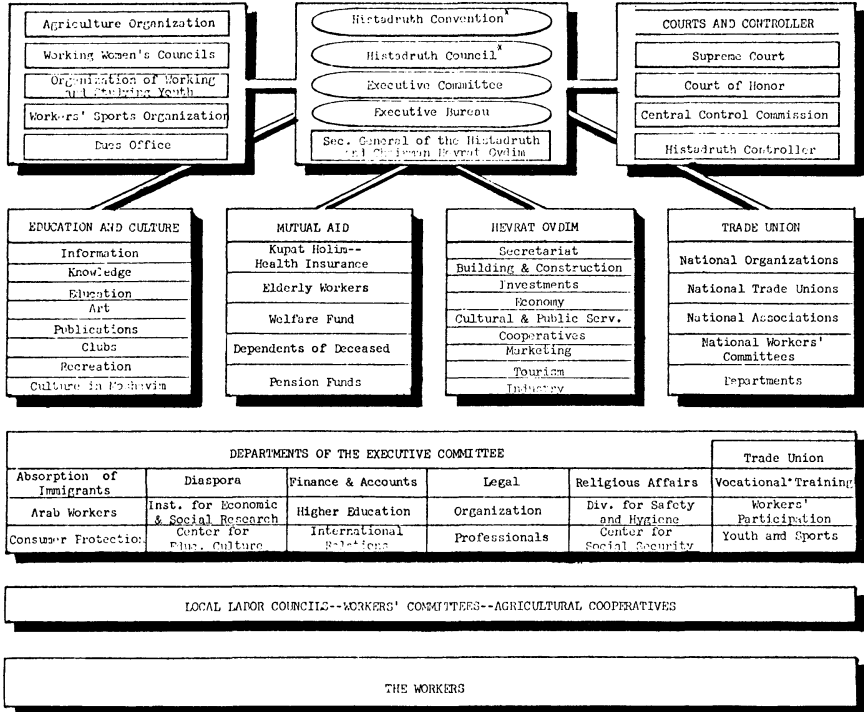
<sup>6</sup> See discussion and data in: J. E. T. ELDRIDGE, *Industrial Disputes*, London, Routledge and Kegan, Paul, 1968, Ch. 2, pp. 68-90; Jack STIEBER, «Unauthorized Strikes under the American and British Industrial Relations Systems,» *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, V, 1968, pp. 232-238.

<sup>7</sup> A typology of trade unions which describes the characteristics of political and business unions can be found in: Robert F. HOXIE, *Trade Unionism in the United States*, (New York; D. Appleton and Company, 1920), pp. 45-52. Clark KERR, John T. DUNLOP, Frederick H. HARBISON and Charles A. MYERS, *Industrialism and Industrial Man*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1964, pp. 193-207. (In this paper we use the term business unions for workers' organizations in countries where the industrializing elite is middle class, and the term political unions for organizations in countries where the elite is revolutionary-intellectual.) A detailed description of these two types of unions is presented in Abraham FRIEDMAN, «Workers' Committees and the Trade-Union Department of the Histadruth — Partners or Rivals,» in Abraham FRIEDMAN (Ed.), *Structural Changes in Labor Unions* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv, Industrial Relations Research Association of Israel, 1972, pp. 23-27.

<sup>8</sup> Detailed description of the roles and functions of the Histadruth as they are defined by its constitution can be found in: Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor Law and Practice in Israel*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

CHART 1

The General Federation of Workers in Israel



\* Acting also as the elected organs of Hevrat Ovdim.

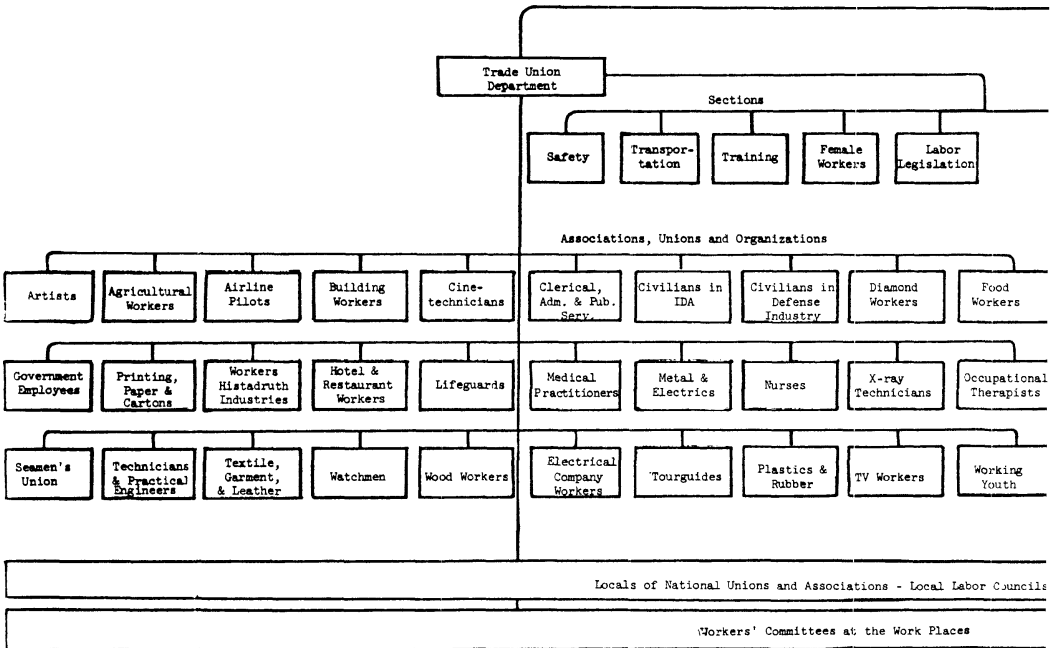
Source: Center for Culture and Education of the Histadruth, 1972.

Functionally, the Histadruth is divided into four departments, namely: The trade union department; Hevrat-Ovdim — the governing body of Histadruth’s economic enterprises; the social security department which includes Kupat-Holim — the health service and insurance organization and the different pension and welfare funds; the center for culture and education. These departments function independently of each other, though they share the same top executives — the secretary general, the executive bureau, the executive committee, the council and the convention of the Histadruth.

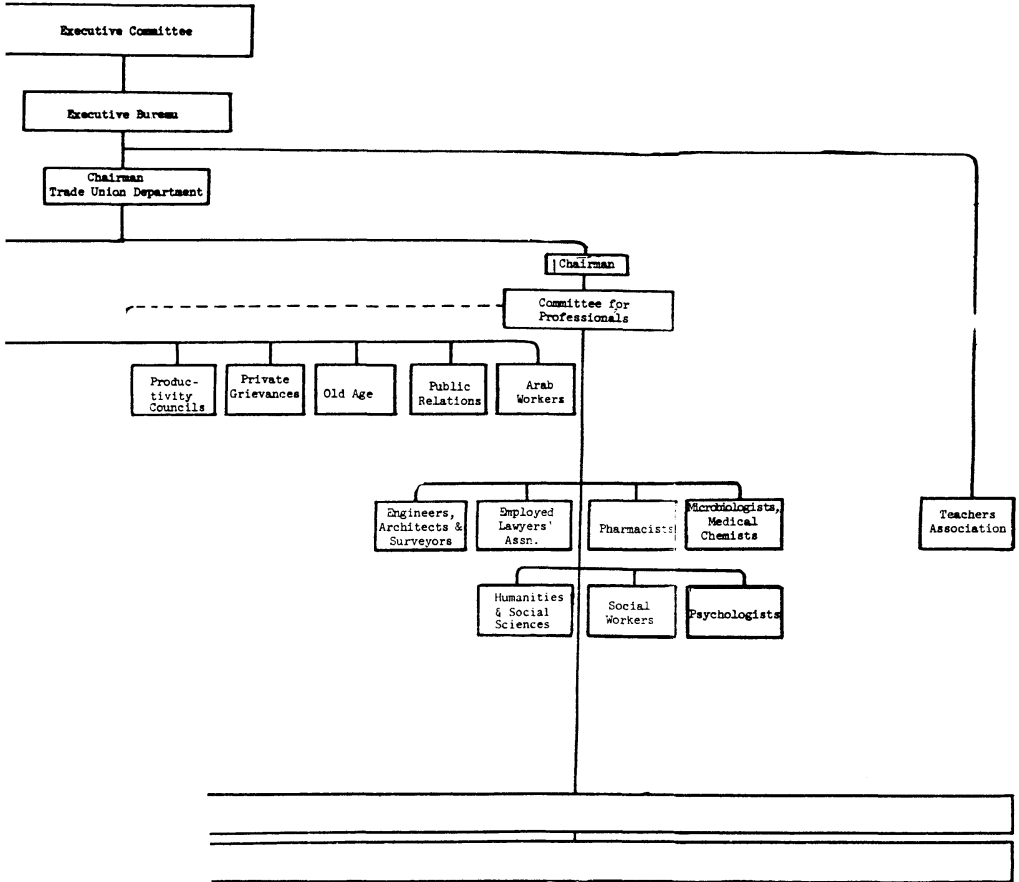
Since this paper deals with the Histadruth function as a trade union, it will focus on the structure of the trade union department. Chart 2 presents the formal organizational structure of the trade union department. It is immediately observable that the department is organized along two parallel and competing lines: one according to geographical location, i.e., the local labor councils, the other by occupational or

CHART 2

The Organizational Structure of the Trade Union Department



Source: General Federation of Workers in Israel, *Report of the Trade Union Department to the 12th Convention* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: The Executive Committee, 1973), p. 3.





industrial affiliation, i.e., the different associations, unions and organizations on both the national and local levels. The chairman, together with the other 42 members of the trade union department, direct and supervise the activities of the intermediate level organizations, while the operations of the lower echelon of the trade union department, namely, the workers' committees, are directed and controlled, at least formally, jointly by the intermediate level organizations of both types — occupational and geographical.

The attempt to fit any one of the theoretical types of trade unions to the Histadruth is bound to fail as it encounters conflicting information for the characteristics of the different organizational levels of the trade union department. The attempt to fit a theoretical type of trade union to the Histadruth is successful once the discussion is separated into two parts, one covering the characteristics of the workers' committees and other those of the trade union department — referring to all the organizational organs of the trade union department excluding workers' committees. The ideal type of business union fits pretty well the workers' committees, while the trade union department can be described as a political union. A detailed comparison and analysis of the characteristics of workers' committees and the trade union department will be presented next.<sup>9</sup>

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF WORKERS' COMMITTEES AND THE TRADE UNION DEPARTMENT

The upper and lower echelons of the Histadruth trade union will be compared by analyzing their following characteristics: goals, functions, tactics, structure, membership, leadership, finance, and relations with political parties.

*Goals* — The orientation of the *trade union department* is toward long-range, general goals. Its goals encompass large sections of society, namely the working class, and the economy as a whole. The goals of the

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<sup>9</sup> This comparison will be based on formal documents, e.g., Histadruth constitutions, and the different labor laws of Israel, and on empirical data. The source for the empirical data on the characteristics of workers' committees is from a study of workers' committees in industrial plants with more than 50 employees. See Abraham FRIEDMAN, *Workers' Committees Study* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv, Institute for Economic and Social Research, 1963. The source of the information on the opinions and attitudes of the Histadruth's rank-and-file is an extensive public opinion survey of Histadruth members in the three largest cities in Israel and their suburbs. See A. FRIEDMAN, «Workers' Committees and the Trade Union Department,» *op. cit.*, pp. 22-40.

trade union department are best represented by the wage policy pursued by it.

Since its establishment in 1941, the trade union department, earned itself an important role in collective bargaining on working conditions and became the most important organ that is concerned with the protection of the standard of living of the worker, *while sharing the responsibility for the national economic policy*.<sup>10</sup> [Emphasis added.]

The large emphasis on broad national goals is evident from the union's wage policy. Since 1950 that policy has been either to attach wage increases to the average increase in productivity or to have no wage increase at all.<sup>11</sup> These policies were adopted in order to help the government fight inflation while devoting a large part of its resources to defense and to absorption of new immigrants.

The basic aspects of the union's wage policy were formulated by the economic committee of the leading political party in the Histadruth, the Labor Alignment currently, MAPAI (Israel Workers' Party) in the past.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast *workers' committees* are orientated toward short-run, specific goals, usually increases in wages and improvements in working conditions at the plant level. Their loyalty is towards their constituency — the workers at the plant. This is evident, for example, from the fact that 48% of the workers' committees in industrial plants with more than 50 employees refused to allow management to discharge an employee regardless of the cause, e.g., even if he was charged with theft from his coworkers. The rationale for this behavior is that workers' committees perceive themselves as the defenders of every worker against his employer.

*Functions* — The functions of the *trade union department* are:

1. Bargaining national and industry-wide collective agreements in accordance with the wage policy of the Histadruth.

<sup>10</sup> General Federation of Workers in Israel, *Report of the Trade Union Department to the 12th Convention* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv, The Executive Committee, 1973, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> See discussion in David METCALF, «Wage Policy in Israel,» *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 8, 1970, pp. 213-223. The descriptions of the different wage policies are pretty accurate, but his predictions with regard to the 1970-71 wage policy were incorrect.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, with regard to the 1970-71 wage policy: A. GALIN and J. TABB, «The Package Deal — A Turning Point in the Israeli Industrial Relations System,» *Economic Quarterly*, 69-70, June, 1971 (Hebrew), p. 7.

2. Approval of strikes and dispute settlement activities through mediation and arbitration even in cases of unauthorized strikes.

3. Dealing with both specific and general problems related to the economic and wage policies, e.g., taxes, prices, industrial relations, labor legislation, incentive systems, unionization, Arab workers, working women, fringe benefits, pensions.

The functions of *workers' committees* are not defined formally, neither by the Histadruth constitution nor by the Collective Bargaining Act (1967). The Histadruth constitution specifies only that «workers' committees, in cooperation with the representative of the local labor council, are the representatives of all the workers at the work place before their employer.»<sup>13</sup> It does not further specify what are the duties of these representatives except to say that collective bargaining and the enforcement of the collective agreement are in the jurisdiction of the national unions and the local labor councils.<sup>14</sup>

In practice, workers' committees fulfill many functions at the work place:

1. In many cases (64% of industrial plants with more than 50 employees) they bargain with the employer on wage rates, incentives, conditions of work, etc., above and beyond those that were agreed upon in the collective agreement between the employer and the trade union department.<sup>15</sup>

2. In the majority of work places they play an active and important role in dealing with problems of promotion, transfer from one work station to another, discharge, disciplinary problems, etc. In 65% of industrial plants, workers' committees participate in the decisions about promotion; of these, in 67% of the plants, the discussion is based on a list of candidates supplied by the workers' committees. In 37% of the industrial plants, workers' committees intervene in the decision to transfer an employee from one work station to another, even if the employee agreed to the transfer. In 82% of the industrial plants, they are members in the plant's disciplinary committee, thus playing an active role in every disciplinary action.

<sup>13</sup> General Federation of Workers in Israel, *Histadruth Constitution* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv, The Executive Committee, 1971, Ch. D, Sec. 1/2, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. D, Sec. 1/3, 4, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Similar findings were found in a study conducted in 1972 — see Shlomit KAMINKA, «Workers' Committees as a Focus of Labor Relations Tension in Israeli Industry» (Hebrew). Unpublished M.A. dissertation. Haifa, Israel, Technion, Israel Institute of Technology, 1972, p. 65.

Several of the activities of workers' committees in areas related to the conduct of work at the work place, are anchored in Israeli labor legislation. This, however, has happened in an erratic fashion, and not in a systematic way. For example:

a) The Labor Inspection (Organization) Law 5714-1954 specifies that: «The representatives of the employees on a safety committee shall be employees of the undertaking elected or appointed by the employees therein, or by the employees' committee, as shall be prescribed by the regulation.»<sup>16</sup>

The Regulations Concerning Safety Committees and Safety Delegates-1960 specify that the employees' delegates will be appointed by the employees' committees (workers' committees), and one of the delegates has to be a member of the employees' committee which will have no other duty assigned to him by the employees' committee.

b) The Annual Holidays Act — 1951 specifies that «the holiday shall be continuous. The employee and the employer may, however, by mutual consent and with the agreement of the local committee of employees, if there is one, break up the holiday.»<sup>17</sup>

3. They initiate, support and direct cultural and social activities among the workers. 80% of the workers' committees in industrial plants were engaged in cultural activities. All the workers' committees engage in one form or another of welfare activities — the most frequent one is arrangement of loans without interest or with low interest to needy employees.<sup>18</sup>

*Tactics* — In order to achieve its goals the *trade union department* employs several different tactics. It employs legislation and political lobbying as well as strikes and economic pressure on employers. In the last two years the labor legislation department of the Histadruth suggested changes in the following acts: Severance Pay Act (1963), Equal Pay to Women and Men Act (1964), Youth Employment Act (1953), Apprenticeship Act (1953) and suggested a new act that will secure the employees rights in the case of bankruptcy.<sup>19</sup> In addition to these ac-

<sup>16</sup> Labor Inspection (Organization) Law 5714, Part 2, 11 in State of Israel, Ministry of Labor, *Labor Laws*, offset reprint from the legislative series of the I.L.O., Jerusalem, 1968, p. 145.

<sup>17</sup> Annual Holidays Act — 1951, Division II, 8, in *ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 55-56.

<sup>19</sup> General Federation of Workers in Israel, *Report of the Sections of the Trade Union Department to the 12th Convention*, Part 4 (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv, The Executive Committee, 1973, pp. 24-28.

tivities the trade union department had approved and directed several strikes. These strikes are of two types: 1. Strikes in large work places where the union wants to establish a new wage rate, incentive method or major changes in working conditions, and by the tactic of whip-sawing, spread it to the whole industry. The strike in the plants of the «Elite» firm in 1972, which lasted for 53 days, is a good example for this type of strike. The issues on which the strike focused were: change in status of employees from daily workers to monthly after twelve years of work, equal starting wage rate to males and females, and increases in wage rates and fringe benefits.<sup>20</sup> The demands of the union were above and beyond those agreed upon in the collective agreement for the food industry and the general wage policy of the Histadruth. 2. Strikes in workplaces, usually those with few employees, in order to organize the work-place or to enforce the terms of collective agreement.

The trade union department has a policy not to approve strikes which are contrary to the union's wage policy or that conflict with the interests of the economy. «The criteria according to which the department is acting in the case of a labor conflict are: Are the demands justified? Can the economy stand the fulfillment of the demands or are they harmful to the industry or the economy as a whole? Are the demands consistent with the Histadruth's wage policy? Can the employees stand the strike and carry it on? Had they tried all the available bargaining channels? Does the declaration of a strike oppose the existing legislation?»<sup>21</sup> Thus, in many cases the trade union department will not approve strikes that were declared at the plant level as they do not fill the above mentioned conditions.

*Workers' committees* try to promote their cause by means of economic pressures, mainly strikes and strike threats. They initiate the actions at the plant level, which are sometimes supported by the trade union department and sometimes opposed. In 64% of the industrial plants, workers' committees were able to secure working conditions above those of the applicable collective agreement. Of these cases the trade union department supported 40% of the workers' committees, was indifferent in 44% of the cases, and opposed the actions in 16% of the cases. The trade union department has very little control over the strike activities of the workers' committees, especially the large and strong ones. This is due to the fact that a failure to get an approval of a strike

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<sup>20</sup> General Federation of Workers in Israel, *Report of the Trade Union Department*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

by the trade union department is of very little consequence to the individuals that take part in them, since in Israel the practice in the majority of the strikes was to pay the employees back payment for the period of the strike regardless of the outcome of the strike. Currently, there is mounting public pressure, supported by the Ministry of Labor to stop this practice, and use the union strike fund in order to compensate the strikers for their loss of income.

*Organizational Structure* — The *Histadruth* is unique in being a «general» trade union; i.e., it is a trade union which encompasses all the political ideologies, as well as most occupations and industries. It includes political parties from the extreme left, namely the two communist parties, to the extreme right, namely GAHAL (the Heruth-Liberal block) and the Independent Liberals party; also included is a religious party.

The organizational structure of the *Histadruth* developed from the top to the bottom. Though, for example, the *Histadruth* was established in 1920 and the internal structure was developed in 1923, the trade union department was not established until 1941 and the national unions and associations was not established until 1945.

The authority within the trade union department is highly centralized. With the chairman and the members of the department holding most of the authority internally while the major decisions are made by the secretary general of the *Histadruth*, the executive committee and the executive bureau. This is evident from the conduct of collective bargaining and the procedure used for the approval of strikes.

The trade union department, upon the approval of the executive committee and the executive bureau formulates, at least once every two years, the union's wage policy, which covers wages and fringe benefits. This wage policy has to be submitted for approval by both the executive bureau and the executive committee. Negotiations on industry-wide or craft-wide contracts or on a collective agreement with an employer that is not concentrated in one geographical area are handled by the members of trade union department. Usually, the secretaries of the national unions involved in the agreement will also participate in the bargaining. Sometimes the members of the trade union department take part, even in negotiations on the plant level.

Strikes by a national organization have to be approved by the trade union department. The approval of a strike in a plant is in the power of both the local labor council and the appropriate national union.

*Workers' committees* represent the workers at the shop level, and in many cases there are several workers' committees at the same workplace each representing different occupations. Usually the separation is between blue collar workers, white collar workers and professionals. Thus, it goes without saying that the general organizational structure of workers' committees is decentralized since there is at least one committee for every workplace.

Formally, the authority of workers' committees was never defined either by the Histadruth or by the legislature. In practice, most workers' committees enjoy a high degree of autonomy, especially workers' committees in large plants or in establishments providing an essential service or product, where in many instances they act independently of the trade union department when the specific situation calls for such an action. Yet, most workers' committees recognize the fact that they would have got less from their employers without the support of the local labor council.

In most of those cases where the employer has many plants or many branches of the same establishment, the workers' committees established at each plant or branch join together and establish a national workers' committee. The national workers' committee is composed of representatives of the participating workers' committees, which are appointed by their committees or elected by special, personal, direct elections. The national workers' committees are highly independent; in 1972 the secretary general of the Histadruth made the remark that in the last two years the Histadruth did not take part in any of the collective bargaining conducted by the national workers' committees.

Most of the day to day decision making and activities of the workers' committees are carried out by the secretary of the committee. In large enterprises the position of a secretary of the committee is a full-time position which is fully paid by the employer; other members of the committee get time off their work in order to take part in the committee activities. The costs of these activities are, usually, also absorbed by the employer.

*Membership* — Membership in the *Histadruth* and its branches is open to all workers 18 years old or older, who live on their earnings from their own work without exploiting the work of others, who agree to abide by the rules and decisions of the official organs of the Histadruth. Membership in the Histadruth is personal and is conditional upon not being a member of any other workers' organization. Membership is also

dependent upon regular payment of the Histadruth dues, which can be paid directly or checked off by the employer.<sup>22</sup>

Every member *has* to belong to a local trade union which covers an occupation or industry and only to one such union.<sup>23</sup> If employment conditions demand the establishment of a national trade union, it will be established. Membership in the relevant national craft or industrial union is compulsory. A worker can belong only to one of the national trade unions.<sup>24</sup>

The appeal of the Histadruth to its members is based mainly on the health and welfare services that it supplies. Yet the majority of the members were compelled to join the union or became members sometime in their past and cannot explain why they remain members. Only a small portion are members because of the trade union activities. Table 2 presents data on the distribution of urban Histadruth members by reason of membership.

TABLE 2

## Reason for Membership in the Histadruth by Type of Membership (Percent)

Reason	Type of Membership		
	Total	Members	Housewives
<i>Compulsory</i> , dues are withheld automatically	32	24	49
<i>Personal reasons</i> , habit, entered many years ago	22	24	18
<i>Health insurance and services</i>	16	15	17
<i>Ideology</i>	15	19	8
<i>Protection of employees</i>	13	16	6
No answer	2	2	2
Total	100	100	100

SOURCE: A. Friedman, *et al.*, «Public Opinion of the Histadruth,» J. Ulitzki (Ed.), *Histadruth Yearbook 1965* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Executive Committee of the Histadruth, 1966, p. 538.

<sup>22</sup> See, General Federation of Workers in Israel, *Histadruth Constitutions*, *op. cit.*, Ch. C, pp. 14-15.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. D, Sec. II/2, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. D, Sec. III/1, 2, 3, p. 17.



The commitment of the rank-and-file towards the Histadruth's policies in general and the trade union department's wage policies is not stable. In recent years whenever the trade union department had supported a restrained wage policy dictated by the Labor Alignment, it was supported only by a minority of the members. In a study conducted in 1965 it was found that only 35% of Histadruth members in large urban settlements had supported the Histadruth wage freezing policy, while 44% disapproved of the policy, with 22% giving no reply. Yet, in those cases where the Histadruth tries to increase the wage levels or fringes it generates relatively large support from the membership. In the same study 60% of the members felt that without the activities of the trade union department the level of their fringe benefits would have been lower, while only 40% felt that without these activities the level of their wages would have been lower.

Members are recruited directly and through workplaces especially those that are union shops. According to a recent legislation the union has the right to collect «organization dues» from the nonmembers at workplaces covered by collective agreements negotiated by the union, this lowered the cost of joining the union.<sup>25</sup> The fact that about 53% of the immigrants join the Histadruth during their first year of stay in Israel can be attributed to a large extent to the fact that during the first 6 months of their stay in the country, new immigrants get free health insurance from the Histadruth.<sup>26</sup>

There is not necessarily a relationship between the fact that the employees are Histadruth members and the fact that the workplace is unionized or not. There are some workplaces, mainly in the service sector where the majority of the employees are Histadruth members, yet the workplace is not organized and the Histadruth members might not vote for organizing the workplace. Thus, the fact that about 75% of the wage earners are Histadruth members does not necessarily serve as an estimate for the degree of unionization of workplaces in Israel.

*Workers' committees* represent only the employees of a specific workplace, sometimes only those employed in certain occupations in the workplace. Workers are represented by the workers' committees by virtue of working in a certain workplace. There are some cases where workers' committees are organized at the shop level without any relationship to the Histadruth or any other trade union.

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<sup>25</sup> 1970 amendment to the *Wage Protection Law*, 5718 — 1958, 25/A/3B. This practice similar to «agency shop» procedure in the U.S.

<sup>26</sup> Abraham BRONSTEIN, *Histadruth Society on Its Anniversary*, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-14.

The appeal of workers' committees to their constituency is based on the degree by which their goals are attained through the committees' activities. In the past during the late 1950's when workers' committees were not responsive to the demands of the members, in many plants the workers used to establish unofficial rival organizations known by the name of action committees. Currently, as workers' committees are responsive to the demands of their members, one will only rarely find an action committee. The workers show a high level of commitment to the workers' committees.

*Leadership* — The supreme body of the *Histadruth* is the convention. The delegates to the convention are nominated by the different political parties.<sup>27</sup> They are elected every four years in general, secret, and proportional elections.<sup>28</sup> The ballots in these elections are cast for political parties, which present the voters with a list of candidates. The convention elects the members of the executive council by their political affiliation and according to the proportion of votes cast for the political party in the *Histadruth* election.<sup>29</sup> The executive council appoints the members of the executive committee, which in turn appoints all the 43 members of the trade union department according to the relative number of ballots cast for each party in the *Histadruth* elections.<sup>30</sup> The elections for the local labor councils and the national unions and associations are very similar to the elections to the *Histadruth* convention, as the candidates are nominated by the political parties and the ballots are cast for a political party and not a candidate.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the elections to the *Histadruth* organs have very little significance to the membership. As is evident from the fact that out of those members that knew to what national union they belong, only 33% mentioned a date when they were asked when the elections were held, 5% said that there were no elections, 38% said that they do not remember the date, 24% did not answer, compared with 80% of the workers that work at an enterprise with a workers' committee which mentioned the date, 12% remembered the election and not the exact date and only 8% did not answer.

The occupants of the high union positions are professional politicians. The secretary of the union is usually also a member of parlia-

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<sup>27</sup> See, General Federation of Workers in Israel, *Proportional Elections Constitution* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv, The Executive Committee, *Histadruth*, 1971, Ch. H, pp. 12-13.

<sup>28</sup> See, General Federation of Workers in Israel, *Histadruth Constitutions*, *op. cit.*, Ch. F, Sec. 1, 2, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. F, Sec. 10, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. H, Sec. 6, p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. D, Sec. 12a, and Ch. 3, Sec. 3, pp. 18, 19.

ment, and most of the secretaries of the union are ministers in the government sometime during their careers.

There is no periodical review of the leadership performance by the rank and file. Thus, most of the urban members feel that they have no influence on the actions of the Histadruth (45% with 14% no answer).

The members of the *workers' committees* are elected in direct personal elections conducted at the shop level. In most workplaces the candidates are nominated according to their personal characteristics; only in a small minority (22%) of the workers' committees was there a list of candidates endorsed by political parties. There is a tendency to select the candidates according to their departmental affiliation at the workplace.

The fact that the elections of the workers' committees are direct means that the workers feel that they have an influence on the outcome of the election. For this reason they are interested more in these elections than in elections to the national unions and have a deeper knowledge about the elections to the workers' committees.

There is periodical review of the leadership performance by the workers at the workplace. In almost all the industrial plants general assemblies of the employees were called and in more than half of them the leaders presented a financial report to the members.

As a result, the leaders of the workers' committees feel that they have to be responsive to the demands and interests of their constituency. This is evident from the fact that when asked according to what interest they will act in a case of conflict of interest between the Histadruth and the workers at the plant, 42% responded according the Histadruth, 34% according to the workers, and 24% according to the specific case. At the same time 93% of them answered that they see themselves as the *Histadruth representatives* at the plant level.

*Finance* — The regular budget of the Histadruth allocates the available resources among the different functional areas including the trade union departments. The major source of income for the Histadruth's regular budget is membership dues. More than half of the dues collected are allocated to the Histadruth's health care and insurance program (Kupat Holim). Most of the resources allocated to the trade union department are included in the «organization and culture» account. The differential allocation of membership dues among the different functional areas of the Histadruth is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3

**Allocation of Histadruth's Membership Dues<sup>a</sup>**

<i>Function</i>	<i>Percent of Total Dues' Revenue</i>
KUPAT HOLIM (Health care and insurance) <sup>b</sup>	55.10
Organization and Culture	33.30
Strike Fund	1.00
Employment Fund	1.00
Labor Councils' Building Fund	1.70
Housing Fund	1.10
Mutual Aid Funds	6.00
Moetzet Hapoalot (Working Womens' Council)	0.80
Total	100.00

SOURCE: Institute for Economic and Social Research: *Histadruth Facts and Figures*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>a</sup> Decision of the Histadruth Executive Committee (August 15, 1971).

<sup>b</sup> Not including family coverage.

Histadruth membership dues are assessed on the basis of a progressive scale according to members' income, ranging from a minimum of 2.5% to a maximum of 4.5% on the first IL 1,000 of monthly earnings. Some 80% of Histadruth members pay their dues through a withholding arrangement with their employers. All dues collected are transferred into the Central Treasury of the Histadruth. The demands of all the branches of the Histadruth are provided for through the yearly budget of the Histadruth which has to be approved by the Executive Committee.<sup>32</sup> Several of the special activities of the Histadruth are financed by special funds collected abroad or from the revenue acquired through the Histadruth's economic activities.

Beside the regular dues the Histadruth also collects special voluntary political dues from its members. The goal of the political dues is to help the political parties finance their activities in the Histadruth. Political dues are assessed at a range from 0.1% to 0.5% of the first IL 700 of the member's monthly earnings. The sums collected together with an additional contribution of the Histadruth are transferred to the different political parties. In 1970 out of the sum of IL 202,172,600 which was the total revenue of the Histadruth IL 6,091,900 or 3.01% were transferred to the different political parties.

<sup>32</sup> Institute for Economic and Social Research, *Histadruth Facts and Figures* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv, The Executive Committee, p. 12.

The activities of the workers' committees are financed through dues that are collected from the employees at the workplace. These dues are collected, in most cases (97%), through a withholding agreement with the employer. These dues are collected separately and are independent of the regular Histadruth membership dues.

The largest expense item in the workers' committees budget is gifts distributed to the employees, usually twice a year — at New Year and Passover. The cultural activities of the workers' committees are financed in most cases either by management or by the local labor council in 89% of the industrial plants. The time that a member of the workers' committee invests in his union activity is fully paid for by management.

*Relationship with political parties* — As was mentioned before, the *Histadruth* wage policy, for all practical purposes, is dictated to it by the economic committee of the Labor Alignment party. By the same token, union leaders are nominated and «elected» to their top leadership positions by the political parties. From time to time a secretary-general of the *Histadruth* has tried to pursue more independent wage policies, and has been immediately caught under cross fire from both the party leadership and the members of the government. The end result is that the *Histadruth* follows to a large extent the directives of the political parties.

Most *workers' committees*, currently, do not have any direct relationship with any *political party*, though some of them did in the past.

*In summary*, it can be said that since the trade union department's goals structure, membership, leadership, financing, relationship with political parties and preferred legislation are similar to the ones of political unions, and since its functions and tactics are a mixture of those of both political and business unions, the ideal type of political union matches quite well the trade union department. Workers' committees are best described as business unions since all of their characteristics are analogous to those of business unions. The implications of the fact that the trade union department is a political union and workers' committees a business union will be analyzed next.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The high rate of unauthorized strikes in Israel can be attributed to the structural dualism of the *Histadruth*, i.e., the incompatibility

between the organizational characteristics of the trade union department and those of workers' committees. It was demonstrated above that their goals and relationship with their constituency and political parties are incongruous. While the trade union department adheres to the prescriptions of the national economic policies as put forward by the Labor Alignment party, workers' committees are committed to the short-run economic goals of their members at the shop level. This discrepancy between the goals of the two organizations results in a large number of unauthorized strikes, most of which are conducted by workers' committees.

Unauthorized strikes are the only means open to workers' committees to express their dissatisfaction with the objectives of the trade union department. Historically, workers' committees were political unions, i.e., their goals were similar to those of the trade union department, their leaders were nominated by organs of political parties and the ballots in the election at the workplace were cast for political parties. As a result of the change in the union membership which joined the union not because of ideological reasons, but more in order to advance their economic situation, the pressure on the Histadruth in general and on workers' committees in particular to change goals was mounting.<sup>33</sup> This pressure was manifested at the plant level by the establishment of action committees that were personally elected in direct elections conducted at many workplaces where the workers' committees pursued the Histadruth wage policy. In those plants where the workers' committees were responsive to the demands of the workers, as they had no authority to participate in collective bargaining, they showed their power by intervening in the management of the production process and related areas which are accepted as being in the realm of management rights. In this way, they could promote at least partially the cause of their members. The end result of this practice was that tensions that were accepted as «natural» between employees and their managers were transferred to «unnatural» tensions between the worker and his union.<sup>34</sup>

In the last two decades, most workers' committees have changed their objectives. Unfortunately, this was not followed by a formal examination and redefinition of their roles, duties and authority. The

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<sup>33</sup> This change started after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, with the large immigration. See discussion in S. N. EISENSTADT, *Israeli Society*. New York, Basic Books, Inc., 1967, pp. 64-65.

<sup>34</sup> See discussion in Shlomit KAMINKA, «Workers' Committees as a Focus of Labor Relations Tension in Israeli Industry,» *op. cit.*, pp. 156, 162.

trade union department remained centralized, at least formally, assigning workers' committees no role in collective bargaining. The only way that was open to workers' committees was to engage informally in collective bargaining, which meant bargaining with the employers for wages and working conditions above those agreed upon between the trade union department and the employer. In several negotiations for collective agreement, workers' committees were compelled to declare a strike that in most instances was unauthorized by the trade union department.

This discussion leads to the conclusion that there is an urgent need for the introduction of a structural change in the trade union department. The only change that might be acceptable to the rank-and-file is that one which will make the Histadruth more responsive to their demands, thus extending the role and authority of workers' committees in the process of collective bargaining and the formulation of an independent wage policy by the Histadruth. Several of the needed changes were introduced in recent years. Among them are: the democratization of the national trade unions, mainly through the conduct of elections for their supreme bodies, the creation of an *ad hoc* committee by the trade union department that has to examine the different problems related to the structure of that department, and the more independent wage policy that was pursued by the last secretary-general of the Histadruth and by the current acting secretary-general.<sup>35</sup> These were small steps taken in the right direction. There is an urgent need for a major move that will change the Histadruth organizational structure towards becoming more of a business union model and less of a political one.

### **Structure syndicale et révolte de la base : l'expérience d'Israël**

Pendant les derniers dix ans, la plupart des grèves qui se produisirent en Israël n'étaient pas autorisées.

C'est là le résultat des tensions entre des différents niveaux d'autorité au sein de Histadruth. L'Histadruth (la Fédération générale des travailleurs en Israël) est la seule centrale syndicale importante en ce pays. Elle compte dans ses rangs 74 pour cent de l'ensemble des salariés, alors que d'autres syndicats en groupent 8 pour cent. Ces tensions sont attribuables à la structure dualiste du mouvement ouvrier en Israël, c'est-à-dire à l'antagonisme qui existe entre les caractéristiques d'organisation des échelons supérieurs, la centrale elle-même, et celle des échelons inférieurs, les comités de travailleurs. Le type absolu de syndicalisme d'affaires convient parfaitement aux

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<sup>35</sup> General Federation of Workers in Israel, *Report of the Trade Union Department*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-9.

comités de travailleurs, alors que l'on peut considérer la centrale comme une organisation politique. Leurs buts et les rapports qu'ils ont avec leurs commettants et les parties politiques se contredisent. Cependant que la centrale endosse les directives de la politique économique nationale du parti travailliste, les comités de travailleurs recherchent les objectifs économiques à court terme de leurs membres au plan de l'usine. Cette divergence entre les buts des deux niveaux d'organisation favorise la multiplication des grèves non autorisées de la part des comités de travailleurs.

Les grèves non autorisées sont l'unique moyen laissé aux travailleurs d'exprimer leur opposition aux objectifs recherchés par la centrale. Historiquement, les comités de travailleurs étaient des syndicats politiques. Leurs buts ne différaient pas de ceux de la centrale. Leurs chefs étaient désignés par la direction des partis politiques. Enfin, les suffrages donnés étaient exprimés en faveur des partis politiques. Mais parce que, depuis un certain temps déjà, les travailleurs n'adhèrent plus aux syndicats pour des raisons d'ordre politique, mais en vue d'améliorer leurs conditions économiques, il s'exerce beaucoup de pressions à la fois sur l'Histadruth et les comités de travailleurs pour modifier les objectifs du syndicalisme. Ces pressions se sont manifestées à l'usine par l'établissement de comités d'action institués par les travailleurs partout où les comités de travailleurs ont adopté la politique salariale de l'Histadruth. Dans les usines où les comités de travailleurs sont devenus sensibles aux revendications de leurs commettants, comme ils n'ont pas le droit de participer aux négociations collectives, ils ont manifesté leur force en essayant d'intervenir dans l'aménagement des processus de fabrication ou autres domaines connexes qui étaient auparavant considérés comme des chasse gardée de la direction. Ainsi pouvaient-ils, du moins partiellement, servir la cause de leurs membres. Le résultat concret de ces tactiques qu'on acceptait comme des tensions « normales » entre employés et dirigeants d'usine se sont-elles graduellement transposées en tensions « contre nature » entre le travailleur et son syndicat.

Au cours des deux dernières décennies, la plupart des comités de travailleurs ont changé d'objectifs. Malheureusement, ceci ne fut pas suivi d'un examen formel et d'une définition nouvelle de leurs rôles, de leurs obligations et de leur autorité. La centrale resta centralisée, du moins théoriquement, n'assignant aucun rôle aux comités de travailleurs dans la négociation collective. La seule issue qui était laissée aux comités de travailleurs, c'était de s'engager officieusement dans la négociation collective, c'est-à-dire de débattre avec les employeurs salaires et conditions de travail au-delà des accords conclus entre la centrale et le patronat. À l'occasion de nombre de ces négociations officieuses, les comités de travailleurs furent forcés de déclencher une grève qui, dans les circonstances, n'était pas autorisée par la centrale.

Cet exposé nous incite à conclure qu'il s'impose d'une manière urgente de changer les structures de la centrale. Et le seul changement qui puisse être acceptable pour la base syndicale, c'est que l'Histadruth soit plus réceptive à leurs revendications, en augmentant le rôle et l'autorité des comités de travailleurs dans le processus des négociations collectives et en formulant une politique salariale indépendante. Plusieurs de ces modifications furent réalisées au cours des dernières années. On peut ainsi les énumérer: la démocratisation des centrales, principalement en ce qui concerne la tenue des élections aux échelons supérieurs, l'établissement par la centrale d'un comité spécial chargé d'étudier les questions qui se rattachent à la structure de la centrale et la mise au point d'une politique salariale plus indépendante que celle qui fut adoptée par l'ancien secrétaire et le secrétaire général actuel de l'Histadruth. C'étaient là autant de pas dans la bonne voie. Mais il est encore besoin de changements plus radicaux en vue de transformer la structure de l'Histadruth de façon qu'elle devienne une véritable centrale syndicale plus qu'une organisation politique.