EAST END JEWS IN POLITICS, 1918-1939:
A Study in Class and Ethnicity

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List of Abbreviations

AJLM: Archives of the Jewish Labour Movement, Tel-Aviv
BDA: Board of Deputies Archives, London
BSP: British Socialist Party
BUF: British Union of Fascists
CPGBL: Communist Party of Great Britain Library
CZA: Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem
DH: Daily Herald
DW: Daily Worker
ELA: East London Advertiser
ELO: East London Observer
EZF: English Zionist Federation
FSA: Federation of Synagogues Archive, London
GLRO: Greater London Record Office
HO: Home Office
IWW: Industrial Workers of the World; 'Wobblies'
ILP: Independent Labour Party
JC: Jewish Chronicle
JI: Jabotinsky Institute, Tel-Aviv
JPC: Jewish People's Council against Fascism and Anti-Semitism
LAC: London Area Council
MEPO: Metropolitan Police files
NAFTA: National Amalgamated Furnishing Trade Union
ORT: Organisation for Rehabilitation and Training
NUTGW: National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers
SDF: Social Democratic Federation
STDL: Stepney Tenants' Defence League
UCWU: United Clothing Workers' Union
ULTTU: United Ladies Tailors' Trade Union
WA: Weizmann Archives, Rehovot, Israel
YW: The Young Worker
YZ: The Young Zionist
ZFGB: Zionist Federation of Great Britain
ZR: The Zionist Review
Glossary

Beth Hamedrash: House of study often serving as a synagogue.

Bund: Abbreviated name of the General Jewish Workers' Union in Russia and Poland; a socialist anti-Zionist party.

Chevra: (Lit. society). Refers to the small synagogues which immigrants established in the East End in the nineteenth century.

Di Tsait: The Jewish Times. East End Yiddish newspaper.

Eretz Yisroel: The land of Israel.

Habonim: (Lit. the builders). Zionist youth movement based on socialist principles.

Haham: Spiritual leader of the Sephardi community, i.e. of Jews originating from Spain and Portugal.

Keren Hayesod: The Foundation Fund; a Zionist fund.

Poale Zion: (Lit. the workers of Zion). Socialist Zionist organisation whose British section was officially formed in 1906.

Revisionism: Zionist movement led by Vladimir Jabotinsky which called for a struggle against British rule in Palestine.

Talmud Torah: Religious Hebrew school.

Tarbuth: (Lit. culture). Zionist inspired Hebrew school network founded in Poland in 1922. Aim of Tarbuth schools was to create a new Jewish secular national identity.

Vatike Habonim: Militant senior section of Habonim.
Introduction

The main focus of Anglo-Jewish historiography has been on the period of mass immigration between 1881 and 1914. This concern with the arrival and initial settlement of thousands of persecuted Jews from Eastern Europe is understandable. The dispersal of Russian and other East European Jews to Western Europe and the United States was a major turning point in modern Jewish history and had a profound impact on both the Jewish and non-Jewish world. For the relatively small Anglo-Jewish community, mass immigration presented unprecedented challenges and problems. Welfare agencies accustomed to dealing with a steady caseload were suddenly overwhelmed by vast numbers of destitute immigrants, speaking no English. It is impossible to determine the precise number who settled in Britain and indeed the 1903 Royal Commission on Alien Immigration recognised that the census did not provide an accurate estimate of alien immigration. The three main reasons cited by the Commissioners for this were that the census officers did not pay sufficient attention to accuracy, aliens did not understand the forms and that aliens preferred to be considered British-born and therefore deliberately misrepresented their nationalities.¹ There was also a further problem which was that aliens were not enumerated according to their religion or ethnic origins. We can, however, safely assume that most Russian and Polish immigrants were Jews

fleeing persecution. Statistics published in the 1903 Royal Commission were extracted from the 1901 census and from this source we are informed that in 1901 there were 95,245 Russians and Poles in Britain, 53,537 of whom resided in London and 42,032 who resided in Stepney.2

The pioneering studies of the East End Jewish immigrant community during the period up to 1914 are social histories which focus on the relationship between the new immigrants and the established Jewish community.3 Recent studies which have presented a formidable challenge to the early accounts by insisting on the primacy of class conflict over ties of religion and ethnicity have still, nevertheless, focused primarily on the period before the First World War. This is true for studies of both the London and provincial Jewish communities.4 By contrast, there has been no comprehensive study of East End Jewry between the two world wars. Secondary source accounts of the East End Jewish community during this mature stage of its development can be found only in more general studies and are

therefore incomplete. A number of studies concerned specifically with anti-semitism and fascism have referred to the East End Jewish community but their treatment of the community has, perhaps inevitably given the nature and scope of these studies, been one dimensional in the sense that East End Jews have been viewed solely in terms of their responses to anti-semitism and fascism. There are also a number of unpublished studies which focus on the inter-war period but again these either discuss the Jewish experience as part of a broader scenario or concentrate on a specific aspect of East End Jewry. The present study is, therefore, an attempt to re-dress the balance.

The essential aim of this study is to examine the extent to which the political activities of East End Jews during the inter-war years facilitated their integration into the local political system and into local society in general. Unlike


assimilation, integration does not demand obliteration of the minority community's distinctive identity. On the contrary, an integrated minority community is one which enjoys full and equal participation in every aspect of society while still retaining its own unique identity. The integration of any minority group into the majority community is a highly complex and lengthy process generally associated with upward social and economic mobility. For this reason the second generation of an immigrant community is likely to be only partially integrated and this can create dilemmas, problems and uncertainties for the minority community regarding its status in society. The second generation Jews who populated the inter-war East End provide a very good case study of such partial integration for we can see how these Jews participated in the local political system without becoming integrated socially, culturally or economically.

Political integration was possible because second generation East End Jews had attained a level of anglicisation sufficient to participate in local politics and, in addition, shared the same class position as the local native population. As a working class community, East End Jews experienced the same social and economic conditions as the non-Jewish working class. Poverty, unemployment and poor housing were the common enemies of both groups of workers who were likewise drawn to leftist politics. Yet despite sharing the same position in the social and economic structure, Jews and gentiles remained, for the most part, segregated in their social and working lives. Jews lived in streets which were populated mainly by Jewish
families and were employed in artisanal trades which reinforced this largely self-imposed ethnic segregation. Such residential and occupational segregation had two important effects. Firstly, it acted as a powerful force against class integration since worker unity in working class communities relied on a combination of workplace ties and neighbourhood life. Secondly, it reinforced cultural differences. The Yiddish-speaking homes in which second generation Jews were raised provided them with a distinct cultural background, even if they ultimately rejected the Yiddish language and its negative associations with the poverty and persecution of East European ghetto life.

The East End Jewish community was different from the native population in other ways too. Most striking was the community's distinct demographic characteristics. Throughout the period of mass immigration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Jewish birth rate was considerably higher than the general birth rate. This high fertility, a legacy of nineteenth century Eastern Europe, was firmly rejected in the years after the First World War by the second generation of British-born Jewish women. The result of this was that Jewish family size declined to a level below the


national average. As Rickie Burman has recently shown for Manchester, the sharp decline in Jewish family size during the 1920s meant that the once crucial economic contribution of women was often no longer required. By remaining in the home, Jewish women were therefore able to exert greater influence on the family and to ensure that Jewish cultural values were transmitted to the children. In this way, women played a crucial role in instilling a strong sense of Jewishness in the family and ultimately therefore in ensuring the survival of ethnic group solidarity.

The concept of an ethnic group has been the subject of numerous scholarly studies and has been defined in a variety of ways, depending on the discipline, experience and interests of the investigator. There is, however, a general consensus that ethnic groups have a sense of "belonging together because of shared cultural characteristics and belief in a common ancestry". One commentator has expanded on this definition and has identified four salient features of an ethnic group; namely, the sense of unique group origins; unique group history; one or more aspects of collective cultural distinctiveness, such as religion, language or customs; and a

sense of unique collective solidarity. This last factor is crucial to the present study for it is central to the question of how East End Jews perceived themselves and how their collective identity determined their political behaviour. One dimension of collective cultural consciousness which was virtually absent from the second generation Jews of the inter-war East End was religion. By rejecting the Jewish religion young East End Jews were, in effect, challenging the very basis of the identity which the community's anglicised leadership had established. The Anglo-Jewish elite was anxious that the community should be perceived as a religious group by the wider society. Their motivation for insisting on a religious identity was that Jews could then be regarded as loyal British citizens of the Jewish faith. Any alternative forms of identity, such as those which included ethnic and cultural elements, represented a threat to the unitary image of the community which the middle class leadership wanted to project to British society.

The challenge of a secular ethnic identity was most clearly manifested in the high profile political activity in which many East End Jews engaged in the inter-war years. Such


15. The conflict between secular and religious definitions of Jewish identity was not unique to the Anglo-Jewish situation. See, for example, P. Hyman, From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939 (New York 1979), p.63.
political activism provided a vehicle for the expression of a secular Jewishness. However, most politically active East End Jews avoided the specifically Jewish politics offered by Zionistic and other separate Jewish political parties and instead utilized the British political system. By rejecting political separatism, East End Jews committed themselves to striving for the ultimate unity of Jewish and non-Jewish workers. This was undoubtedly a massive task, especially as political integration had to take place without the supporting framework of residential and occupational integration. However, it was a task to which Jewish political activists of all political persuasions in the East End were unequivocally committed. To give just one illustration of this, even issues which could be regarded as specifically Jewish were couched in universal terms to give them appeal to both Jews and non-Jews.

Given this scenario, it would be inaccurate to speak of 'Jewish politics' in the East End and to study Jewish involvement in local politics as though the aim of politically active Jews was to further Jewish interests. Similarly, to identify a movement of 'Jewish communism' in the East End as one historian has recently done, is to misinterpret the nature of Jewish involvement in the party.16 Undoubtedly, there were Jewish Communists in the East End and, indeed, certain aspects of the Communist Party's policy, particularly during the Popular Front period, attracted many Jews to the party. However, at no stage did they transform it into a Jewish political party. Rather,

to reiterate an earlier point, they utilized the opportunity presented by the party to express their secular ethnic identity in a general political context. Furthermore, although Jewish Communists were undoubtedly a significant force in the East End, it should be borne in mind that even at the height of the Communist Party's popularity in the mid-1930s the Stepney Labour Party, especially its Mile End branch, retained and even increased its Jewish membership and support and yet Srebrnik does not refer to 'Jewish Labourism'. On the contrary, he argues that the Stepney Labour Party was hijacked by the Irish.17 This analysis seems to be the product of viewing the Stepney Labour Party as a unified homogenous body. However, like the Stepney Communist Party, it was divided by internal feuding and factionalism. To conclude this critique, we cannot speak of 'Jewish politics' in the East End but only of Jewish involvement in politics. It was this involvement which facilitated the crystallization and articulation of a sense of Jewishness based on ethnicity and class.

Given the primacy of ethnicity and class in this study, two of the main objectives must be to determine the extent to which East End Jews introduced specifically Jewish issues into East End politics and the extent to which their political activity represented the defence of a class position. Closely related to these themes is whether Jewish political activists experienced any conflict between their Jewish interests and their party political interests. The priority given to the

role of political activists as local leaders of the East End Jewish community creates the necessity to focus on individual personalities. Without such character sketches it is impossible to determine the motivations of those individuals who played a formative role in shaping the collective identity of the Jewish East End in the 1920s and 1930s. Reference to family background and occupation, together with an outline of the main organisations to which the individual belonged are all, therefore, deemed to be essential in contributing to our understanding of the local political leaders and their attitude to the elite-dominated Jewish communal institutions.

Although distanced from the East End by the class composition of their memberships, Anglo-Jewish communal institutions nevertheless had an important impact on the social and political life of the East End because the leaders of these institutions continually tried to exert their influence in order to solve what they regarded as the 'East End Problem'. This was a generic term which was applied to a wide range of concerns which West End Jewry from time to time expressed about East End Jewry. On some occasions, it referred to the indifference of Jewish East Enders to religion. On other occasions, particularly when anti-semitism was at the forefront of the political agenda, it referred to the activities of unscrupulous Jewish employers in the East End who sweated their workforce. It could also refer to the tendency for East End Jews to involve themselves in forms of political activity considered unsuitable by the leadership. This applied particularly to Jewish involvement in the Communist Party.
The Board of Deputies of British Jews, founded in 1760, stood at the pinnacle of the Anglo-Jewish institutional infrastructure. The Board's main activity was to safeguard the civil rights of the Jewish community. It came to be regarded as the only authoritative political institution of Anglo-Jewry and the only institution having the confidence of the British government. The Board's membership was predominantly synagogue-based and it therefore represented Jews as a religious minority. This system of representation led, by the 1930s, to considerable discontent with the Board, particularly among young politically aware Jews in the East End.

The two major orthodox synagogal institutions in Anglo-Jewry were the United Synagogue and the Federation of Synagogues. The United Synagogue was founded in 1870 by an Act of Parliament which confirmed the financial and religious union of the main London orthodox synagogues. One of the main aims of the United Synagogue's founders was to preserve traditional Judaism in an English setting. To this end, various liturgical modifications were made to the synagogue service which were intended to ensure that the style of worship would be both formal and decorous. In harmony with their anglicised style, constituent synagogues were usually large cathedral-like structures. An important function of the United Synagogue was to act as an agent of communal control. By means of a formal,


organisational structure the close-knit, highly anglicised Anglo-Jewish aristocracy who comprised the leadership of the United Synagogue, hoped to ensure an economical use of financial resources. At the same time, they believed that they were making an important contribution to efforts aimed at preventing a future religious schism in the community. In this second aim the United Synagogue was not entirely successful. The major reason for this was its failure to attract the large influx of new immigrants from Eastern Europe. The result of its inability to attract this new community was the formation of the Federation of Synagogues.

The Federation was founded in 1887 by Samuel Montagu, Liberal MP for Whitechapel between 1885 and 1900. Montagu was the head of a successful City banking firm and a cousin of Lord Rothschild, the president of the rival United Synagogue. Although Montagu had impeccable credentials as a member of Anglo-Jewry's ruling elite, he enjoyed an unequalled rapport with East End Jewish immigrants. His ability to address immigrant Jews in Yiddish and his obvious piety endeared him to the Jews of the East End ghetto. His essential aim in forming the Federation was to unite in one organisation the multitude of small immigrant synagogues which had sprung up all over the immigrant quarter after 1881. Although Montagu's benevolent intentions cannot be in doubt, he did also intend the Federation to act as an instrument of social control. Like other members of the Jewish establishment, Montagu feared the spread of socialism among East End Jews. He believed that he could exert a beneficial influence by supervising the affairs of the
immigrants and by demonstrating that they were a law-abiding, non-socialist community.

The term 'synagogue' does not convey the full range of functions which the immigrants' small places of worship fulfilled. As well as being a house of prayer, the immigrant synagogue was also a social institution where Jews from the same town or district in Eastern Europe could come together in order to recreate the communal life which they had left behind. Another important function of the immigrant synagogue was to serve as a benefit society dispensing payments to mourners during the seven days' confined mourning when no work could be done. In these ways, the immigrant synagogue functioned as a society and was thus known by its Hebrew term 'chevra'.

The chevras did not, indeed could not, fulfill all the welfare and charity needs of the immigrants. This task required a centralised administrative structure with access to a plentiful supply of funds. The Jewish Board of Guardians, founded in 1859, was the largest Anglo-Jewish charity and welfare organisation serving the immigrants. However, the Board's ambivalent attitude to the immigrants, particularly in regard to its efforts aimed at encouraging emigration and repatriation, made East End Jews highly suspicious of Board officials. The


belief, common among East End Jews, that the Board sought to make the acquisition of relief as difficult and humiliating as possible, was deep rooted and survived into the period after the First World War. The East End Jewish attitude to the Board undoubtedly played a major role in shaping a climate of opinion which led to the creation of autonomous Jewish relief organisations in the East End.

A final point should be made about the geographical definition of the Jewish East End. Any definition must be qualified by the fact that the area which was known as the Jewish East End never had fixed physical boundaries. Nevertheless, some general observations can be made. The Jewish East End was located in the borough of Stepney and its focal point was in the district of Whitechapel (see map overleaf). The Jewish community, even after the First World War, did not penetrate into all Stepney neighbourhoods. Although Jews gradually moved eastwards into Stepney Green and Mile End, they carefully avoided the Irish neighbourhoods near the docks. An important consideration in relation to the present study is that many Jews who had moved away from Stepney still retained close links with the area in terms of political association, employment, synagogue membership, family and social ties. Any over-rigid delineation of the Jewish East End would, therefore, exclude many individuals who played a vital role in the political life of the area but who no longer resided there. This would be particularly true in the case of politically active East End Jews who had moved to Hackney. In addition, the location of Jewish trades in neighbouring boroughs necessitates the
inclusion of districts such as Bethnal Green and Shoreditch in this study.

In view of the impracticality of imposing rigid geographical definitions there is a case for defining the Jewish East End as a psychological concept rather than a physical concept. This was often the approach of Jewish East Enders themselves and it has also been the approach taken by Jewish writers of the East End, both in novelistic and memoir literature. The particular value of this approach is that it enables the historian to delineate the psychology and self-identity of an East End Jew. The novels and memoirs of writers such as Simon Blumenfeld, Willy Goldman, Joe Jacobs, Bernard Kops, Emanuel Litvinoff and Ray Waterman form part of a genre of East End proletarian writing which evokes the harsh reality of East End life in the inter-war years. As their work vividly shows, the squalor of the slums and the struggle for survival in an underpaid East End tailoring or furniture workshop produced, almost by necessity, a sense of community and common concern. Neighbourhood life was marked by close family and friendship bonds and was reinforced by an intense cultural life centred around libraries, clubs, cafes, billiard rooms, dance halls, and education classes. All the above mentioned writers make some reference in their work to the cultural and political

influences of informal meetings at the Whitechapel Library, the Workers' Circle, and the Young Communist League meetings at the junction of Whitechapel Road and Vallance Road. Politics was thus an integral part of the cultural life of the Jewish East End and, to a large extent, was shaped by local cultural values.

The literature of the period also includes many references to the generational conflict between foreign-born parents and English-born children. The children had rejected the Yiddish culture of their parents and yet remained excluded from English culture and society. Suspended in a cultural limbo, young East End Jews struggled to forge their own identity from the plethora of small social, literary and political organisations which punctuated the neighbourhood. In this way, the East End as a place developed and reinforced the collective identity of young Jews. This concept of a 'sense of place' has been the focus of recent social geographical analysis. In particular, the work of David Ley in the United States and John Eyles and Gillian Rose in Britain has established clear links between a sense of place and identity. Eyles has perceptively observed that "people recognise in their 'communities' (or in their local culture) a source of identity which is manifested as a sense of belonging". This sense is "established and reaffirmed in the context of everyday life rather than through rare and
formalised procedures". By affirming their sense of belonging through the pattern of daily life in the East End, the sense of group identity of Jews was constantly being reinforced and solidified.

The material covered in this study is arranged thematically rather than chronologically and encompasses the major areas of Jewish involvement in East End politics in the inter-war years. Chapter One places the East End Jewish community in its social and economic context. Chapter Two discusses Jewish involvement in East End municipal politics. Chapter Three involves a consideration of the nature of Jewish trade unionism in the East End. Chapter Four discusses the conflict between Communists and Zionists for ideological supremacy in the East End. Chapter Five examines the various responses of East End Jews to anti-semitism and fascism. Chapter Six considers the significance of Sunday trading in the East End. Although the chapters are self-contained, they do not stand in total isolation from each other. One of the strongest connecting themes is anti-semitism. Thus, for example, the activities of Jewish employers who sweated their workers, Jewish landlords who charged exorbitant rents and Jewish traders who opened all weekend were all targeted by Jewish political activists in

their dual battle aimed at halting anti-semitism and improving
the living and working conditions of Jewish and non-Jewish
workers in the East End. By highlighting the importance of
such interaction it is hoped that the study will be able to
present the totality of the Jewish political experience in the
East End during the inter-war years.
Chapter One:
The Jewish East End: A Society and Economy based on Class and Ethnicity

An examination of the social and economic structure of the Jewish East End is crucial for an understanding of the political activities and allegiances of the community. Henrietta Adler's study of 'Jewish Life and Labour in East London' which appeared in The New Survey of London Life and Labour in 1934 forms the basis of any discussion concerning the changing social and economic structure of East End Jewry during the inter-war years. In view of the absence of additional statistical information it is difficult to verify Henrietta Adler's conclusions. However, as will be shown, her evidence has been corroborated by contemporary newspaper reports, oral testimony and memoirs.

The first point which needs to be made is that East End Jewry was not a static community; rather it was a community in

flux. The changing socio-economic status of East End Jews was a continuous process which characterised the periods both before and after the First World War. Together with the forces of migration, anglicisation, and integration, socio-economic factors had an important impact on the class structure of the community and thus on its political affiliations. The process of migration from the East End and the relocation of traditional Jewish industries to North London acted as the motive forces behind the changing social and economic structure of the Jewish East End. However, geographical mobility did not affect all sections of the community. For many of those who remained in the East End, the continued high incidence of unemployment meant that the standard of living did not improve. It was these Jews who were left behind in the East End who shaped the political character of the community during the 1920s and 1930s.

In terms of their occupational distribution, low social status and residential concentration, East End Jews constituted a proletariat community. The very nature of their position in the social and economic structure had the effect of driving a wedge between East End Jews and middle class Jews in the suburbs. Although most East End Jews shared the same social and economic position as the non-Jewish proletariat, the Jewish employment structure was significantly different. Jewish economic life was marked by a high degree of concentration in the workshop trades, especially tailoring and furniture making. A popular alternative to the largely
subterranean existence of workshop life was street trading, and many Jews eked out an existence as costermongers and hawkers. By contrast, the non-Jewish employment structure was far more diverse. The docks, wharfs, warehouses, railway engineering works, breweries and food and soft drinks factories were all important employers of East London labour.² Jewish occupational segregation ruled out the possibility of solidarity between Jewish and non-Jewish workers in the workplace. A related effect was to place serious obstacles in the way of worker unity in the trade union movement. In practice, therefore, Jews were a separate category within the working class. Even English-born Jews were regarded as a foreign rather than indigenous part of the population of East London. This no doubt reflected the fact that East End Jews emphasised their separateness and distinct cultural identity by participating in their own social organisations. However, the Communist Party and the left-wing of the Labour Party treated the Jewish working class quite differently. Jews were seen as members of a particular class and had no status as an ethnic group outside a class analysis. The Jewish working class was thus divested of its ethnic separateness and regarded as part of the international working class. In practice, such an analysis bore little relation to the reality of Jewish working class life. The survival of Jewish cultural consciousness in the East End was confirmed by a survey

carried out by John Carrier in 1969. He concluded from a study of the Jewish communities in Stepney and Hackney that both groups had maintained a social class and an ethnic identification. Thus, working class Jews were homogenous in terms of their "common cultural background, work and life experiences and consciousness of being Jewish".

The Jews who populated the East End in the inter-war years were mainly the descendants of immigrants who had fled from persecution in Eastern Europe during the period 1881 to 1914. The massive influx of immigrants during that period had given Stepney the reputation as the 'Jewish Ghetto' of the metropolis. Whole streets came to be occupied by Jewish immigrants. The natural gravitation of immigrant Jews towards the East End as their first point of settlement, irrespective of their economic position, was largely determined by the fact that this area already contained a significant Jewish population and therefore the new arrivals could obtain lodging and employment in an already established ethnic neighbourhood. In addition, the presence in the East End of friends and relatives from their former home towns and shtetls in Eastern Europe, acted as a powerful attraction to


new immigrants seeking to make their homes in London. Although most of the Jews who arrived in the East End during the period of mass immigration were destitute, there were also a number who were somewhat financially better off. In addition, some of the immigrants quickly improved their economic position. It was these comparatively prosperous Jews who were able to afford to set up their own small business or to buy cheap local housing as an investment. As one of the authors of a major contemporary study of East End Jewry, published in 1900, commented: "It should be clearly recognised that they form a community which is not stagnant in poverty but everywhere bubbling up with life and enterprize". As anglicisation and upward social mobility occurred, the original ethnic neighbourhood was abandoned and Jews sought better housing facilities elsewhere. In this way, the East End functioned as a transitional staging post on the way to Jewish integration into the wider community. The presence of a significant upwardly mobile element in the East End before 1914 meant that the pre-war East End Jewish community was marked by a far greater degree of social diversity than that which characterised the community after the First World War when many of the better off East End Jews had begun the journey to the North-West London suburbs. Thus, an inevitable result of the movement of upwardly mobile Jews away from the original area of settlement was to leave a primarily working class Jewish population in the East End. The cohesiveness of

6. Ibid., pp.17, 57-60.
7. Ibid., p.60.
the Jewish East End after 1918 as compared with the relatively
diverse social and economic structure of the community before
1914 proved to be of fundamental importance in shaping the
community's political allegiances.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Jewish
population of East London defined as Stepney, Poplar and
Bethnal Green, was estimated to be about 125,000.\(^8\) In 1929,
an estimate based on information about Jewish households given
in *The New Survey* set the figure at 85,000 of whom 62,000
resided in Stepney.\(^9\) In addition, East London now accounted
for a smaller proportion of London Jewry. Henrietta Adler
estimated that in 1929 East London accounted for 60% of the
Jewish population of London as compared with 90% in 1889.\(^10\)
Despite this decline in the Jewish population of East London,
the borough of Stepney still contained the largest number of
aliens in London. In 1914, there were estimated to be 53,000
aliens in Stepney. According to the 1921 Census the number
was 37,288. This figure represented 30% of all aliens in
London and 15% of the total population of Stepney.\(^11\) A decade
later, there were still over 25,000 aliens in the borough.\(^12\)

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9. Quoted by Lipman in *ibid*.
11. Figures quoted by M. J. Landa in *Jewish Chronicle (JC)*
12. Figure from 1931 Census quoted by W. J. Fishman in 'A
    People's Journée: The Battle of Cable Street (October
    4th 1936)', *History from Below: Studies in Popular
    Protest and Popular Ideology in Honour of George Rüde*,
The proportion of these aliens who had become naturalised was small. The 1921 Census, for example, recorded just 3,488 naturalised aliens in Stepney. There were two major reasons why there continued to be so many unnaturalised aliens in the East End long after immigration into the area had ceased. One reason was the relatively high cost of becoming naturalised. For many working class Jews in the East End the £10 naturalisation fee was prohibitive. Secondly, the naturalisation process was complicated and often lengthy. Delays in granting naturalisation caused considerable concern to the Board of Deputies, particularly in the 1920s when much of its Law and Parliamentary Committee's time was taken up with the issue.

As late as 1937, Basil Henriques, warden of the Bernard Baron St. George's Jewish Settlement and leader of the Oxford and St. George's Jewish Boys' Club, expressed his concern that naturalisation was not encouraged by the Home Office. Henriques cited the fifteen year residence qualification to back up his claim. Despite the considerable difficulties involved in becoming naturalised, there was nevertheless a gradual decline in the number of unnaturalised aliens in the East End. This process paralleled the general decline of the East End Jewish population which occurred in increasingly large numbers from 1914 onwards.


The most immediate cause of the decline in the East End Jewish population was the virtual cessation of immigration which occurred at the outbreak of the First World War. The Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act, passed in 1919, ensured that there would be no post-war resumption of large scale Jewish immigration from Central and Eastern Europe. The absence of new foreign arrivals meant that the East End Jewish population was increasingly of English birth. This important change in the composition of the East End Jewish population was commented on by Henrietta Adler. She remarked that "immigration having ceased entirely in recent years, the Jewish population of East London will, within a short period, be almost without exception English-born". A second, equally important explanation for the decline in the East End Jewish population was migration from the area. However, it was not until 1914, when the arrival of new immigrants ceased, that the effects of internal migration began to have an impact both on Jewish population size in the East End and on the social and economic structure of the East End Jewish population. Alongside migration from the East End, there was also some geographical mobility within the East End as the Jewish population gradually moved eastwards from Whitechapel towards Stepney Green and Mile End.

15. For a fuller discussion of the 1919 Aliens Act, see below, pp.235-236.

16. The New Survey, Vol.VI, p.273. The increasingly English-born composition of the East End Jewish population was also commented on by Munby, op.cit., p.34.

More important in the long term than such internal migration was the movement of significant sections of the East End Jewish population out of the area. As has already been mentioned, this process was not new in the inter-war years. Ever since Jews had moved into the East End in large numbers in the 1880s there had been a continuous process of dispersal from the area. Henrietta Adler has shown how geographical mobility was actively encouraged by the leaders of London Jewry who feared the dangers inherent in such a dense concentration of foreign immigrants. The policy of dispersion was aided by the Four Per Cent Dwellings Company which, after 1892, erected their new dwellings in Camberwell, Dalston and Stoke Newington. With the exception of Camberwell, the location of the Four Per Cent Dwellings were in areas to which Jews moved in increasingly large numbers.

From the early 1920s attention was increasingly focused on the new locations to which East End Jews were moving. For example, in 1923 M. J. Landa, writing in the Jewish Chronicle,


Not only have the foreigners decreased in number, but they have spread from the regions of Whitechapel, Mile End, Spitalfields and St. George's (which are in Stepney), and from the neighbouring districts of Bethnal Green to Hackney (which includes the regions of Clapton, Stamford Hill and Amhurst Park), to the Islington areas of Highbury and Canonbury; to Stoke Newington (Green Lanes); to St. Pancras (Bloomsbury and Camden Town); and to the West and North-West - Hampstead, Paddington (Maida Vale), Marylebone (St. John's Wood), Kensington (which includes Notting Hill), and have become naturalised in the process.

The most common route out of the East End was northwards to Hackney and beyond. The tendency for Jews to move out has been shown in the changing distribution of London synagogues during the inter-war years. Synagogues were increasingly being established in areas outside the East End. In 1929 the United Synagogue set up a North and North-East London Committee to consider the provision of synagogue and class room accommodation in the district. Ernest Lesser, the chairman of the Committee, believed that the United Synagogue should make more effort to attract young people moving into North and North-East London. The Committee noted that many of the East End Jews who had recently settled in the area were poorer than those Jews who had settled there during the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century. This was an indication that geographical mobility did not necessarily imply upward social mobility. The Committee


concluded that "it may be predicted with some confidence that the North and North-East of London will, notwithstanding a certain ebb and flow, remain a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood for the next twenty or thirty years".23

There were two major reasons why Jews were moving out of the East End in ever increasing numbers during the inter-war years. The relocation to North London of many East End firms in the traditional Jewish trades was often accompanied by a migration of Jewish labour. This provided further proof that geographical mobility was not necessarily an indication of upward social mobility. The migration of Jewish industries to North London also helps to explain why Jewish migration from the East End followed a different route from non-Jewish migration. Gentiles moved eastwards to Barking, Ilford and Dagenham where they were often rehoused on the new London County Council (LCC) estates. The Jewish population, by contrast, moved northwards to Hackney and Tottenham in order to be near their work.24 Non-naturalised Jews were in any case unable to obtain accommodation on the LCC's housing estates since preference was given to British subjects.25

The development of mass production techniques in the

23. JC, 6 December 1929, pp.13-14. The report of the North and North-East London Committee was dated June 1929.


furniture and tailoring trades made it necessary for small East End workshops to enlarge their premises in order to make room for the new machinery. This led to the gradual migration of many firms to areas of North London where there was sufficient cheap land available to open large factories. Furniture firms moved from the industry's original base in Bethnal Green and Shoreditch to the Lea Valley, Tottenham and Edmonton. A number of tailoring firms relocated to Hackney. However, the migration of the tailoring trade from the East End was not necessarily associated with the growth of factory production. Although large scale production was carried on at firms such as Polikoff, Simpson, and Schneider, there were many instances where tailoring workshops operated from the large rooms of houses in Hackney.

The second reason why Jews were moving away from the East End was to escape the area's overcrowded housing conditions. Henrietta Adler expressed the situation succinctly when she


Dissatisfaction with crowded and comfortless homes and, to some extent, the shifting of industry have led large numbers of Jewish workers to seek for better housing accommodation in cleaner and healthier surroundings.

At both the 1921 and 1931 Censuses, Stepney was calculated to be the most overcrowded borough in London. In 1921, 68,921 of its population was living two persons per room. In 1931, 50,420 of the population was housed with more than two persons per room. The North-West ward of St. George's-in-the-East, which was populated mainly by Jews, was singled out by _The New Survey_ as the most overcrowded ward in London. During the early 1930s, concern about East End housing conditions, as they affected Jews, was expressed by leading Jewish communal workers. Hannah Cohen, President of the Jewish Board of Guardians, Henrietta Adler, and Basil Henriques all voiced the belief that a major Jewish initiative for a re-housing programme was required. In the absence of any such programme, those Jews who were able to, moved out of the East End in

34. _JC_, 23 December 1932, p.18; 30 December 1932, p.10; 6 January 1933, p.15.
search of better housing elsewhere.

Despite the continuous process of migration during the 1920s and 1930s, the East End Jewish community still remained in some senses an enclosed, ghetto community. Social and work contact, even for young English-born Jews who had received their education at local LCC schools, continued to be conducted in a predominantly Jewish environment. Yet, according to one contemporary observer, the most striking characteristic of the East End Jewish community, particularly of the youth, was the extent to which it had become assimilated into the English working class. William Zukerman, an American journalist, attributed this advanced degree of assimilation to two factors. Firstly, the period of Jewish immigrant life in England was too short-lived and the number of immigrants who entered too small to leave a lasting influence on the second generation. Secondly, the young English-born Jews "grew up in the midst of the English working class, and were assimilated to it". There is some evidence to indicate that young Jews, especially those inclined to radical left-wing politics, had

35. Interview with Moshe Rosette (Tel-Aviv, April 1987). The East London Observer (ELO) reinforced the community's sense of separateness by running a weekly column entitled "Ghetto Gossip". The column first appeared on 8 January 1927.


37. Ibid., p.70.
become assimilated to the English working class. However, Zukerman over-emphasises the extent of assimilation. His complete denial of the existence of a separate Jewish identity cannot be sustained by the facts. It was not true to suggest "that what goes under the name of the East End Jew is in reality no specific Jewish type at all. It is but the general East London Labour type with which the young East End Jew has assimilated so thoroughly that it is difficult to differentiate between the two". A more satisfactory analysis of the situation was provided by a prominent member of the Workers' Circle Friendly Society. Referring to the decline of Yiddish as a spoken language among young East End Jews, Dr I. N. Steinberg concluded that although these Jews were "divorced from Jewish tradition, and as a consequence are removed from the Jewish masses" they could not assimilate themselves with the English working class because they did not possess a common tradition.

The decline of Yiddish among the second generation separated young English speaking Jews from the immigrant world of their parents. Many young East End Jews also remained

38. See, for example, M. Cohen, I was one of the Unemployed (London 1945). See also the novel by S. Blumenfeld, Jew Boy.


40. The Circle, October 1934, p.2.

aloof from organised Jewish activities.\textsuperscript{42} For example, the Jewish friendly societies movement which had originated in the East End showed a steady decline in membership during the inter-war years. This downward trend was attributed to the failure to attract Jewish youth in sufficiently large numbers.\textsuperscript{43} It was, however, in the sphere of religious observance that young Jewish East Enders became most alienated from the culture and traditions of their parents. As early as 1919 a Zionist magazine argued that it was useless to attempt to shepherd young Jews into a synagogue.\textsuperscript{44} Concern about the decline in religious observance among working class Jews was frequently expressed by London Jewry's lay and religious leaders in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1928 the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith organised a symposium at which leading Anglo-Jewish communal figures expressed their concern at the way in which "the East End had got right away from religion".\textsuperscript{45} This was attributed to the fact that young Jews felt alienated from the foreign, Yiddish-speaking rabbis who served the small Federation synagogues in the East End. Ernest Lesser, chairman of the United Synagogue's Welfare Committee, expressed this alienation succinctly when he said: "The children grew up out of sympathy with the foreign atmosphere and ritual of

\textsuperscript{42} The Jewish World, 11 January 1934, p.8.


\textsuperscript{44} The Junior Zionist, supplement to The Zionist Review, April 1919, p.9.

\textsuperscript{45} The Jewish Graphic, 3 February 1928, p.3; The Jewish Guardian, 3 February 1928, p.5.
the synagogue, and consequently the synagogue did not make the appeal it should make".46

A number of initiatives were suggested to reverse the trend towards secularisation. For example, a series of letters published in the *Jewish Chronicle* at the beginning of 1919 emphasised the need for resident ministers in the East End.47 Rabbi Dr. Meir Jung, Chief Minister of the Federation of Synagogues, felt that the answer to the decline in orthodoxy in the East End lay in more religious education.48 To this end, he founded the Sinai League which aimed "to preserve and promote traditional Judaism amongst Jewish young men and women".49 The League was based in Whitechapel and became the launching pad for a network of Sinai Associations throughout London.50 Another serious attempt to deal with the problem was the Reconstruction movement which was initiated in 1919 by the Reverend Joseph Stern, minister of the East London Synagogue in Stepney Green.51 The movement was supported by such communal luminaries as the Reverend A. A. Green, minister of Hampstead Synagogue, and Henrietta Adler who, as well as

46. Ibid. An article in *The Times* also drew attention to the decline in religious observance among second generation English-born Jews. See *The Times*, 28 November 1924, p.16.

47. See, for example, *JC*, 14 February 1919, p.6.

48. Ibid., 28 February 1919, p.22.


being the author of the Jewish study in *The New Survey*, was a well known Jewish communal worker and grand daughter of a former Chief Rabbi. Reconstruction embodied the paternalistic idea that West End Jews should offer their services as voluntary workers in the East End in order to raise the spiritual standards of East End Jewry. From the late 1920s, the idea began to circulate in the Jewish press that in order to attract young East End Jews to the synagogue a concerted effort should be made to "re-Judaize" the East End. In 1935, there was even a suggestion that the social activities of the youth should be "Judaised" by instilling in Jewish youth clubs a strong religious bias. However, despite all the initiatives suggested and the attempts made to revive religion in the East End, young Jews continued to drift away from the synagogue and to reject traditional Jewish values. The *Zionist Review*'s conclusion in 1935 that "religion does not dominate Jewish life in the East End" was therefore correct. For example, one eyewitness has reported how Jews from the East End flocked to the West End on Friday evening: the start of the Jewish sabbath. In addition, regret was expressed at the time by West End Jews that East End Jews

53. See, for example, *The Jewish Guardian*, 11 March 1927, p.11.
56. Jacobs, *op.cit.*, p.119. For further accounts of the extent to which the Jewish sabbath was flouted by East End Jews see *ELA*, 8 January 1927, p.6; 15 January 1927, p.3.
sought amusement "in such places as the dance hall, the billiard saloon, and similar places".\textsuperscript{57} Nevertheless, it has been pointed out that although young Jews were not practising their religion as much as their parents, and indeed were increasingly questioning the whole concept of religion, they still considered themselves to be Jews and were prepared to defend themselves against external threats such as anti-semitism.\textsuperscript{58} This astute analysis encapsulates the important fact that East End Jews retained a sense of community even when they rejected their religious identity. This had important implications for the political activities and allegiances of East End Jews.

The economic conditions of the East End Jewish community had an equally important impact on the community's political affiliations. The \textit{New Survey} commented that "The Jewish working class community in East London is still on the whole a poor community, its proportion of poverty being slightly greater than that of the surrounding non-Jewish population (13.7\% compared with 12.1\%)."\textsuperscript{59} Jewish poverty was now due primarily to unemployment rather than to overcrowding as it had been in the past.\textsuperscript{60} In 1929, for example, 64\% of Jewish poverty in East London was estimated to be due to unemployment, or part-time or casual employment, compared with 35\%.

\textsuperscript{57} The \textit{Jewish Guardian}, 3 February 1928, p.5.
\textsuperscript{58} Jacobs, \textit{op.cit.}, p.190.
\textsuperscript{59} The \textit{New Survey}, Vol.VI, p.22.
\textsuperscript{60} Lipman, \textit{A Century of Social Service}, pp.151-2.
among the non-Jewish East London population. Unemployment plagued the East End Jewish community throughout the inter-war period but was particularly severe in the early 1920s and the early 1930s. However, it was difficult for the problems of Jewish unemployment and poverty to be recognised because some contemporary reports and statements emphasised the supposedly special characteristics of Jews which made them less susceptible to poverty. For example, in 1921 the Jewish chairman of the Distress Committee in Whitechapel stated in an interview that "There is a very large Jewish population here, but so far the distress among them has not been very noticeable, for the reason that, as a rule, they are a thrifty people". A similar point was made in a Toynbee Hall enquiry into unemployment in East London. Nevertheless, there were attempts by those with first hand knowledge of unemployment to bring the issue to a wider audience. At the beginning of 1921, when most of the trades in which Jews were employed were going through a period of great depression, the Workmen's Fund convened a conference at the Poale Zion Club in Sandy's Row, Stepney, to deal with the problem of unemployment among Jews. Representatives from all the Jewish trade unions and all the branches of Poale Zion, the socialist Zionist party, participated in the conference which agreed to undertake relief work and to organize a workmen's kitchen. In an

61. Ibid., p.152.
64. JC, 4 February 1921, p.34.
interview published in the *Jewish Chronicle*, Oscar Tobin, the Jewish mayor of Stepney during 1921/1922, indicated the extent and severity of Jewish unemployment in the borough, particularly in the clothing and cigar trades. The gravity of the problem was also indicated by the bankruptcy of the Jewish Board of Guardians which, in October 1921, was forced to reduce its grants and the scale of its allowances by 15% "and to exercise special discrimination in relieving cases". The *Jewish Chronicle* argued that because of the "unparalleled strain" on the Board the community itself should be prepared to relieve the unemployed and their families.

The industrial depression which set in during 1929 had an equally catastrophic effect on the East End Jewish community. In 1933, Marcus Lipton, a Labour Party activist in Stepney, contended that the Jewish community was no longer able to alleviate poverty from its own resources. He said that among those receiving public assistance were young English-born Jews. This was certainly true since the Jewish Board of Guardians in London stated that it was not its policy to relieve the young able bodied unemployed. Such cases were referred to the Public Assistance Department of the LCC. Even so, in 1933 the Board was faced with its highest number

65. Ibid., 25 November 1921, pp.18-19.
66. Ibid., 21 October 1921, p.12.
67. Ibid., 9 September 1921, p.10.
68. Ibid., 3 March 1933, pp.8, 12.
69. Ibid., 31 March 1933, p.12.
of cases in the inter-war period. 70 Lipton attributed the high level of Jewish unemployment to the fact that industries on which East End Jewry had previously depended for their livelihood, in particular tailoring, were badly hit by the depression. 71 Unemployment was also a serious problem in the cabinet-making branch of the furniture trade. According to one Jewish cabinet-maker, "The trade could only offer different degrees of insecurity. None except the most favoured knew from one day to another when they would be out of work". 72 Harry Dubow, the Jewish president of the Amalgamated Union of Upholsterers, laid part of the blame for unemployment in that section of the furniture trade on the Jewish Board of Guardians. Dubow contended that in spite of the Union's advice the Board continued to place apprentices in the upholstery trade which was already flooded with juvenile labour. 73

Although unemployment was often high in the traditional Jewish trades during the inter-war years, the period also witnessed a decline in the number of Jews employed in the immigrant trades. Nowhere was this decline more apparent than in the tailoring trade. 74 In 1930, the Jewish Board of

70. Lipman, A Century of Social Service, p.146; Pollins, op.cit., p.185.
71. JC, 3 March 1933, pp.8, 12. This point was confirmed by Henrietta Adler in The New Survey, Vol.VI, p.287.
72. M. Cohen, What Nobody told the Foreman (London 1953), p.81. See also Cohen's account in I was one of the Unemployed, p.2.
73. JC, 24 February 1933, p.16.
Guardians reported a continuing decline in the number of Jews entering the trade.\(^7^5\) The New Survey estimated that tailoring then accounted for only 29% of the Jewish male workers in East London.\(^7^6\) A similar decline occurred in the number of Jews employed in the boot and shoe trade.\(^7^7\) This industry had been declining in importance since the late nineteenth century.\(^7^8\) The decline in the number of Jews employed in the footwear trade during the inter-war years occurred at the same time as the movement of the trade northwards from Stepney to Tottenham.\(^7^9\) This relocation was undertaken to facilitate the transfer of production from small workshops to large factories. Other immigrant trades in which there was a decline in the number of Jewish workers were the tobacco and cap trades.\(^8^0\) The only immigrant workshop trade which experienced an increase in the number of young Jewish entrants was the furniture trade.\(^8^1\) The New Survey estimated that in 1930 the numbers had risen to between 6,000 and 8,000 Jewish furniture workers in East London.\(^8^2\) One other trade which continued to employ many East End Jews and which was vitally important to

\(^{75}\) Lipman, A Century of Social Service, p.150.


\(^{79}\) Ibid., p.358. See also JC, 12 February 1937, p.25; Munby, op.cit., p.65; Pollins, op.cit., p.187.

\(^{80}\) Pollins, op.cit., p.193.


\(^{82}\) Ibid., Vol.II, Part I, p.218.
the community's economic life was street trading. Petticoat Lane in Aldgate continued to serve as the most important market for the whole of the Jewish East End and for Jews outside the East End. A smaller Jewish market existed in Hessel Street, situated on the south side of Commercial Road.\textsuperscript{83}

More than one commentator has suggested that the reason for the decline in the number of Jews employed in immigrant trades was the mechanisation of these trades and the fact that Jews objected to becoming factory workers.\textsuperscript{84} However, other less tangible factors were equally significant in explaining the changes which were occurring in the occupational structure of East End Jewry in the inter-war period. The desire to enter occupations with better prospects and a higher status than were available in the traditional Jewish trades led increasing numbers of young East End Jews into office work, shop work and hairdressing.\textsuperscript{85} \textit{The New Survey} estimated that in 1930 5\% of Jewish male workers in East London were shop assistants, 4\% were clerks and 2\% were hairdressers.\textsuperscript{86} Ironically, working conditions in the distributive and hairdressing trades were often little better than those in the old immigrant trades.\textsuperscript{87} In an exposé on conditions in the

\textsuperscript{83} Munby, \textit{op.cit.}, p.331. See also White, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.105, 200.


\textsuperscript{85} \textit{The New Survey}, Vol.VI, p.286; Pollins, \textit{op.cit.}, p.189.

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{The New Survey}, Vol.VI, p.295.

\textsuperscript{87} On the distributive trade in the East End see below pp.156-157.
predominantly Jewish hairdressing trade in East London, the Jewish Chronicle listed a catalogue of complaints and abuses. For example, it was reported that a high percentage of hairdressers suffered from tuberculosis due to the unhygienic conditions in the shops; that apprentices were exploited; that wages were low; and that an average of sixty-six hours per week was worked.88

Although important changes were taking place in the occupational structure of the East End Jewish community, particularly among young Jewish East Enders, the old immigrant trades still dominated the economic life of the Jewish East End and continued to provide the main source of Jewish employment.89 In addition, despite the growth of factory production, small workshops continued to be the norm in the East End. For example, as late as 1939, there were still as many as 439 small furniture workshops in Bethnal Green.90 Even after 1945 it was stated that "the clothing industry still has more than a flavour of the domestic system".91 Methods of production and working conditions in these small enterprises had changed little since the original Booth Survey in the late nineteenth century.92 In the furniture trade, for example, hours of work

88. JC, 26 February 1937, p.29.
89. The New Survey, Vol.VI, p.295. Table V shows the proportion of Jewish wage earners per 1,000 of the Jewish population of East London in 31 occupations.
92. Hall, op.cit., p.87.
often extended to seventy and eighty per week, without over-
time pay. Sweating in the Jewish workshop trades was the
subject of a detailed Jewish Chronicle investigation in the
late 1930s. The investigation had been prompted by a desire
to discover whether there was any truth in the Fascist
allegation that Jewish employers were responsible for the
sweated labour conditions in the East End trades. The invest-
igation concluded that sweating was not a specifically Jewish
offence, except in the furniture trade where, it was stated,
some Jewish employers had made anti-semites of their employees
because of the bad conditions of work. On the whole, how-
ever, where sweating did exist, it was found to be due to cir-
cumstances beyond the control of the employer, such as the
seasonal nature of the trades. The effects of seasonal
demand could be seen most clearly in the ladies' branch of the
tailoring trade. As a fashion trade, ladies' tailoring was
affected by seasonal changes in fashion. Thus, during the two
busy seasons from March to May and from September to October,
tailors had to work long hours to finish the orders. During
the long, slack periods, by contrast, many tailors languished
in unemployment and poverty.

93. Hurst, op.cit., p.15.
94. JC, 5 February 1937, pp.9, 24.
95. Ibid., 26 February 1937, p.30. For the other JC articles
on "Jews and Labour Conditions" see ibid., 22 January
1937, pp.25, 26; 29 January 1937, pp.20-21 (tailoring
trade); 5 February 1937, pp.9, 24-25 (furniture trade);
19 February 1937, pp.26-27 (fur trade); 26 February 1937,
pp.29-30 (hairdressing trade).
trade unions to the problem of sweating see below pp.141-
145.
Sweated labour conditions, unemployment and poverty had the effect of politicising a large sector of the Jewish community in the East End. Politics therefore served as the means by which Jews could articulate their grievances to the wider society. The solutions proposed by most politically active Jews for the major social and economic problems facing the East End and the country in general were based on a variety of radical left-wing ideas. Political debate and activity in the inter-war Jewish East End was essentially an autonomous grass roots phenomenon in the sense that it was given coherence and direction by a locally based political leadership. The catalyst for the formation of this radical leadership was internal migration which, during the inter-war years, was depriving the East End of many of its traditional political leaders. Thus, the temporary vacuum left by the departure of these political and communal leaders was increasingly filled by the youthful second generation English-born Jews in the East End.

The dispersal of sections of the East End Jewish community also had an important impact on the structure of the community. Having lost its wealthier elements to the new Jewish suburbs, the East End Jewish community now became far more cohesive economically, socially and therefore inevitably politically. Although, as has been clearly illustrated, many of those who moved out were themselves working class, migration was even more a feature of upwardly mobile lower middle class Jews, such as minor professionals and small businessmen. In addition, it is important to bear in mind
that even those working class Jews who did move out required a
degree of economic security not enjoyed by most Jewish East
Enders. Therefore, the effect of migration on the Jewish East
End was to create a broadly homogenous ethnic working class
community. The ethnic composition of the community is crucial
in the context of this study because it was its ethnicity
which distinguished the community from the surrounding
indigenous working class population and which imbued it with a
unique self-identity. Although ethnically distinct, this
community came to participate fully in local political life
and was undoubtedly as concerned with general political issues
as with specifically ethnic issues. The proceeding chapters
will consider some of the major political issues which engaged
the interest of second generation East End Jews and will
examine their collective and individual responses to these
issues as expressed in political action.
Chapter Two:  
The Jewish Entry into East End Politics

Jewish involvement in municipal politics in the East End entered a new phase after 1918. Although there had been Jewish councillors in Stepney before the First World War, it was only after the war that Jews began to play a major role on the borough council and in the local ward committees. The increasing involvement of young Jews in municipal politics reflected the growing confidence of second generation Jews who felt at home in the East End. Fluent in English, they were fully conversant with local affairs and this, combined with a flair for organisation, led a number of East End Jews to enter the local political arena for the first time. Although Jewish involvement in municipal politics permeated all political parties, Jewish Liberals and Conservatives increasingly lost out to the Labour Party which began to attract growing numbers of East End Jews after 1918. An examination of the changing political allegiances of East End Jews therefore involves an evaluation of the relative strengths of Jewish participation in the local Liberal and Conservative Parties, and the extent of the Jewish role both in the early development of Stepney Labour Party and in the expansion of the party's power and influence in the borough during the 1930s. An integral concern of the chapter is an assessment of the extent to which Jews participated in local politics as members of a distinct ethnic group. In this context, attention will be focused on the way in which Jewish councillors responded to specifically Jewish issues.
Although this study focuses on political activists rather than on voters, it is necessary to give some indication of the nature and size of the electorate in the East End. During the inter-war years local franchise qualifications were governed by the Representation of the People's Acts of 1918 and 1928. The 1918 Act gave the vote to women over thirty who were householders or wives of householders, and to all men over twenty-one who lived in the area or who had occupied business premises in the area for six months. In practice, this meant that businessmen often did not live in the ward where they had the vote. The 1928 Act extended the vote to all women over twenty-one on the same qualification as men.¹ A number of people were excluded from the vote. They included undischarged bankrupts and people in receipt of poor relief. In addition, of course, aliens did not have the vote.² In practice, aliens, especially those in the East End, were Jews. The exclusion of aliens from the electoral register meant that in Stepney a very small proportion of the population had the vote. Furthermore, British wives of aliens could vote only in parliamentary elections, thus narrowing the local government electorate in the borough even further.³ In 1921 42.3% of the Limehouse population


3. ELA, 14 September 1935, p.5.
had the vote; in Mile End it was 26.9% and in Whitechapel and St. George's it was just 25.6%. To be eligible for election as a borough councillor, candidates were required to have lived in the borough for one year. In practice, a number evaded the residence qualification by having an address in the borough where they would stay overnight two or three times a year. This applied particularly to Liberal and Conservative candidates, thus reinforcing Labour's claim to be the only party representing the East End working class. In common with non-Jewish Labour candidates, Jewish Labour candidates tended to live in Stepney. Although it was not necessary for candidates to live in the ward where they were seeking election, Jewish political activity was concentrated in those wards where Jews lived in the greatest numbers. Thus, Jews did not stand for election in the Irish-Catholic neighbourhoods near the docks. This is apparent from an examination of the candidate lists which were published in the local press.

Local ward parties in Jewish neighbourhoods often nominated only Jewish candidates. Two wards which frequently chose Jewish candidates were the Mile End West and Spitalfields East wards. This feature of local party politics in Stepney

5. Ibid., p.20.
6. For the addresses of borough council candidates at the first election after the war see ELO, 25 October 1919, p.5.
7. See, for example, ELA, 8 November 1919, p.3; 4 November 1922, p.5; 7 November 1925, p.8; 27 October 1928, p.3; 7 November 1931, p.5; 10 November 1934, p.6; 6 November 1937, p1.
undoubtedly helped to reinforce ethnic loyalties among Jewish voters. For example, in 1919 when Stepney returned its first Labour council, Spitalfields East ward failed to elect any Labour councillors. Instead, three Jewish Progressives (as the Liberals called themselves at local elections) were returned.8 When a Labour council was elected in 1925 both Mile End West and Spitalfields East unanimously returned their anti-socialist Jewish councillors in preference to Labour candidates, only some of whom were Jewish.9 One reason which has been cited to explain this phenomenon is that Jewish voters often knew the Jewish councillors personally and would go to them with their problems.10 It seems likely that it was this loyalty to individuals which prevented the largely Jewish electorates of Mile End West and Spitalfields East wards from returning all their Labour candidates until 1934. By 1935, when the whole borough had become staunchly Labour, the situation was reversed. A by-election in the Spitalfields East ward in that year resulted in 455 votes for the non-Jewish Labour candidate against 152 votes for the Jewish anti-socialist Ratepayers' candidate.11 Thus, East End Jews finally seemed to be placing their party loyalties before their ethnic loyalties.

Although Jewish candidates often benefited from the support of Jewish voters, such support was rarely obtained by

8. ELA, 8 November 1919, p.3.
10. Interview with Harold Altman (May 1985).
explicit ethnic appeals. In the first place, Jewish candidates at local elections tended not to emphasise their Jewishness. This was particularly true of Jewish Labour candidates who frequently sought to bury their ethnic identity beneath their commitment to the British Labour movement. In this context, the appeal for support by a Jewish member of Mile End Labour Party in 1922 on the basis of his Jewish communal work was the exception to the rule. Significantly, the appeal did not take the form of a public address to Jewish voters but was issued as a private letter to Dr. Moses Gaster, Haham of the Sephardi community. The hope was that Gaster would intervene to offer his support to the Jewish Labour candidates in Mile End:12

Now I can also boast of much Jewish work, but the work being voluntary and carried on inconspicuously, it is not likely to arouse much communal notice. Neither is one anxious that it should, but one would like, at a time like this to get some little credit for a work satisfactorily executed ... Those who are standing with me, Messrs. Frankel and Kershaw, have similarly associated themselves with communal effort, the former in strong advocacy against the Deportation of Foreign Jews, and the latter with me, as Vice Chairman of the Million Penny Fund and Executive member of the Jewish Workers War Emergency Relief Fund.

On the rare occasions when Jewish candidates did make specific appeals as Jews, they did not prove successful. One Jewish candidate in Whitechapel at the 1928 LCC elections discovered this when, according to the Jewish Labour candidate, he "tried to introduce religious belief into the election".13

Despite the potential for independent political behaviour presented by the presence of two large ethnic groups in the

12. C. Truman to Moses Gaster, 24 October 1922, Gaster MSS.
13. ELO, 17 March 1928, p.3.
borough, namely the Jews and the Irish, political events in Stepney did, in fact, mirror events in other working class London boroughs during the period. As elsewhere in London, the decline in the political fortunes of the Conservative and Liberal Parties was reflected both in local election results and in attempts by these parties to halt the Labour advance by forming anti-socialist electoral coalitions. 14 The first such pact in Stepney was formed in 1922 when the Progressive and Municipal Reform (Conservative) Parties combined to win 33 seats in the borough council elections against Labour's 27. 15 In 1925 the election was virtually a straight fight between Municipal Reform and Labour since the Progressives were in disarray. 16 The result was a clear Labour victory. 17 In 1928 most of the anti-socialists fused to form the People's Party. 18 Once again, the Labour Party was elected with a clear majority. 19 The national swing against Labour in 1931 gave the anti-socialists their last opportunity to govern Stepney. However, the Municipal Reform Party was only able to muster a majority by relying on four Independent councillors who held

15. ELA, 4 November 1922, p.5. For a comparison with results in other London boroughs see Daily Herald (DH), 3 November 1922, p.2.
16. ELO, 24 October 1925, p.3.
17. ELA, 7 November 1925, p.8. See also DH, 4 November 1925, p.2.
18. ELO, 27 October 1928, p.5.
19. Ibid., 3 November 1928, p.5. See also DH, 3 November 1928, p.6.
the balance of power. In 1934 the sweeping Labour gains at the municipal elections nationally were repeated in Stepney where the Labour Party won all the seats on the council. Labour retained all the seats in 1937, except one in Spitalfields East which was won by the Jewish Communist candidate, Phil Piratin.

Although Stepney followed the rest of working class London in its general political outlook, specific ethnic factors did have a unique impact on local political allegiances. This impact was not powerful enough to push Stepney in an opposite political direction from the rest of working class London. It was, nevertheless, sufficiently strong to make a mark on the political landscape in the Jewish East End. There were, for example, distinct Jewish attitudes to both the Conservative and Liberal Parties. These attitudes explain why the Conservatives enjoyed such little support in the Jewish areas of the East End and why the Liberals continued to enjoy the support and loyalty of some East End Jews until relatively late in the period. As the party which was associated in the minds of working class Jews with the anti-alien legislation of 1905 and 1919, the Conservative Party was deeply unpopular in the Jewish East End. At the 1922 general election, there was even an attempt to urge Jews not to vote Conservative. In an appeal published in the

20. ELA, 7 November 1931, p.5. For the general Labour setback in London see DH, 4 November 1931, p.11.

21. ELA, 10 November 1934. For the national results see DH, 2 November 1934, p.1.

22. ELA, 6 November 1937, p.1. On Piratin's victory see below pp.203-204. For the results in the other London boroughs see DH, 3 November 1937, p.10.
Jewish Chronicle, Shlomo Kaplansky, a Palestinian representative of the socialist Zionist party, Poale Zion, who was in London at the time, urged Jews not to vote Conservative. He believed that a Conservative victory would mean an intensification of anti-foreign feeling and anti-alien legislation. However, not all Jews accepted that Conservatism was incompatible with Jewish interests. Indeed, as late as 1938, one Jewish Conservative in Stepney believed that "the principles of true Conservatism are the only principles to which as Jews they can adhere, for what more conservative religion based on heritage and historic custom is there than the Jewish religion." The participation of Jews in the local branches of the Conservative Party was confirmation that this analysis was not the preserve of an isolated individual.

Among the most prominent Jewish Conservatives in Stepney were Adolph Ludlow (formerly Ludski), Joseph Emden, Rabbi B. N. Michaelson, Lewis Beber, Lionel Franks and G. E. Abrahams. Ludlow twice stood unsuccessfully in LCC elections as a Municipal Reform candidate for Whitechapel. He was connected with the Junior Imperial League, the forerunner of the Young Conservatives, and he was an executive member of the Union of Stepney Ratepayers, an anti-socialist alliance. In addition, Ludlow was, for a time, vice-president of the Whitechapel and

23. JC, 10 November 1922, p.13.
24. ELA, 23 April 1938, p.6.
25. This was in 1919 and 1925. See East London Handbook, 1919, p.11; ELA, 28 February 1925, p.4.
St. George's Conservative Association. As a rising star in the Zionist movement in England, he was honorary secretary of the English Zionist Federation (EZF). Emden was a colourful character who frequently had letters published in the East London press espousing his beliefs as a Conservative trade unionist. He was a vice-president of the Mile End Conservative Association and was chairman of both the Mile End and East London branches of the Junior Imperial League. In addition, he was vice-chairman of the London Federation of Conservatives. Rabbi Michaelson, a communal worker who was attached to the Jewish Institute in Stepney, was chairman of the Mile End West ward Conservative Association. He was also a councillor in Mile End during the years 1928 to 1934. Beber was chairman of the Mile End Conservative Association. Despite the involvement of these individuals in local Conservative associations, the political loyalties of the East End Jewish community did not lie with the Conservative Party.

In contrast to the Conservatives, the Liberal Party in the East End retained the loyalty of sections of the Jewish community. This was despite the fact that after 1918 the

26. ELA, 28 February 1925, p.4; ELO, 22 October 1927, p.4. For additional information about Ludlow I am grateful to the late Percy Cohen, CBE, head of Library and Information at Conservative Central Office, 1928-1948.

27. ELA, 8 July 1933, p.3; 2 March 1935, p.2; 8 February 1936, p.8; 15 February 1936, p.3.

28. Ibid., 10 April 1937, p.5.

29. Ibid., 10 August 1929, p.5; 15 November 1930, p.3.

30. Ibid., 30 June 1928, p.8.
Liberal Party had entered a period of irreversible decline at the national level and was rapidly becoming a political irrelevance. Three main reasons can be cited to explain the survival of Jewish support for the Liberals in the East End. Firstly, as the party which had granted Jews political emancipation in the nineteenth century, the Liberals were still able to claim the support of a minority of Jewish political activists in the East End. Secondly, the Liberal Party enjoyed the patronage of a number of prominent local Jewish communal personalities. The presence of these individuals in the party created the impression that Liberalism was still a viable force in the area even though in fact the local party organisations were moribund and little more than hollow shells. Thirdly, the Whitechapel Liberal Party's election campaign for the parliamentary by-election of November 1930 and Barnett Janner's subsequent victory in Whitechapel in the 1931 general election inaugurated an impressive, albeit brief, revival in the local Liberal Party's fortunes.31

The importance of personalities in keeping Liberalism alive in the Jewish East End should not be underestimated. The *East London Observer* went so far as to comment in 1929 that Liberalism in the East End was moribund except in the areas controlled by two Jewish communal workers: Miriam Moses and Ida Samuel.32 However, it was not only Jewish Liberals who helped to keep the party alive in the East End. James Kiley, a

31. See, for example, ELA, 28 February 1931, p.3.
32. ELO, 25 May 1929, p.6.
former mayor of Stepney and MP for Whitechapel between 1916 and 1922, was a noted philo-semite who championed Jewish interests in Parliament. As far as the Jewish Liberals were concerned, there is evidence to indicate that some were popular because of their involvement in Jewish communal life rather than because of their involvement in local politics. This was certainly true of Miriam Moses who was the best known Jewish communal worker associated with the Liberal Party in Stepney. The daughter of Mark Moses, a prominent Liberal and synagogue worker in the East End, Miriam Moses was one of the stalwarts of Liberalism in Whitechapel and was for many years chairman of the Whitechapel Liberal Association. Through her work as a manager in local schools Miriam Moses came into contact with many Jewish parents. In this way, she was able to build up a personal following in the local Jewish community. This has led one former political colleague to argue that she was associated in the Jewish community's mind with her public and social work rather than with her political work. Nevertheless, the popularity which Miriam Moses engendered in the Jewish East End was translated into support for her at the polls. Evidence of a personal following can be seen in the fact that in the five


34. This was the view of the late Sam Klein, JC correspondent in the East End in the 1930s. (Interview with Sam Klein, April 1985.)

35. Interview with Harold Altman (May 1985). I am also grateful to Monty Richardson, Lady Janner, Phyllis Gerson and the late Florrie Passman for providing me with detailed insights into the motivations and character of Miriam Moses.
council elections which she contested in the predominantly Jewish Spitalfields East ward between 1921-31, she always headed the poll by a significant majority.36 In addition, the fact that Spitalfields East failed to return any Labour councillors until 1934 when Miriam Moses chose not to stand for re-election provided further evidence of the personal following which she commanded among the local Jewish population.37 Miriam Moses's involvement in Jewish organisations was exceptionally wide ranging. In particular, she was the founder of the Brady Jewish Girl's Club and helped to run the Jewish Children's Country Holiday Home.38 Her political career in Stepney reached a peak in 1931 when she was elected the country's first Jewish woman mayor.39

Another well-known Jewish Liberal personality in Stepney was Harry Kosky, a successful businessman who lived in Knightsbridge. Kosky represented the heavily Jewish Whitechapel East ward during the years 1904-28 and was mayor of Stepney in 1923.40 Like Miriam Moses, his involvement in Jewish communal life gave him a high profile in the East End community. He was president of the Great Garden Street Talmud Torah and a vice-

36. For Miriam Moses's electoral victories in Spitalfields East see JC, 8 July 1921, p.34 (by-election); ELA, 4 November 1922, p.5; 7 November 1925, p.8; ELO, 3 November 1928, p.5; ELA, 7 November 1931, p.5.
37. ELA, 10 November 1934, p.3.
38. JC, 2 July 1965, p.37 (Obituary).
39. Ibid., 13 November 1931, p.23.
40. ELO, 11 November 1922, p.3; ELA, 11 November 1922, p.5.

Jack Somper, who succeeded Kosky as mayor in 1924, was a man of considerable political experience. He had been Kiley's election agent in 1918 and held a number of positions in the local Liberal Party and on Stepney Council. In 1924 he was chairman of the Mile End Liberal Association and leader of the council. Somper was largely responsible for the alliance between Liberals and Conservatives in East London which found expression in the Ratepayers' Party. As a prominent exponent of the anti-socialist alliance Somper was also a member of the executive council of the Union of Stepney Ratepayers. In 1932 he was chosen as leader of the Ratepayers' Party, a post he held until he retired from municipal work in 1934. Somper's political record suggests that it may be more accurate to describe him as an anti-socialist rather than a Liberal. Nevertheless, from 1919 to 1928 he represented the largely

41. ELO, 11 November 1922, p.3; ELA, 30 June 1923, p.3; C. Roth, The Federation of Synagogues, 1912-1937: A Record of Twenty-Five Years (London 1937), p.11.

42. ZR, October 1918, p.104; See also English Zionist Federation (EZF), 24th Annual Report (1922-23). For Kosky's Zionist family background see Jewish Guardian, 28 May 1926, p.7.

43. ELA, 24 November 1923, p.3.

44. Ibid., 24 March 1923, p.5; ELO, 15 November 1924, p.3.

45. ELA, 26 December 1925, p.5.

46. Ibid., 27 January 1923, p.5.

47. Ibid., 19 November 1932, p.2; ELO, 19 November 1932, p.6.
Jewish ward of Mile End West as a Liberal councillor. Although active in Jewish communal life in Golders Green where he lived Somper was not noted for his commitment to Jewish affairs in the East End. Two Liberals in Stepney who were actively involved in East End Jewish communal life were Abraham Magen and Jack Rosenthal. Like Somper, Magen was a councillor for the Jewish stronghold of Mile End West ward. He was a member of the London Schechita Board, the London Talmud Torah Trust and the Federation of Synagogues, which he represented on the Board of Deputies. In addition, he was vice-president of the Philpot Street Great Synagogue. Rosenthal was best known as the owner of the Pavilion Theatre in Whitechapel which staged Yiddish plays and was the venue for many important meetings of Jewish interest. He represented Spitalfields West ward until 1925 when he joined Miriam Moses in Spitalfields East.

No list of Jewish Liberals in the East End would be complete without the Reverend Joseph Stern, or the 'Jewish Bishop of Stepney' as he was referred to by non-Jewish East Enders. Stern was Minister of the East London Synagogue from 1887 to 1927. As Minister of the only synagogue belonging to the United Synagogue in Stepney Stern was acutely concerned with the anglicisation of immigrant Jews. In local politics,

49. JC, 31 October 1919, p.37. For profiles of Rosenthal see also The Jewish Guardian, 22 April 1921, pp.21-22; ELA, 7 January 1922, p.3.
50. The Jewish Guardian, 12 April 1922, p.9; ELA, 22 April 1922, p.3.
he represented the Mile End West ward on the council until 1928, and was chairman of both the Mile End Board of Guardians and the Committee of the LCC schools in Mile End. In Jewish affairs, he was one of the founders of the Stepney Jewish Lad's Club, secretary of the Stepney Jewish Schools and a member of the Jewish Education Board and the Jewish Board of Guardians.51

As events were to show, the apparent revival of East End Liberalism caused by the 1930 by-election in Whitechapel lacked substance as it was based on a specific issue and relied on the personal popularity of Barnett Janner.52 As MP for Whitechapel and St. George's after 1931 Janner took a particular interest in the housing and rent problems of his constituents and in the problems of his street trading constituents, many of whom were Jewish.53 Janner's energetic constituency work contributed to the false impression that the local party was now in a healthy condition. Any hope that the revival was genuine was shattered in 1935 when the Labour candidate, James Hall, won back the seat he had lost to Janner in 1931. Janner's defeat and subsequent departure from Whitechapel in 1935 signalled the irreversible decline of Liberalism in the East End. By 1937, David Goldblatt, the prospective Liberal parliamentary


52. For a fuller account of the Whitechapel by-election see below pp.190-198.

candidate for Whitechapel and St. George's, could only appeal to Jewish voters on the basis of the Liberal Party's past record. The *East London Advertiser* commented that "The large majority of the people of Whitechapel were of his own faith and his message to them was to harken back to the history of Liberalism, in which was embodied security, freedom, comfort and safety for them".\(^54\) This was just one indication of the Liberal Party's irrelevance to the East End Jewish community.

The primary reason for East End Jewry's abandonment of the Liberal Party was the fundamental shift which had occurred in the social and economic structure of the community. After 1918 the East End Jewish community became primarily working class in character.\(^55\) In common with gentile East Enders, Jewish East Enders experienced poverty and unemployment. The effect of such social and economic conditions was to radicalise the Jewish East End, especially young Jewish East Enders who became profoundly alienated from the politics of the Liberal Party. However, it was not only young Jews who were attracted by the pull of the Labour Party. Abraham Valentine, the veteran president of the Whitechapel and Spitalfields Costermongers Union and a Liberal councillor in Whitechapel since 1903, switched his allegiances to the Labour Party in 1919.\(^56\) Marcus Lipton, who was elected Labour MP for Brixton in 1945, began

\(^54\)  *ELA*, 16 January 1937, p.4. See also 24 April 1937, p.4.

\(^55\)  See above, pp.74-75

his political career in the Liberal Party in Stepney. In 1928 he was adopted as a Liberal LCC candidate for Mile End. Six years later he was returned as a Labour councillor in Mile End where he had become chairman of Mile End Labour Party's East ward. The attraction of the Left meant that the normal political home of many working class Jews became the Labour Party and, increasingly in the 1930s, the Communist Party. Since the Communist Party did not become a force on the council, the concern in this chapter will be primarily with the growth in power and influence of the Stepney Labour Party and Jewish participation in this process.

The Jews who participated in the formation of Stepney Labour Party in 1918 either were the English-born children of the immigrant generation or had spent most of their lives in England. The social and economic milieu in which these Jews grew up led them to make the conscious decision to enter the arena of local political life and to work with like-minded non-Jews for the betterment of society in general. The conditions produced by the First World War created the framework for a degree of integration between Jewish and non-Jewish East Enders. It was this process which ultimately made political co-operation possible in the post-war years. One particularly important effect of the war for many East End Jews was that it provided them with new economic opportunities. Government contracts, especially for army uniforms, created employment in the

57. ELA, 3 March 1928, p.5.
58. Ibid., 10 November 1934, p.3; Stepney Citizen, October 1934, p.1.
East End so that it became possible even for unskilled Jewish workers to earn high wages. Ironically, this caused great anxiety to the Jewish Board of Guardians who feared that many young Jews, upon leaving school, were being attracted to 'blind alley' unskilled occupations which offered high wages. To counter this trend, the Board tried to persuade East End Jews to take up apprenticeships in skilled trades, but their efforts met with little success.59

An even more dramatic effect of the war was the introduction of conscription in the spring of 1916 and the Anglo-Russian Military Convention of July 1917. The Convention was intended to oblige Russian Jews resident in Britain to do military service, either by serving in the British army or by joining the Russian army.60 The combined impact of conscription and the Convention meant that thousands of East End Jews were brought into contact with gentiles for the first time. At the political level, the Marxist British Socialist Party (BSP) and the Stepney branch of the non-Marxist anti-war Herald League both contributed to the growing political co-operation which was achieved between Jewish and gentile socialists during the last year of the war.61 The Stepney Herald League's programme of meetings and activities reflected the interests of its largely Jewish membership. For example,


speakers were invited to address the members on the Zionist movement, a subject which guaranteed lively debate since most members were passionately anti-Zionist. Meetings were held in the Jewish Capmakers' Union Hall. In April 1918, the Stepney Herald League announced that it was playing a major role in the formation of a local Labour Party. The proposed new party held out the possibility of Jewish and gentile political co-operation on a much greater scale than had been possible in the existing socialist groups.

At the inaugural meeting of the Stepney Labour Party and Trades Council in June 1918 there were delegates from most of the Jewish trade unions in the East End. In a sense this was not surprising because there was no rival political party to appeal for the support of the trade unions. After 1920, however, the Labour Party constantly had to compete with the Stepney Communist Party for the support of the trade unions. This was of particular importance for the Stepney Labour Party because most of the Jewish unions affiliated to it were more radical than non-Jewish unions. The Boot and Shoe Operatives, the Jewish Bakers' Union, the Cigar Makers' Trade Union, the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association (NAFTA), the Hat and Cap branch of the United Garment Workers' Trade Union, the United Ladies Tailors' Trade Union (ULTTU), and the Whitechapel and Spitalfields Costermongers' and Street Sellers' 

62. This was the view expressed by D. Bloom, the branch secretary, quoted by Bush, *op.cit.*, p.187.

Union were all affiliated to the Stepney Labour Party. The Boot and Shoe Operatives and the Jewish Bakers' Union were both represented by Isaac Sharp, a full-time Jewish trade union official. Sharp was secretary of the Jewish Bakers' Union and in 1919 he was elected a delegate to the Labour Party conference. Also in that year he became a Labour councillor for the Mile End West ward. The ULTTU was represented by its full-time secretary, Jacob Fine. Fine's name was synonymous with the ULTTU. Born in a Lithuanian village in 1883, Fine came to England in 1904. He worked as a tailor in Stepney until 1915 when he became secretary of the ULTTU, a post he held until 1950. In 1934, Fine was elected a councillor for the Whitechapel East ward. As a councillor, Fine took a special interest in labour and housing problems, and in issues affecting Stepney's Jewish population. The Whitechapel and Spitalfields Costermongers' Union was represented by its secretary John Raphael. Raphael, a former editor of the Jewish World, sister paper of the Jewish Chronicle, had been an unsuccessful parliamentary candidate in Whitechapel in the 1918 general election. He had represented the Whitechapel Costers' Union in the election and stood as an Independent candidate. Shortly after the election, he became an enthusiastic supporter of the Labour Party and was elected a Labour councillor in

64. Stepney Trades Council and Central Labour Party, Annual Report, 1919-1920, p.1; ELO, 1 June 1918, p.3.
65. For a profile of Sharp see ELA, 1 April 1922, p.3. See also ibid., 8 November 19197,3.
66. JC, 28 May 1971, p.24 (Obituary); Fishman, East End Jewish Radicals, p.256.
Whitechapel in 1919. 67

As well as trade unions, the new Stepney Labour Party and Trades Council also included among its affiliates the BSP and the Independent Labour Party (ILP). Both of these bodies were represented by Jewish delegates. 68 The first secretary of Stepney Labour Party was a Rumanian-born Jew named Oscar Tobin. 69 Tobin, a chemist by profession, played an instrumental role in the formation of the party. 70 Together with Sam Truman, who was also Jewish, Tobin helped to found the Mile End Labour Party in 1918 and was described by the East London Advertiser as the 'Father' of that party. 71 It would not be an exaggeration to accredit Tobin with being the major force in the Stepney Labour Party in the immediate post-war period. He held virtually every important position in the party. He was secretary of Stepney Trades Council, the first Labour Party whip on the council elected in 1919, and the first Jewish mayor of the borough in 1922. 72 In addition, Tobin was responsible for organising Labour's campaign in the first council elections after the war in 1919 and must therefore take much of the

67. The Jewish World, 27 November 1918, p.7; ELA, 8 November 1919, p.3.
69. ELO, 1 June 1918, p.3.
70. ELA, 6 March 1920, p.5.
71. Ibid., 24 November 1923, p.3. See also 6 March 1920, p.5.
72. Ibid., 20 March 1920, p.2; 26 November 1921, p.3; JC, 25 November 1921, p.18.
credit for the Labour victory.\(^73\) The 1919 municipal elections provide good illustration of the development of new Labour allegiances among Stepney's Jews. Between fourteen and sixteen Jews stood as Labour candidates, and nine were elected.\(^74\)

Throughout the inter-war years most Jewish Labour councillors in Stepney belonged either to the Mile End Labour Party or to the Whitechapel and St. George's Labour Party. These neighbourhood parties were both affiliated to the Stepney Labour Party. Mile End Labour Party was Jewish in all but name. An examination of the names published in the Stepney Citizen reveals that the party consistently chose Jewish ward and section officers.\(^75\) Among its founder members were those who were to become leading figures in the Stepney Labour Party. Alfred Kershaw, a teacher, served as secretary of Mile End Labour Party from its foundation until 1930.\(^76\) In 1923 he was elected secretary of Stepney Trades Council and Borough Labour Party.\(^77\) In addition, Kershaw edited the Stepney Labour Times, a newspaper produced by Mile End Labour Party.\(^78\) He served as a councillor on the first Labour council elected in 1919 and in 1922 was elected an Alderman.\(^79\) Dan Frankel, a tailor by pro-

73. ELA, 18 October 1919, p.5; 26 November 1921, p.3; 28 January 1922, p.3.
74. Ibid., 8 November 1919, p.3.
75. Stepney Citizen, 1929-1939.
76. Ibid., January 1930, p.4; ELA, 25 January 1930, p.3.
77. ELA, 19 May 1923, p.3.
78. Ibid., 23 March 1929, p.7.
79. Ibid., 19 May 1923, p.3.
fession, started his political career in the ILP. He represented the Whitechapel and Mile End branch of the ILP on the new Stepney Labour Party in 1918. However, Frankel was not on the left-wing of the Labour movement and he gradually moved into the mainstream of Labour politics in Stepney, becoming chairman of the Mile End Labour Party from 1925 to 1936. In addition, he served as president of Stepney Trades Council and Borough Labour Party, and in 1928 was elected chairman of the Stepney Board of Guardians. The following year he became Mayor of Stepney and in 1934 was chosen as leader of the Labour group on the council. Frankel's political career extended beyond the East End. He represented Mile End on the LCC (1931-1939) and in 1932 he was elected to the executive committee of the London Labour Party. His career reached a pinnacle in 1935 when he was elected the Labour MP for Mile End. By this time, Frankel's popularity had plummeted among the more radical Jewish workers in the East End. He was increasingly disliked for his right-wing views and

82. *ELA, 21 April 1928*, p.4.
83. *JC, 21 December 1928*, p.26; *ELA, 17 November 1928*, p.3; *ELA, 10 November 1934*, p.5.
85. *ELA, 16 November 1935*, p.5.
his economic tendencies. One Jewish voter in Mile End even wrote to the East London Observer prior to the 1935 general election urging Jews not to vote for Frankel because he had done nothing in the fight against fascism. This was not entirely true because Frankel had recently spoken at a mass protest demonstration in Hyde Park against Nazi persecution.

The professionalism of Mile End Labour Party owed much to the organisational skills of its full-time secretary and election agent, Israel Shafran. Shafran organised the election campaigns of both John Scurr, MP for Mile End from 1923 to 1931 and Dan Frankel. He was a charismatic figure who was responsible for making the Mile End party the largest and most effectively organised branch of the Stepney Labour Party. At the annual meeting of the party in 1930, a record membership of just over 2,000 was reported. In the same year, Mile End Labour Club, established in the Jewish neighbourhood of Stepney Green, was praised as the finest Labour Club in East London.

86. A number of contemporaries have testified to Frankel's unpopularity, especially as a constituency MP. Interviews with Lady Janner (April 1985); Jack Wolkind (April 1985); Harold Altman (May 1985).
87. ELO, 2 November 1935, p.6.
89. ELA, 14 February 1925, p.5.
90. ELO, 18 January 1930, p.5; Stepney Citizen, February 1930, p.4.
It offered social activities and free legal advice, and was responsible for the publication of the *Stepney Labour Times* and the *Stepney Citizen*. Some of the party's activities were specifically aimed at a Jewish audience. For example, its League of Youth organised membership drives in Jewish streets. In addition, the Women's Section, a vibrant body with over 600 members in 1935, was amply supplied with Jewish members. Leading members of the Women's Section included the wives of Oscar Tobin and Dan Frankel who were both political figures in their own right. Sarah Tobin was elected to the council in 1922. Lily Frankel's political career was more wide ranging. Elected a councillor in 1934, she served as secretary and chairman respectively of the Women's Section. She was also a member of various school managing bodies, a co-opted member of the LCC and served as chairman of Stepney Council's Maternity and Child Welfare Committee in the 1930s. Other Jewish women who played an important role in the Mile End Labour Party were the sisters Sophie and Debbie Levene. Debbie Levene was on the executive committee of the party and was secretary of the League of Youth in 1932. Annie Bass, elected a councillor in 1934, also served as secretary of the

92. Ibid. See also June 1930, p.1.
93. Ibid., September 1931, p.1; October 1937, p.1.
95. ELA, 4 November 1922, p.5.
96. Stepney Citizen, February 1930, p.4; February 1934, p.4; ELA, 10 November 1934, p.3.
97. ELA, 3 February 1934, p.5.
98. Stepney Citizen, March 1932, p.4; April 1932, p.4.
League of Youth, and was active in her union, the ULTTU. Ann Goodman served as secretary and chairman of the west ward of the party.

The Whitechapel branch of Stepney Labour Party had no figure comparable to Shafran who continually galvanised the members into action. Another difference between the Whitechapel and Mile End branches was that the Whitechapel Labour Party contained a sizeable number of Irish-Catholic members. Nevertheless, the first secretary of the party, Harry Schwarz, was Jewish. In September 1919, Schwarz and John Raphael were involved in fighting a number of eviction orders affecting tenants in Brick Lane, many of whom were Jewish. A series of highly successful open-air protest meetings was organised and Raphael bombarded the local press with letters publicising the plight of the tenants. As a result of the Labour Party's campaign the eviction orders were withdrawn. Although the Whitechapel Labour Party never fulfilled its early promise, the branch did include two Jewish members who were to achieve considerable prominence in Labour politics in Stepney: Issy Vogler and Morris Davis. Vogler, who was a teacher in the East End, was regarded as one of the intellectuals of the Labour

99. ELA, 10 November 1934, p.3; Stepney Citizen, November 1937, p.1.
100. Stepney Citizen, April 1937, p.1; March 1938, p.1.
101. EL0, 20 September 1919, p.3; ELA, 13 September 1919, p.5.
102. EL0, 20 September 1919, p.3; 27 September 1919, p.4; ELA, 13 September 1919, p.5; 20 September 1919, p.3.
103. EL0, 20 December 1919, p.2.
Party in Stepney. He rose quickly through the ranks of the Whitechapel Labour Party which he joined in 1922, becoming a member of the executive committee in 1924. Two years later he became secretary of the Stepney Trades Council. In a council by-election in 1927 he fought Spitalfields East ward and won a seat there for Labour for the first time. The following year he was re-elected to the council for the predominantly Jewish St. George's North-West ward. During the years 1930 to 1931 he was the leader of the Labour group on the council and in 1931 he was re-elected to the council for Mile End New Town. He was subsequently appointed both chairman and leader of the Labour opposition on the council. In 1935, at the remarkably young age of twenty-nine, he was elected mayor of Stepney.104

Morris, or Morry, Davis was a highly controversial politician who aroused the strongest feelings of anger and resentment amongst East End Jewish radicals. One of the founders of the Whitechapel Labour Party, Davis was first elected to Stepney Council in 1924.105 He was simultaneously chairman and treasurer of the party.106 From 1925 he represented Whitechapel and St. George's on the LCC and served on virtually every committee of Stepney council. He became mayor of the borough in 1930 and was elected leader of the

104. ELA, 10 November 1934, p.5; interview with Lily Gold, sister of Issy Vogler (February 1985).
105. ELA, 24 June 1924, p.5; JC, 23 December 1927, p.9.
106. ELA, 22 November 1924, p.3; The Jewish Graphic, 30 March 1928, p.2.
council in 1935. It was during Davis's years as council leader in the mid-1930s that he consolidated his power on the council and extended his control over most political offices in the borough. He was a power broker par excellence. Unlike most Jewish Labour politicians in the East End, Davis was also active in Jewish communal life. He was a founder of the London Jewish Hospital, a manager of Jews' Free School, vice-president of the Talmud Torah Trust, a member of the Board of Deputies, and a vice-president of the Jewish National Fund, a Zionist fund-raising body which bought land in Palestine. However, it was as president of the Federation of Synagogues, a post to which he was elected in 1928, that Davis made his mark on the Anglo-Jewish communal scene. Davis was a fervent Zionist and he used the Federation's campaign against the previous president, the aristocratic and anti-Zionist second Lord Swaythling, to champion the cause of the immigrant Jews in the East End. Once in office, Davis's refusal to tolerate opposition, both in the Federation and on Stepney Council, earned him many political enemies.

Despite his often dubious methods, Davis deserves credit for his work on behalf of East End Jewry. In particular, he

107. For profiles of Davis see ELO, 15 November 1930, p.5; ELA, 15 November 1930, p.4; 28 December 1935, p.3.

108. On Davis's Jewish communal work see The Jewish Graphic, 30 March 1928, p.2; ELA, 15 November 1930, p.4; ELO, 15 November 1930, p.4. For a recently published account of Davis's career see Alderman, The Federation of Synagogues, pp.56-68.

109. Minutes of the Board of the Federation of Synagogues, 2 December 1925; 20 March 1928, Federation of Synagogues Archive (FSA).
led a Board of Deputies deputation to the LCC in 1928, asking the LCC to remove the restrictions on the award of its scholarships to children of aliens.\textsuperscript{110} As a result of this deputation, the LCC decided to lift its restrictions.\textsuperscript{111} Davis was also instrumental in transforming the character of the Federation and in making it one of the most radical of the Anglo-Jewish institutions. Notably, in 1933 the Federation was in the forefront of the protests against Nazi persecution in Germany and of demands for a boycott of German goods and services. This was in sharp contrast to the more passive stance assumed by the Board of Deputies leadership. As early as May 1933 the Federation passed a resolution, which was communicated to the British government, protesting against the persecution of Jews in Germany and urging the government to facilitate the admission of German Jews into Palestine and England.\textsuperscript{112} Later in the year, the Federation played a major role in the formation of the Jewish Representative Council which, in the Federation's own words, was formed because the Board of Deputies had "declined to declare an official boycott of German goods and services".\textsuperscript{113}

Specifically Jewish issues were rarely discussed on the council. This was because many Jewish councillors, especially

\textsuperscript{110.} \textit{JC}, 13 January 1928, p.20.


\textsuperscript{112.} Board of Federation minutes, 22 May 1933, FSA.

\textsuperscript{113.} \textit{Ibid.}, 21 December 1933. On the Federation's support for a boycott see also 19 July 1933, FSA.
Jewish Labour councillors, had already become distanced from Jewish communal affairs. In 1926 even the Irish-Catholic mayor of Stepney, who was also vice-chairman of the Stepney Board of Guardians, said he had been very disappointed with some of the Jewish members of that body because they had taken no steps to make provision for the religious needs of the Jewish children in the Board's homes. He had therefore set up a home for Jewish children, the first of its kind in Stepney, where the dietary laws could be kept. The *East London Observer* took a more sympathetic view of the Jewish members of the Stepney Guardians whom, it reported, "made a point of looking after the religious and other needs of their co-religionists". In addition, there is no doubt that Jewish communal causes could still attract the support of East End Jews from across the political spectrum. Thus, in March 1927 a mass meeting organised by the Society for the Promotion of Trades and Agriculture among Jews, known by the acronym ORT, was supported by both Labour and Liberal Jews. Prominent among those involved in ORT was the Liberal Kosky and the Labour activist Kershaw. Thus, there were Jews who, as well as being active in municipal politics in the East End, continued to participate in Jewish institutional life and to be concerned with issues which affected Jews. Morry Davis is the most outstanding example of such a politician, but there were others.

The most common form of communal involvement for politically inclined East End Jews was the Jewish friendly society movement. Most Jewish friendly societies had been formed in the East End in the second half of the nineteenth century and their formation coincided with the period of mass immigration from Eastern Europe. The principal benefit offered by Jewish friendly societies was the death benefit. For many Jewish activists in the Stepney Labour Party, the friendly societies provided them with their only contact with formal Jewish institutional life. They also fulfilled an important unintended function. Their rules and methods of procedure initiated many Jews into the world of associational politics. Experience in this field often served as the launching pad for a career in municipal politics. Alfred Kershaw and Israel Shafran were both prominently involved in friendly societies. Kershaw became president of the Ache! Ameth Friendly Society in the 1920s, and in the 1930s he was elected chairman of the Association of Jewish Friendly Societies. He also represented the Association on the Board of Deputies.


119. The Jewish Guardian, 9 November 1928, p.4.
Shafran became chairman of the Association during the early 1930s. Jewish Conservatives in Stepney who made their names in the friendly society movement were Lewis Beber and Adolph Ludlow. Beber was president of the Achei Brith and Shield of Abraham Friendly Society during 1922-23. Ludlow was a member of the Society's Executive Council. Jewish Liberals in the friendly society movement included Jack Rosenthal, Abraham Magen and Alfred Kosky.

On the rare occasions when Jewish issues were raised on Stepney Council, it was invariably by Jewish Labour councillors. For example, the deportation of alien Jews was a highly emotive issue in the East End Jewish community during the early post-war years. In April 1920 Stepney Council adopted councillor Kershaw's resolution protesting against the "alleged wholesale deportations of alien Jews in the East End of London" without trial. Tobin dwelt at length on the issue in the 1919-20 annual report of Stepney Trades Council and Labour Party. He said that the action of the government in arresting and deporting alien trade union officials had been a matter of such 'grave concern' to the council, that a

120. Association of Jewish Friendly Societies, Annual Report, 1933, p.22
122. ELA, 28 February 1925, p.4.
124. Stepney Borough Council minutes, Vol.XX, 26 April 1920; JC, 30 April 1920, p.28.
deputation interviewed the Labour Party in Parliament with a view to drafting amendments to mitigate the worst features of the Aliens Restriction Bill. Tobin believed that the position of all trade unionists was threatened by the government policy which made it a criminal offence for an alien to be a member of a trade union.\textsuperscript{125} In this way, he related the specific difficulties of alien trade unionists to the labour movement in general, thus giving a broader socialist validity to the problems faced by alien trade unionists. Another major concern of Jewish Labour councillors was the plight of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe who, after the First World War, were the victims of catastrophic famine and pogroms. In 1920 the Stepney Trades Council and Labour Party passed a resolution urging the setting up of a fund for the relief of distress in Central and Eastern Europe. Tobin brought the matter to the attention of the council and requested that a meeting be called to focus interest on 'Fighting the Famine'.\textsuperscript{126} Nearer to home, Jewish Labour Party activists were confronted with discrimination against British-born and foreign-born Jews in a variety of areas including employment, housing and education. The LCC was a particular target for criticism as has already been seen in the case of the educational scholarships. Despite the extent to which discriminatory legislation affected the lives of many East End Jews, there is little evidence of protests from Stepney's Jewish councillors. One important

\textsuperscript{125} Stepney Trades Council and Central Labour Party, Annual Report, 1919-20, p.5.

\textsuperscript{126} Stepney Borough Council minutes, 8 March 1920; 26 April 1920. For Jewish East End protests against pogroms in Poland in the immediate post-war period see Bush, \textit{op.cit.}, p.208.
exception was Jacob Fine. In 1935 he protested in the strongest terms against the LCC regulation excluding aliens from their estates. There were occasions when Jewish Labour councillors actually opposed policies which would benefit Jews. In 1923, for example, a group of Labour councillors, including at least one Jewish councillor, objected to a proposal that Jewish patients in the Bancroft Hospital, Mile End, should be provided with kosher meat. Their justification for opposing the proposal was that Jewish patients would be receiving preferential treatment. In reality, the episode illustrated the extent to which some Jewish councillors had abandoned their religious beliefs in favour of a secular perspective on local affairs. The outcome of the controversy was that the Mile End Board of Guardians agreed to supply kosher meat to patients who requested it.

The programmes and policies of the early Labour councils in Stepney were marked by considerable idealism. Much was achieved despite practical difficulties. A major problem was that most Labour councillors, including the Jewish ones, had little experience of running a local administration. Nevertheless, many of the progressive policies pursued in the immediate post-war period were implemented by Jewish members of the Stepney Labour Party. For example, the Labour chairman of the Housing Committee in 1919 was John Raphael. He believed that the first Labour council in Stepney represented a "miniature

revolution".\textsuperscript{129} Under Raphael's leadership, Stepney became the first borough to take advantage of the powers conferred by the Housing and Town Planning Act. This Act authorised local authorities to conduct systematic sanitary inspections. The result of this policy in Stepney was, in the words of Oscar Tobin, that an enormous number of "insanitary dwellings had been rendered habitable".\textsuperscript{130} An indirect effect of the council's policy of dealing with insanitary housing conditions was, according to Raphael, that it "struck terror into the hearts of the landlords and their agents".\textsuperscript{131} The council made attempts to solve the housing shortage in the borough by the erection of dwellings in Jubilee Street, a predominantly Jewish street, and the acquisition of Mile End Fire Station which was converted into flats.\textsuperscript{132} In an election propaganda piece, which he wrote for the \textit{Stepney Labour Times} in October 1928, Kershaw argued that the Labour Party tackled the housing problem thoroughly and, during its period in office, had built 414 self-contained flats, equipped with bathrooms. This was more than three times the number built since the inception of the council in 1900. Permission had also been obtained from the Ministry of Health for a large slum clearance scheme in the Limehouse Fields area.\textsuperscript{133} This scheme aimed to rehouse about


\textsuperscript{130} \textit{JC}, 25 November 1921, p.18.


\textsuperscript{132} \textit{JC}, 25 November 1921, p.18.

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Stepney Labour Times}, October 1928, p.4.
1,900 people. By the end of the 1920s Stepney's Labour councils had erected Riverside Mansions in Wapping, the Brunton Wharf estate, and the mainly Jewish-tenanted Hughes Mansions in Whitechapel.134

Despite these important initiatives much remained to be done to solve the acute housing shortage in the borough. Inevitably, there was disagreement between Jewish Liberal and Labour councillors about how Stepney's housing crisis should be tackled. In 1933, for example, Dan Frankel attacked Miriam Moses' proposal for Jewish charitable endeavour to fund a housing programme "as one asking rich Jews to house poor Jews". He added that he strongly opposed "any racial element being brought into the housing problem".135 Together with the provision of kosher meat in hospitals, the housing crisis indicated the extent to which some Jewish councillors were trying to exclude specifically Jewish issues from the local political agenda. This in turn was an indication of the new type of secular East End Jew who had become fully assimilated into local political life. The Labour Party solution to the housing problem was articulated by Vogler, a councillor for the North-West ward of St. George's, already shown to be the most overcrowded ward in London. Vogler believed that only local authorities could solve the housing problem. He pointed out that Stepney Council and the LCC were making progress but that much more could be achieved if the Jewish communal workers

135. ELA, 4 March 1933, p.6.
ceased to put their trust in large scale philanthropy "and supported wise public expenditure instead of supporting the economy ramp".\textsuperscript{136} Jewish Liberals remained unconvinced that local councils were the best institutions to manage housing estates. Jack Somper, for example, remained committed to private enterprise and appealed to "big city companies" to help in the destruction of the slums.\textsuperscript{137}

As the first Labour chairman of Stepney Council's Public Health and Maternity Committee and of its Child Welfare Committee, Oscar Tobin was responsible for implementing the great extension of infant welfare work in the borough. In particular, he initiated one of the biggest schemes of milk distribution to babies and nursing mothers in the country. The scheme cost nearly £15,000 per year and was aimed at reducing infant mortality. According to Tobin, the scheme resulted in a decrease by over half the infant mortality in one year. In addition, the council assumed control of all tuberculosis centres in the borough, which had previously been under voluntary control.\textsuperscript{138} Although Tobin was primarily concerned to implement measures which would benefit all sections of the community, he did support a council recommendation that the Jewish Maternity Home in the borough should set aside a bed to be used only for Jewish patients. The fact that the recommendation was rejected might well have been an indication

\textsuperscript{136} JC, 27 January 1933, p.14.
\textsuperscript{137} ELA, 5 August 1933, p.5.
\textsuperscript{138} JC, 25 November 1921, p.18; ELA, 26 November 1921, p3.
not of discrimination but of the Labour council's desire that all sections of the community should be treated equally and that no one section should be seen to be in receipt of any privilege.  

In common with other Labour councils, one of Stepney's first measures was to introduce a £4 minimum wage for all council employees. Raphael emphasised the importance of this measure in the Stepney Labour Party's first annual report in 1919-20. Raphael was also one of a number of Jewish Labour councillors who were prominent in protests against the level of unemployment in the borough. In 1920, he participated in a council deputation to the Ministry of Labour on the subject of the serious increase in unemployment. The deputation urged that a solution be found and immediate relief given. The following year Tobin presided at an open meeting held to voice the demands of the local unemployed. He pointed out that because of financial restraints a borough council could do very little to solve the unemployment problem. He reiterated the Labour Party's policy that any real measure of relief had to come from the government. The protests continued into the 1930s. In 1935, for example, Issy Vogler, who was mayor at the time, called a meeting in Stepney to protest against what the

141. ELA, 21 August 1920, p.4.
142. Ibid., 16 September 1922, p.5.
Labour Party regarded as the inadequate scales of unemployment relief laid down by the Unemployment Assistance Board.\textsuperscript{143} Two years earlier, Dan Frankel had protested at a meeting of the London Labour Party executive committee at the harsh way in which Public Assistance was administered in London.\textsuperscript{144}

The unemployment issue also served as a further source of conflict between Jewish Labour councillors and their Jewish anti-socialist opponents on the council. Deputations representing unemployed workers were guaranteed to introduce issues which aroused political passions on both sides. In 1933, a deputation from the Stepney branch of the Communist-Party-backed National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM) made a number of demands at a council meeting. The three representatives of the branch were Jewish and its secretary was Nat Cohen, a fiery local Communist who had already enjoyed an eventful political career. A member of the Communist Party of Great Britain at its inception, he subsequently went to Argentina where he was imprisoned and later deported for his revolutionary activities.\textsuperscript{145} On his return to England, he became organiser of a Communist front body, the Stepney International Labour Defence. He spent several months in the Soviet Union in 1934 and in 1936 he was one of the first British

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 16 February 1935, p.8.
\item \textsuperscript{144} London Labour Party Executive minutes, 6 July 1933, GLRO.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Daily Worker (DW), 17 May 1932, p.2; Jacobs, Out of the Ghetto, pp.78, 83-86.
\end{itemize}
volunteers to Spain. It was not surprising, therefore, that Jewish Liberal councillors were less than enthusiastic about Cohen's presence in the council chamber. He was, in fact, ordered out of the chamber by Miriam Moses. Vogler, by contrast, welcomed the deputation which, he said, proved how much suffering existed among people living in a distressed area. This provoked the response from Somper that the Labour Government had not improved the lot of the working class. Dan Frankel's reply to this attack was to say that the Labour Government had not been responsible "for cutting the unemployment benefit, and giving local authorities instructions and orders not to spend money on unemployment". He added that it was not within the jurisdiction of local councils to deal with unemployment. However, even a subject as controversial as unemployment could draw Jews of differing political persuasions together. In 1934, for example, both Somper and Vogler supported a request from the Stepney branch of the NUWM for the council to receive a deputation from the branch. The deputation asked the council to provide accommodation for the Hunger Marchers who were protesting against the Unemployment Bill. As a result of the deputation, both Vogler and Miriam Moses proposed that the council ask the Minister of Health for permission to incur expenditure in order to be able to comply with the request of the Stepney branch of the NUWM. It

146. DW, 10 September 1933, p.4; 25 November 1936, p.1; Jacobs, op.cit., pp.98, 142, 215.

147. ELA, 28 January 1933, p.5.

therefore seems that where a humanitarian issue rather than a purely party political issue was at stake, Jewish councillors were able to present a united front.

The major issue on which Jewish councillors of different political persuasions were never able to agree was the funding of local authority services. In practice, this was the rates issue which dominated municipal politics in the East End in the 1920s. In Stepney, Jack Somper was in the forefront of the attacks against what he regarded as the first Labour council's extravagance. He was particularly incensed about the cost to the rates of Labour's milk scheme and its £4 minimum wage for council workers.\textsuperscript{149} Tobin's response was that Stepney had no choice but to levy a high rate. He cited a number of reasons why the council had been forced to increase the rates. One of the most important reasons was that Stepney, in common with other poor boroughs, had a low rateable value. This meant that it was necessary to levy a high rate in order to get the same return as a richer borough which could levy a lower rate. Secondly, the council was compelled to collect the rates for the LCC, Metropolitan Police, Metropolitan Water Board and local Board of Guardians, but it had no control over the expenditure of these bodies which were continually demanding more money. Other reasons cited by Tobin for the high rates were the accumulation of public works neglected during the war, which now urgently required to be carried out; the great increase in contractors' prices and the extention of municipal

\textsuperscript{149} ELA, 9 April 1921, p.5; 27 January 1923, p.5.
work embodied in new legislation. Moreover, the previous Municipal Reform council had paid low wages, whereas the Labour council was now paying a living wage.\textsuperscript{150} Tobin added that Stepney would follow Poplar's lead in refusing to pay the LCC and Police precepts levied upon it and instead would use the rates to support the borough's unemployed. The Labour council's case thus rested on what it believed to be the basic unfairness of a system which placed a very heavy burden on the mainly poor people of Stepney. In this context, Tobin's call for the "equalisation of the rates" was a reflection of events in other East End boroughs.\textsuperscript{151}

When a Ratepayer's council was elected in 1922 Somper, as chairman of the council's Finance Committee, seized the opportunity to propose a motion which abolished the £4 minimum wage.\textsuperscript{152} He believed that this would save ratepayers £80,000 per annum.\textsuperscript{153} Somper was also responsible for implementing a significant reduction in the rates.\textsuperscript{154} It seems that he regarded rate reductions as a personal crusade. In an interview published in the \textit{East London Advertiser} in 1923,


\textsuperscript{152.} ELA, 28 April 1923, p.5; Stepney Borough Council minutes, \textit{Vol.XXIII}, 23 April 1923.

\textsuperscript{153.} ELA, 11 August 1923, p.5.

\textsuperscript{154.} \textit{Ibid.}, 4 August 1923, p.5.
Somper said that he considered the reduction of the high rates to be the most important aspect of council work. A further rate reduction was achieved by Somper in 1924. The result of Somper's efforts was a reduction in the rates from an average of 21s in the £ in 1921-22 under Labour to 14s 19½d in the £ in 1924-25 under the Ratepayers Party. However, it must be stressed that Somper was not alone in his condemnation of Labour's spending policies. All Jewish anti-Labour councillors, together with their non-Jewish colleagues, objected to the rates set by the Labour Party. The issue brought Jewish Liberal councillors into direct conflict with Jewish Labour councillors in 1928. Ida Samuel and Miriam Moses criticised the Labour council for its extravagance and bad administration regarding the Board of Guardians. Morry Davis countered these charges by explaining that the council had no choice but to levy the precepts submitted to it.

The enthusiasm to introduce new and innovative socialist programmes died in the 1930s. Complacency and opportunism set in as the Stepney Labour Party became firmly entrenched in power after 1934. Morry Davis's dictatorial style of leadership set the tone of the Labour group on the council in the 1930s. Issy Vogler, who by 1939 had been neutralised as a political force, ceaselessly criticised what he called the

155. Ibid., 11 August 1923, p.5.
156. Ibid., 22 March 1924, pp.3, 8; 2 August 1924, p.5.
157. Ibid., 7 May 1927, p.3.
158. ELO, 7 April 1928, p.3.
"Steam Rollering Caucus" which controlled the council. However, it would be wrong to attribute the ruling Labour group's increasing unpopularity, especially among left-wing Jewish workers, solely to Davis's personal influence because the group itself experienced a shift to the right during the 1930s. Stepney Labour Party's drift to the right was accompanied by an increase in the power of the Irish-Catholic faction in the party. Despite the Daily Herald's optimistic comment that the growth of the Labour movement in East London had helped to bind Jews and Irish together, relations between Jewish and Irish councillors were rarely amicable. Evidence of the general coolness in relations between the two ethnic groups was apparent in their seating arrangements in the council chamber. The Jewish Labour councillors sat together in one group while the Irish councillors sat elsewhere. When the issue of birth control advice was raised at council meetings voting seems to have taken place along ethno-religious lines with Jewish councillors in firm opposition to Irish-Catholic councillors. In 1932, for example, Jewish councillors of all political persuasions supported a recommendation of the Ministry of Health which gave permission for birth control information and facilities to be provided for married women attending the council's Maternity and Child Welfare centres in cases where further pregnancy would be dangerous to the mother's health.

159. ELA, 10 June 1939, p.5.
160. DH, 29 November 1930, p.8.
161. Interview with Lily Gold (February 1985).
162. ELA, 9 July 1932, p.6. See also Stepney Borough Council minutes, Vol. XXXI, 29 April 1931.
Despite these less than friendly relations between Jewish and Irish councillors, Morry Davis cultivated close working relationships with Alderman Sullivan, an influential Irish member of the council, and Jerry Long, who served both as leader of Stepney Council and was mayor of the borough in 1938. Long, who was firmly on the right of the party, was an important figure in the Catholic Action group. Catholic Action's main base of support was in Wapping and the group served as the umbrella for the right-wing Irish section of Stepney Labour Party. Davis's tactical alliance with Long led to Tammany Hall style politics on Stepney Council. The two men carved out spheres of influence for each other on the council and made independent decisions about the award of council contracts. Davis even made council appointments without consulting the relevant committee. At the same time, patronage and nepotism increasingly marked the running of council affairs. The situation was such that among council employees the abbreviation for Stepney Borough Council, SBC, was known as Sisters, Brothers and Cousins because so many councillors secured jobs for their relatives on the council. Davis and Long built up such a strong power base in Stepney that in 1939 one councillor called their alliance "the Davis-

163. Interview with Harold Altman (May 1985).
164. Interview with Monty Goldman (April 1985).
166. For example, see ELA, 1 February 1936, p.5.
167. Interview with Jack Wolkind (April 1985). The point was confirmed by Harold Altman (interview May 1985).
The two men had been given a freer rein over council policy after the 1937 borough council elections. Until that time the right-wing tendencies of the Stepney Borough Council Labour group were kept in check by the left-wing trade union dominated Stepney Trades Council. However, the powers of the Trades Council over the Borough Labour Party were emasculated at the time of the 1937 council election. This election witnessed the climax of the friction which had marked relations between union delegates on the Trades Council and borough council members of the Stepney Labour Party. The Trades Council refused to endorse the nominations of leading council members whom it considered too right-wing in outlook. The London Labour Party instructed Morgan Phillips, the party agent in Whitechapel, to resolve the situation. As a result of his reorganisation, the Stepney Trades Council and Borough Labour Party were henceforward to be entirely separate bodies. The Trades Council thus lost its political veto and its power to intervene in local Labour Party affairs. In practical terms, the separation meant that the Stepney Labour Party was now a solidly right-wing body, dominated by Davis and Long.

Despite the commanding position which Davis and Long enjoyed on the council, the Labour group never became a monolith. This was because some Labour members consistently

168. Statement by Helena Roberts at a council meeting, ELO, 1 April 1939, p.6.

challenged the hegemony of the ruling Labour clique. However strenuously he tried, Davis was never able to silence the opposition. Neither was he able to prevent the serious splits which occurred within the ruling Labour group from 1936. By an interesting quirk of fate Davis's major opponents were Jews. The splits which occurred on Stepney Council thus provide good illustration of Jews challenging each other on a political basis rather than on an ethnic basis. The fact that the splits had nothing to do with Jewish or ethnic issues illustrates the extent to which these Jews had integrated into the local political scene. The first major controversy occurred in December 1936 over the seemingly innocuous issue of how best to advertise temporary Christmas jobs. At a stormy council meeting, Davis proposed that the jobs be advertised in the local press while his opponents, led by Vogler, wanted jobs filled in the customary way through the Labour Exchange.\footnote{170. ELO, 12 December 1936, p.1. For a similar disagreement in 1938 see \textit{ibid.}, 4 June 1938, p.1.} Davis's resolution was agreed to almost unanimously and in the aftermath of the dispute Vogler and his supporters were suspended from the council.\footnote{171. \textit{Ibid.}, 2 January 1937, p.1.} The suspended councillors did not allow the matter to rest. They pressed the London Labour Party to conduct an enquiry into their suspension. The enquiry discovered that Davis's real intention was that prospective council employees should be nominated by councillors. This revelation gave the executive committee of the London Labour Party "the gravest suspicion of undesirable and irregular practices". The enquiry noted that it was significant that the
proposal to fill jobs in this way had not been mentioned at the council meeting in December. As a result of the enquiry, the London Labour Party urged the re-instatement of the suspended councillors.172

The enquiry was significant in that it brought the affairs of the Stepney Borough Council Labour group under the close scrutiny of the London Labour Party for the first time. Morry Davis and his cohorts never recovered from the allegations of corruption with which they were tainted by the enquiry's findings. Nevertheless, Davis remained firmly in control of the council administration. In 1938 a major split occurred over Davis's instruction to Labour councillors not to support any motions proposed by the Communist councillor, Phil Piratin. Even the conservative *East London Advertiser* failed to understand this directive, commenting that "Councillor Piratin's policy on local affairs is practically that of the Labour Party, and when he gets up to move a resolution it is usually to emphasise their own beliefs".173 Piratin's first motion on the increased cost of living confirmed the *East London Advertiser* 's statement. In line with Davis's instruction, the motion received no seconder and so was rejected. This led Piratin to claim, with some justification, that he had not even been granted the privileges allowed to the Ratepayers

172. Suspension of Four Stepney Councillors: Report of Committee of Enquiry appointed by the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party and the Executive Committee of the London Labour Party, 5 May 1937, London Labour Party Executive Committee Documents, Box 17, GLRO; London Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 6 May 1937, GLRO.

173. *ELA*, 7 May 1938, p.3.
opposition in the previous council. Councillors Vogler and Helena Roberts, who was Jewish by birth but had converted to Christianity, supported Piratin and spoke out against the ruling which they believed to be dictatorial and undemocratic, even though they risked their own political careers by doing so. In February 1938 both made statements explaining their reasons for breaking with the Labour group on the council. Vogler complained that the Labour group had "long since passed from the method of reasoning together over its common problems to the path of being told what to do". He also claimed that "The group drifts aimlessly and purposeless from month to month. Waste, muddle and inefficiency are adding over 2/- in the £ to the rates". Helena Roberts, in her statement, said it had become increasingly clear that the Labour Party policy was "becoming subservient to a dictatorship of a few blindly followed by others with no conception and no desire to faithfully carry out its pledges to the electors". She subsequently resigned from the Limehouse Labour Party while Vogler was expelled from the Whitechapel and St. George's Labour Party. Meanwhile, the London Labour Party, increasingly concerned about allegations of malpractices by Labour councillors, instituted a further enquiry into certain

174. ELQ, 1 January 1938, p.5. The following year Piratin was refused permission to propose that the council set up a committee to investigate the alleged police brutality in connection with the eviction of tenants from Langdale Mansions. See Stepney Borough Council minutes, Vol.XXXIX, 28 June 1939; 26 July 1939.

175. ELA, 26 February 1938, p.1.

176. Ibid.

177. ELQ, 5 March 1938, p.1.
aspects of the council's administration. This time Herbert Morrison, secretary of the London Labour Party, insisted that the leadership of the Stepney Labour Party be investigated. Thus, Morry Davis had succeeded in arousing the wrath of one of the most powerful figures in the Labour movement in London.\footnote{178} However, even Morrison was unable to break the Davis-Long hegemony because the Stepney Labour Party refused to co-operate in the new enquiry which therefore had to be abandoned.\footnote{179}

Although Vogler and Roberts now refused to accept the Labour whip, their opposition to Davis and the ruling clique continued unabated. In May 1938 the council passed a new bye-law prohibiting the chalking of political slogans on pavements in the borough. Vogler said that the bye-law was deliberately being introduced to cripple the Communist Party as a revenge for their electoral victory in Spitalfields East the previous year. Roberts, Vogler and Piratin collectively opposed the bye-law on the grounds that it deliberately affected the poorer members of the community who had no money to spend on advertising.\footnote{180} The executive committee of the largest Jewish trade union in the East End, the United Ladies Tailors' Trade Union (ULTTU), agreed unanimously that the council's decision "was reactionary and anti-labour to the core". The union therefore

\footnote{178}{London Labour Party Executive Committee minutes, 20 January 1938; 17 March 1938, GLRO.}

\footnote{179}{Stepney Borough Council Administration: Report of Committee of Enquiry, 19 May 1938; Secretary's Report, 14 July 1938, London Labour Party Executive Committee Documents, Box 18, GLRO.}

\footnote{180}{\textit{ELO}, 28 May 1938, p.1; \textit{ELA}, 4 June 1938, p.3.}
urged the more progressively minded Stepney Trades Council to convene a meeting for the purpose of rescinding the resolution.\textsuperscript{181} In addition, the union itself protested to the council against the resolution.\textsuperscript{182} By the end of 1938 the coalition of forces ranged against Davis had become even more bold in their protests. For example, in November Vogler raised the charge of "Jobs for Pals" at a council meeting.\textsuperscript{183} This was the first time that anyone had referred to patronage in such an open manner. The following year a number of councillors complained that Davis, as chairman of the Air Raid Precautions Committee, had arbitrarily decided to submit Stepney ARP to central control.\textsuperscript{184} By this stage, the opposition to Davis had grown to include a number of other Jewish Labour councillors, notably Morry Glinsman, Harry Gordon, Henry Solomons and Reuben Silkoff.\textsuperscript{185} Solomons and Silkoff were both local trade union leaders. Solomons was vice-chairman of a branch of the Shop Assistants' Union.\textsuperscript{186} As secretary of the Stepney Trades Council and chairman of the Houndsditch and Whitechapel Branch of the Shop Assistants' Union Silkoff was a leading figure in the labour movement in Stepney.\textsuperscript{187} He was an

\textsuperscript{181} ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 26 May 1938, ULTTU Archive, D/S/24/51.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 7 July 1938.

\textsuperscript{183} ELO, 5 November 1938, p.1.

\textsuperscript{184} ELA, 1 April 1939, p.5.

\textsuperscript{185} For their opposition to Davis see, for example, ELO, 2 July 1938, p.1; ELA, 2 July 1938, pp.1, 5.

\textsuperscript{186} ELA, 10 November 1934, p.3.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 8 January 1938, p.4; 2 April 1938, p.8. Also see below p.157.
example of the kind of left-wing Jewish working class leader in the East End whose policies and public pronouncements were much closer to the aspirations of ordinary East End Jews than the policies of the by then largely discredited Stepney Labour Party.

Political developments in Stepney were reflected in other working class boroughs. This was especially true for the contrast between the aspirations of the early Labour councils in the 1920s and the complacency which increasingly marked local Labour administrations in the 1930s. The uniqueness of these developments in Stepney was that they occurred in an area noted for its large ethnic communities. The Jews and the Irish both assumed, in proportion to their numbers, a far greater role in local politics than the native English population. Throughout the inter-war period, approximately one-third of the sixty Stepney councillors were Jewish; one third were Irish and the remaining third native English. In common with the general trend in working class areas, the number of Jewish Liberal and Conservative councillors declined dramatically during the period. This had an important implication for the type of Jew involved in local politics. Jewish Liberals usually took an active interest in Jewish affairs and tended to participate fully in local Jewish communal and religious life. By contrast, most Jewish members of the Labour party, with one or two notable exceptions, played no part in Jewish communal

188. See above note 7 for the candidate lists. I was aided in the identification of Irish councillors by Lily Gold (interview, February 1985).
life. In this respect, they shared the experience and outlook of most of their Jewish contemporaries on the left. For these Jews, their lack of involvement in Jewish communal institutions in no way signified a rejection of their Jewish identification and commitment. On the contrary, their self-identity as Jews cannot be in doubt.

There are a variety of ways in which an ethnic group can express its collective identity and thereby demonstrate its distinctiveness. For Jewish members of the Labour Party in the inter-war East End, association with official Jewish communal institutions was shunned in favour of local autonomous activities and organisations which nevertheless provided a platform for Jews on the left to express their solidarity with other Jews. Labour Jews mounted various campaigns on behalf of fellow East End Jews and, throughout the period under consideration, were deeply concerned with the plight of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, specifically Jewish issues were often expressed in such a way that they harmonised with party political interests. Thus, for example, in 1920 Jewish socialists experienced no conflict between their opposition to the deportations of foreign Jews and their commitment to the policies of the Labour Party. The fact that Jewish councillors felt sufficiently confident to publicly raise Jewish issues in a secular political context marked an important new stage in the development of a collective ethnic identity in the Jewish East End. Politically active Jews were, in effect, creating a legitimate form of ethnic political protest within the framework of the British political system. This protest was
entirely local and autonomous; East End Jews sought neither the advice nor the assistance of official Jewish bodies such as the Board of Deputies.

The political framework provided by the local council also meant that for the first time significant numbers of East End Jews found themselves in the position of opposing fellow Jews along party political lines. This created the impression that second generation Jews were attempting to subsume their Jewish identity beneath their political identity. However, the fact remained that even for the most radical left-wing Jews, their social and cultural worlds were delineated by Jewish neighbourhood life in the East End. Ultimately, this 'sense of neighbourhood' overrode political differences and ensured the survival of an ethnic identity among second generation working class Jews in the East End.
Chapter Three:
Trade Unionism in the Jewish East End: From Isolation to Integration

Trade unionism in the Jewish trades has been the subject of vigorous, and at times vitriolic, debate among historians. In the traditional view, it was believed that the unique individualism of Jewish workers, together with the nature of industrial organisation in the immigrant workshop trades, militated against effective trade union organisation. More recently, the validity of this argument has been questioned. The most significant challenge to the traditional view has come from a Marxist historian who identifies class conflict rather than ethnic solidarity as the crucial variable in the Jewish immigrant world. In between the extremes of those two diametrically opposed views, there has arisen a third strand of thought which acknowledges a far greater complexity in the experience of Jewish workers. In this view class and ethnic stereotypes are rejected in favour of an analysis which places the role of unorganised workers at the centre of Jewish immigrant life.

Each of these views has a certain validity. Both class

1. The major exponent of this view is Lloyd Gartner. See his book The Jewish Immigrant in England, p.119.
2. Buckman, Immigrants and the Class Struggle, passim.
and ethnic factors played a vital role in determining the nature of Jewish trade unionism. At the same time, the nature of the Jewish immigrant trades, which were often small scale and subject to seasonal fluctuations in demand, ensured that Jewish trade union membership remained highly unstable. Significant numbers of the Jewish working class in the East End therefore spent much of their working lives unorganised in small workshops which were scattered throughout the area. Although an unorganised workforce was part of the reality of life in the Jewish East End, Jewish trade union leaders nevertheless fought a continual battle to bring as many Jewish workers into the trade union movement as possible. The important struggles of the inter-war years have previously been neglected in accounts of Jewish trade unionism. This study is thus an attempt to redress the balance. Special attention is drawn to trade unionism in three traditional immigrant trades: baking, furniture making and tailoring. In addition, one newer trade is examined – the wholesale distributive trade.

The inter-war period marked a new and important stage in the development of the organised Jewish workers movement in the East End. Indeed, it is crucial to distinguish Jewish trade unions of the years 1918 to 1939 from the immigrant

4. The studies by S. Lerner and J. A. Gillespie are exceptions but they concentrate only on certain aspects of Jewish trade unionism in the inter-war years. See S. Lerner, The History of the United Clothing Workers' Union: a case study of social disorganisation (University of London Ph.D. 1956) and Gillespie, Economic and Political Change in the East End of London during the 1920s.
unions of the period before 1914. The second generation of English-born Jews in the East End who came to dominate local unions in the inter-war years inherited the radical traditions of their revolutionary immigrant parents but differed from them in one important respect. They were eager to participate in the wider labour movement in the East End. The very Englishness of these young Jews facilitated their ability to communicate with their non-Jewish counterparts. Although favouring unity with the general trade union movement, these Jewish workers were nevertheless anxious to preserve their distinct ethnic identity.

During the period 1880 to 1914 there had existed a multiplicity of small Jewish trade unions in the East End. Many of these enjoyed only an ephemeral existence. Their formation was often the product of specific grievances and their membership based on a small coterie of sub-divisional workers. In the mens tailoring trade, for example, there was a Jewish Tailors' and Pressers' Union, an East London Waistcoat Makers' Union and a Jewish Military Uniform Tailors' Union.\(^5\) By contrast, after the First World War no separate Jewish trade unions were formed and those that had survived from the earlier period had to struggle to retain their independence.

Lloyd Gartner ascribed the demise of independent Jewish trade unions, albeit indirectly, to the Trade Boards Act of 1909. This Act made provision for the setting up of a board in the tailoring trade which was to consist of an equal number of employers and workers representatives and which had the power to compel employers to pay a minimum wage. Gartner contended that by serving as a stimulus to trade unionism in tailoring the Act helped to create a new union: the Tailors' and Garment Workers' Union (TGWU). A number of the small Jewish unions amalgamated with the TGWU as a result of the London ladies tailors' strike of 1912. In this way, according to Gartner, the Trade Boards Act spelt the beginning of the end of Jewish trade unions. However, Gartner fails to take into account other important factors. In particular, the changing structure of industry, especially after 1918, militated against small, sectional unions and provided the conditions for the creation of national trade unions. Increasingly, Jewish craft occupations such as tailoring and cabinet-making were transformed by new technology into large scale industries. This new industrial structure simplified production processes and enabled unskilled labour to operate the machinery. The small Jewish craft unions had no place in the new system.

Despite these developments, the introduction of new methods and new machinery was far from even. Significant sectors of the traditional Jewish trades continued to operate

6. Gartner, op.cit., pp.139-140.
from small workshops well after 1918. Even in these workshops, however, the trend was for independent Jewish unions to amalgamate with the relevant national union. Thus, in 1918 the East End based Independent Jewish Cabinet-Makers' Union amalgamated with the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association (NAFTA) and henceforward was known as the East London United (No. 15) Branch of the national union.\(^7\) Considerable pressure was also placed on the United Ladies Tailors' Trade Union (ULTTU), a predominantly Jewish and East End based craft union, to amalgamate with the TGWU which in 1932 became the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers (NUTGW). The ULTTU had been formed in 1909 from an amalgamation of smaller Jewish tailoring unions and functioned as an independent Jewish union until 1939.\(^8\) Throughout this period, the union was isolated from the national trade union movement. Although it affiliated to the Trades Union Congress in 1922 it was expelled when negotiations for amalgamation with the TGWU collapsed in the early 1920s.\(^9\) Officials from the TGWU took the view that the existence of small unions such as the ULTTU which catered for particular sections of workers posed one of the greatest obstacles to organising workers in the garment industry.\(^10\) The issue of amalgamation therefore


\(^{9}\) Interview with Mick Mindel, chairman ULTTU 1938 to 1939 (June 1985).

\(^{10}\) The Garment Worker, March 1926, p.9; January 1926, p.12.
forms a crucial element in this chapter.

Although no new Jewish trade unions were formed after 1918 significant numbers of Jewish workers in the East End remained loyal to existing ethnic labour organisations. The bakers formed one such group of organised Jewish workers. The London Jewish Bakers' Union was unique among Jewish labour organisations in that it survived beyond 1939. However, after 1918 the union was but a shadow of its former self. Admittedly, it never had been very large. At its peak in 1912 there were just 200 members. By 1933 this had fallen to 129 and by 1939 to 118. The Jewish Bakers approached the ULTTU for support during one of the most difficult chapters in the union's history in the mid 1920s. The ULTTU willingly offered its support, both moral and financial. For example, in June 1925 striking members of the Bakers Union appealed to the ULTTU membership to buy only bread which carried the union label. The chairman of the ULTTU promised to give "every possible support". The following year a deputation from the Bakers Union appealed for a grant in aid of an appeal by their union against the conviction of three pickets. the ULTTU agreed to grant the Bakers £25. This kind of fraternal


13. ULTTU members' meeting, 3 June 1925, ULTTU Archive, D/S/24/4.

contact was significant, in that it involved exclusively Jewish groups of workers, thus confirming the endurance of bonds of ethnicity as well as of class.

From 1914 to 1924 the Jewish Bakers' Union was under the dominating influence of its secretary, Isaac Sharp. The next major personality who assumed control of union affairs was Solomon Lever who was the union's secretary from 1929 until his death in 1959. Lever had originally been a cabinet-maker by trade and before 1914 had been a member of the Independent Jewish Cabinet-Makers' Union. Men such as Sharp and Lever represented a new type of Jewish political leader in the East End. They were both professional trade unionists who dedicated their careers to the cause of the trade union movement. Similar examples of full-time trade union leaders could be found in the East End branches of the furniture and tailoring unions.

Although the East London United Branch of NAFTA was not independent, since it functioned as a constituent part of the national union from 1918, it was nevertheless recognised as a Jewish branch. However, the branch did try to attract non-Jewish members. Indeed, it was accepted branch policy that the future of No. 15 could best be secured by drawing in all

15. See above, p.67.


17. Interview with Morry Lebow, former secretary of Branch No. 15 (June 1986).
As the largest branch in the union, No. 15 enjoyed national importance. In terms of size, the branch grew steadily during the inter-war period. In 1919 it had a membership of 611, and by 1930 there were over 900 members. By the end of 1939 this had risen to over 1,200. During the 1920s and 1930s the membership was still largely foreign-born. This explained the branch's continued use of Yiddish alongside English in its published material and at branch meetings. The centrality of Yiddish in the life of the branch was confirmed by Jack Moss (interview June 1986), editor of the furniture trade union journal FTAT Record and a lifelong member of Branch 15.

18. Ibid. The point was confirmed by Jack Moss (interview June 1986), editor of the furniture trade union journal FTAT Record and a lifelong member of Branch 15.


20. Interview with Jack Moss, op.cit.


22. See, for example, NAFTA Monthly Reports, June 1930, p.6; July 1930, p.6; August 1930, p.8.


24. Interviews with Jack Moss and Morry Lebow, op.cit.
the branch was underlined in 1920 when the post of branch secretary was advertised. The candidate had to be "capable of doing efficiently the branch secretarial work in addition to speaking Yiddish". Sid Fineman, a fluent Yiddish speaker, was elected to the post. Fineman succeeded J. N. Cohen who had moved on to become a full-time paid organiser of NAFTA. Cohen, a tailor by profession, had been largely responsible for the amalgamation of the Independent Jewish Cabinet-Makers' Union with NAFTA.

Fineman, who was a Communist, was respected for his organisational and oratorial skills. All the prominent personalities in the branch had radical political allegiances, although not all were Communists. For example, Issy Eisenstone, an anarchist, had been an organiser of the Independent Cabinet-Makers' Union. Eisenstone was blacklisted by his employer who regarded him as a dangerous agitator. Unable to find employment in any other workshop he set up his own small business. According to Morry Lebow, a former secretary of the branch, this was a common fate for those considered troublemakers. Barnett Weinberg, a well known left-wing printer in the East End and a member of Branch 15, also went into business after being blacklisted. Another

25. NAFTA Monthly Report, April 1920, p.27.
26. Ibid., July 1920, p.28.
27. Ibid., April 1920, p.27.
28. Interview with Morry Lebow, op.cit.
prominent personality in the branch was the chairman Morris Jacobs. Jacobs was an ideological Marxist who came from an orthodox Jewish family. His background, which may seem surprising for a Communist, was not unique among radical Jews in the East End. Indeed, even a Jewish Communist as prominent as Phil Piratin shared a similar orthodox family background.

As well as his links with the Communist Party, Morris Jacobs had also been closely involved with its forerunner, the British Socialist Party (BSP). He had three sons who, like their father, were all militant trade unionists. One son, Julius, became an active member of Branch 15. He was also prominently involved in the London Trades Council and during the 1930s was a member of the Council's executive committee.

Other Jewish Communists in the branch included Robert Shube, who was also a member of the executive committee of NAFTA, and Lou Smith who, sponsored by the Young Communist League, studied in the Soviet Union for a time in the 1930s. Both men stood as Communist Party candidates in the municipal elections in Stepney in 1931.

30. Interview with Morry Lebow, op.cit.
32. See, for example, London Trades Council, 79th Annual Report, 1938, pp.10, 13. For Jacobs's opposition to the Fascists see below p.276.
34. ELA, 7 November 1931, p.5.
The militant character of the No. 15 Branch and the extent to which its leaders were associated with the Communist Party is well illustrated by the resolutions which the branch placed before the London Trades Council to which it was affiliated. Although the London Trades Council was itself a left-wing body, it was clearly not sufficiently radical for the Jewish leaders of NAFTA's East End branch. 35 For example, at a delegate meeting of the Council in 1925 the branch proposed a resolution urging affiliation to the Communist Party's National Minority Movement. 36 Other resolutions proposed by the branch concentrated on the plight of the unemployed. Thus, a resolution of 1928 instructed the London Trades Council to convene a conference of representatives of all "Trades Union District Committees, Branches and all branches of the National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement in the London District". 37 The aim of the conference was to strengthen the National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement and to decide on ways of bringing mass pressure to bear on the government. The following year the branch forwarded a resolution, urging the London Trades Council to support the marchers of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. However, the secretary of the Council expressed regret that the branch had brought the resolution as the march


36. London Trades Council, minutes of delegate meeting, 12 March 1925. See also ibid., 14 May 1925; 11 June 1925.

37. Ibid., 13 September 1928.
was entirely unofficial. It was therefore decided that no vote should be taken. In 1935 Julius Jacobs, on behalf of the No. 15 Branch, proposed a resolution stating that the London Trades Council objected to the penalising of the unemployed by sending them to task work and residential centres such as the Belmont Industrial Colony in Kent. The LCC was urged to close down all such centres in the London area and to devise schemes for providing "socially useful work at trade union rates and conditions". This resolution was carried. Thus in some cases the branch was able to impose its radical solutions on the London Trades Council.

One area where the No. 15 Branch was less successful was with regard to the problem of sweating in the furniture trade. The problem was given considerable publicity by the Jewish Chronicle in an in-depth article which it published in February 1937. The conclusion reached in the article was that Jewish employers were largely responsible for the sweating which was rife in the trade and that this had led to the growth of a strong anti-Jewish feeling among some of the furniture workers. One trade union official asserted that it was not a coincidence that Mosley's Blackshirts were strongest in the two East End furniture districts: Bethnal Green and Shoreditch. As far as the accusations of sweating were concerned, the article revealed that there were no Trade Board regulations for the furniture trade and thus no legally

38. Ibid., 14 February 1929.
39. Ibid., 14 February 1935.
enforceable minimum regulations regarding wages and hours of work. The only regulations which existed were rules drawn up between the London Furniture Trades' Federation, representing the employers, and the various branches of NAFTA, representing the workers. Despite its numerical strength as the largest branch in NAFTA and its reputation as the most militant branch in the union, No. 15 was unable to negotiate improved working conditions for furniture workers in the East End.

Similar organisational problems beset the East End tailoring trade. East End tailors joined the relevant union for their section of the industry. In ladies tailoring this was the ULTTU and in gents tailoring the East London Sub-Divisional Workers' Branch of the NUTGW. Most Jewish tailors were employed in the ladies branch of the trade which was organised primarily in small workshops under a Jewish master tailor. The master tailor was the middleman who subcontracted work from the manufacturer. The major reason why ladies tailoring functioned on a small scale basis until relatively late in the period was that as a fashion trade it was highly susceptible to seasonal changes in style and thus difficult to mass produce on standardised machinery. Gents tailoring, which after 1918 was increasingly concentrated in large factories using mass production techniques, employed fewer Jewish tailors. This was partly because Jewish tailors

41. For a description of the ladies tailoring trade in the East End in the inter-war years see Jacobs, Out of the Ghetto, pp.36, 48-49.
tended to specialise in skilled work which had no place in the factory system but also because the gentile environment of the factories had little appeal for Jewish workers.\textsuperscript{42} However, there continued to be a considerable amount of gents tailoring in the East End which operated mainly from small workshops and employed primarily Jewish male tailors in contrast to the general trend in the industry. Indeed, as late as 1937, most of the members of the East End Sub-Divisional Branch were employed in small scale workshops.\textsuperscript{43}

The history of the Sub-Divisional Branch can be divided into two distinct periods with 1935 serving as the dividing line. This was the year that Aaron Rollin was appointed branch secretary. Before 1935 the branch was in a state of considerable disorganisation. It was estimated that in 1928 there were only about 120 members.\textsuperscript{44} By 1932 this had increased to 652; by the end of 1935 to 1,075 and by June 1936

\textsuperscript{42} The latter factor, stressing the role of ethnicity in Jewish working class life, is backed up by oral testimony from Jewish Communist trade unionists. For example, Danny Silver, retired official of the NUTGW, has related how his father shunned factory work in favour of the small, friendly Jewish environment of workshops (interview, June 1985). A contemporary article in The Times confirmed the preference of Jews for small workshops. See The Times, 28 November 1924, p.15.

\textsuperscript{43} London Sub-Divisional Classification, 28 February 1937, Aaron Rollin MSS., 240/T.3, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick. See also The Tailor and Garment Worker, December 1935, p.14.

\textsuperscript{44} Report on interview between executive board, NUTGW, and H. Clare (secretary Sub-Divisional Workers Branch), 12 November 1932, Rollin MSS., 240/T/3.
the figure had leapt to 1,432.\textsuperscript{45} This steady increase masked the serious organisational and other problems which affected the branch during the late 1920s and early 1930s. In February 1928 M. Hyman, the branch's newly appointed organiser, listed the major difficulties. He cited these as apathy resulting from the disorganisation of the branch, the large scattered area covering members' places of work, the existence of an opposition union (the United Clothing Workers' Union) and the refusal of many employers to admit him into their workshops.\textsuperscript{46} The problems faced by the branch were in many respects similar to those experienced in ladies tailoring. Bernard Sullivan, the London organiser of the TGWU described the effect which large factories had on the small gents tailoring workshops in the East End:\textsuperscript{47}

In the small workshops, the workers accept longer hours and bad conditions to keep the work out of the factories. Sweating is rife in these workrooms. In one firm, women received 50\% less than the Trade Board rates and the men worked seven days a week.

There was also a tendency for male tailors to be displaced by women, who according to the new branch secretary, were more difficult to organise.\textsuperscript{48} However, the most devastating blow to the branch in the short term was to be caused by the breakaway United Clothing Workers' Union (UCWU) which split the membership and resulted in the expulsion of the branch's


\textsuperscript{46} The Garment Worker, February 1928, p.9.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., July 1928, p.9.

\textsuperscript{48} Report on interview between executive board, NUTGW, and H. Clare, op.cit.
In an interview with the executive board of the NUTGW in 1932 in which he was required to defend the branch's poor financial position and low membership, H. Clare, the branch secretary, informed the executive that he had the most difficult branch in the union: "A good many of them (the members) don't understand English very well; they are not able to express themselves and are very suspicious". Despite the growing number of young English-born Jewish tailors who were entering the trade, the foreign Yiddish-speaking element remained a significant force and continued to create its own problems during the 1930s. Clare believed that he would be able to put the branch on a sound basis if he could employ a Jewish assistant, somebody, as he put it "that understands the psychology of the people". It was not until the appointment of Aaron Rollin as branch secretary in June 1935 that a more professional approach was taken to organisational work. Rollin was one of the new generation of charismatic Jewish trade union leaders in the East End. Born in Latvia in 1885, he started his career as a union official in Glasgow in 1913. He moved to Leeds in 1916 and came to London in 1934 to take up the post of area secretary and organiser for the London and


51. Ibid.
Southern Area of the NUTGW. He soon took control of the East End branch of the union and worked to boost its membership. Rollin later explained that when he first arrived in London he found the union membership "very small, stagnant and stationary" and that the unorganised workers whom he approached were hostile to the union leadership, both national and local. In addition, he encountered the antagonism of East London members whose minds, he said, were "poisoned" against the NUTGW during the breakaway.

The first test of Rollin's abilities as a trade union officer occurred during the widely publicised Coleman strike of 1935. Coleman's was a Jewish firm of mantle manufacturers in the City of London. In January 1935, forty union members at the firm were dismissed during what the directors called a slack period. The real reason for the dismissals, however, was the directors' refusal to recognise the union. After the strike had been in progress nearly three months Rollin expressed his fear in a letter to the Jewish Chronicle that the dispute was developing in such a manner "as to create a


55. See Law and Parliamentary Committee file on the Coleman strike, Board of Deputies Archive (BDA), Cl3/3/2/3. Also see DW, 4 January 1935, p.3; 7 January 1935, p.3; 9 January 1935, p.7; 12 January 1935, p.3; 24 January 1935, p.3; 7 February 1935, p.3; 9 February 1935, p.7; 27 February 1935, p.3.
definite antagonism towards the Jewish Community on the part of the Organised Trade Unionists who are at present forming the main bulwark against anti-Semitism in this country". He also observed the growing anger of some gentile union leaders who, at mass meetings in connection with the strike, had openly declared that it was scandalous that Jewish employers, who owed their presence in Britain to British democracy, should have the audacity not to recognise the trade union movement. Acutely aware of the anti-Semitism which this state of affairs was arousing, Rollin approached Neville Laski, president of the Board of Deputies. Laski arranged for a conference to be held between the two sides in the dispute. As a result of this conference a settlement was eventually reached, the terms of which provided for full recognition of the union. This episode provides a rare example of co-operation on an ethnic basis between the middle class leadership of the Jewish community and its working class counterpart in the East End.

Writing after the strike, Rollin referred to the unorganised state of the mantle makers which had made it possible for the firm of Coleman to obtain numerous blacklegs in their factory. According to Rollin, this was also the view taken by many mantle makers as was shown by the fact that


57. Ibid.

since the settlement of the strike the principal workers of two important mantle factories had joined the NUTGW.59 Rollin's comments were a thinly disguised attack on the ULTTU and its secretary Jacob Fine. A personality clash between the two men had ruled out the possibility of any joint action during the strike. After the settlement of the strike, Fine wrote to Alfred Wall, secretary of the London Trades Council, complaining that the ULTTU had been excluded from the negotiations for a settlement even though his union had eight members involved in the dispute.60 Rollin emphatically denied this charge and repeated his allegations about the "deplorable state of organisation and conditions amongst the London Mantle Makers". As a solution he strongly urged that the ULTTU amalgamate with the national union.61 Thus, although he was a Jewish trade unionist and was deeply concerned with the fate of Jewish workers, Rollin's experience in the East End convinced him that small independent Jewish unions could not survive in the rapidly changing economic environment of the 1930s. Indeed, Rollin opposed all small independent unions on principle, regarding them as divisive and harmful to the trade union movement.

One such small union was the UCWU. This had been formed by the Communist Party in March 1929 in line with the party's 'Class against Class' policy which involved opposition to

59. Rollin, My Year in London, p.3.
61. Rollin to Wall, 13 June 1935, ibid.
'reformist' trade unions. As a breakaway union, the United Clothing Workers express aim was to destroy the TGWU, regarded by the Communist Party as being under the control of reactionary union leaders. Despite its ambition to become the national union for all tailors in the country, the UCWU never came anywhere near to superseding the TGWU. On the contrary, from the beginning of 1930 until the Communist Party dissolved it in 1935 it functioned as a small Jewish sectional union with its influence restricted to the workshops of the East End. Throughout its history, the union's leadership was comprised of East End Jewish Communists and its outstanding personality was Sam Elsbury. Elsbury was a brilliant orator who commanded a huge personal following among East End tailors. He had been born in Russia and had been active in the trade union movement in Leeds before coming to London in 1918 where he was appointed chairman of the East London Sub-Divisional Workers' Branch. Elsbury was also active in local politics in Bethnal Green where he was a councillor in the early 1920s. He was chairman of the South-West Bethnal Green Labour Party and in 1922 he was elected vice-president of Stepney Trades Council and Labour Party. At the same time, Elsbury was playing a prominent role as a founder member of the Communist Party and was secretary of its Electoral

62. The Young Worker, 16 March 1929, p.2.
63. Material for the Third Annual Conference of the United Clothing Workers Union, NUTGW Archive.
64. The Garment Worker, August 1926, p.5. See Lerner, op.cit., pp.170-218 for full biographical details.
65. ELA, 24 June 1922, p.6.
Committee. In 1927 he became a member of the National Minority Movement's executive committee. Elsbury was able to combine his activities as a Labour borough councillor with his involvement in the Communist Party because during the 1920s labour politics in Bethnal Green were dominated by a group of left-wing Labour members and Communists. The national Labour Party came down firmly against such alliances and in 1928 Bethnal Green Trades Council and Borough Labour Party was disaffiliated from the Labour Party. The other major figures in the UCWU were Dave Cohen and Dave Gershon: both Communists. Neither could match Elsbury for leadership ability or charisma. Cohen was briefly a member of the executive board of the TGWU. Gershon, a member of the union's London executive committee, subsequently became secretary of the National Minority Movement and editor of its publication The Red Needle, which was printed in English and Yiddish. In 1932 he edited The Tailors' Measure for Unity and Action, a UCWU paper.

The crucial event which led to the formation of the UCWU was the unofficial strike at the giant Rego factory in

Edmonton which began in October 1928. The executive board of the TGWU refused to sanction the withdrawal of labour asked for by Elsbury who was subsequently expelled from the union in March 1929. Elsbury's expulsion was a further step on the way to the formation of a breakaway union. He believed he was expelled because he was a member of the Communist Party. The union did not refer directly to Elsbury's Communist Party membership but instead explained the reasons for his dismissal in terms of the Rego dispute and Elsbury's connection with The Red Needle which attacked the executive board of the TGWU. At the time of his expulsion, Elsbury was the prospective Communist Party parliamentary candidate for South-West Bethnal Green. His election agent J. Valentine, who was also Jewish, published a letter in The Garment Worker in March 1929 stating that Elsbury had no intention, if elected, of surrendering his union activities. This sealed Elsbury's fate with the TGWU.

70. Although the Rego factory was based in Edmonton it employed East End labour. In addition, the union activists who initiated the strike were Jewish East Enders. On the strike see Workers' Life, 12 October 1928, p.1; 19 October 1928, p.1; 16 November 1928, p.1; 30 November 1928, p.1; 14 December 1928, p.1; 21 December 1928, p.1; The Young Worker, 20 October 1928, p.1; 3 November 1928, p.1; 10 November 1928, p.1; 17 November 1928, p.1; 24 November 1928, p.1; 1 December 1928, p.1; 8 December 1928, p.1; 15 December 1928, p.1; 22 December 1928, p.1; The Garment Worker, November 1928, pp.6-7.

71. The Garment Worker, March 1929, p.3; Workers' Life, 15 March 1929, p.5; The Young Worker, 9 March 1929, p.1


73. The Garment Worker, March 1929, p.3.

74. Ibid., p.2.
The meteoric rise of the UCWU led Elsbury and Cohen to make optimistic predictions about its future. Cohen believed "we are rapidly building up a great National Trade Union which will serve the interests of all Clothing Workers" while Elsbury felt confident that the UCWU was "well on the road to superseding completely the old Union". The fact that the UCWU initially won over most of the London membership of the TGWU, including the Jewish tailors in the East End workshops, appeared to confirm such optimistic conclusions. Elsbury claimed that, at its peak, the London membership reached 5,000. However, this success was shortlived and following a number of disastrous strikes, the union swiftly collapsed.

The turning point in the union's fortunes was the strike at the Polikoff factory in Hackney which was embarked upon to achieve recognition of the UCWU. During the strike Dave Cohen, the chairman of the union and the shop steward for the Polikoff cutters, deserted the strikers and left the country for Canada. Although Cohen attempted to justify his actions, rumours persisted that Polikoff had paid Cohen off to remove him from the scene. The most severe blow to the union, however, was Elsbury's expulsion from the Communist Party for refusing to implement the party's policy which involved the indiscriminate calling of strikes, irrespective of their

75. The Clothing Worker, May 1929, pp.1, 4. See also Workers' Life, 5 April 1929, p.3.


77. The Clothing Worker, June 1929, p.2; Workers' Life, 17 May 1929, p.5; The Young Worker, 11 May 1929, p.1; 18 May 1929, p.1; 25 May 1929, p.1; 8 June 1929, p.3.

78. The Garment Worker, May 1929, p.12.
chance of success.\textsuperscript{79} As the man on the scene, Elsbury was aware of the disastrous effect which this policy was having on the morale of the membership. The precarious financial position of the UCWU and the resulting inability to make strike payments had already lost the union many members during the Polikoff strike. After Elsbury's dismissal from the union there were further desertions from the union, especially among factory workers.

In 1935 surviving members of the UCWU were absorbed into the NUTGW. However, it has been argued that UCWU members were unable to gain readmission to the NUTGW because the national union refused to accept Communists. Therefore, according to this argument, Communist tailors joined the ULTTU instead, injecting it with a "new organisational fire".\textsuperscript{80} In fact, the ULTTU was equally reluctant to admit Communists. Sarah Wesker, an executive committee member of the UCWU, later confirmed that after she left that union she initially joined the NUTGW.\textsuperscript{81} Indeed, the ULTTU regarded the UCWU as a direct threat and feared that by causing dissension among tailors, the breakaway union would wreck the ULTTU.\textsuperscript{82} Undoubtedly, the aim of the UCWU was to undermine the ULTTU. In 1931, for example, the UCWU was very active amongst ladies tailors on

\textsuperscript{79} DH, 24 December 1929, p.6; DW, 1 January 1930, p.3; 10 January 1930, p.7.

\textsuperscript{80} Gillespie, \textit{op.cit.}, p.350.

\textsuperscript{81} Sarah Wesker to ULTTU executive committee, 14 October 1937, ULTTU Archive, D/S/24/51. See also Mick Mindel's experience, p.152 below.

\textsuperscript{82} ULTTU 22nd Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1929, p.3.
the question of their forty-eight hour week and 2/6d an hour campaign. During the campaign, leaflets were distributed and meetings and demonstrations held. Despite this, the UCWU did not succeed in securing the leadership of the campaign. Two main reasons have been given for the union's failure. Firstly, the campaign was confined to the Whitechapel area and was not directed at the large workshops. Secondly, no organised work had been undertaken by UCWU sympathisers in the ULTTU itself. In 1933 there occurred a more open clash between the two unions. The dispute broke out after twenty unemployed clothing workers were arrested for congregating at a spot in Whitechapel where Jewish tailors traditionally came to look for jobs. The convicted men were given the alternative of a £2 fine or one month in prison. Fine's comment that the ULTTU appreciated the efforts of the police, as the union was being exploited by non-union members, prompted Gershon to draft a resolution stating that the unemployed clothing workers viewed Fine's attitude with disgust. The resolution was unanimously adopted at a meeting of over 200 unemployed clothing workers. Such actions by the UCWU were hardly likely to endear it to the ULTTU or to convince the ULTTU of the wisdom of accepting former UCWU members whom it regarded as Communist troublemakers.

83. Report of the Executive Committee to the Third Annual Conference of the United Clothing Workers' Union, March 1932, NUTGW Archive.

84. Unemployed Clothing Workers: the United Clothing Workers' Union and the United Ladies Tailors' Trade Union, typescript, n.d. See also United Clothing Workers' Union address to Unemployed Clothing Workers, 13 March 1933. Both documents are in the NUTGW Archive.
Despite the continual failure of the UCWU's organisational initiatives, the union continued to harbour great expectations. The first annual conference of the union in 1930 called on the membership to conduct "intensive agitational and organisational campaigns throughout the industry" in order to achieve a programme of demands which included a forty-four hour week, an immediate 10% increase in the wages of all workers in the industry, and the immediate elimination of all overtime. In addition, the conference set a number of tasks for the executive committee and membership, the most important of which were the initiation of strike action against rationalisation in the industry, the development of opposition work in the 'reformist' unions, the establishment of special committees for youth and women in the clothing industry and efforts to draw unemployed clothing workers into the union.\textsuperscript{85} Similar tasks were set by the union at its third annual conference in 1932, but by the union's own admission there were no organisational gains worth recording. Even the Soviet-backed Clothing Workers' International Committee had to admit in 1932 that "the UCWU is still a sectarian organisation ... It has no connection with the masses, has won no authority among the masses".\textsuperscript{86} Ironically, it was the very policy pursued by the Communist Party urging

\textsuperscript{85} Executive Committee's Report to the Second Annual Conference, 11 April 1931, pp.7-8, NUTGW Archive.

\textsuperscript{86} Material for the Third Annual Conference of the United Clothing Workers' Union, March 1932, p.1; Report of the Executive Committee to the Third Annual Conference of the United Clothing Workers' Union, March 1932, p.1; Draft Resolutions for the Third Annual Conference of the United Clothing Workers' Union, March 1932, pp.1-2. All documents in NUTGW Archive.
the UCWU to take strike action even where this action had little chance of success, which reduced the UCWU to a Jewish sectional union. This was hardly the result the Communist Party had intended. The grass roots membership had no say in this disastrous policy. The failure of the UCWU therefore rested ultimately with the Communist Party and not with the Jewish members and leaders of the union in the East End.

This conflict between the interests of Jewish tailors in the East End and the demands of a non-Jewish trade union was not unique. It also appeared in the debates in the ULTTU concerning the relative merits of amalgamation with the national union as opposed to a federation with the master tailors. There were those in the ULTTU who feared that amalgamation would lead to a loss of the union's Jewish identity. As a craft union, the ULTTU's main strength was in the small workshops employing six to twelve tailors which were located in the densely populated Jewish areas of Whitechapel and Aldgate. An important by-product of the small workshop base of the ULTTU was that there were few shop stewards. This feature allowed a close relationship to develop between the rank and file and the union leadership. 87 Although the head office of the union was in Whitechapel and although it conducted most of its organising work in the East End, there was also a West End branch. In addition, ULTTU members, although primarily resident in the East End, were to be found all over London. 88

87. Interview with Mick Mindel (June 1985).
88. The Costume and Mantle Worker, Vol.1, No.1, July 1927, p.3.
The ULTTU was the largest of all the East End Jewish tailoring unions and in 1928 the union's journal, The Costume and Mantle Worker, estimated that it was the largest Jewish trade union in England with 4,000 members.89

The ULTTU was more than a trade union: like the Workers' Circle it was a centre of Jewish social and cultural life in the East End.90 It was also a very democratic union and its meetings served as the forum for a wide spectrum of left-wing views. Anarchists, Bundists, Communists and Labour Party members all had the opportunity to air their views at union meetings. The membership, though left-wing and internationalist in outlook, nevertheless took a lively interest in Jewish affairs both in England and abroad. In the immediate post-war period, for example, the union was actively involved in a number of Jewish organisations whose object was the relief of Jews from pogroms and famine in Central and Eastern Europe. Prominent among these organisations were the Federation of Ukrainian Jews and the Federation of Polish Jews.91 In addition, the secretary and vice-chairman of the union were members of the executive committee of the Jewish Workers War Emergency Relief Fund.92 The involvement of ULTTU members in

89. Ibid., Vol.2, No.5, July 1928, p.4.


91. ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 8 April 1926; 15 April 1926, ULTTU Archive, D/S/24/4.

92. Ibid., 12 January 1922, D/S/24/1.
these organisations and their genuine concern with the fate of fellow Jews in Eastern Europe can be explained by the feelings of ethnic solidarity which East End Jews had with their brethren who were suffering in Eastern Europe. The fact that East End Jews often had relatives in Eastern Europe strengthened their commitment to work for the alleviation of their suffering. In the 1930s the union participated in the United Jewish Workers' Committee for the Relief of Jewish Children in Poland and the Jewish National Day of Protest and Self-Denial. The United Jewish Workers' Committee, which was formed in 1937, consisted of elected representatives from the major Jewish unions in London, branches of the Workers' Circle and Poale Zion, the socialist Zionist organisation.93 The Jewish National Day of Protest, which was held in January 1939, was designated a fast day and its object was to raise funds for 600 Polish-Jewish child victims of Nazi persecution who were stranded in the so-called 'no-man's land' on the borders of Poland and Germany.94 During the 1930s, the ULTTU also received deputations from a number of organisations which strengthened the union's role in Jewish communal affairs. For example, deputations were received from bodies as diverse as the Jewish People's Council against Fascism and Anti-Semitism, the World Jewish Congress, the Provisional Palestine Committee, the Workers' Circle, the Jewish Communal Restaurant (which provided cheap meals for the unemployed), and the


94. ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 1 December 1938; 15 December 1938, D/S/24/6.
British Section of the YIVO Institute, an educational centre for the study of Yiddish culture whose headquarters were in Poland.95

In its recruiting campaigns the ULTTU made much of the benefits which awaited potential members. In 1935 the union listed ten reasons why tailors should join the ULTTU. The most attractive benefits offered were the low contributions (for men 7d. and for women 3½d. per week), the high benefits (25/-d a week strike pay), free convalescent benefit, free legal advice and "protection against dismissal, victimisation, wage reductions and unfair working conditions".96 Despite these benefits, the union never succeeded in attracting a majority of East End tailors. Even as late as 1938, the union controlled less than 10% of the tailors in the East End.97 Furthermore, there were frequent criticisms that even those tailors who paid their subscriptions were not making a significant contribution to the union. Apathy was a frequent cause for complaint, and discussion of important matters often had to be postponed because too few members had come to the meeting.98 Another problem was the high turnover of membership. This fact was disguised by the annual membership

95. Interview with Mick Mindel (January 1987).
97. ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 21 July 1938, D/S/24/6.
98. Ibid., 25 January 1923, D/S/24/2; ULTTU members' meetings, 13 February 1929; 18 May 1929; 17 December 1929, D/S/24/10/1; shop stewards' meeting, 7 March 1938, D/S/24/11/1.
figures released by the union which showed a steady increase during the years 1918 to 1939. In 1919 the total membership was 2,717; in 1921 it had increased to 3,950; in 1922 to 4,341 and by 1926 it had risen to 4,733.\textsuperscript{99} However, as Jacob Fine complained, a number of tailors joined the union when they were employed in a union shop but their membership lapsed when they left.\textsuperscript{100} Fine attributed this instability of membership to the fact that a large number of the tailors were "not as class conscious as they should be", a somewhat surprising conclusion in view of the tailors' reputation for political militancy.\textsuperscript{101} An examination of the composition of the union membership helps to explain Fine's conclusion. The membership consisted of a combination of older foreign-born Jews and young English Jews.\textsuperscript{102} According to an editorial comment in \textit{The Costume and Mantle Worker} in July 1928, the replacement of the older members by the young English-born generation did not result in the creation of a new militant membership. On the contrary:\textsuperscript{103}

The burden of finding solutions for trade problems was still left to that type of membership which is nearing elimination, and is numerically losing influence. The type of membership that is on the increase has kept complete silence.

100. Ibid., 17th Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1924, p.5.
The ULTTU's mixed membership created other difficulties peculiar to a Jewish union. In particular, the young membership resented the union's continued use of Yiddish. For example, some objected to half the union journal being printed in Yiddish. Others doubted the value of advertisements in the major East End Yiddish newspaper, Di Tsait (The Jewish Times) "because a large section of our membership never read that paper". The custom of advertising union meetings in the Yiddish press led one member to complain that many members did not know when union meetings were held. She remarked: "A lot of the members cannot read them [the Yiddish newspapers] and therefore they are quite unaware as to when meetings are taking place". At the union conference in August 1928 one member expressed disappointment that the conference had conducted a discussion in Yiddish, "which was hardly or not at all, understood by many of the English delegates".

The youth were not alone in harbouring grievances against the older leadership. Women too had long felt neglected by the predominantly male leadership. Although a women's committee was formed during the mid-1920s under the able guidance of Minnie Spivack, a politically conscious union activist, little progress was made in attracting women into

104. ULTTU Organising Committee minutes, 18 January 1927, D/S/24/12/1.

105. ULTTU Special Executive Committee minutes, 29 January 1927, D/S/24/5.

106. ULTTU members' meeting, 4 September 1928, D/S/24/10/1.

107. The Costume and Mantle Worker, Vol.2, No.6, October 1928, p.11.
the union.108 In 1927 one English-born female member, Esther Schneider, raised the question of the large number of felling hands who were not members of the union.109 The following year she drew attention to the general neglect in organising women.110 Although there certainly was a tendency for the male leaders to ignore the female labour force, there were nevertheless major problems regarding the organisation of female workers. In particular, since marriage was the first priority for most women, it was usually difficult to persuade them to retain their trade union membership once they had married.111 Some of the more perceptive male members were aware of the dangers of ignoring female workers. As early as 1923 Fine noted the increasing incidence of female labour in the trade and urged the executive committee to take "effective measures to combat the spreading danger by organising the female workers".112 However, other male members remained sceptical about campaigns to organise women "because of the racial and psychological difficulties that exist between the male workers of the union and the female workers that have

108. Ibid., Vol.2, No.5, July 1928, p.11.
109. ULTTU Organising Committee minutes, 8 March 1927, D/S/24/12/1.
110. ULTTU members' meeting, 4 September 1928, D/S/24/10/1.
111. Interview with Mick Mindel (January 1987).
112. ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 18 January 1923, D/S/24/2. For other examples of male members urging the union to organise women see ibid., 3 May 1923, D/S/24/2; 17 March 1927, D/S/24/5; ULTTU members' meeting, 21 April 1928, D/S/24/10/1.
flooded the trade".\textsuperscript{113} This was a reference to the fact that many of the women who were entering the trade, particularly the unskilled factory sector, were not Jewish. This continued to be the case during the 1930s. Such tensions between Jewish male workers and non-Jewish women were not new. They had existed in the 1880s and 1890s and had their roots in the tendency for women to work for even lower wages than the men.\textsuperscript{114}

Resentment against women was gradually broken down during the 1930s. The female worker ceased to be looked upon as the enemy of the trade but, instead, "as an exploited friend" who, being unorganised, suffered even more than the male worker.\textsuperscript{115} Through the efforts of Sarah Wesker, who was appointed woman organiser by the executive committee of the union in 1937, the entire method of approach to female workers was changed. New inroads were made in several large factories where the women had been totally unorganised.\textsuperscript{116} Sarah Wesker already enjoyed a formidable reputation as a trade union organiser when she joined the ULTTU. In 1927 she had organised the young women at the Rego factory; in 1929 she had taken a leading part in the strike at Polikoff's, and in 1930 she had led a strike at

\textsuperscript{113}ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 17 March 1927, D/S/24/5.


\textsuperscript{115}A Brief Summary of the Union's Activity for the Quarter ending 31 March 1938, typescript, D/S/24/52/1.

\textsuperscript{116}ULTTU, 30th Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1937, p.3.
the Simpson factory in Hackney. She had been the only female member on the executive committee of the UCWU and in 1933 she was appointed full-time woman organiser of that union. It was largely as a result of her efforts that UCWU members were absorbed into the NUTGW in 1935. The following year she was elected to the women's committee of the London Branch of the NUTGW.117

Despite the progress made by Sarah Wesker in organising women, the view taken by most male members was that the question of organising female labour was of peripheral importance to the ULTTU. They believed that the union's greatest challenge lay in coping with the difficulties created by economic collapse, massive unemployment and the perennial problem of small workshops and sweated labour conditions. In 1920, Israel Kapitanchick, a member of the union's executive committee and a Yiddish journalist, wrote an article in Di Tsait confirming the extent of the crisis facing the union.118 Two reasons for the post-war crisis had been cited in the union's annual report for 1919. Firstly, army contracts had ceased with the end of the war. This led to an immediate fall in demand. Secondly, demobilised men flooded the trade. The result was an immediate reduction in wages combined with an increase in working hours.119 The following year, the union

117. Sarah Wesker to ULTTU Executive Committee, 14 November 1937, D/S/24/51.

118. I. Kapitanchick, translation of an article published in Di Tsait, 16 July 1920, D/S/24/53/2.

reported that two-thirds of its membership was unemployed.\textsuperscript{120} Unemployment in ladies tailoring remained high throughout the 1920s and in 1929 the union commented that "unemployment has been greater in our trade, and more in evidence among our members than even among the dockers or casual labourers".\textsuperscript{121} By 1932 over 75\% of the ULTTU's members were unemployed while the remainder were under-employed. As a result, a considerable number of members were forced to leave the trade in search of other occupations.\textsuperscript{122} Further tangible evidence of the crisis was reflected in the setting up of a distress fund in 1926.\textsuperscript{123} Prior to the formation of this fund, "scores of heartrending appeals from members for financial aid had reluctantly been refused".\textsuperscript{124} Fine's solution was for the union to become an annual subscriber to the Jewish Board of Guardians. In this way, Fine argued, the union would be able to recommend deserving cases. However, the idea was strongly opposed by the executive committee because of the "humiliating and degrading manner and method" in which the Board of Guardians administered its relief. It was thus believed that any association with the Board would be a stigma on the progressive character of the union.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 13th Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1920. No page numbers cited.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 22nd Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1929, p.4.


\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 19th Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1926. No page numbers cited.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 13th Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1920.

\textsuperscript{125} ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 13 July 1922, D/S/24/1.
At the height of the post-war economic recession in March 1921, the ULTTU held a mass meeting at the Pavilion Theatre in Whitechapel. The meeting passed a strongly worded resolution condemning any attempt by the master tailors to reduce the level of wages and to increase the hours of work at a time when unemployment was so high. The meeting also decided to press for a forty-eight hour week and to refuse to co-operate with irresponsible masters.\textsuperscript{126} At the end of the year the union was able to report that it had successfully managed to maintain the standard of members' wages compared with the reductions that had been made in other trades and industries.\textsuperscript{127} In order to maintain wage levels the ULTTU conducted a number of campaigns during the 1920s which aimed at establishing a minimum wage. In 1923, for example, the executive committee drafted a scheme to fix a minimum piece rate of pay for all members of the ULTTU binding them not to accept work at a lower rate than 3/- per hour.\textsuperscript{128} In 1926 the union revised its scheme for establishing a minimum wage in the trade during slack time. It was decided that the minimum be £3 irrespective of the volume of work. This was rejected by the master tailors.\textsuperscript{129} Shortly afterwards, the membership was balloted on the question of whether or not a general strike should be called to enforce the demand. The result of

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{JC}, 4 March 1921, p.30.

\textsuperscript{127} ULTTU, 14th Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1921, p.5.

\textsuperscript{128} ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 19 April 1923, D/S/24/2.

\textsuperscript{129} Revised scheme for establishing a guaranteed minimum wage in the trade during slack time, typescript, 1926, D/S/24/48.
the ballot showed that an overwhelming majority opposed taking strike action.  

The unrestricted working of overtime, which resulted from the seasonal nature of ladies tailoring, was equally difficult for the union to control. In January 1927 the chairman, S. Joseph, suggested that members should be asked to sign a declaration pledging themselves not to work overtime. Joseph later admitted that resolutions restricting overtime were unable to succeed because members were not prepared to observe trade union conditions when, after a prolonged slack season, they had the opportunity to work long hours during the busy season. Thus, the union leadership appeared to be unable to control the membership who, because of the seasonal nature of the trade, were not prepared to unite to solve their common economic problems.

In 1928 the ULTTU held its first delegates trade conference. On the agenda were a number of resolutions dealing with the most serious issues confronting the union. Most of the resolutions were passed with little difficulty. However, a resolution calling for a union regulated working day to be from 8am to 6pm aroused considerable opposition. The most contentious part of the resolution stated that no

131. ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 6 January 1927, D/S/24/5.
132. Joint meeting of all committees of the Union, 26 April 1927, D/S/24/15.
133. For a full list of the conference resolutions see ULTTU conference agenda for the first delegate trade conference, 18-19 August 1928, D/S/24/49.
overtime was to be worked without the union's permission. Such permission would only be granted during the busy seasons from March to mid-May and during September and October. Even during these busy periods, overtime was not to exceed three hours per week. In supporting the resolution, the chairman said that overtime was now "the black spot of the Jewish workers" and he warned members not to be provocative by giving English workers the opportunity to accuse Jews of working long hours and undercutting the wages of other workers. The reason why the union did not seek a total ban on overtime was because it had finally reconciled itself to the impracticality of such a ban. As Fine explained, the seasonal nature of the trade meant that the majority of the members were compelled by the "spectre of slackness and starvation" to work as many hours as their physical strength permitted, in order to complete the work which the employer gave them during the busy time. Only a small minority of the members were strong enough to resist the temptation not to work overtime when work was available and they were victimised by their fellow workers as well as by their employers, for being conscientious trade unionists who refused to work overtime. Fine argued that if the proposed resolution was adopted, it would enable the members to observe the rules, and employers to respect the union's orders. During the busy period when overtime might be justified, the union would be able to control the workshops, check applications for overtime and withdraw permission where

134. The Costume and Mantle Worker, Vol.2, No.6, October 1928, p.6.
135. ULTTU members' meeting, 28 August 1928, D/S/24/10/1.
it was felt the circumstances did not justify overtime. 136
Eight members opposed the resolution arguing that any attempt to limit the amount of overtime worked would lead to strike action. In addition, they contended that shorter hours would cause an unacceptable reduction in members' earnings. When the resolution was put to the vote it was defeated by a large majority. This led the chairman to express his "deep regret" that the conference should have rejected the forty-eight hour week. 137

A further problem which confronted the union during the inter-war years and which was also related to the seasonal nature of ladies tailoring was the sweated labour conditions against which there had been such an outcry in the 1880s and 1890s. 138 The government had attempted to curb sweating by setting up a trade board for the clothing industry in 1912. In practice, however, the piece-work system in operation in the clothing trade enabled the employers to avoid the minimum rates set by the trade board as it was impossible for the

137. Ibid., p.8.
inspectors appointed to make adequate inspections.\textsuperscript{139} The seasonal nature of ladies tailoring compounded the problem since it meant that during the few busy months of employment both the master tailors and their employees had to work long hours to finish the orders. During this time virtually all workers obtained full employment at relatively high wages. The necessity to meet deadlines meant that little attention was paid to the sanitary conditions in the workshops. The rapid growth of small workshops after the recovery from the post-war economic recession led the ULTTU to comment in 1924 that "The ugly combination of bedroom workshops has reappeared on the scene ... Day after day that reptile known as the small employer multiplies by leaps and bounds".\textsuperscript{140} Two years later the union reported that a considerable number of large workshops were closing down in favour of small workrooms that did not comply with sanitary conditions and "are hardly worthy of the name workrooms".\textsuperscript{141} The rapid growth of these small workshops created additional organisational problems for the union. Effective communication and co-ordination of activities became increasingly difficult as tailors were isolated in small units throughout the East End. The mushrooming of small workrooms was closely connected with the ease with which tailors could become masters. Indeed, Fine doubted whether there was another trade in England in which it

\textsuperscript{139} Labour Research Department, ed., Wages and Profits in the Clothing Trades, Labour White Papers, No.50, April 1933, Rollin MSS., 240/T/4.

\textsuperscript{140} ULTTU, 17th Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1924, p.8.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 19th Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1926, p.29.
was so easy to become an employer.\textsuperscript{142} The result of such mobility in the trade meant that the distinction between tailors and master tailors was often blurred.

In September 1929 the ULTTU organised a demonstration in Trafalgar Square to protest against the resurgence of sweated labour which was attended by about 8,000 people.\textsuperscript{143} A resolution was unanimously adopted urging legislation to prohibit the manufacture of garments in any workshop which was also used for domestic purposes. The resolution also insisted that all tailors' workshops be registered with the LCC or with the local authorities so that necessary inspections could be carried out. In addition, the government was called upon to increase the number of Trade Board and factory inspectors. The union's anti-sweating campaign captured the attention of a wide section of the public and speakers at the Trafalgar Square demonstration included such prominent figures in the non-Jewish trade union world as A. M. Wall, secretary of the London Trades Council, and A. J. Cook of the Miners' Federation.\textsuperscript{144} The national press also gave considerable publicity to the plight of East End tailors. For example, in an interview published in Reynolds Illustrated News, Jacob Fine gave a graphic description of conditions in the East End sweating "dens" which, he said, could not be improved until all workshops were registered and subject to proper

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p.13.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 22nd Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1929, p.4.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., p.5.
inspection. This was followed by an editorial article in the **Daily Herald** under the title "Slaves of the Needle".

After the successful demonstration and the publicity received in the national press, ULTTU representatives were invited to confer with officials at the Home Office and the Ministry of Labour. The union was able to provide the officials with facts and figures substantiating union complaints against insanitary workshops and breaches in the Trade Board rates. Action was taken almost immediately. A number of particularly insanitary workshops in East London were visited by inspectors and extensive improvements were ordered. Some workshops were forced to close because the owners or occupiers were unable to comply with the inspectors orders. The union also submitted a memorandum to the British Wholesale Mantle and Costume Manufacturers' Association demanding that a list of fair master tailors and manufacturers be compiled, and that this list should serve as a safeguard to the public that the garments produced by these employers were not made by sweated labour or in insanitary workshops. A subsequent conference between the Manufacturers' Association, the Master Ladies Tailors' Organisation and the union led to an agreement to conduct joint investigations into the trade. The facts revealed prompted the Ministry of Labour to issue a

146. DH, 17 September 1929, p.4.
147. ULTTU, 22nd Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1929, p.6.
148. Ibid., p.7.
special circular to master tailors drawing attention to the necessity for them to keep records about time and piece-workers. The union believed that the issue of the circular was mainly due to its agitation and was optimistic that it would, to some extent, check the irresponsibility of employers who were under the impression that they had no obligation to piece-workers. Despite these initiatives, Fine realised that there was no easy solution to the problem of sweated labour. In October 1929 he told a Sunday Chronicle reporter that the union had "to employ a regular secret service force to keep track of these dens (in Whitechapel) and to warn our members". As late as 1937, when the Jewish Chronicle, published the results of its investigation into conditions in the East End ladies tailoring trade, sweating was still shown to be rife.

The Communists in the ULTTU believed that the essential prerequisite for an improvement in working conditions and the abolition of sweated labour was amalgamation with the national union. The advantage of amalgamation was suggested by one member as early as 1920. However, the initial strategy chosen for dealing with the urgent problems confronting the union was the attempt to form a federation with the master tailors. This strategy was the one favoured by the moderate

149. Ibid., p.9.
150. The Sunday Chronicle, 13 October 1929, p.5.
152. I. Kapitanchick, translation of an article published in Di Tsait. See above, n.118.
Labour leaders of the union, especially Jacob Fine and Israel Caplan. The Master Ladies Tailors' Organisation was, like the ULTTU, predominantly Jewish and East End based. Its main personality was its secretary, Israel Kutner, who was also prominent in the Jewish friendly society movement. An early attempt at co-operation between the masters organisation and the union was made in 1918 when it was agreed that tailors should be paid a guaranteed weekly wage of £3.10s and that the working day should be from 8am to 7pm. This agreement proved unenforceable. In 1923 the union tried to reach a mutual understanding about the definition of a master and to find a way in which mutual support could be given to check the growth of the small and irresponsible masters who were injuring the employers as well as the workers. A joint conference defined a master as anyone who employed seven or more workers and who was not himself engaged in the making of a garment. Five joint conferences were organised in 1923 with a view to forming a federation, but by the union's own admission these proved an "utter failure".


154. JC, 14 December 1945, p.13 (Obituary).


156. ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 12 April 1923, 3 May 1923, D/S/24/2.

In 1927 the ULTTU discussed the possible usefulness of another conference with the masters. The chairman, Lou Colton, who was a Communist, was of the view that because the Master Ladies Tailors' Organisation had weakened in strength and influence and therefore had no control over its membership, it would be a waste of time to confer and negotiate with a body which itself had no power. Caplan disagreed. He believed that now there was more need than ever to reach an understanding with the masters because of the growing number of small masters. An alliance with the Master Ladies Tailors' Organisation would, according to Caplan, "at least help to abolish family workshops, which are a curse to the trade".158 For the moment, however, it was decided that no further negotiations be entered into with the masters. It was only at the beginning of the 1930s that serious attempts at co-operation were again made.

In 1930 Fine remarked that it was "only by co-operation that the present evils could be combatted".159 It was largely at Fine's instigation that the first of a series of joint conferences was held with the Master Ladies Tailors' Organisation in May 1931.160 The conferences were chaired by Morris Myer, editor of Di Tsait and a prominent figure in Jewish communal

158. ULTTU Special Executive Committee minutes, 29 January 1927, D/S/24/5.
160. ULTTU/Master Ladies Tailors' Organisation: minutes of conferences on amalgamation in Ladies Tailors' Federation, 19 May 1931, D/S/24/18.
politics in the East End. Numerous meetings between the union and the masters organisation led to agreement on a number of issues. A resolution was unanimously passed in favour of a forty-eight hour week with a maximum of four hours overtime. The two sides also agreed on the establishment of a joint board and the creation of a joint fund of £2,000. In addition, they agreed to provide mutual assistance for organisational purposes and to pay compensation to members of both sides involved in a stoppage of work as a result of joint action. Members of the Master Ladies Tailors' Organisation agreed not to employ non-union labour while ULTTU members agreed not to work for master tailors who were not members of the masters organisation. The culmination of all this activity was the decision to set up a Ladies Tailors' Federation. A delegation visited Sir Stafford Cripps and he prepared a draft constitution for the proposed Federation.

The idea of a Federation attracted considerable opposition, especially from Communists in the union. A "Mantle Militant" writing in The Garment Workers' Leader condemned what he called "Fine's Fascist Federation" which he

161. Second meeting of full conference between Master Ladies Tailors' Organisation and ULTTU on 5 December 1933, dated 2 February 1933. See also Joint sub-committee meeting on 21 November 1933 and Third joint sub-committee meeting on 28 November 1933, dated 5 December 1933. All documents in D/S/24/18.


regarded as a form of class collaboration. The conclusion reached by The Garment Workers' Leader was that the union would be "swallowed up" in a Federation with the masters. Members were thus warned to regard the scheme with the deepest suspicion. Despite left-wing opposition, the plans for a Federation went ahead. In 1936, a joint conference agreed to a draft constitution for the Ladies Tailors' Federation. This laid down minimum rates of pay, made provision for slack periods, defined a master as someone who employed a minimum of five workers and agreed to recognise closed union shops. The stated aims of the Federation were to promote the mutual interests of masters and workers and to ensure that each side would be protected against unfair competition. Despite the massive amount of ground work and preparation which was put into the scheme the proposed Federation never materialised. According to one theory, this was due to the inadequate organisation of both the small masters and the ladies tailors. Although it is certainly true that neither the ULTTU nor the Master Ladies Tailors' Organisation controlled a majority of tailors and masters in the trade, it is clear that the administrative machinery did exist to make the Federation a viable proposition. Other reasons must, therefore, be

164. The Garment Workers' Leader, No. 4, May-June 1934, p. 6. See also No. 5, June-July 1934, p. 6.
165. Ibid., June-July 1934, p. 7.
168. Lerner, op. cit., p. 413.
sought to account for the failure to put the scheme into effect.

The major reason why the plans for a Federation with the master tailors were never implemented must be seen in the context of the increased Communist strength in the union by the late 1930s. In 1937, for example, the master tailors' organisation asked the union to unite with them in a general strike against the manufacturers. The masters hoped, somewhat naively, that Jewish ties would prove stronger among the tailors than class loyalties. They misjudged the situation because the prospect of any kind of federation with the employers proved ideologically unacceptable to the majority of the union membership.\textsuperscript{169} In 1938 the executive committee of the ULTTU finally reported that it had decided "not to collaborate with the Masters".\textsuperscript{170} By this time the committee had come under the control of Communists.\textsuperscript{171} During the 1920s, by contrast, Communist influence in the ULTTU had not been marked. In 1925, for example, the Communist Party invited the ULTTU to support a movement which it had initiated to upset the agenda of the Trades Union Congress by adding other matters. The union decided to give their delegate a free hand but not to pledge the union since this would involve it in a "temporary breach" with the Trades Union Congress and

\textsuperscript{169} DW, 15 September 1937, p.3; interview with Mick Mindel (January 1987).

\textsuperscript{170} ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 10 February 1938, D/S/24/6.

\textsuperscript{171} Interview with Danny Silver, former NUTGW official (June 1985).
attach it to the Communist Party without having first consulted the members.\footnote{ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 9 July 1925, D/S/24/4.} Another indication of the ULTTU's reluctance to have any contact with the Communist Party in the 1920s was its refusal to accept organisational help offered by the Young Communist League.\footnote{Ibid., 24 December 1925.} More important, however, was an incident which occurred in February 1927 when the Stepney Trades Council decided that affiliated societies should endorse the decision of the annual conference of the Labour Party which excluded members of the Communist Party from participation in any Labour group. The executive committee of the ULTTU also recommended that members should vote in favour of this decision. Colton believed that Stepney Trades Council had taken this step because he was a Communist and the Labour Party therefore objected to his being represented on the Labour group of the Board of Guardians. At a union meeting he proposed that the union should vote against the recommendation. However, the recommendation was carried, although the chairman of the ULTTU made it clear that the aim was not to oppose Colton as a delegate but to follow the official Labour Party line.\footnote{Ibid., 3 February 1927, D/S/24/5; ULTTU members' meeting, 5 February 1927, D/S/24/10/1.}

Israel Caplan nevertheless formed a mantle makers branch of the Amalgamated Society of Tailors in the East End in 1928 because he believed, contrary to all the evidence pointing to the Communist Party's lack of influence, that the ULTTU was,
in fact, dominated by Communists who had conspired to replace him by Sam Elsbury. Indeed, Caplan claimed that he was forced to form a new branch in order to save members of the ULTTU "from a Communist regime". Colton argued that the very fact that there were only nine members of the Communist Party in the entire membership of the union was sufficient to repudiate Caplan's "lying statement" that the ULTTU was being ruled by the Communist Party. Mick Mindel, who was elected chairman of the ULTTU in 1938, has confirmed that, far from dominating the union, Communists actually found it difficult to be accepted as members. Mindel cited his own case as evidence. He joined the Communist Party in 1931 but when he subsequently attempted to join the ULTTU his application was not accepted for eighteen months. Mindel stated that his experience was repeated in many similar cases. However, once Communists had been granted membership they were in a position to carry out propaganda and agitational work in the union, and to recruit new members. In common with other young radicals in the union, Mindel's background was secular and political. His Russian-born father, Morris Mindel, was a Bundist and a founder member of the Workers' Circle. Mindel therefore developed a political consciousness from an early age. He first took an interest in the trade union movement in 1929 when the issue was whether he should join the United Clothing Workers Union. In 1934 he stood as a Communist candidate at the Stepney Borough Council elections but was awarded just

175. ULTTU members' meeting, 21 November 1928, D/S/10/1.  
176. Ibid.  
177. Interview with Mick Mindel (June 1985).
83 votes. Like Sarah Wesker, he lived in the Rothschild Buildings, a block of flats in Spitalfields tenanted mainly by Jewish families. The Buildings had been designed and funded by members of the Anglo-Jewish aristocracy. If they had been intended to serve as an agent of social control for their Jewish working class tenants, there is considerable irony in the fact that the flats produced a number of radicals who played an important role in the Jewish East End labour movement.

Mindel's political career in the East End labour movement paralleled the growth of Communist influence in the ULTTU. It was the extension of this influence in the 1930s which eventually made possible the amalgamation of the ULTTU with the NUTGW. The moderate executive committee of the ULTTU had been cautious in its attitude to amalgamation which, it feared, would lead to a loss of the union's Jewish identity. It was thus only in the late 1930s when the Communists in the union gained the upper hand that amalgamation was finally achieved. During the 1920s and early 1930s, the executive committee's standard response to any calls for amalgamation was to say that the union was prepared "to give assistance towards amalgamation providing the interests of our members are safeguarded".

Amalgamation conferences were held during the 1920s but each side's conditions for amalgamation proved unacceptable to the other. The ULTTU, for example,

178. ELA, 10 November 1934, p.6.
180. ULTTU, 22nd Annual Balance Sheet and Report, 1929, p.11.
made local autonomy a condition of any amalgamation. In 1925 the executive committee expressed the unanimous opinion that "whilst amalgamation of all the unions catering for the Tailoring Trade is desirable, it would be fatal for our organisation to accept the conditions which the UGW (United Garment Workers) desire to impose". In 1925, as a result of the ULTTU's intransigence, the union was disaffiliated from the Trades Union Congress.

Negotiations for amalgamation were re-opened in November 1929. However, the ULTTU pulled out of the discussions in 1931 and refused to sanction a ballot of its members on the question of whether or not the amalgamation scheme should be accepted. The executive committee believed that the union should insist on retaining the right to take immediate strike action. Such demands for complete autonomy on the question of the power to strike proved unacceptable to the TGWU. The other union which had participated in the discussions, the Amalgamated Society of Tailors, did amalgamate with the TGWU and the new union, the NUTGW, began its official life in 1932. This left the ULTTU in an even more isolated position in the trade union movement. Negotiations with the national union

181. ULTTU Executive Committee minutes, 14 December 1922, D/S/24/2.
182. Ibid., 20 April 1925, D/S/24/2.
183. Ibid., 12 March 1925, D/S/24/3.
were re-started in 1937. The new scheme worked out for amalgamation made an important concession to the ULTTU. The union was to be allowed to retain its trade rules, customs and conditions. It was also to be empowered to exercise local autonomy in small disputes involving not more than twelve workers. Some members still expressed doubts about the wisdom of amalgamation and feared that the ULTTU would lose its identity. However, the executive committee were unanimously in favour of amalgamation. They stated:

Rationalisation in the Ladies' Garment Industry is rapidly spreading and the standard of wages in our trade is being serious menaced ... It is no longer a local or sectional problem, but a national problem, and only through the unity and strength of a national organisation and through a struggle on a national scale, can the attacks upon the standard of our wages be properly resisted.

Mick Mindel played a crucial role in winning the members over to support of the amalgamation. During his election campaign for the chairmanship of the union in 1938 he made it clear that a vote for him was a vote for amalgamation. Like Rollin, he believed that Jews and non-Jews should work together in the common struggle against the reactionary forces of capitalism and fascism. This had also been the view of David Dubinsky, president of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union of America, when he addressed members of the ULTTU at a meeting in East London in July 1936. Urging the

186. ULTTU shop stewards' meeting, 5 December 1937, D/S/24/11/1.
188. ELO, 10 September 1938, p.1.
189. Interview with Mick Mindel (January 1987).
ULTTU to amalgamate with the NUTGW, he argued that Jewish workers could not afford to remain isolated at a time when the international labour movement was fighting fascism throughout the world. Even Fine, who had previously been sceptical about the motives of Communists in the union who favoured amalgamation, now added his considerable influence to the arguments for amalgamation. In a statement in 1938, he said that he was convinced that division in the workers' movement was a "deadly poison which saps, disintegrates and devitalises the workers". The amalgamation was finally achieved in July 1939, thus bringing to an end an important chapter in the history of the Jewish trade union movement in the East End.

At the same time as the ULTTU was grappling with the problem of amalgamation, another group of Jewish workers in the East End were organising themselves for the first time. Jewish workers in the wholesale distributive trade chose not to form a separate Jewish union. Instead, they formed themselves into a branch of the Shop Assistants' Union. The wholesale distributive trade in the East End consisted primarily of Jewish owned shops and warehouses. These employed young assistants between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one. The majority of these assistants were Jewish but, according to the general secretary of the Shop Assistants' Union "Love of race is not the underlying motive for employing


191. Statement by Fine on amalgamation, 1938, n.d., D/S/24/52/1. See also ELO, 10 September 1938, p.1; The Tailor and Garment Worker, June 1939, p.6.
Jews in preference to Gentiles. On the contrary, Jewish workers were exploited as much as non-Jewish workers. Employers were in a particularly strong position because the wholesale trade was not governed by the Shops Acts. Sanitary conditions in the warehouses were appalling and working hours were notoriously long, with warehouses frequently open from 8.30am to 7.30pm Monday to Friday and 8.30am to 3.30pm on Sundays. No payment was provided for overtime. It was not until 1934 that a serious attempt was made to organise the workers in the Whitechapel and Houndsditch area. The task of forming a branch of shop assistants was undertaken by a group of twelve Jewish workers in the trade. The leading personality in the branch and its first chairman was Reuben Silkoff. In common with Morris Jacobs and Phil Piratin, Silkoff's parents were religious, and Silkoff himself became actively involved in the religious life of the East End Jewish community after 1945 when he served as secretary of the New Road Synagogue in Whitechapel. Although he did not come from a political family, Silkoff became politically conscious from an early age. He firmly believed that the problems of capitalist society could only be solved by socialism. Jewish workers, too, could only hope to improve their conditions by socialism. For Silkoff, the trade union movement offered the best possibility for Jewish and gentile workers to unite and

192. The Shop Assistant, 18 January 1936, p.42.

193. Ibid., 11 January 1936, p.22. A Communist paper, The Young Worker, had exposed the appalling insanitary conditions as early as 1929. See The Young Worker, 6 July 1929, p.3.
fight against fascism and anti-semitism. 194

Silkoff has estimated that of the Houndsditch and Whitechapel Branch's 400 members, 60 to 70% were Jewish. 195 This was a reflection of the large number of Jewish assistants in the East End warehouses. Despite the large number of Jewish members, the branch did not possess any of the traditional characteristics of a Jewish immigrant union such as the use of Yiddish as a medium for conducting branch business. Instead, the young English-speaking membership expressed its Jewishness in terms of an ethnic group solidarity. The expansion of the Houndsditch and Whitechapel Branch was such that it grew to be the largest branch in the Shop Assistants' Union. The resulting prestigious position which it enjoyed in the union guaranteed the branch its own supplement in the union journal. The majority of the union's national membership was not Jewish. The fact that the Houndsditch and Whitechapel Branch received such great acclamation at national conferences was therefore testimony to the success of a policy which aimed at uniting Jewish and non-Jewish workers against the common enemy: the employer. 196 Silkoff was anxious to refute any suggestion that it was primarily Jewish employers who were responsible for "anti-trade union activities". He contended

194. I am grateful to Reuben Silk for the details about the formation of the Houndsditch and Whitechapel Branch and for the details about his own personal background (interview August 1986).

195. Ibid.

196. The Shop Assistant, 2 May 1936, p.374; 23 May 1936, p.432.
that most employers, by the very nature of their position, were opposed to trade unions until they were compelled to recognise them. In addition, Silkoff made no distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish workers.197

Workers are workers the world over and their problems are the same ... to a very large extent we have broken down the barriers of race amongst all sections of the Distributive workers in Houndsditch and Whitechapel in a common struggle.

Recruitment in the Houndsditch and Whitechapel Branch received its biggest boost from the branch's campaign to persuade warehouses in the district to close at 3pm on Sundays. In June 1935 an agreement was reached between the union and the warehouse employers for opening hours to be 9am to 7pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 3pm on Sundays.198 The employers subsequently formed an East London Traders' Association for the purpose of negotiating with the union. In November the Association decided that in the busy period leading up to Christmas, the opening hours for Sunday would be extended from 3pm until 5pm. Two reasons were given for this decision. Firstly, orthodox Jewish traders closed at sunset on Friday which, in the winter, meant 3.30pm at the latest. They therefore argued that they should be able to make up this time by remaining open for an extra two hours on Sundays. Secondly, the traders argued that in order to cope with the Christmas trade it was necessary to remain open until 5pm.199

197. Ibid., 18 January 1936, p.43.
199. The Shop Assistant, 8 February 1936, p.102.
In response the union instructed its members to cease work at 3pm as usual. On the day when the new scheme was to operate the staffs in five warehouses obeyed the union and walked out at 3pm. The following day twenty-one members of the union employed by the two Jewish firms of Rintzler and Levy were locked out. Negotiations resulted in the reinstatement of the locked out members and agreement by the employers that they would close at 3pm on Sundays and make payment for any overtime worked. In addition, the firms pledged that there would be no victimisation and that they would recognise the union shop stewards.200

The truce did not last long. Shortly after Christmas the shop steward at Rintzler was dismissed along with three staff who had supported him. The union believed that by victimising members of the staff who had been active in trade union work the firm was attempting to break up trade union organisation in the firm. As a result, the union gave its full support to members involved in the dispute. At about the same time, the firm of Goldman in the Houndsditch district dismissed over seventy trade union members without notice. The firm used the pretext that they were re-organising their business, but their action was perceived as a concerted attack on the union.201 Both disputes aroused a great deal of sympathy throughout the trade union movement in London. Support was forthcoming from


a number of trades councils in London as well as from the local trades council in Stepney which set up a solidarity committee for the strikers. Of particular importance was the fact that Jacob Fine acted as a mediator between the employers and the union, thus confirming the ethnic ties between different groups of Jewish workers. In addition, many messages of congratulation on the shop assistants' stand were received from youth clubs. This was a testament to the young age of the strikers, most of whom were under twenty. The branch recognised the special problems created by organising young workers and called a meeting of parents of the strikers to explain the situation to them and enlist their support.

The Houndsditch and Whitechapel Branch organised a vigorous campaign in support of the workers of both firms. Mass poster parades were held through Whitechapel and large public meetings were organised. One of the biggest demonstrations in support of the strikers at Rintzler's was held at Whitechapel Art Gallery and attended by over 600 people. Speaking at this meeting, Aaron Rollin said that as a Jew he was ashamed at the attitude adopted by Jewish employers in the East End towards trade unionism. He admitted that while some were good employers, others were guilty "of

203. Ibid., 8 February 1936, p.103.
204. Ibid., 18 January 1936, p.44; DW, 3 January 1936, p.8.
exploiting their own race". Similar sentiments were expressed by the union's national leadership. For example, the general secretary, writing in the union journal, stated that a visit to East End warehouses run by Jewish firms "opens ones eyes to the way in which Jewish workers are exploited by Jewish traders". Despite these negative images of Jewish employers, there is evidence that the non-Jewish rank and file of the union recognised that there were good and bad Jewish employers, and that the common enemy of all workers was the capitalist system. This conclusion, reached by some of the more politically conscious union members, led the Houndsditch and Whitechapel Branch to comment optimistically that the growth of the branch offered the most effective way of fighting fascism: "Barriers between Jewish and Gentile workers are smashed in the common fight for a decent standard of living, and for a Socialist future". The struggles at the firms of Rintzler and Goldman thus gave many young shop assistants their first opportunity to acquire a political education. Ultimately, it was this which proved to be of greater importance for Jewish workers in the East End in the long term than the failure of the strikes in the short term. Even the so-called failure of the disputes needs to be qualified. At both firms, the end of the strike resulted in a settlement which secured confirmation of the union's original

205. The Shop Assistant, 4 January 1936, p.3. See also DW, 23 December 1935, p.8.
206. The Shop Assistant, 18 January 1936, p.42.
207. Ibid., 25 January 1936, p.63.
208. Ibid., 23 May 1936, p.432.
agreement with the firms regarding hours of work, payment of
ing an English workers association which at the same
time succeeded in maintaining an ethnic identity. The
experience of the shop assistants in Houndsditch and White-
chapel was duplicated among other groups of Jewish workers in
the East End, particularly the tailors and furniture workers.
If the 'Englishness' of these other unions was less pro-
nounced, this was only because they still contained
significant numbers of older foreign-born Jews. The desire
for self-segregation on the part of these immigrant workers
was the result of a combination of internal and external
factors. The major external factor was the concern to avoid
anti-semitism while the most significant internal factor was
the wish to maintain a Jewish identity. In addition, there
were purely pragmatic linguistic and cultural differences
which ensured that immigrant Jewish trade unionists would
remain segregated from the mainstream trade union movement.

Integration was gradually facilitated by the anglicised
second generation during the 1920s and 1930s. These cadres of

209. For the end of the disputes see ibid., 18 February 1936,
highly politicised Jewish youth were able to overcome some of the previously insurmountable barriers to worker unity such as language differences. However, although the second generation was undoubtedly committed to full participation in the wider labour movement, these Jews were nevertheless determined to maintain their Jewish identity within the trade union movement. This tension between the desire to be accepted as full and equal members of the organised British working class while at the same time striving for a recognition of the special needs and characteristics of Jewish workers, was never completely resolved. Prisoners of their own transitory status, with one foot in the world of the British worker and the other in the immigrant world, second generation Jews could do no more than attempt to reach an accommodation with the trade union movement.

The desire for unity with the British labour movement was by no means universal, even among the most committed Jewish trade unionists in the East End. As the experience of the United Ladies Tailors' Trade Union has illustrated, a number of Jewish trade unionists remained unconvinced of the wisdom of amalgamation with the national union. It was the more youthful English-born members who ultimately steered the union into formal amalgamation in 1939. Similarly, it was the young English-born organisers of the East End shop assistants who ensured that trade union organisation took place within the framework of the national union. Ultimately, therefore, it was clear that Jewish trade unionists would regard the idea of separate Jewish unions as a relic of the immigrant past.
Chapter Four:
Communism and Zionism: Ideological Conflict in the Jewish East End

During the inter-war years the Jewish East End became the arena for a major political conflict as communism and Zionism vied for the allegiance of East End Jews. This chapter will examine the relative strengths of these two movements in the East End and will seek to show which ideology presented itself as more relevant to the problems confronting Jewish East Enders in the 1920s and 1930s. Recent research on the subject has emphasised Communist success and Zionist failure in the East End. However, these studies ignore the fact that communism was a negligible force in the East End until the mid-1930s. In the present study, the so called Communist 'capture' of the Jewish East End is viewed in a broader context and takes into account the process by which East End Communists overcame the inherent incompatibility between Jewish and Communist interests.

The traditional view of Zionism in the East End held that the immigrant masses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries were passionately Zionist. This view can no longer be sustained. Although the East London Zionist Association, founded in 1907, was one of the oldest associations in the country, Zionism in the East End did not have a strong organisational base. Prominent Zionists addressing mass meetings in the East End could certainly be assured of a large audience. However, the day to day administration of the movement depended heavily on the commitment of a few outstanding individuals, notably the Reverend J. K. Goldbloom and Morris Myer. Goldbloom was the principal and guiding influence of the Redman's Road Talmud Torah in Stepney. This institution inculcated Zionist values into its pupils. Instruction was given in modern Hebrew, the language of the Jewish pioneers in Palestine. Goldbloom was deeply committed to the revival of Hebrew as a living language and was an active member of the English Zionist Federation's (EZF) Hebrew Committee. Indeed, as well as his numerous activities on behalf of Zionism in the East End, Goldbloom was also a prominent national figure in the Zionist movement. He chaired a number of EZF committees and in


3. ZR, March 1920, p.191.

4. See above, n.1.


7. See, for example, EZF 21st Annual Report, May 1919-April 1920, p.3.
1929 became chairman of the EZF.\textsuperscript{8}

Morris Myer was also prominent in the EZF and for some years was vice-president of the organisation.\textsuperscript{9} Myer had an interesting political career. He arrived in London from Rumania in 1902 as an anarchist. In 1913 he founded a Yiddish daily newspaper in the East End, \textit{Di Tsait}.\textsuperscript{10} By 1918, he had rejected his earlier anarchism and had become a firmly committed member of Poale Zion, the socialist Zionist party. In that year, Myer played a leading role in the formation of the Jewish National Labour Council. This body was formed largely as a result of a conference called by Poale Zion and held at the Old Kings Hall in Commercial Road, Stepney.\textsuperscript{11} The aim of the Council was to unite the Jewish labour movement in Britain around three specific demands:- equal rights for Jews in all countries; national rights in those countries where Jews lived in great numbers; and "the creation of a Jewish National

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{8} EZF 30th Annual Report, July 1928-January 1930, p.10.
\item \textsuperscript{9} See, for example, EZF 29th Annual Report June 1927-June 1928, p.2; Ibid., 30th Annual Report, July 1928-January 1930, p.3.
\item \textsuperscript{10} Fishman, \textit{East End Jewish Radicals}, p.261.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Memorandum and Invitation issued to Jewish Trade Unions, Jewish Political Labour Organisations and other Jewish workers' Societies, Workers' King Branches etc., Central Committee of the Jewish Socialist Labour Party Poale Zion of Great Britain and the Jewish National Trade Union Committee, n.d. Archives of the Jewish Labour Movement (AJLM), (42), 12 III; \textit{The Herald}, 15 June 1918, p.8.
\end{itemize}
Home in Palestine". Myer claimed that the Council represented "the great majority of the Jewish workers in this country, and we are in favour of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine". The Council itself was able to list as members six branches of Poale Zion and sixteen Jewish trade unions, including the Cigarette Makers' Trade Union, Hat and Cap Makers' Trade Union, the Jewish branch of the National Boot and Shoe Union, the Jewish Bakers' Union, the Jewish branch of the Garment Workers' Union, and Branch 61 of NAFTA. However, the listing of these unions as members of the Council must be treated with some care because it did not necessarily mean that a majority of the members either supported the Council's aims or were active on its behalf. For example, Branch 61 of NAFTA had recently united with the Independent Cabinet Makers to form Branch 15 of NAFTA. This new branch was noted as one of the most militantly Marxist in the East End. It therefore seems unlikely that it would have endorsed any organisation propounding Zionist aims. Indeed, in 1936, an anti-Zionist resolution proposed by the central committee of NAFTA at the Labour Party conference in Edinburgh was said to have the full support of the "great majority of the union's Jewish


13. Ibid., p.3.

members". In addition, some of the unions stated to be members of the Council, especially the Jewish Bakers Union, were tiny in number and had entered a period of permanent decline. It would, therefore, be an exaggeration to suggest that the Jewish National Labour Council was representative of the Jewish working class.

There is nevertheless some indication of Jewish trade union support for Zionism. For example, in 1929 a delegate from the Jewish National Labour Council addressed a ULTTU members meeting. As a result, the union agreed to make a donation to the Jewish workers in Palestine. The union also participated in a demonstration in Trafalgar Square in September 1929 to protest against the riots in Palestine. Later, in 1938, the union participated in a conference convened by the Provisional Palestine Committee which met to discuss a petition to the government against the restriction of Jewish immigration into Palestine. In general, though, Palestine was not an issue in the forefront of Jewish workers' consciousness as Jacob Fine confirmed in the 1920s when he wrote that "Palestine is not the pivot upon which the hopes of the Jewish people rests".

15. Quoted by Alex Gossip (general secretary of NAFTA) in S. Harrison, Alex Gossip (London 1962), p.54.
16. ULTTU members meeting, 4 September 1929, ULTTU Archive, D/S/24/10/1.
17. Ibid., 25 September 1929, D/S/24/10/1.
18. Ibid., Executive Committee minutes, 20 October 1938; 1 November 1938; 1 December 1938, D/S/24/6.
In sharp contrast to the lack of enthusiasm expressed for Jewish nationalism in the East End, radical left-wing internationalism flourished in the ghetto environment both before and after 1918. In order to understand the attraction of revolutionary socialism for East End Jews it is necessary to place the phenomenon in its historical context. First, however, it should be clearly stated that not all historians would agree that there is an innate connection between Jews and communism. W. D. Rubinstein, for example, argues that Jewish support for the left was a product of a peculiar set of historical circumstances; namely, the economic conditions of Jews in the Russian Pale of Settlement and subsequently in the urban ghettos of the West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Jews became upwardly mobile and moved into the middle classes, so Rubinstein argues, they lost their radicalism and increasingly supported Conservative parties.\(^\text{20}\) Although Rubinstein weakens his case by generalisation and over-simplification, it is hoped that the present study will indicate that it is important to locate the relationship between Jews and communism in specific times and places.

Jewish involvement in revolutionary movements had its roots in the huge Russian ghetto known as the Pale of Settlement which had been created by an edict of Catherine II in 1794 and which survived until 1917. Confined to the Pale and excluded from careers in the bureaucracy and from holding academic posts, Russian Jewish intellectuals were ripe for

radicalisation. However, it was not until the pogroms in the Pale during 1881-1882 that large numbers of the Jewish intelligentsia were galvanised into political opposition to the Tsarist regime. Their own first hand experience of state-sponsored anti-semitism which had blocked their careers, combined with the devastating impact of the pogroms and the appalling poverty and economic conditions in the Pale, convinced many intellectuals, especially the youth, that the only solution to the Russian Jewish problem was to work for the overthrow of the Russian autocracy and its replacement by a society organised on socialist principles of justice and equality. Thus, Jewish socialism was motivated almost entirely by persecution and economic misery.

The development of a Russian Jewish urban proletariat in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and its alliance with the already disaffected intelligentsia, served as a further spur to the spread of Jewish socialism. However, despite the introduction of class conflict into the workplace and the gradual organisation of Jewish workers for the defence

of their economic interests, the Russian Jewish proletariat, in common with its counterparts in Western Europe and North America, was not a classical Marxist proletariat. On the contrary, it was overwhelmingly a proletariat of artisans, while the Russian workforce, small though it might have been in relation to the West, was a factory proletariat. Marxists believed that such structural differences, thought to be peculiar to a non-assimilated Jewish community, would disappear once Jews had become integrated into the international socialist movement. For Jewish socialists, however, the process of attempting to dissolve the Jewish workers' 'Jewishness' proved to be highly problematical. In particular, by politicizing the socio-cultural life of the Russian Jewish proletariat by means of, for example, schools, newspapers and youth groups, Jewish socialists actually helped to forge a secularised Jewish group identity for Jewish workers. This subculture of working class Jewish life which developed in the Pale, and its subsequent reconstruction in Western Europe and North America, reinforced existing barriers between Jewish and non-Jewish workers instead of facilitating their removal.

The massive emigration which followed each wave of pogroms in Russia included many of the personnel who had been active in the illegal revolutionary parties. As a result, ideologies which had been formulated in the Pale of Settlement established themselves in the new Jewish centres overseas. Among those who found refuge in the East End were anarchists and Bundists, as

well as Jews who became active in Marxist parties such as H. M. Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and its successor the British Socialist Party (BSP). The BSP subsequently provided the largest contingent for the newly formed Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Indeed, a number of East End Jews began their political career in the BSP before moving into the Communist Party. Anarchism and Bundism were equally important in the left-wing political culture in the East End. Both ideologies provided some of the personnel for the fledgling Communist Party in the East End, and in this way acted as an important link between pre-war and post-war East End Jewish radicalism.

The major historian of East End anarchism has argued that conflicting attitudes towards the First World War "was a death blow to East End Anarchism". Although it is true that the movement never regained its pre-war popularity, anarchism was kept alive during the war years by East End members of the American-based Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), or 'Wobblies' as they were commonly known. The British Section of the IWW was formed in 1913 and had a hall in Whitechapel. One of the organisers for the IWW in the East End was Esther Archer (formerly Argeband) who was a well known open-air speaker during the First World War. Albert Elsbury, a tailor, for a time edited the IWW's paper, The Industrial Worker. He was later a founder member of the CPGB and in the early 1920s was a

23. Fishman, East End Jewish Radicals, p.306.
member of the Shoreditch branch of the party. He also edited The Worker which was a Communist inspired paper circulating in Shoreditch and Bethnal Green. Two other East End anarchists who provided a link between the pre and post-war radical political culture in the East End were Issy Eisenstone and Sam Dreen. Dreen was an interesting character who, like Morris Myer, made the political journey from anarchism to Zionism. In 1913 Dreen left the anarchists and became a member of Poale Zion. In 1930 he became chairman of Poale Zion.

One of the most prominent members of the BSP in the East End and subsequently a prominent Communist was Sam Elsbury, brother of Albert Elsbury. In 1929 when Sam stood as a Communist parliamentary candidate in South-West Bethnal Green, his election agent, J. Valentine, was a political acquaintance from his BSP days. The BSP also benefited from the support of a number of Russian Jewish emigres living in the East End.


27. On Eisenstone, see above p.110.

28. Interview with Mick Mindel (January 1987); interview with Moshe Rosette (Tel-Aviv, April 1987); Fishman, East End Jewish Radicals, p.304.


30. On Elsbury, also see above pp.121-122, 123-125.

For example, Boris Kahan and his sister Zelda were professional political agitators who infused the radical movement in the East End with enthusiasm and organisational skills. Boris Kahan later returned to the Soviet Union. Another Russian-born BSP member was Joseph Fineberg. In 1911 Fineberg was secretary of the Stepney and Whitechapel Branch of the SDF. During the war he was secretary of the Stepney BSP branch. After his return to Russia in 1918 he became the secretary to Maxim Litvinov, later the Soviet Ambassador to Britain.

Of all the left-wing ideologies which flourished in the Jewish East End, Bundism was the only specifically Jewish socialist ideology. Founded in 1897 in Vilna, the centre of Russian-Jewish intellectual life, the Bund was a non-Zionist autonomous Jewish socialist party whose aim was to function within the international revolutionary movement. The Bundist political philosophy was essentially based on the concept of a Jewish nationality which expressed itself through the Yiddish language and a secular proletarian culture. Throughout its history in Eastern Europe, the Bund was torn by the inner contradiction of being an independent Jewish socialist party which was trying to participate in and be accepted by the

33. Kendall, op.cit., p.32. On Fineberg see also Bush, Behind the Lines, pp.70, 177, 186.
34. Weller, op.cit., p.58.
35. Levin, op.cit., p.259. For a full account of the Bund in Russia see ibid., pp.260-373. See also Frankel, op.cit., pp.141, 171-257; Rischin, The Promised City, pp.43-47.
international revolutionary movement. In the West, local and national political conditions often masked this contradiction with the result that Bundists moved easily into Communist parties. Despite this, the Bundist movement never really resolved the fundamental contradiction of trying to operate in an international revolutionary environment.

The fluidity of movement between Bundism and communism in the East End undoubtedly helped to shape the character of the Stepney Communist Party. The party leadership at first tolerated and later actively encouraged the specifically Jewish identity which the Stepney branch acquired, largely as a result of its assimilation of Bundist ideas. The centre of Bundism in the East End of London was the Workers' Circle Friendly Society. The Circle had been founded in Stepney in 1909 by a group of Russian Bundists. It was precisely because the Circle had its roots in the Bundist tradition that Jewish Communists who were later associated with the Circle retained a positive Jewish identity and a continuing concern for issues which affected Jews. All the founding members of the Circle were cabinet-makers, a fact which underlined the political radicalism of this group of Jewish workers. Although founded by Bundists, the Circle served as the meeting place and forum for all left-wing Jews in the East End. According to one observer, it became the largest centre for Jewish Labour activity in England "where social democrats and trade unionists joined with

The Russian Revolution in 1917 was an important factor in radicalising Jewish opinion in the East End. Indeed, a number of Jews returned to Russia to fight in the Revolution. The general secretary of the Workers' Circle estimated that as many as 300 of its members returned to Russia under the terms of the Anglo-Russian Military Convention. For some revolutionary Jews, the Convention dovetailed nicely with their desire to return to revolutionary Russia. However, despite the obvious enthusiasm for the Revolution in the Jewish East End, the Communist Party remained a negligible force in the area throughout the 1920s. A major reason for this was that the party did not campaign on any issues which would have won it widespread support among East End Jews. For example, it did not campaign against the government's discriminatory anti-alien laws, neither did it take up the cases of Jews threatened with deportation. Nevertheless, Jewish Communists continued to meet in the Workers' Circle during the 1920s. It should be stated here that the Central Committee of the Circle was not affiliated to the Communist Party, or indeed to any political


However, individual branches had considerable autonomy and were organised along ideological lines. Thus, Branch 10, most of whose members lived in the East End, was popularly known as the "Communist branch". The formation of Branch 10 in 1919 was a turning point in the history of the Circle. For the first time, an attempt was made to attract the new generation of young, English speaking Jews in the East End. The new branch was affiliated to the Stepney Trades Council and Borough Labour Party, the Mile End Labour Party and the Whitechapel and St. George's Labour Party. Its members included such prominent Jewish Labour personalities as Morry Davis, Dan Frankel, and Israel Shafran. The branch's early links with the Stepney Labour Party do not contradict its reputation as a "Communist branch", because the Communist and Labour parties in Stepney often worked in close co-operation in the immediate post-war period. This brief honeymoon did not last and in 1929, as the Communist Party's "class against class" policy went into operation, the decision was taken by Branch 10 to disaffiliate from the various Labour parties. Membership of Branch 10 was never very large. In 1929 it was estimated to be

40. Interview with Monty Goldman (April 1985); interview with Solly Kaye (April 1986).
41. Interview with Louis Appleton (January 1985).
43. Ibid., p.6.
about 120.46 By 1935 it was said to have reached the "record high figure of 216".47 Nationally too, the Circle was never able to attract a majority of Jewish workers, even during its peak years of activity in the 1920s and 1930s. National membership only grew from 1,300 in 1922 to 3,000 in 1939.48

Unlike the Workers' Circle, no precise date is available for the foundation of the Stepney Communist Party. However, the Stepney branch was already in existence in 1920 and by the following April was reported to be meeting weekly.49 Accurate membership figures for the Communist Party are notoriously hard to come by and the Stepney Communist Party is no exception. Phil Piratin, who became secretary of the Stepney Communist Party in 1936 and was elected the Communist MP for Mile End in 1945, has estimated that in 1934 membership stood at 115. By 1936 this had doubled to 230.50 Piratin put the 1939 figure at 500.51 Since no statistics are available to indicate the proportion of Jews in the Stepney Communist Party, this can only be gauged by examining the extent of Jewish involvement in the party and by looking at the areas where the party was most

46. Ibid., p.6.
49. The Communist, 12 August 1920, p.12; 9 April 1921, p.2.
50. Interview with Phil Piratin (June 1985).
51. Piratin, Our Flag Stays Red, p.49.
active. As has already been shown, there was a steady, albeit small, flow of Jews from the various left-wing radical groups in the East End into the Communist Party. This process was, to some extent, aided by the Russian Revolution. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the leading personnel in the Stepney Communist Party, as well as many of the members, were Jewish. This was in sharp contrast to Jewish involvement in the Communist Party at the national level. During the inter-war period only two Jewish East End Communists served on the Central Committee: Sam Elsbury who was elected at the 9th Congress of the party in 1927 and Sarah Wesker who was elected at the 12th Congress in 1932.  

Although, as has been shown, the Russian Revolution was an important factor in radicalising East End Jews, it was nevertheless a lost opportunity for the Communist Party in the East End. The small number of East End Jews who joined the party in the early 1920s comprised mainly the hard core of ideologically committed individuals who had staffed the various revolutionary groups in the East End before 1918. A large potential reservoir of support for the Stepney Communist Party remained untapped because the Communist Party made little attempt to widen its appeal to include the mass of working class Jews in the East End. If 1917 was a lost opportunity for the Communists, it proved to be equally disappointing for the Zionists in terms of capturing the support of East End Jews.

As the year in which the government issued the Balfour Declaration, which held out the promise of a Jewish National Home in Palestine, 1917 should have been a great success for the Zionist movement in the East End. Indeed, according to Isaac Miller, Zionism did become the dominant factor in working class Jewish life in the East End after 1918. Another East End Zionist, Moshe Rosette, who was a prominent figure in Poale Zion, believed in retrospect, that most East End Jews were sympathetic to Zionism both before and after 1918. Rosette's view has been reinforced by Wally Gold, a president of the Federation of Zionist Youth in the 1930s. However, these optimistic evaluations of the condition of Zionism in the East End are not borne out by the documentary evidence. Admittedly, it is possible to discern some superficial vigour in the various Zionist groups in the East End in the 1920s. However, the rapid collapse of Zionism in the East End in the early 1930s serves to indicate how insubstantial the basis of this support had been.

The centre of Zionist activity in the East End was the 'Beth Zion' (Zion House) in Fulbourne Street, Whitechapel. This served as the home for the East London Zionist Association, a number of Zionist youth groups, and the two

53. Interview with I. J. Miller (August 1987). Miller was prominently involved in the Zionist movement in the East End as secretary of the East London Zionist Association (1928-1932) and secretary of the East London Keren Hayesod Council. He was also a full-time official for the Zionist Federation of Great Britain during the years 1925-1973.

54. Interview with Moshe Rosette (Tel Aviv, April 1987).

55. Interview with Wally Gold (Herzlia, April 1987).
East End branches of the major Zionist fund-raising bodies: the East London Jewish National Fund Commission and the East London Keren Hayesod Council. The East London Jewish National Fund Bazaar, organised by the Commission and held annually at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, was described as one of the "traditions of London Zionism" thus confirming its status as a London-wide event, rather than a purely East End event. Many of those who participated in and held stalls at the Bazaar were not East Enders. In addition, Jews travelled from many areas outside the East End to attend the Bazaar.

A number of Zionist youth societies functioned in the East End in the 1920s and these included the East London Young Zionist League, the East London Young Judeans and the Young Maccabees. These groups provided little evidence of vitality. While the League struggled on throughout the inter-war years, despite increasingly frequent references to apathy, the Young Judeans and the Young Maccabees were forced to merge in 1927. Habonim, a Zionist youth organisation based on socialist ideals, made attempts to organise East End youth from the late 1920s. Other politically oriented Zionist youth groups included the Young Poale Zion, East London Young Revisionists and the Arlozoroff Club. Unlike the Young Poale Zion, the Young Revisionists did succeed in establishing a

57. The Young Zionist (YZ), March 1933, p.14.
58. Ibid., November 1929, p.2.
centre in the East End.\textsuperscript{59} In 1931, The Revisionist Bulletin claimed that the Young Revisionists in the East End numbered 80.\textsuperscript{60} Two years later, however, The Young Zionist claimed that the Young Revisionists had very few members.\textsuperscript{61} The Arlozoroff Club functioned in the Bethnal Green area in the 1930s and was a small left-wing Zionist group, numbering no more than thirty members.\textsuperscript{62}

The major Zionist political parties, notably the right-wing Zionist Revisionists and the socialist Poale Zion, made little headway in the English Zionist movement in general in the inter-war years. This was because English Zionists were not, on the whole, given to ideological differentiation among themselves. Any differences which did arise were not usually crystallized into political parties. Nevertheless, the Revisionists and Poale Zion both attempted to make inroads in the East End. Vladimir Jabotinsky, the leader of the Revisionists, could always be assured of a big audience in the East End. For example, in 1928 he addressed a meeting in Yiddish at the Pavilion Theatre in Whitechapel.\textsuperscript{63} The following year he was one of the speakers at a Revisionist meeting attended by 1,500 people at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. Jabotinsky received "a

\textsuperscript{59} The Revisionist Bulletin, 3 September 1931, p.3, Jabotinsky Institute (JI), G2/3/6.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 7 December 1931, p.3.
\textsuperscript{61} YZ, June 1933, p.10.
\textsuperscript{62} The Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland (formerly EZF), 37th Annual Report, 1936-1937, p.33.
\textsuperscript{63} The Monthly Pioneer, February 1929, p.6.
tremendous ovation and the general atmosphere was one extremely favourable to Revisionist ideas".\textsuperscript{64} Also in 1929 Jabotinsky addressed a mass meeting of approximately 2,000 Jewish ex-servicemen in the East End at which resolutions were passed calling for the formation of Jewish military police units in Palestine and the granting of land there to Jewish ex-servicemen.\textsuperscript{65} It has been suggested that Jabotinsky, in common with other Zionist leaders, attracted large audiences because he was a famous personality, rather than because East Enders supported his policies.\textsuperscript{66} Nevertheless, the Revisionists did organise regular street meetings in the East End which were said by the admittedly partisan \textit{Revisionist Bulletin} to be well attended.\textsuperscript{67} In the same year, however, it was stated that the East London branch of the movement had been passing through a difficult time.\textsuperscript{68} There were attempts to open new Revisionist branches in the East End but these met with little success.\textsuperscript{69} The Revisionists did, however, succeed in opening a centre in New

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{64} The \textit{Revisionist Bulletin}, 6 September 1929, p.2, JI, G2/3/5.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Interview with Wally Gold (April 1987).
\item \textsuperscript{67} The \textit{Revisionist Bulletin}, 8 November 1929, p.1, JI, G2/3/5.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 19 April 1929, p.7, JI, G20.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 30 November 1930, p.3, JI, G2/3/6 reported the opening of a new branch in Mile End with just sixteen members. Ibid., 14 January 1931, p.4, G2/3/6 stated that a new branch was formed in the East End with 50 members.
\end{itemize}
Road, Whitechapel in 1931.  

Poale Zion, as a socialist Zionist party, should have had more chance of attracting the support of Jewish workers in the East End. However, the evidence shows that it was equally unsuccessful in its attempts to build a power base in the area. Even Moshe Rosette, one of the leading lights of the party, has admitted that Labour Zionists represented a small section in the Zionist movement. As early as 1918 Poale Zion was forced to defend itself against an attack from the Jewish Social Democratic Organisation which was affiliated to the BSP. This anti-Zionist organisation had claimed that Poale Zion had "no right to speak on behalf of organised Jewish labour, either in this country or any other ... They have never been authorised by the Jewish Trade Unions to speak on their behalf, and if anything these Unions are indifferent or even hostile to Zionism". Poale Zion counter-attacked by listing all the Jewish trade unions which, it stated, had supported the

70. Union of Zionist Revisionists, Central Committee for Great Britain: Merkaz and Central Committee meeting minutes, 22 January 1931, JI, G2/3/6.


72. Interview with Moshe Rosette (April 1987).

73. A Calumny Repudiated, statement by the Jewish Socialist Labour party, Poale Zion, Central Committee, 1918, AJLM, (42) 12 III/4.
idea of a national home in Palestine. In 1920 Poale Zion became affiliated to the Labour Party. This step proved to be of some importance in persuading mainstream Labour Jews in the East End who generally took little interest in Zionist matters to support Zionist resolutions at Labour Party conferences. Thus, for example, at the 1920 conference Oscar Tobin, president of the Stepney Labour Party, seconded a Poale Zion resolution requesting the government to remove its restrictions on the immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe into Palestine. In 1930 Dan Frankel, who was also not noted for his Zionism, asked the Labour Party conference to support the socialist movement in Palestine so that the Jewish community there could be organised on a socialist basis. These pro-Zionist utterances by two of Stepney's leading Labour Jews were very much the exception to the rule. Even Poale Zion recognised that support from Jewish workers or from their elected representatives was not, in the main, to be expected. Nevertheless, Poale Zion did not give up hope and as late as 1938 organised a private meeting in the East End to which it invited the secretaries of a number of Jewish trade union branches, such as Aaron Rollin and Jacob Fine, and the chairmen

74. Ibid. This list corresponded closely to the unions affiliated to the Jewish National Labour Council. The questions raised regarding the value of this list have been noted above. See p.168.

75. Shirmoni, op.cit., p.237.


of a number of branches of the Workers' Circle. Although a committee was elected to approach the Jewish workers and Jewish trade unions in London, a pessimistic conclusion could not be avoided as the committee pointed out that "much opposition was to be expected from the strong Communist element in East London". 78

More potentially promising recruiting grounds for the Zionists than the Zionist political parties were the East End synagogues and Jewish friendly societies. Both the Federation of Synagogues, under whose umbrella most East End synagogues functioned, and the Association of Jewish Friendly Societies, had a strong basis of support in the East End. Their membership tended to be drawn from the older generation of Jews who were concerned to preserve traditional Jewish values in a rapidly changing world. Zionism penetrated these two organisations with varying degrees of success. In 1929 the Synagogue Council, set up by the EZF to serve as an umbrella for synagogues wishing to affiliate to the Zionist movement, consisted of representatives of thirty synagogues in the East End of London. 79 The Federation of Synagogues had itself come under Zionist influence when Morry Davis was elected president in 1928. The actions taken by the Federation after 1928 in support of the Zionist movement bore the imprint of Davis's enthusiasm for Palestine as a Jewish homeland. For example, the Zionist Federation, in its annual report for 1932,

78. ZR, 21 October 1938, p.17.
attributed the doubling of the Federation's contribution to the Keren Hayesod to the influence of Davis, who had recently returned from a trip to Palestine. The following year, Davis was instrumental in arranging a loan of £10,000 from the Federation to the Jewish National Fund. At the time of the Palestine riots in 1929 Davis issued a number of strongly worded resolutions on behalf of the Federation instructing its honorary officers to urge the government to provide full compensation to the victims, to settle the question of the Wailing Wall by ensuring the right of Jewish worship there without any interference, and to dismiss any officials responsible for the riots. The culmination of Davis's Zionist work in the Federation was a revision of the Federation's bye-laws in 1934 which now stated that the declared aim of the Federation was "To further the upbuilding of Eretz Yisroel". It would be difficult to assess how far Davis's personal commitment to Zionism percolated through to the Federation's membership. A Zionist journal had no hesitation in attributing the Federation's support for Zionism to Davis's personal influence commenting that "there is to-day hardly a constituent synagogue of the Federation which is not heart and soul with the movement, and one cannot but attribute the change to the


82. Board of Federation minutes, 12 September 1929, FSA.

83. Laws and Bye-Laws of the Federation of Synagogues (Revised Rules), August 1934, typescript, FSA.
personal influence of the chairman" (namely Davis). Thus, whatever the extent of Zionist support among individual members of Federation synagogues, there can be little doubt that Davis had succeeded in transforming the Federation into a powerful pro-Zionist body.

The Jewish friendly societies, many of which were located in the East End, supported the Zionist movement in principle. However, the extent of their practical support for the movement must be called into question. The EZF Annual Report for 1919-1920 noted that while some friendly societies, such as the Grand Order of Israel, the Achei Ameth and the Sons of Jacob, supported the Zionist cause, others did not associate themselves with the movement. Some friendly societies formed their own Zionist associations with the aim of propagating Zionism among the lodges. These did not prove a success. In 1922, the Council of Representatives of the Friendly Societies which was affiliated to the EZF, decided to include the shekel (membership certificate to the Zionist Organisation) in the members' subscriptions to their friendly society. This gesture had little impact in winning the support of friendly society members. In 1935, The Zionist Review commented glumly that the friendly societies' record in Zionist

86. See, for example, ZR, April 1919, p.232; May 1919, p.15.
87. Ibid., February 1920, p.171.
activity was "not worthy of their numbers and potentialities". Apart from the Order of Ancient Maccabbeans, which was a Zionist organisation as well as a friendly society, the only society which was said to give active support to Zionism was the Sons of Jacob.90

The Labour Government's White Paper, issued in October 1930, introduced stringent restrictions on Jewish immigration and land purchase in Palestine and offered the Zionists a second opportunity to mobilise mass support in the East End. A massive protest meeting against the White Paper was held at the Pavilion Theatre and addressed by leading Zionists including Chaim Weizmann, Selig Brodetsky and Nachum Sokolov.91 Even more fortuitously for the Zionists, a parliamentary by-election was called in November 1930 for the Whitechapel and St. George's constituency. The election had been caused by the death of the Labour MP, Harry Gosling, a gentile sympathetic to Zionism. 40% of the electorate in Whitechapel were estimated to be Jewish.92 Thus, East End Zionists were given a great opportunity to register a protest against the government's Palestine policy.93 The Jewish press, which normally shunned

89. ZR, January 1935, p.167.
90. Ibid., February 1935, p.188.
91. The Jewish Guardian, 1 October 1930, p.7.
any suggestion of a Jewish vote, on this occasion urged Jews not to vote for the Labour candidate. Editorials in the Jewish Chronicle were backed up by numerous contributors to the letter pages who were unanimous in exhorting Jewish voters in Whitechapel not to vote Labour. The Liberal Party, at one time a considerable force in the Jewish East End, saw an opportunity to revive its flagging fortunes in the area. The Whitechapel Liberal Party therefore selected as its candidate Barnett Janner, a young Jewish communal activist and a prominent leader of the EZF. The Jewish Chronicle commented that "Now there is a Jewish candidate no Jewish vote need be lost". Janner's election literature emphasised that he was "the only candidate who had fought for the Jewish National Home through thick and thin". Janner was aided in his campaign by the support of the Palestine Protest Committee which was formed by the East London Young Zionist League. The Committee stated that it represented thirty organisations. One of its most ardent supporters was the East End based Jewish ex-servicemen's organisation, the Jewish Legion. The Protest

95. See, for example, JC, 31 October 1930, pp.27-28; 14 November 1930, pp.23-24.
96. Ibid., 7 November 1930, p.6.
98. Circular from A. Gordon, 7 November 1930, CZA, A241.
99. ELA, 15 November 1930, p.4; FLO, 15 November 1930, p.5; Palestine Protest Committee minutes, 12 November 1930, CZA, A241.
100. L. Sarna (secretary, Jewish Legion) to A. Gordon, 10 November 1930, CZA, A241.
Committee claimed to be non-political. However, its stated aim of opposing the Labour candidate and thus registering a protest against the government clearly contradicted this claim. The Committee positively urged Jews to vote for Janner. In return for its support, Janner paid the Committee's election expenses.

The Labour candidate at Whitechapel was James Hall. The Jewish World commented that if he were elected, his success would be taken as an indication that the Jews of Whitechapel did not seriously object to the government's White Paper. Hall did his best to assure Jewish voters that he supported the Mandate. He even wrote to Poale Zion informing them that he would be prepared to vote against official Labour Party policy, if the need arose. There is evidence to indicate that Labour Jews in the East End supported Hall, even though they were advised not to do so by the Palestine Protest Committee.

101. JC, 28 November 1930, p.16; ELA, 29 November 1930, p.8.
102. JC, 7 November 1930, p.22; 14 November 1930, p.22; ELA, 8 November 1930, p.5; 15 November 1930, p.4; ELO, 15 November 1930, p.5; Palestine Protest Committee minutes, 4 November 1930; 12 November 1930; Policy of Palestine Protest Committee, typescript, n.d., CZA, A241.
103. Palestine Protest Committee Circular, 19 November 1930, CZA, A241.
104. J. H. Sear (Janner's election agent) to A. Gordon, 2 December 1930, CZA, A241.
106. Election message from James Hall to the electors of Whitechapel, 29 November 1930, CZA, A241; JC, 21 November 1930, pp.31-32.
107. Hall to Poale Zion, 20 November 1930, AJLM, (42) 12 III/7.
and the Jewish press. For example, the *Daily Herald* commented that a large number of Hall's helpers were Jews. These included Jacob Fine of the ULTTU and the secretary of the London Jewish Bakers' Union. In addition, Hall received a sympathetic hearing at an election meeting which he addressed at the ULTTU Hall in Whitechapel. Somewhat surprisingly, in view of his fervent Zionism, Morry Davis even seconded Hall's adoption as Labour candidate.

Thus, it would appear that Labour Jews in the East End did not seem to experience a conflict of interest when they offered their wholehearted support to Hall. The same could not be said of the Labour Zionists centred around Poale Zion. The White Paper had placed Poale Zion in an unenviable position. Shlomo Kaplansky, the London based Palestinian representative of Poale Zion, wrote to the British Labour Party in the following terms: "The statement of British policy in Palestine just published is an unexpected blow to us who have taught the Jewish People to trust the British Labour Government". Nevertheless, Kaplansky, realising that Poale Zion was faced with the alternative in Whitechapel of supporting the Labour candidate or withdrawing from the Labour Party to which they were

108. *DH*, 22 November 1930, p.3.
111. *ELA*, 8 November 1930, p.5.
112. S. Kaplansky (on behalf of the London Political Committee of the Jewish Socialist Labour Confederation Poale Zion) to the Labour Party, 23 October 1930, Weizmann Archives (WA).
affiliated, advised Poale Zion to support Hall.\textsuperscript{113} As a result, Poale Zion was censured by the Jewish Chronicle while its decision was deplored by Weizmann and the Zionist Executive.\textsuperscript{114} Once Poale Zion had committed itself to support Hall, it conducted a vigorous campaign on his behalf. Handbills were distributed throughout the district and a public meeting was held in Whitechapel to put across the Poale Zion case.\textsuperscript{115} Despite its energetic efforts, Poale Zion's arguments that it was part of the international socialist movement and not part of the present Labour Government, sounded unconvincing to most Zionists.\textsuperscript{116} As a result of its untenable position as a Zionist party forced to defend an anti-Zionist government policy, Poale Zion lost what little credibility it had previously enjoyed in the East End.

Ironically, the main beneficiary of the by-election in the long-term was the Stepney Communist Party. The Communist candidate at Whitechapel was Harry Pollitt. Pollitt aimed his campaign almost exclusively at Jewish voters. His election address, for example, consisted of a blistering attack on the

\textsuperscript{113} Interview with Moshe Rosette (April 1987); minutes of the 36th meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 24 November 1930, WA.

\textsuperscript{114} JC, 21 November 1930, p.6; minutes of the 111th meeting of the Zionist Executive, 26 November 1930, WA. See also The Monthly Pioneer, December 1930, p.7.

\textsuperscript{115} On the handbills see Labour Party/Poale Zion Handbill: To the Jewish Voters of Whitechapel, CZA, A241. On the meeting see The Jewish World, 4 December 1930.

\textsuperscript{116} Rosette was given the opportunity to put across Poale Zion's case in The YZ, January 1931, p.8. However, a Zionist opponent of Poale Zion dismissed Rosette's arguments as weak. Ibid., p.9.
Balfour Declaration and on the leaders of the Zionist movement whom, he claimed, supported the Declaration for their own selfish financial interests.\textsuperscript{117} According to Pollitt, the only country which had solved the Jewish Question successfully was the Soviet Union. By the allocation of the region of Biro-Bidzhan for Jewish colonisation, Pollitt argued, the Jews as a group now had the same rights as other ethnic minorities in the USSR.\textsuperscript{118} Pollitt's sentiments on Biro-Bidzhan were shared by a number of Jewish Communists in the East End. For example, Issy Panner, who wrote under the pseudonym of Israel Rennap, claimed that the Jewish problem had ceased to exist in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{119} In the mid-1930s there was even a Jewish organisation in the East End which raised funds for Biro-Bidzhan. This was the Organisation for Jewish Colonisation in the USSR, known by its Russian acronym, ICOS.\textsuperscript{120} ICOS drew its support mainly from Communists in the Workers' Circle.

\textsuperscript{117} DW, 24 November 1930, p.2.


\textsuperscript{119} The Circle, October 1934, p.5. Rennap expanded his thoughts on Biro-Bidzhan in his book Anti-Semitism and the Jewish Question (London 1942), pp.48-54. He was also for a time in the mid-1930s secretary of Branch 10 of the Workers' Circle. For Rennap's anti-Fascist activities see below, p.275.

\textsuperscript{120} The Circle, June 1935, p.7; interview with Issy Weinberg (London, June 1987); Jacobs, Out of the Ghetto, p.187. See also the article by Rennap and Alf Holland in the DW, 7 May 1936, p.4 to mark the second anniversary of the Soviet Government's decree declaring Biro-Bidzhan an autonomous Jewish republic. Holland and Rennap were joint secretaries of ICOS.
Like James Hall, Pollitt benefited from Jewish support for his campaign. A significant number of local Jews made financial contributions to his election fund.\(^{121}\) At one of his election meetings, held in a predominantly Jewish street, Pollitt was asked if he believed in Palestine for the Jews. His reply that he believed in "the world for the workers" apparently "drew loud applause from the Jewish workers who were present".\(^{122}\) Pollitt also addressed 500 Jewish workers in Brick Lane on the Communist Party's policy on Palestine.\(^{123}\) His election agent was Abraham Spiegel, a Jewish member of the London District Party Committee. Spiegel was also secretary of the East London Jewish Workers' Council, an anti-Zionist, Communist body which was formed at the time of the Palestine riots in 1929.\(^{124}\) Pollitt's candidature was endorsed by the East London branch of NAFTA.\(^{125}\) The branch contributed £5 towards Pollitt's election expenses.\(^{126}\) Pollitt also received the support of the United Clothing Workers' Union.\(^{127}\) Even more significantly, members of the Oxford and St. George's Boys' Club pledged their support for Pollitt, thus foreshadowing the considerable support which the Communist Party was to

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121. DW, 10 November 1930, p.2; 12 November 1930, p.2.; 17 November 1930, p.2; 19 November 1930, p.2.
122. Ibid., 10 November 1930, p.2.
123. Ibid., 19 November 1930, p.2.
124. Ibid., 29 December 1930, p.1; 30 December 1930, p.1; ELA, 3 January 1931, p.5.
125. DW, 12 November 1930, p.2.
126. Ibid., 19 November 1930, p.2.
127. Ibid., 3 December 1930, p.2.
enjoy in East End Jewish youth clubs from the mid-1930s. 128

The Daily Worker, which provided extensive coverage of the election, commented that "the violent Zionist propaganda does not appear to have cut much ice amongst the working class Jews in Whitechapel. Everywhere the Communist policy on Palestine is received with acclamation". 129 Although this was probably a somewhat exaggerated view of Communist success in the Jewish areas of Whitechapel, a report of a debate between Janner and Pollitt attended by 2,000 people, in which it was stated that Janner was booed, provides confirmation that the Zionists did not enjoy unanimous support among East End Jews. 130 The result of the election further confirmed this conclusion. Although Pollitt came bottom of the poll, he received just over 2,000 votes. James Hall scraped a narrow victory for Labour. However, the Labour majority was drastically reduced from 9,180 to 1,099. 131 The high Liberal poll (Janner received 7,445 votes) must be attributed, at least in part, to the effect of the Labour Government's White Paper. In addition, Janner's undoubted personal popularity in the Jewish East End was an important factor in the high Liberal turn-out. This aspect of the Liberal campaign was noted by at least one East End

128. Ibid., 29 November 1930, p.2.


130. DW, 29 November 1930, p.2.

During the by-election campaign, Whitechapel had become a political battleground as Communists and Zionists fought for the vote of East End Jews. It was partly as a result of pressure from the Zionist lobby that the Labour majority was drastically reduced. The entry of the Communist Party into the election also played a part in this process by splitting the Labour vote. The election showed that Jews were willing to support a Zionist ticket in certain, exceptional, circumstances. However, the fortunes of the Zionist movement in the East End after 1930 indicate that little long term benefit was derived from the success of Zionist lobbying in November 1930. After the initial euphoria had died down, the inherent weaknesses in the infrastructure of East End Zionism became only too clear. The Labour Zionist movement, Poale Zion, never recovered from its shattered reputation. Despite attempts to widen its membership among working class Jews in the East End during the 1930s, Poale Zion remained largely lower middle class in social composition. This was essentially because the party's aim of building a socialist Jewish state in Palestine had little relevance to the problems faced by working class Jews in the East End during the 1930s.

After 1930, the problem of Zionism in the East End was defined largely in terms of the need to attract Jewish youth.

132. ELA, 6 December 1930, p.5.
133. Shimoni, op.cit., pp.251, 252, 259.
A brief survey of the declining fortunes of the East London
Zionist Association gives an indication of the extent of the
problem. In 1920 The Zionist Review had reported that the
Association occupied the "foremost position" in English
Zionism.\(^{134}\) It appeared to be flourishing with over 500
members.\(^{135}\) Three years later, an observer remarked that "the
centre of gravity of English Zionism lies in Whitechapel".\(^{136}\)
Yet even in these early post-war years, not all commentators
took such an optimistic view. In 1922, for example, it was
stated in The Zionist Review that there was "tremendous work to
be done in the sphere of educating the young Jewish elements to
the Zionist idea" in the East End.\(^{137}\) By 1930 the East London
Zionist Association was so concerned about the poor condition
of East End Zionism that it submitted a resolution to the EZF
Annual Conference expressing the need for the EZF to "undertake
a more intensive programme of propaganda among both the
Synagogue and the existing Organisations of Jewish youth".\(^{138}\)
However, the situation did not improve and in 1934 the
Association's membership fell to the record low figure of
75.\(^{139}\) Although membership picked up in the following year,

\(^{134}\) ZR, January 1920, p.155.
\(^{136}\) ZR, August 1923, p.43.
\(^{137}\) Ibid., February 1922, p.164.
\(^{138}\) EZF 31st Annual Report, 1930, p.73; Resolution submitted
to the EZF 30th Annual Conference, 1930, CZA, Z4/3565/iii.
\(^{139}\) ZFGB, 35th Annual Report, 1934, p.28.
the outlook for Zionism in the East End remained bleak.\textsuperscript{140} Young Zionist societies fared even worse. In 1933 the Association of Young Zionist Societies described the situation in the East End in dramatic terms as "one of the greatest problems facing Anglo-Jewry".\textsuperscript{141} The unhappy state of young Zionism was graphically illustrated when the East London Young Zionist League was forced to merge with the Young Maccabeans and Judeans in order to survive.\textsuperscript{142}

The least convincing of all the reasons cited for the difficulties in organising Zionist groups in the East End is apathy.\textsuperscript{143} Such an attitude does not explain why East End Jews involved themselves in other forms of political activity with enthusiasm and vigour. There are, in fact, a number of reasons why Zionism fared so poorly in the East End in the 1930s in comparison with the previous decade which itself had not been a golden age for East End Zionism. Firstly, those Jews who had formed the backbone of the Zionist movement in the East End were moving out of the area in increasingly large numbers by the 1930s. This trend has been commented on by contemporary


\textsuperscript{141.} ZFGB, 34th Annual Report, 1933, p.75. See also YZ, January 1933, p.11; July 1933, p.8; August 1933, p.12.

\textsuperscript{142.} YZ, March 1933, p.13.

\textsuperscript{143.} Wally Gold, for example, has cited this as Zionism's main problem in the East End (Interview April 1987). See also YZ, April 1929, p.14.
eyewitnesses as well as by the Zionist press. East End Jews were moving to middle class districts in North and North-West London and those among them who were committed Zionists continued their Zionist activities in the new Jewish districts. The loss of these upwardly mobile Jews meant that it was now clearer to see which section of East End Jewry had been the stalwarts of the Zionist movement. East End Zionism suffered an equally serious blow from the loss of 'Beth Zion' in 1935. The lack of a centre thereafter was cited as a major factor in the organisational difficulties experienced by Zionist groups in the East End. After 1935 the East London Zionist Association met in members' houses, mainly in North London. This served to highlight the extent to which East End Zionism lacked a social as well as a physical base.

The greatest challenge to Zionism in the East End in the 1930s was communism. As one contributor to The Young Zionist succinctly put it, "The tendency in the best part of our Jewish working class, that part which it is worth our while to keep within the ranks of the Jewish people, is to join the Communist

144. Interview with Moshe Rosette (April 1987); interview with Wally Gold (April 1987); ZR, August 1934, p.94; October 1935, p.120.
145. ZR, May 1935, p.52.
147. London Regional Council minutes, 16 November 1937, CZA, F13/331.
Movement". The Communist appeal having received the fillip of the Biro-Bidjan declaration goes on to captivate the youthful imaginations of the East End of London ... Against a creed which promises economic salvation on an international scale, the Zionist offer of national freedom appears a nebulous and insubstantial thing.

There was even evidence of Zionists in Stepney deserting the movement and joining the Communists. However, some Zionists have argued that the Communist Party's influence in the East End has been vastly exaggerated. They point out that the Stepney Communist Party was a small group which did not capture the East End. Although the local party was small in number its influence was widely disseminated in the Jewish areas of the East End. The Communists' hostile attitude to Zionism did little to dampen Jewish enthusiasm for the party. Indeed, Jewish Communists were among the most ardent supporters of the party's Palestine policy. As Joe Jacobs, who was secretary of the Stepney Communist Party during the years 1935 to 1936, has written "We fought Zionism as a nationalist reactionary creed, based on religious aspirations, which could only act as a means of dividing the workers and eventually doing harm to the best

148. YZ, December 1932, p.17.

149. Ibid., September 1934, p.3. For similar sentiments see Ibid., January 1933, p.3; November 1934, p.6; September 1935, p.63; Zionist Federation Executive Committee minutes, 3 September 1934, CZA, Z4/3565/ix.

150. See, for example, the letter from M. Weiser in the YZ, March 1936, p.15.

151. Interviews with Wally Gold (April 1987); Moshe Rosette (April 1987); Isaac Miller (August 1987).
interests of Jews and non-Jews alike". This Jewish Communist attitude to Zionism was sufficiently prevalent for it to find its way into a contemporary radical East End novel. In Simon Blumenfeld's *Jew Boy*, the anti-hero, a young tailor, says that "As a worker, I won't be any better off in Palestine, maybe worse. I don't see why I should change one set of exploiters for another because they happen to be Jewish." East End Jewish Communists were in the forefront of protests against the treatment of political prisoners in Palestine in 1930. These protests were led by Spiegel and the East London Jewish Workers' Council. The Communist press even directed its anti-Zionist message specifically at Jewish workers.

According to Joe Jacobs, the opposition of Jewish Communists to Zionism was facilitated by the Bundist tradition among the immigrants from Poland and Eastern Europe. As has already been shown, the Workers' Circle acted as a powerful agent in passing on this tradition. During the 1930s the connection between individual Jewish Communists in the East End and membership of the Workers' Circle became even more pronounced. In 1935, for example, the Circle decided to lift its


154. *DW*, 22 May 1930, p.3.

155. See, for example, *The Young Worker*, 7 September 1929, pp.1-2.

ban on Communist meetings at Circle House.\footnote{157} By the following April the Stepney branch of the Daily Worker League was meeting regularly at Circle House.\footnote{158} Despite the upper hand which the Communists clearly enjoyed in the Workers' Circle, the organisation did not become exclusively Communist in orientation. Two London branches, 15 and 19, remained affiliated to Poale Zion.\footnote{159} The existence of lively debate between Communists and Zionists in the Circle confirmed the survival of political plurality in the organisation.\footnote{160} The political dominance of the Communists in the Workers' Circle also needs to be qualified by the following point. Although the Circle was founded and led by people whose aims were political, the organisation's headquarters at Circle House in Alie Street, Stepney, which was opened in 1924, became a focal point for social and cultural activities in the Jewish East End.\footnote{161} The Sunday concerts held at Circle House were particularly popular. In addition, during the 1930s, the Circle ran a Yiddish Schule (school). However, this did not prove very successful and by November 1935 only thirty children were attending the school. Even The Circle questioned the value of a Yiddish school, commenting that as the children spoke English, it seemed absurd to teach them socialism in Yiddish.\footnote{162} In 1939 there were

158. DW, 21 April 1936, p.2.
159. Interview with Louis Appleton (January 1985).
160. Ibid. Also interview with Issy Weinberg (June 1987).
162. The Circle, November 1935, p.4.
complaints that most members belonged to the Workers' Circle purely for the friendly society benefits which it offered, such as cheap burials and loans. It is, therefore, necessary to draw a distinction between the politically active leadership of the Circle and the majority of the membership who, although they may have agreed with its general aims, joined primarily for the various social and other benefits which it offered.

The upsurge of sympathy for the Communist Party in the Jewish East End during the 1930s can be explained by the fact that there were a number of issues on which the party campaigned which were of specific concern to Jews. For the Communist Party, it was a happy coincidence that these issues did not cause a conflict between the interests of East End Jews and its own political interests. Through the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, the Communist Party campaigned against unemployment. The economic instability of the East End and, in particular, of the furniture and tailoring trades in which many Jews continued to be employed, meant that unemployment was one of the harsh realities of East End Jewish life. Morry Jacobs, a prominent Communist trade unionist in the East End, was involved in the Unemployed Workers' Movement at the national level. The Stepney branch was led by Jewish Communists such as Morry Silver, Alf Chernoff and Morry

163. Ibid., May 1939, p.6. This fact has been corroborated by oral testimony: interview with Harry Wayne (June 1985).

164. Interviews with Monty Goldman (April 1985); Solly Kaye (April 1986).
Goldstein. In addition, the Communist-backed East London Trade Union Committee which was set up to oppose the government's 1934 Unemployment Bill, included the ubiquitous Morry Jacobs as well as Dave Gershon of the United Clothing Workers' Union and M. Greenberg of the East End branch of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers.  

The Communist Party's militant stand against domestic fascism attracted many young Jews in the East End to the party. Equally significant in terms of attracting East End Jews, was the party's support for the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War. As the only party which advocated an interventionist policy in the war against Franco's Nationalists, the Communist Party appeared to stand alone in its determination to challenge the threat of fascism in Europe and the state sponsored anti-semitism which this implied. In contrast to the Stepney Communist Party's enthusiastic support for the Republicans, the Stepney Labour Party was, to say the least, lukewarm in its support. This was because by the mid-1930s the party had become dominated largely by an Irish Catholic faction, and the Catholic Church was fiercely anti-Republican. It was not hard to understand, therefore, why...  

166. East London Trade Union Committee, n.d., uncatalogued, pamphlet collection, CPGBL.  
167. See below, pp.261, 262-263.  
168. A number of contemporary witnesses have testified to the Catholic domination of Stepney Labour Party and its hostile attitude towards the Republicans. For example, interview with Harry Wayne (June 1985).
many Jews in the East End should support the Communist Party and view the fate of Spain as having more relevance to their own situation than the activities of a group of mainly middle class Zionists on behalf of a remote Jewish homeland in Palestine. Jewish Communists in the Workers' Circle were in the forefront of the East End campaign to raise funds for the Republicans. In May 1937 it was reported that the Circle had collected £500 in the previous nine months. The following year the Circle set up an Aid for Spain Committee and appointed itself the patron of the Jewish Naftali Botwin Company of the International Brigade. A number of East End Jews fought in Spain and some were killed. Two East End tailors, Nat Cohen and Sam Masters, were among the first to join the International Brigade.

A third issue which won the Communist Party popular support among East End Jews was its campaign against high rents and slum housing conditions. This campaign was conducted by the Stepney Tenants' Defence League (STDL), a Communist pressure group which was formed in 1937. The League had

169. The Circle, May 1937, p.6. On Jewish Communist support for the Republican cause see H. Srebrnik, 'Jewish Communist Activity in London on behalf of the Spanish Republic', Michigan Academician, XVI, 3 (Spring 1984), pp.371-381. I am grateful to Dr Srebrnik for drawing my attention to this article.

170. The Circle, August 1938, p.3.


three full-time Communist officials. Its first secretary was Michael Shapiro, an East Ender by birth, who lectured at London University and was an expert on tenants' rights. In 1938 he produced a Tenants' Guide which was a simple explanation of the highly complex Rent Acts. These rent laws, the first of which had been passed in 1915, were intended to prohibit rent increases on working class houses. In practice, however, there was widespread illegal overcharging by landlords. In the East End, for example, it was estimated that tenants of one predominantly Jewish block of flats had been overcharged by amounts ranging from 3d. to 10s. per week in rent. Stepney Communist Party and the STDL both suggested broadly similar solutions to this state of affairs. Each of them demanded immediate rent reductions, the carrying out of necessary repairs and the extension of the Rent Acts to bring all working class houses under control. The League was prepared to organise rent strikes in order to achieve these aims. By means of organising the tenants against their landlords, it was hoped to achieve a further aim, namely to unite

173. Ibid., p.48. See also Branson, op.cit., p.198.
176. ELO, 26 August 1939, p.3.
Jewish and gentile workers against fascism. A number of the slum landlords in the East End were Jewish - a fact which aroused considerable hostility among many tenants. The League hoped to show Fascist inclined tenants that their Jewish neighbours suffered equally under the slum landlords and that it mattered little whether the landlord was Jewish; it was his action as an exploiting capitalist which had to be attacked and not his Jewishness. This aspect of the rent strikes was particularly stressed by Jewish Communists.178

Rent strikes were not a new idea. They had been organised during the industrial struggles of 1889 and during the First World War.179 In the East End, the first strike organised by the STDL was in 1938 at Southern Grove Dwellings in Mile End.180 The success of this strike opened the floodgates to rent strikes in a large number of East End dwellings.181 Brady Street Mansions and Langdale Mansions, both owned by the same Jewish landlords and tenanted mainly by Jews, were the scenes of the longest and most bitter struggles.182 Rent strikes at these two blocks of flats lasted for five months in 1939. At one stage five families were evicted from Langdale Mansions, an

182. Interview with Monty Goldman (April 1985); ELA, 14 January 1939, p.1; 21 January 1939, p.1; ELO, 14 January 1939, p.1; Piratin, op.cit., p.43.
act which led to large scale disturbances outside a local police station. The landlords ultimately gave in to the tenants' demands and reduced the rents. According to Tubby Rosen, an East End Jewish Communist and one of the strike organisers, the STDL had achieved reductions amounting to £18,000. Equally important, Rosen believed that the strikes had united Jew and non-Jew and had thus led former Fascist sympathisers to abandon their anti-semitic prejudices. The Board of Deputies had taken a less optimistic view of the strikes and indeed was so concerned about the adverse publicity attracted by offending Jewish landlords that it intervened behind the scenes to bring about a settlement as quickly as possible. For example, Rabbi Brodie was dispatched by the Board to secure a settlement of the dispute at Langdale Mansions. Brodie's intervention was welcomed by Tubby Rosen. The leadership which Jewish Communists, like Rosen, had provided in the strikes, was widely praised. Messages of support for the League were received from people as diverse as J. J. Mallon, warden of Toynbee Hall, Rabbi Zeffert of the East

183. DW, 28 June 1939, p.1; ELA, 1 July 1939, p.1; ELO, 1 July 1939, p.1; 8 July 1939, p.1; Piratin, op.cit., pp.43-44.
184. ELA, 25 March 1939, p.2. See also ibid., 8 July 1939, p.1; DW, 10 July 1939, p.1; Piratin, op.cit., p.44.
185. JC, 2 June 1939, p.20. See also ibid., 22 December 1939, p.18.
186. Resumé of Cases Reported and Investigated: Rent Strikes in the East End, 8 March 1939, April-May 1939; Trade Matters and Social Questions: Cases during May-June 1939, June-July 1939, BDA, CI37/I/12.
London Synagogue and Jacob Fine of the ULTTU. Once again, the Communist Party appeared to many East End Jews as the only party which was prepared to champion their interests. For most of the Jewish housewives who had manned the barricades at Langdale Mansions, the rent strikes gave them their first experience of participating in a political action. The fact that they may not have joined the Communist Party en masse as a result of the strikes, should not diminish the impact which the strikes had on winning the party further popular support in the Jewish East End.

During the 1930s, the Communist Party increasingly tailored its appeals to a Jewish audience. This applied to the London District Committee of the party as well as to the Stepney branch. In 1933, the Daily Worker invited Jewish workers to a mass meeting to hear a statement on the situation in Germany. The following year, the London District Committee issued an appeal to the Jewish working class in Yiddish, urging them to participate in an anti-Fascist demonstration in Hyde Park. Meanwhile in the East End, the party held its outdoor meetings in predominantly Jewish streets. For example, meetings had been held in Osborne Street, Whitechapel, since 1923. By the early 1930s they were also being held at Bloom's Corner in Old Montague Street.

189. DW, 29 June 1939, p.1.
190. Ibid., 18 March 1933, p.4. See also Ibid., 27 March 1933, p.1.
191. Ibid., 6 September 1934, p.3.
192. Ibid, 6 October 1930, p.2.
These meetings attracted Jewish tenants from the buildings in Flower and Dean Street and Thrawl Street. Other popular Communist venues in the Jewish East End included Philpot Street, Stepney Green, Cannon Street Road, and Vallance Road. Jewish Communists addressed these meetings in Yiddish. The requirement that all Communists had to belong to a trade union meant that local Jewish union branches in the East End were important recruiting bases. Communist activity in the ULTTU and the East London branch of NAFTA was particularly marked. Indeed, these were the only two branches whose executives were represented at the Annual Conference of the National Minority Movement in 1926. It was in the 1930s, however, that the Communist Party openly began to direct its efforts to Jewish workers. In 1936, for example, the East London Communist Sub-District Congress decided to give more attention to the problems of Jewish workers. One of the Communist Party's greatest successes in the East End was in attracting Jewish youth to the party. The Mile End and Whitechapel and St. George's Young Communist Leagues were

193. Interview with Monty Goldman (April 1985).
194. Ibid. Also interview with Danny Silver (June 1985).
195. Interviews with Danny Silver (June 1985); Phil Piratin (June 1985).
196. Interview with Danny Silver (June 1985).
198. DW, 13 January 1936, p.8.
predominantly Jewish in composition. The social and outdoor activities offered by the Young Communist Leagues gave many East End Jews their first opportunity to break out of the ghetto environment. In 1935, Young Communist League members formed a sports and social club in the East End branch of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers. Henceforth the branch became a centre of Communist activity. Jewish Young Communist League members were also encouraged to attend Jewish youth clubs in order to conduct political activity and recruit new members. This policy of infiltration was viewed with considerable alarm by club leaders at the Oxford and St. George's Club and the Stepney Jewish Girls' Club.

Despite its success in mobilising Jewish support in the East End, the Communist Party generally fared abysmally at local elections. As one political activist at the time has noted "the Communist Party were always active but could never get a vote". According to Solly Kaye, secretary of the Hackney Communist Party from 1936 to 1940 and after the war one of the twelve Communist councillors elected in Stepney, the reason for the party's poor showing at local elections in the inter-war years was that people did not view it as an electoral

199. Interview with Danny Silver (June 1985).
200. Ibid.
202. Interviews with Danny Silver (June 1985); Phil Piratin (June 1985); Solly Kaye (April 1986); Manny Weiss (June 1985).
203. Interview with Sam Cohen (June 1985).
organisation. This view has been supported by Phil Piratin, who has pointed out that the Communist Party did not contest elections with the intention of winning, rather, elections were used as an opportunity to conduct political propaganda. The Communist Party first put up candidates at a Stepney Borough Council election in 1928. The four candidates, all Jewish, came bottom of the poll in their respective wards. In 1931, the Communist Party fielded sixteen candidates. Eight of these were Jewish and stood in the heavily Jewish populated wards of Spitalfields West, Spitalfields East and Whitechapel Middle. Again, the party came bottom of the polls; one Jewish Communist candidate in Spitalfields West received a derisory thirteen votes. At the next council elections in 1934 the five Communist candidates fared slightly better. Two Jewish Communists standing in the predominantly Jewish Mile End Old Town West ward came bottom of the poll, but they did at least manage to collect over 100 votes each. In Spitalfields East ward too, the Jewish Communist candidates fared better than in the past. Piratin has attributed these improved results to the party's activity during an attempted eviction at a block of flats in the ward. In 1937, Piratin, who had recently been

204. Interview with Solly Kaye (April 1986).
206. For the nominations see ELA, 27 October 1928, p.3. For the results see ELO, 3 November 1928, p.5.
207. ELA, 7 November 1931, p.5.
208. Ibid., 10 November 1934, p.6.
209. Interview with Phil Piratin (June 1985).
elected secretary of the Stepney branch, was the party's only candidate in the borough.\textsuperscript{210} He was elected for the Spitalfields East ward with 616 votes and thus became the first Communist councillor in London.\textsuperscript{211} Piratin attributed his success to the party's fight against fascism, its campaigns on behalf of the unemployed, and, most importantly, his own determination to win the election.\textsuperscript{212}

Zionists did make attempts to respond to the challenge of the Communist Party in the East End. Debates were organised at which representatives from each side put forward the case for their own ideology. One such debate between the Association of Young Zionist Societies and the Youth Council of the Workers' Circle was held at Circle House, described by \textit{The Young Zionist} as "the stronghold of Communist Jewry in East London".\textsuperscript{213} \textit{The Young Zionist} believed that the only thing which the debate had shown was the extent to which the Communist ideology had been accepted.\textsuperscript{214} The following year the left-wing Zionist group, the Arlozoroff Club, organised a debate on communism and Zionism at Shoreditch Town Hall at which the speakers were the Reverend Maurice Perlzweig and Willie Gallacher. Even \textit{The Zionist Review} had to concede that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{210} Piratin, \textit{Our Flag Stays Red}, pp.52-53.
\item \textsuperscript{211} \textit{ELA}, 6 November 1937, p.1; Piratin, \textit{op.cit.}, p.53.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Piratin, \textit{op.cit.}, p.55. Interview with Phil Piratin (June 1985).
\item \textsuperscript{213} \textit{YZ}, November 1934, p.3.
\item \textsuperscript{214} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{itemize}
the audience was composed mainly of Jewish Communists. A series of articles in *The Zionist Review* on "The Communist Challenge and a Zionist Reply" presented Poale Zion's response to Communist arguments. The author, J. L. Cohen, criticised Jewish Communists for ignoring the progress which was being made towards a socialist society in Palestine. He also pointed out that while Bundists and Jewish Communists recognised the rights of all other nations, they denied "the rights of their own people. They care very little about Jewish matters as such". However, the record of the Communist Party in the East End in the 1930s showed that Communists were acutely concerned with issues which affected Jews. This was, in fact, the major reason why the party appealed to so many Jews. A writer in *The Young Zionist* was nearer the mark than most other Zionists when he stated that, in order to be effective in the East End "Zionist propaganda must address itself to the problems of the Jewish worker in daily life".

This question of the relevance of Zionism to East End Jews was one which appeared with increasing frequency during the 1930s. Eventually, even the most enthusiastic Zionists were forced to conclude that traditional Zionist activities were of little relevance to the lives of Jewish East Enders and held


216. *ZR*, November 1935, p.127. See also *ibid.*, August-September 1935, pp.91-92; October 1935, pp.113-115. The articles were later issued by the Federation of Zionist Youth as a booklet, *The Communist Challenge and a Zionist Reply* (London 1936).

little attraction for East End Jewish youth. The Hebrew classes, which were an important aspect of Zionist activity in the East End, gave particular cause for concern. Classes were held at the Redman's Road Talmud Torah and at the Beth Hamedrash (House of Study) in Mulberry Street, Stepney.\[218\] The task of retaining the interest in Zionism of former pupils of these classes was not an easy one. One attempt was made by the establishment of Hebrew clubs which were set up under the auspices of the Tarbuth Association. The aim of this Association was to promote the study of the Hebrew language and literature in Britain.\[219\] However, Zionists realised that the Hebrew clubs attracted only a small number of young Jews. The setting up of the Jewish National Club in 1933 represented a further attempt to renew the allegiance of East End Jews who had left the young Zionist movement. Even a stalwart of East End Zionism like Isaac Miller had to admit to the failure of the Club.\[220\] Two years later the Federation of Zionist Youth stated that there was a real need for a new type of propaganda in the East End.\[221\] As a result, from the mid-1930s, the Federation conducted an outdoor meetings campaign in the area. Some meetings were held in Aldgate in conjunction with Vatike Habonim, the militant senior section of the Habonim youth

220. Interview with I. J. Miller (August 1987). See also ZFGB, 34th Annual Report, 1933, p.34.
221. YZ, May 1935, p.63.
Although the idea of holding open-air meetings was not new, the Federation's systematic and aggressive approach marked a departure from earlier attempts to penetrate the area. During 1937 and 1938, the Federation of Zionist Youth designated certain days as "Palestine Days" during which thousands of leaflets were distributed in the East End and open-air meetings held. The days' activities usually culminated in a mass meeting at Whitechapel Art Gallery. In 1938 the London Regional Council of the Zionist Federation took the first steps towards introducing Zionism into East End Jewish youth clubs. The East London section of the Council supplemented the work of the Federation of Zionist Youth by helping to co-ordinate the propaganda drives in the East End.


223. Open-air meetings had been held on a regular basis since the early 1930s. See, for example, ZFGB, 32nd Annual Report, 1931.

224. Wally Gold was one of the organisers and speakers at these days. Interview with Wally Gold (April 1987). See also YZ, November 1937, p.24; January 1938, p.24. For the Federation of Zionist Youth's East End campaigns in general see ibid., April 1937, p.20; ZR, December 1936, p.176; 12 May 1938, p.3; 27 October 1938, p.5; Zionist Federation Executive Committee minutes, 13 December 1937, CZA, A295/6; ZFGB, 38th Annual Report, 1937-1938, p.57; ibid., 39th Annual Report, 1938-1939, p.64.

225. London Regional Council minutes, 11 January 1938, CZA, F13/331.

The most significant of all the young Zionists' efforts to re-assert their authority in the East End and recover some of the ground which had been lost to the Communists, was their decision to take a militant stand against fascism. The new militancy of young Zionists led them to advise East End Jewish youth to reject the Board of Deputies advice to steer clear of anti-Fascist organisations. Instead, these militant Zionists reminded Jewish youth that since their natural allies were to be found "in the ranks of democratic non-Jewish youth" they should support the demands of the unemployed for higher scales of relief, the campaign for trade union rates of pay and the fight against sweat shops.227 Commenting on the Fascist results in the LCC elections of March 1937, the editor of The Young Zionist stated that it had now become a political necessity to abandon the "suicidal neutrality advocated by the Board of Deputies".228 The normally staid Young Zionist, even argued that "the parties of the Left alone are capable of leading democratic forces against Fascism and against those governmental tendencies which assist it".229 It was in this radical spirit that young Zionists urged East End Jews to support the Jewish People's Council, a body which had aroused the serious ire of the Board of Deputies.230 The Federation of Zionist Youth did, in fact, affiliate to the Jewish People's Council. This action was strongly criticised by members of the

227. YZ, December 1936, p.11.
228. Ibid., March 1937, p.4.
230. Ibid., p.9.
Zionist Federation who objected to the Council on the grounds that it was led by "communists and anti-Zionists". The culmination of The Young Zionist's support of the Jewish People's Council was the publication of an article by Jack Pearce, the Council's secretary, in which he gave a detailed statement explaining the Council's policy and its attitude towards fascism.

Despite the Communist Party's failures in the electoral sphere, it nevertheless offered a programme of action which was in harmony with the needs of East End Jews. Zionism, by contrast, was never able to escape from its image as the ideology of middle class Jews. During the 1920s, when there was a plethora of Zionist groups in the East End, Zionism was presented with the opportunity to capture a significant section of East End Jewry. However, as has been indicated, the personnel who provided the backbone of East End Zionism were moving out of the area; a process which accelerated considerably during the 1930s. This situation further encouraged working class Jews who remained in the East End to perceive Zionism as the ideology of middle class suburban Jews.

In sharp contrast to the experience of Zionist groups, the Communist party in the East End benefited from the high political profile adopted by Jewish Communists. Their prominence in the anti-fascist struggle and in the rent protest


232. YZ, September 1937, pp.9-11.
movement won them considerable popular support as well as confirming them in their role as chief defenders of the rights of East End Jews. In championing the rights of fellow Jews, Jewish Communists were expressing their own ethnic identity. It was therefore plainly false to argue, as one irate young Zionist did, that "as soon as a young Jew enters the Communist Party, he flings away from him, as some unpleasant heritage from an unjust system, all his Jewishness". In fact, the Communist Party provided East End Jews with a means of expressing their Jewish identity within the framework of a secular political culture. One contemporary witness has even suggested that East End Jewish Communists "were Jews before they were Communists". The record of Jewish Communists, especially those active in the Bundist inspired Workers' Circle, lends considerable credence to this view. As well as their support for the Botwin Battalion, Communist activists in the Circle also took a particular interest in the plight of Jewish child victims of Nazi persecution and were responsible for setting up the United Jewish Workers' Committee for the Relief of Jewish Children in Poland. In view of this activity on issues which were essentially Jewish, it would be impossible to draw a distinction between Jewish and Communist concerns in the East End. However, the point cannot be made too strongly that this ethnic radicalism was in no sense parochial. Jewish Communists were unequivocally internationalist in their outlook. Their

233. Ibid., December 1931, p.17.

234. Interview with Bessy Weinberg (June 1987).

235. The Circle, May 1937, p.2; May 1938, p.3; Workers' Circle Central Committee minutes, 9 February 1938 in ibid., p.4.
concern for the Jewish working class was therefore just one aspect of their concern for the international proletarian movement.

Ironically, Zionism, the Jewish national movement, appeared to offer little in terms of relevant policies and practical support for East End Jews. On the most important issue confronting the Jewish world in the inter-war years, namely political anti-semitism, Zionists argued that the only real solution was to be found in setting up a Jewish homeland in Palestine where Jews would be free of such hatred. However, the establishment of an independent Jewish state did not seem to be an immediate possibility. Therefore, the Zionist case contained an inherent weakness and could offer little comfort to East End Jews faced with the daily threats of Mosley's Blackshirts. In addition, most East End Jews had only very vague notions about Palestine. It was simply too remote to appeal to a community fully occupied with its own immediate economic and political struggles. Although the Zionists did try to inject some dynamism into their East End campaigns, it was too little too late. For example, as has been illustrated, some militant young Zionists recognised that a more active anti-fascist campaign was essential if the Zionists were to retain any credibility among the East End Jewish masses. However, their independent initiatives did not receive the support of senior Zionist officials. In addition, Zionists demonstrated their support for Jewish victims of Nazi persecution by house-to-house collections in the East End for the
Youth Aliyah Fund. 236 This Zionist fund had been established to help re-settle young German Jews in Palestine. The fact that the Fund's administrative centre was not based in the East End provides further evidence that Zionism itself had no strong roots in the area.

East End Jewish youth proved to be the most impervious section of the community to Zionist appeals. The two institutions which the Zionists had selected for special attention in their campaigns, the Federation of Synagogues and the Jewish friendly societies, had little attraction for the youth, while attempts at propagandising in the youth clubs proved to be futile in the face of well organised Communist opposition. Zionist recruiting in the trade unions depended, to a large extent, on Poale Zion, an organisation which itself enjoyed little support from the Jewish working class. The Communist Party, by contrast, successfully cultivated the support of East End Jews largely because Jewish Communists themselves provided political leadership on all the major contemporary issues affecting the lives of working class Jews in the East End. As a result, the party enhanced its prestige in the Jewish East End and attracted to its ranks many Jews who would not normally support a Marxist party.

236. ZR, 24 November 1938, p.4; YZ, December 1938, p.21.
Chapter Five:
Jewish Responses to Political Anti-Semitism and Fascism in the East End, 1918-1939

Many of the Jews growing up in the East End in the inter-war years were barely a generation removed from the Tsarist persecutions which had brought their parents or grandparents to England in the last quarter of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century. These young Jewish East Enders, although more confident and self-assertive than their parents' generation, were nevertheless particularly sensitive to any form of perceived hostility from the host community. This chapter examines both the practical and theoretical responses of East End Jews to the various manifestations of anti-Jewish sentiment which were expressed in the inter-war years.

The first point to stress is that Fascist anti-semitism was not a political aberration. As this chapter will show, the government, the LCC and local authorities were all, to varying degrees, implicated in anti-Jewish activities and their officials frequently harboured anti-Jewish attitudes. Anti-alien sentiment was at its height in the years immediately following the First World War. Since the majority of aliens in Britain were Jewish, anti-alien measures were bound to have their biggest impact on Jews. The very term 'alien' is closely associated with the archetypal anti-semitic stereotype of the Jew as "the foreigner within, the
quintessential, unassimilable alien". In 1902 the Jewish Chronicle despaired at the "difficulty which the popular mind has in maintaining a distinction between 'Jews' and 'aliens'". This was perhaps not very surprising since non-Jewish aliens such as, for example, the blacks and Chinese in the East End, were a tiny and discrete minority. During the inter-war years East London's Chinatown was confined to two streets in Limehouse which straddled West India Dock Road close to the dock's entrance. At its maximum size in the 1930s, Chinatown consisted of no more than 5,000 people, mainly single men who were sailors. The black community in East London was equally small and was similar in composition to the Chinese community in that it consisted primarily of single men. Like the Chinese, blacks also tended to live in the dockside areas.

Despite immigration during the inter-war years the black population remained numerically tiny. Although, as one commentator has explained, figures are hard to obtain, it has

been estimated that the total black population of Britain in 1945 was no more than 10,000.\textsuperscript{5} As well as constituting a tiny proportion of the East End immigrant population, blacks and Chinese tended not to participate in local politics. In addition, the demographic structure of the two communities was such as to preclude them from much of the discrimination with which Jews were confronted. Thus, for example, communities consisting predominantly of single men were unlikely to be affected by an LCC discriminatory policy with regard to educational scholarships. There is no doubt, however, that blacks and Chinese were the subject of white hostility but this was of a quite different nature from the sort of discriminatory legislation directed against Jews. In the case of the blacks, much of the hostility directed against them was the result of white male resentment at inter-racial sexual relations. Indeed, sexual relations between black men and white women were viewed with disgust and horror and were cited as the main explanation for the sporadic outbreaks of anti-black rioting in 1919 in the East End and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{6} The concern in this study, however, is with the systematic discrimination of Jewish aliens in the spheres of welfare benefit, education, employment and housing.

In the 1930s Mosley's strident political anti-semitism became the driving force behind his British Union of Fascists

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., p.213.

(BUF). Fascist anti-semitism presented a direct physical threat to Jews in the East End who increasingly felt abandoned by the official leadership of the community, the Board of Deputies of British Jews. East End Jewry's physical isolation from the Anglo-Jewish leadership was compounded by the enormous social and economic differences between the two sections of the community. The leadership was comprised of middle class and upper middle class Jews, while the Jewish population in the East End, particularly after 1918, was primarily working class in character. Conflicting notions concerning how best to tackle the question of communal defence led to clashes between Jewish political leaders in the East End and the Board of Deputies. The relationship between East End and West End Jews must therefore form an integral part of this study.

Hostility towards and fear of new comers was not a new phenomenon in the inter-war East End. The indigenous population was for the most part impoverished, living in overcrowded and insanitary housing conditions and often at the mercy of seasonal employment. This depressed community did not offer a friendly welcome to the massive influx of foreign Jews who entered the East End in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As employers, Jews were accused of

exploiting their workforce; as shopkeepers they were criticised for their alleged policy of seven day trading and price-cutting; as tenants they were blamed for exacerbating or causing the acute housing shortage in the East End and as landlords they were accused of charging exhorbitant rents and refusing to carry out necessary repairs. The accusation that Jews were displacing native English from housing accommodation was firmly denied by two East End estate agents interviewed by the Jewish Chronicle in 1919. One of them described as the "merest moonshine the report which had appeared in the daily Press that foreign Jews were ousting native-born Christians in the East End so that the latter were unable to find living accommodation". In their haste to blame the Jews for many of their problems, native East Enders frequently forgot that Jewish workers endured the same economic hardships and poor housing conditions as gentile workers, and that they were as much the victims of exploitation from their co-religionists as the gentiles.

Some of the strongest manifestations of hostility towards Jews emanated from the other major immigrant group in the East End, namely the Irish Catholics. The main influx of Irish had occurred in the mid-nineteenth century. The precise number who settled in London is not known since the census returns do not indicate the cumulative growth of the Irish population and religious surveys do not distinguish Irish from other

8. JC, 18 April 1919, p.6.
Catholics. However, attempts have recently been made to estimate the size of the Irish-born population in Britain. In terms of their place in the economic system, most Irish immigrants were casual labourers who worked on the docks and railways. Others eked out a living from street trading where they competed fiercely with Jewish traders. As the poorest section of the working class, the Irish were under very serious economic pressure and were consigned to the worst housing available. It was therefore perhaps inevitable that the Irish should feel threatened by the influx of Jewish immigrants in the late nineteenth century. The Jewish immigrants increasingly competed with the Irish for scarce housing resources. Furthermore, there were important political differences between the Jews and the Irish. As Paul Thompson has indicated, the Irish were the most unstable group in London politics in the late nineteenth century. This was partly because their political loyalties were divided by a number of pragmatic issues such as the Catholic schools question which drew them to Conservatism and Irish nationalism.


which drew them to the Liberal Party. However, it was also because the Irish, unlike the Jews, never developed an autonomous immigrant sub-culture and network of community organisations which could provide social cohesion and political and cultural distinctiveness. As a result, an Irish 'community' as such was not created.

Although Jews and Irish led a quite separate political existence even when they found themselves on the same side of the ideological divide, it was not until the 1930s when East End Jews were being drawn to the Communist Party in increasingly large numbers that political tensions between the two groups became really pronounced. The East End Irish were particularly alienated by the anti-religious tone of Communist party politics. At the same time Irish elements in the East End, influenced by the anti-semitic tendencies of certain sections of the Catholic press, came to support, or at least sympathise with, the aims of fascism. Irish support for Franco during the Spanish Civil War served to reinforce the widely held Jewish belief that the Irish were their natural antagonists. As has already been indicated, most East End Jews, and indeed most Jews in general, supported the Spanish Republicans whom the Irish regarded as anti-Catholic. These

13. Thompson, op.cit., p.27.
differing responses to the Spanish Civil War highlighted what were essentially religious tensions between Jews and Irish. Indeed, it would seem that although much of the hostility between the two groups was manifested in the social, economic and political spheres, the origin of the tension was religious. This conclusion is especially surprising since East End Jews were not, on the whole, religiously observant. The fact that such deep seated religious differences could still have an impact on a secular, ethnic Jewish community therefore testified to the power of the historical conflict between the Jewish religion and the Catholic Church.

The largest concentrations of Irish in the East End were in the dockland areas of Shadwell and Wapping. This was the area to the south of Cable Street and it was an unwritten rule among Jews never to wander into this territory. Although it would be difficult to assess accurately how far Jewish fears of attack were justified and how far they were the product of exaggeration and popular myth, there is oral evidence to indicate the existence of open hostility towards Jews straying into the area. For example, one former resident of Stepney has described how Jewish children playing in Shadwell Park would have stones thrown at them by gentile children.16 The same witness also testified to the existence of discrimination against Jews in some street markets. It was known that in Watney Street, for example, some of the stall holders refused

to serve Jews. Local animosity towards Jews was also apparent in Bethnal Green. For example, Moshe Rosette has related how Jews going to Victoria Park walked via Grove Road in Mile End to avoid Approach Road in Bethnal Green where they were liable to have stones thrown at them.\textsuperscript{17} Non-violent forms of popular anti-semitism were manifested in the East End press where, in the 1920s, advertisements appeared in the 'apartments to let' section which clearly stated "no Jews".\textsuperscript{18}

Antagonism between the Jews and the Irish spilled over into the council chamber. Jewish councillors and the local Jewish public drew attention to what they perceived to be anti-semitic outbursts by Irish councillors. A case in point was the controversial decision to elect Miriam Moses as mayor of Stepney in 1931. The events surrounding her election are relevant. The municipal elections of November 1931 had resulted in a hung council with the return of thirty Municipal Reform members, twenty-six Labour members and four Independent members.\textsuperscript{19} The Independents, under the leadership of Miriam Moses, held the balance of power on the council. After she narrowly defeated James Hall in the mayoral election, she was subjected to a series of extremely bitter personal attacks by some Labour members. They accused her of selling her Progressive principles and submitting her independence to the

\textsuperscript{17} Interview with Moshe Rosette (April 1987). The existence of popular anti-semitism in Bethnal Green was confirmed by Isaac Miller. Interview (August 1987).

\textsuperscript{18} See, for example, ELA, 11 February 1922, p.1.

\textsuperscript{19} ELA, 7 November 1931, p.5.
Municipal Reform party in order to be mayor. Alderman Sullivan made a particularly virulent denunciation of her and a local newspaper reported that she was escorted to the mayoral chair amid Labour cries of "Shylock". As the new mayor proceeded to welcome the two new Aldermen (Basil Henriques and Jack Somper) one of the spectators called out, "I have had enough of this. You're all a bunch of Yids". Despite these outbursts there remains considerable doubt as to how far the episode portrayed Stepney's Labour councillors in an anti-semitic light. It is important to note that among those in the forefront of the attacks on Miriam Moses were two Jewish councillors, Issy Vogler and Dan Frankel, both of whom questioned her political integrity.

More serious in their implications for Jews were the anti-alien, in practice anti-Jewish, recommendations which were put before council committees. Stepney Council had a long tradition of passing such resolutions. As early as 1900, the council passed a resolution supporting legislation to restrict the immigration of aliens. In June 1918 Stepney Council's General Purposes, Staff and Education Committee recommended that the council express to the government the opinion that all male aliens of military age should be either

20. Ibid., 14 November 1931, p.3.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid. For further criticisms of Miriam Moses by Frankel and Vogler see ibid., 30 January 1932, p.5; 27 February 1932, p.5.
23. ELA, 30 November 1901, p.8.
called up for military service, interned or repatriated. The Committee also recommended that aliens should not be permitted to open or acquire businesses which Englishmen had been compelled to relinquish during the war.\textsuperscript{24} The resolution was passed with twenty-four voting for and twenty-one against. Throughout the war and for some time after it, resentment continued to be expressed against anyone who had evaded military service, in particular foreign-born Jews.\textsuperscript{25} Resentment against Jews was further compounded by the popular belief that many Jews who stayed at home had profited from the war.\textsuperscript{26} A further reason for the post-war anti-alienism was the widespread conviction that Jews were the principal carriers of, what was termed, the "Bolshevik bacillus".\textsuperscript{27} However, many of the anti-alien sentiments expressed on Stepney Council after the war appeared to be devoid of such ideological content. For example, in February 1919 the council supported an anti-alien resolution which had been passed at a conference organised by Stoke Newington Borough Council the previous July. The resolution stated that all enemy aliens as well as

\textsuperscript{24} Stepney Borough Council minutes, Vol.XVIII, 19 June 1918.


\textsuperscript{26} Bush, \textit{op.cit.}, p.170; Holmes, \textit{op.cit.}, p.135.

\textsuperscript{27} The phrase was coined by Churchill. However, it should be seen as a reflection of Churchill's attitude to Bolshevism, which he despised, rather than as an attack on the Jews per se, for whom he frequently expressed admiration. For Churchill's sympathetic attitude to the Jews see O. K. Rabinowicz, \textit{Winston Churchill on Jewish Problems} (London 1956), pp.19-45, 84-85. For the accusation that "Jews were synonymous with Bolsheviks" see D. Cesarani, 'Anti-alienism in England after the First World War', \textit{Immigrants and Minorities}, Vol.6, No.1 (March 1987), pp.7-8.
naturalised subjects of enemy origin over the age of eighteen should be interned or repatriated. During the discussion one councillor "urged that it was high time public influence was aroused and the aliens in this country got rid of. The English people in Stepney ought to be protected, and the alien question dealt with once and for all".  

Anti-alien legislation hit East End Jews hard during the decade after the First World War. They were confronted with a network of anti-alien measures emanating from Parliament, the LCC and the borough councils. At the parliamentary level the Aliens Restriction (Amendment) Act of 1919 presented the most serious threat to large sections of the East End Jewish population. It proved to be far more radical than the wartime measures against enemy aliens, extending into peacetime the provisions of the Aliens Restriction Act of 1914 which had enabled the passing of Orders in Council for the control, supervision, detention and deportation of aliens. Under the terms of the 1919 Aliens Act the police were given unprecedented powers and many Jews who had been settled in the country for years could be detained and deported on the flimsiest of grounds by order of the Home Secretary. Internal restrictions on aliens were increased to the extent that it became an offence for aliens to cause sedition amongst the armed forces or civilian population, or to cause industrial unrest in an industry in which they had been employed for less

28. ELO, 15 February 1919, p.3.

than two years. In addition, aliens could only land at certain specified ports and had to obtain permission to enter from an immigration officer. Refusal was mandatory if the alien was unable to support himself and his dependents. Having entered the country, aliens were then required to register their particulars locally. The Act also imposed restrictions on the employment of aliens so that, for example, they were barred from appointment to the civil service. The only aspect of the Act which could offer any comfort to East End Jews was that it was not a permanent statute. It had to be renewed annually under the Expiring Laws Continuance Bill. However, in the xenophobic climate of the 1920s, in which Jews were perceived as constituting a dangerous subversive group holding internationalist political views, the renewal of the Act was little more than a formality. Interestingly, Stepney Council's Finance and Parliamentary Committee took an even more radical view than the government. The Committee urged Stepney Council to support a recommendation from the National Political League which advocated a ten year ban on immigration. The council rejected the recommendation by just six votes.

The 'Red Scare' of the mid-1920s reinforced the belief held by many Conservatives that Jewish aliens, especially those in the East End of London, could not be accorded the same political rights as the rest of the population since they


31. ELO, 10 May 1919, p.3.
remained an unassimilable group. A series of articles on 'Alien London' published in The Times towards the end of 1924 gave added weight to such accusations. According to the Jewish Chronicle the articles were "an indictment ... The main purpose of the contributions was to expose what the writer deems to be the undesirability of the aliens".\(^{32}\) Similarly, The Times complained in an editorial that many of the aliens from Eastern Europe were of "poor physique, subject to diseases of the skin and other more serious complaints, indifferent to the evils of overcrowding, commercially dishonest and untruthful, prone to gambling, easily inflamed and excited, and poorly equipped with the civic sense".\(^{33}\)

Confronted with both a hostile press and a Conservative Government committed to taking a firm stand against aliens, there was little that East End Jews themselves could do. Lacking access to the corridors of power they were obliged to rely on the efforts of the community's official representative body, the Board of Deputies. However, even the Board, with its official status and its network of contacts in the Home Office, was unable to persuade the government to lessen the severity of its aliens legislation. Before the Aliens Bill was passed, Henry Henriques, a prominent member of the Board

\(^{32}\) JC, 12 December 1924, p.13. For further JC comment on the articles see ibid., p.7; 28 November 1924, pp.7-8. For the articles see The Times, 27 November 1924, pp.13-14; 28 November 1924, pp.15-16; 2 December 1924, pp.15-16; 4 December 1924, pp.15-16; 8 December 1924, pp.15-16.

and in 1922 elected its president, suggested that the Board should attempt to have an amendment inserted stating that an alien was not to be deported unless he had the opportunity for his case to be heard by an official tribunal. The amendment was put forward in the House of Commons by Lionel de Rothschild. The failure of even this mild amendment led to complaints from the Jewish Chronicle that the Board's Law and Parliamentary Committee was not doing all that it should in defence of the aliens. East End members of the Board added their criticisms. For example, Morris Myer, who represented an East End synagogue on the Board, contended that the Board was not "too keen on defending the alien". In 1925 another East End deputy, B. S. Straus, criticised a Board deputation to the Home Secretary which, he said, should have emphasised that aliens created employment rather than unemployment.

Undoubtedly, the 1920s did see the Board on the defensive. A warning issued by the chairman of the Board's Aliens Committee to young Jews of alien parentage advised them of the danger of taking part in communist activity. The chairman of the Committee pointed out that the Home Secretary had made an order for the deportation of a foreign-born Jewish youth as a result of a charge made against him in connection with a

34. JC, 2 May 1919, p.16.
35. Ibid., 24 October 1919, p.22.
36. Ibid., 31 October 1919, p.8.
38. Ibid., 20 February 1925, p.13.
communist meeting in a public park. In the Board's defence, it must be said that it was faced with an extremely hostile government and public opinion. In such an atmosphere, Board deputations to the Home Secretary aimed at persuading him to ameliorate the effects of the Aliens Bill proved to be singularly unfruitful. The election of Labour Governments in 1924 and 1929 did little to improve the situation. This led to accusations that the real obstructionists were the permanent officials at the Home Office. In 1929 the Board's Aliens Committee saw the new Labour Home Secretary and produced a memorandum which advocated a number of sweeping reforms of the aliens legislation. Amongst the reforms advocated were a reversion to the procedure of the Aliens Act of 1905 by which the immigrant had the right of appeal against the decisions of immigration officers, the introduction of a judicial process in the case of deportations, and easier conditions for naturalisation. The Board's inability to have these changes implemented provided the necessary confirmation for those who suspected an entrenched anti-alienism among Home Office officials.

39. Ibid., 23 October 1925, p.18.

40. See, for example, ibid., 19 December 1919, pp.7, 21-22. The Board continued to send deputations to the Home Secretary after the Bill had been passed but to no avail. See, for example, ibid., 3 August 1923, p.10; 23 May 1924, p.16.

41. This was the view of Samuel Finburgh, Conservative MP for North Salford. Quoted by D. Cesarani, 'Anti-Alienism in England after the First World War', Immigrants and Minorities, p.21.

Anti-alien sentiment was also manifested in a variety of other government Bills enacted in the post-war years such as the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1922. This Act extended the period during which benefits could be drawn, as well as altering the rates of benefit and increasing the contributions, thus clearly discriminating against Jewish aliens who paid into the unemployment fund since they were excluded from certain of its benefits especially 'uncovenanted benefit'. This was benefit over and above the amount the unemployed man was entitled to from his contributions and in theory it was an advance against future contributions.\footnote{C. L. Mowat, \textit{Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940} (London 1966), p.127.} The Jewish friendly societies were particularly vocal in opposing this legislation, and a representative from the Association of Jewish Friendly Societies participated in a Board of Deputies deputation which was received at the Ministry of Labour. The deputation drew attention to the unfairness inherent in excluding aliens from the benefits given to British-born citizens, especially as employed aliens contributed to the insurance fund.\footnote{JC, 21 April 1922, p.29.} The following year a further deputation appealed to the Ministry of Labour on "behalf of Jewish aliens". One of the participants in this deputation was the Jewish trade union leader Jacob Fine.\footnote{Ibid., 20 April 1923, p.12.} His presence on the deputation was somewhat surprising since not only was he not a member of the Board but the Board usually eschewed all contact with Jewish labour leaders in the East End. The fact that the
Board was prepared to countenance Fine at all was therefore an indication of its genuine desire to ensure fair treatment for alien Jews. It was not only the Board which spoke out against the Unemployment Insurance Act. In 1923 Harry Gosling, Labour MP for Whitechapel and St. George's, made his maiden speech in the House of Commons on the unfairness of the Act. The only concession which the government would agree to was to permit uncovenanted benefit to anyone who had been resident in Britain for ten years. Previously, residence was required since the fixed date of 1911.

During the 1920s the LCC took actions which, while appearing to be superficially anti-alien, were in fact clearly anti-Jewish in their implications. LCC discrimination against both British-born and foreign-born Jews, especially in regard to education, employment and housing, served to strengthen the impression among working class Jews in the East End that they were being treated as second class citizens. In March 1920 the LCC ruled that its scholarships were to be restricted to the children of British-born subjects. The effect of this ruling was that even the British-born children of non-naturalised Jews were excluded from entering the scholarship exams. This led the Board of Deputies to complain to the LCC that it was in breach of the 1914 British Nationality Act which stated that a naturalised British subject was entitled

46. ELA, 31 March 1923, p.2.
47. JC, 23 October 1925, p.17.
48. Reported in LCC Education Committee minutes, Report of the Higher Education Sub-Committee, 28 June 1928, GLRO.
to all the rights of a natural-born British subject. However, it was only after two deputations from the Board in 1927 and 1928 that the LCC announced that in future, scholarships would be awarded to children of aliens if evidence could be shown that their parents had taken steps to obtain naturalisation. As a result of the LCC's decision, a number of Jewish candidates who previously would have been ineligible for scholarships were awarded them. The LCC's discriminatory employment policy was also instituted in 1920. A standing order in June of that year stipulated that only British-born citizens would be employed except in the case of teachers of foreign languages. In October 1928 a Board of Deputies deputation presented its views on the matter to the LCC. Shortly afterwards, the employment restrictions were removed. In 1923 the LCC decided to give preference in the letting of its accommodation to British subjects. 

49. 68th Board of Deputies Annual Report, 1919, p.41.


51. See, for example, LCC Higher Education Sub-Committee minutes, 2 May 1929; 6 June 1929; 20 June 1929, GLRO.

52. LCC General Purposes Committee minutes, 28 June 1920, GLRO; JC, 21 January 1921, p.16.

53. Board of Deputies memorandum on the deputation to the chairman of the LCC Establishment Committee, 25 October 1928, BDA, E3/94.

practice, however, applications from non-British subjects were not even considered.\textsuperscript{55} Despite protests from the Board of Deputies, it was not until 1936, two years after the election of a Labour LCC, that the Council decided to rescind its discriminatory housing regulation. Even then, the LCC stated that it did not wish to alter the general principle of giving preference to British subjects.\textsuperscript{56} Borough councils were also accused of discriminating against Jews in the letting of their property. In one notable case in 1927, which became known as the 'Lenin Flats Scandal', Bethnal Green Borough Council was accused of refusing to permit Jews to become tenants of the new flats on the Lenin estate. The issue was given national prominence by The Daily Mail who saw it as an example of a corrupt Labour council giving preference to tenants who knew Labour councillors or who were prepared to bribe their way into the flats.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55} LCC Housing Committee minutes, 18 June 1923; LCC Minutes of Proceedings, 1923, 1: Report of the Housing Committee, 28 June 1923, GLRO. See also Memorandum on LCC Housing Policy, n/d, BDA, C13/3/9; M. E. Waldman (general secretary, Achei Ameth Friendly Society) to B. A. Zaiman (secretary, Board of Deputies), 18 January 1933; Julius Jung (secretary, Federation of Synagogues) to B. A. Zaiman, 11 October 1932, BDA C13/3/9. For editorial comment in the Jewish press on discrimination practised against foreign-born Jews in the housing estates of the LCC see The Jewish World, 22 December 1932, p.2.

\textsuperscript{56} LCC Minutes of Proceedings, 1936, 1: Reports of the Housing and Public Health Committee, 22 January 1936; 5 February 1936; 19 February 1936, GLRO.

\textsuperscript{57} The Daily Mail, 25 August 1927, p.8; 26 August 1927, p.7; 27 August 1927, p.7; 9 September 1927, p.9; 10 September 1927, p.7; 19 September 1927, p.7; The Jewish Graphic, 23 September 1927, p.11. I am grateful to Dr David Cesarani for drawing my attention to the 'Lenin Flats Scandal'.
Another aspect of discrimination against Jews emanated from some of the East London county courts. If they came before the courts, Jewish East Enders could not automatically expect to receive a fair hearing. One judge who was the subject of many complaints was Judge Cluer who presided at the Whitechapel County Court and subsequently at the Shoreditch County Court. An editorial in *The Jewish Guardian* in 1922 urged that the "serious attention" of the Home Secretary should be directed to Cluer's "inveterate habit of sneering and jibing at the Jews". To take just one example, the paper reported that Cluer had said to a Jewish debtor "That is another fraud, and peculiarly characteristic of your race".58 After discussing a report of Cluer's comments which had appeared in the *Evening Standard* the Board of Deputies decided that Lord Rothschild and Henry Henriques should make known to him the Jewish community's strong disapproval of his utterances.59 Clearly, the Board's efforts had little effect since Cluer continued his attacks on the Jews throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. In 1932 *The Jewish Weekly* commented that in cases where Jews came before Cluer "the result is a foregone conclusion; the evidence of the Jew is brushed aside with a sort of sneer and a fine or imprisonment is inevitable".60 Cluer's prejudice, although the best documented, was not unique. For example, Alfred Kershaw, who as well as being


active on Stepney Council was also a JP, confirmed that he had sat with magistrates who were "not very partial to Jewish people".  

The wide range of discriminatory legislation and practices perpetuated against East End Jews in the 1920s was met by a firm response from the Board of Deputies. The Board benefited from its reputation as the official representative of the Anglo-Jewish community. Its organisational framework gave it access to local and central government departments and through its various committees, especially the Law and Parliamentary Committee and the Education Committee, the Board was able to develop important links with the LCC and with the Home Office. By meeting with officials of the LCC and influencing them in their decisions to rescind some of their discriminatory practices, the Board achieved a measure of success in its efforts to ensure equality for East End Jews. Less successful were the Board's efforts to challenge the government's hostile attitude towards Jewish aliens in the 1920s. The number of aliens deported during the years 1923 to 1926 testified to the government's determination not to be swayed by Jewish protestations, even from a body as respectable as the Board. Nevertheless, the fact that the Board was prepared to risk arousing the hostility of local and central government officials was an indication of the Board's positive

62. The numbers deported were as follows: 351 in 1923; 228 in 1924; 256 in 1925; 230 in 1926. See The Jewish Guardian, 25 November 1927, p.4.
response to a number of the most pressing problems facing East End Jewry. East End Jews themselves, with one or two notable exceptions, appear to have taken little part in campaigning against discrimination. Although the absence of protest may seem surprising there is a logical explanation. East End Jewry, unlike West End Jewry, did not possess the kind of organisational framework which would have given it access to local and central government departments.

The nature of the threat facing East End Jews in the 1930s was radically different from that which the community had faced in the 1920s. Instead of discriminatory legislation, the major threat in the 1930s consisted of a political party which had an avowedly anti-semitic policy and which condoned physical violence against Jews. Confronted with this new threat, East End Jews mobilised themselves as individuals and in groups. By contrast, the Board of Deputies appeared to assume a much more passive role than had been the case in the 1920s. The dichotomy between the Board's positive response in the 1920s and what was perceived by East End Jews to be its negative response in the 1930s is indeed striking. The major factor which determined the Board's policy of not attacking the BUF as a political party, or fascism as a political creed, was its desire to remain neutral in British party politics. This in turn was determined by a feeling of insecurity in British society which was shared by many of the Board's leaders. The small size of the Anglo-Jewish community, combined with the leadership's awareness of the fragility of the community's position in British society, does perhaps help to
explain why the Board chose to remain aloof from British party politics.

More difficult to explain is the Board's harmonious relationship in the 1930s with the Home Office and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. This marked a dramatic shift from the position in the 1920s when the Board's relationship with government authorities had been, to say the least, strained. The most likely explanation for this shift is that while during the 1920s the Board's concern to protect the interests of the Jewish community clashed with the interests of the authorities, in the 1930s both the government and the Board were equally concerned to halt the anti-Semitic campaign of the BUF. In addition, the government's concern to maintain public order dovetailed nicely with the Board's concern to prevent Jews becoming involved in Fascist disturbances. However, while the Board was cultivating a friendly dialogue with the Home Office its relationship with the East End Jewish community was becoming increasingly strained. East End Jews were angered by what they perceived to be the Board's passivity. The Board, for its part, failed to appreciate that its calls for restraint in the face of Fascist provocation gave it an uncaring image among East End Jews.

The response of the East End Jewish community to political anti-Semitism and fascism was complex. Jewish councillors, trade unionists and Communists as well as specifically Jewish defence groups each had their own distinct identity and political complexion. Thus, the defence debate
within the Jewish East End was as vigorous as the debate between East End and West End Jews. This aspect of the issue has often been largely ignored by historians who have studied the subject. There has been a tendency to reduce the debate to an argument between the Board of Deputies and the Jewish People's Council against Fascism and Anti-Semitism. The situation was, in fact, much more complex. In this revised version East End Jewry will be seen as a community united on the need to oppose the anti-semitic menace but often bitterly divided about how the menace should be tackled.

Since 1934 Stepney had been governed by the Labour group which controlled all the seats on the council. The Labour Party prided itself on a long tradition of defending oppressed and minority groups. However, the Stepney Labour Council's actions in 1936, when Fascist disturbances in the borough were at their height, were severely limited by the nature and composition of the council as well as by the law restricting the powers of local government. The ruling Labour group was a predominantly right-wing body. As Phil Piratin has argued, only a handful of the council's Labour members could be described as socialist. The majority were moderate men and women whose main concern was to ensure the maintenance of law and order in the borough in the inflamed conditions of 1936. In fact, the extent to which the council was able to contain


or prevent Fascist disturbances and counter demonstrations was limited by the Local Government Act of 1929. This set out which matters were ultra vires. Thus, the council did not have the power to ban marches, demonstrations or political meetings. This was a public order matter and, as such, came within the ambit of the Home Secretary. Nevertheless, the general problems of public order in the borough created by the BUF's activities could be discussed at sessions of the council. Indeed, the discussion of local public order problems was often the only means by which the BUF's political anti-semitism could be aired because, under the council's standing orders, only local authority matters could be raised at council meetings. In practice, the mayor was sympathetic to the fears of the local Jewish population and so it was never very difficult to introduce a Jewish perspective to council debates on public order questions.

Stepney Borough Council first discussed Fascist disturbances in detail in June 1936. Although there had been a wave of Blackshirt violence since the latter part of 1935, most of the so-called 'Jew baiting' had been confined to the neighbouring boroughs. It was only in the late spring and early summer of 1936 that the Blackshirts began to extend their activity into Stepney. The earliest recorded complaints to the police regarding 'Jew baiting' were received in November 1935 from Jewish traders in Green Street, Bethnal Green where
the local BUF headquarters was located. In the following weeks and months numerous complaints were made by Jews in Shoreditch, Hackney and Stoke Newington. Some of the complaints concerned physical assaults made by Blackshirts against individual Jews, others involved the shouting of anti-Jewish threats. There were also complaints about yellow labels bearing the words 'Perish Judah' which were affixed to Jewish homes and businesses.

By June 1936 Stepney Council was obliged to recognise the growing disorder in the borough as a result of provocation by Fascist demonstrations. During the council meeting at which the disturbances were first discussed Issy Vogler contended that Fascists had been permitted by the police "to go into market streets and hurl insults at stallholders who happen to be Jews". He said that Jewish citizens asked only for the rights which applied to other citizens: "They are entitled to police protection and must be astounded to see Fascists in street markets shouting 'Down with Jewish stallholders' and


66. Captain A. M. Hudson MP (North Hackney) to Sir John Simon, 13 February 1936, HO 144/21377/502735/39. For further complaints made to Hudson by his Jewish constituents see HO 144/2378/502735/95. See also summary of complaints to the police about 'Jew baiting' incidents, 18 June 1936, Metropolitan Police files (MEPO) 2/3042, PRO; JC, 21 February 1936, pp.10, 35; DH, 7 March 1936, p.11.


68. ELA, 27 June 1936, p.5.
'Down with the Jews'. The main consequence of the meeting was the passing of a resolution which stated that the police were not taking sufficient measures to protect the rights of Jewish citizens in the borough. The meeting also urged all East London borough councils to participate in a joint deputation to the Home Secretary. Morry Davis, who was at the time the leader of the Labour group on the council, responded to the resolution by announcing that "As a Jew and a British subject I am proud this evening that colleagues of mine on the Stepney Council have taken the initiative to call the attention of the authorities to the danger which liberty in this country is facing". However, the extent of Davis's personal involvement in anti-Fascist initiatives was limited. In July 1936 he addressed a large anti-Fascist demonstration in Victoria Park. In October of that year, after the Battle of Cable Street, he wrote a letter to the Home Secretary, Sir John Simon, in which he stated that he saw "one of England's most progressive boroughs, together with its neighbours, allowed to become the cockpit for hooligans and political racketeers". He warned that if the government did not act quickly, local residents would be forced into forming bodies of vigilantes. Apart from these two actions there is little evidence of Davis's willingness to provide leadership to East

69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. JC, 17 July 1936, p.32.
73. Ibid., 30 October 1936, p.17.
End Jews over the issue of BUF anti-Semitism. This seems quite remarkable in view of Davis's position in the East End Jewish community.

In 1937 and 1938 Davis made some highly unpopular decisions in the council chamber. At a meeting of the council in 1937 he voted, along with three other Jewish councillors, in favour of letting Limehouse Town Hall to the Fascists for a BUF meeting. Councillors Frankel and Vogler both protested vehemently at the letting of the Town Hall for such a purpose. In the event, the vote was in favour of Mosley speaking at the Town Hall. This prompted Vogler to comment that he "never believed that we should vote for the destruction of freedom". The following year Helena Roberts, the much admired mayor of the borough in 1936, tabled a motion to the effect that the council expressed its grave concern at the alleged batoning of Stepney citizens by the police at recent Fascist meetings in the borough. She also suggested that a committee of enquiry be appointed to hear evidence in order that it might be in a position to approach the Commissioner of Police. Vogler seconded the motion but Morry Davis, still leader of the council, moved that they proceed to next business. This caused considerable disturbances in the public gallery and prompted Helena Roberts to say that, "If any

75. ELA, 27 February 1937, p.1.
76. ELO, 2 July 1938, p.7; JC, 8 July 1938, p.40.
Jewish councillor votes for next business I am heartily ashamed of them".\textsuperscript{77} In the event next business was carried. Davis never offered any explanation for his unpopular decisions. This was a reflection of the contempt in which he held political debate in the borough. His authoritarian style of leadership led him to be regarded with considerable scepticism by many of the more radically inclined Jewish workers in the East End.

Like Morry Davis, Dan Frankel was on the right-wing of the Labour Party. Nevertheless, he could claim with perhaps even greater justification than Davis to represent the Jews of the East End for in 1935 he was elected the Labour MP for Mile End. Frankel also represented Mile End Centre ward on the council. Throughout 1936 Frankel's advice to the Jewish population was unequivocal: under no circumstances should Jews confront the Fascists on the streets. He believed that Jews would be best served by giving no cause for provocation. However, in the highly inflamed and tense conditions of 1936 this was not the sort of advice which many East End Jews were willing to heed. It was certainly difficult to expect Jews to ignore the weekly BUF meetings held on street corners where speakers poured out a tirade of anti-Jewish invective. Regular meetings were held at the corner of Duckett Street in Mile End. This street and the area surrounding it was well known locally as a Fascist stronghold. It was here that speakers were heard to refer to Jews as "Rats and vermin from

\textsuperscript{77}. ELO, 2 July 1938, p.7.
the gutters of Whitechapel". It was even more unrealistic to expect Jews to ignore the anti-semitic rantings of local BUF leaders such as E. G. 'Mick' Clarke and Raven Thomson when they used loudspeakers and thus had the power to project their propaganda into people's homes. The extent of the problem was illustrated when the Jewish Chronicle suggested the passing of a bye-law empowering the police, upon the complaint of local residents, to ban the use of a loudspeaker at meetings. Local Jews thus became very indignant when their parliamentary representative urged them to stay away from Fascist meetings. Addressing a meeting at a school in Stepney Frankel warned Jews to "take care that their conduct is of such a nature that they refuse to get excited and hysterical". He added that if he did all that his Jewish constituents wanted him to do - "to march into the Fascist headquarters and fight and kick up rows" - he would be turning non-Jews into Fascists. The Communist MP Willie Gallacher questioned the logic of Frankel's advice. He asked:

How is it possible to stay away from the chalking of offensive remarks on the pavements and on the walls of houses, and the sticking of placards on the doors of houses, and from these people (the Blackshirts) going into shops and intimidating the shopkeepers?

78. JC, 3 July 1936, p.16.
79. Ibid., 8 July 1938, p.10.
80. ELO, 12 September 1936, p.1.
81. ELA, 19 September 1936, p.7.
Frankel was aware of the unpopularity of his advice, saying that he had become "unpopular with members of my own race because I have asked them to be restrained and to give no cause for provocation".  

Frankel's unpopularity with his Jewish constituents stemmed not only from the belief that he was giving them the wrong sort of advice, but also that he was not adequately defending their interests in Parliament. He refrained from participating in the major parliamentary debates on Fascist disturbances in the East End. It was therefore left to local non-Jewish MPs, with the important exception of Sir Percy Harris, Liberal MP for South-West Bethnal Green, to alert the government and the country to the seriousness of the situation in Stepney and the neighbouring boroughs. The first full scale debate on the Fascist terror in East London took place in March 1936. The debate was opened by Herbert Morrison, Labour MP for South Hackney. He gave a summary of antisemitic incidents brought to his attention. He commented that the situation in the East End "contains the elements of grave political trouble unless the police and magistrates come down firmly and say it is to be stopped". In reply, Sir John Simon insisted that the police were not guilty of bias in favour of the Fascists and that "in this country we are not


prepared to tolerate any form of Jew baiting". In consultation with the Commissioner of Police, Simon decided to detail additional police for duty in the East End of London. As a solution to the problem, F. C. Watkins, Labour MP for Hackney Central, suggested the prohibition of political uniforms. This proposal was echoed by Len Silver, a Jewish Conservative in Stepney, at the Central Council of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations.

In June a number of East End MPs petitioned Sir Geoffrey Lloyd, the Under Secretary at the Home Office, about the "reign of anti-Jewish terrorism now proceeding in East London". James Hall said there was evidence of a "deliberate attempt to create racial strife by raising the anti-Jewish question in a manner calculated to provoke violence and bloodshed". Hall asked whether the Home Secretary was aware that at a recent meeting of Stepney Borough Council a resolution was passed drawing attention to the fact that the police in the district showed a partiality towards the Fascists and "as far as possible, allowed them to do exactly when they liked". Sir Percy Harris and George Lansbury, Labour MP for Bow and Bromley, provided further confirmation of the extent

89. Ibid., 19 June 1936, p.9.
of physical and verbal abuse by Fascists against Jews in East London. In July there was a more comprehensive parliamentary debate on the mounting terror in East London. Lansbury believed that in nearly every East End district east of Aldgate there was "real terror among the Jewish population". Later in July, Hall noted that "there has been a development of the intimidation; shopkeepers and stall holders have been assaulted, beards of old men have been pulled".

In November 1936 Frankel finally explained why he had scrupulously kept out of discussions with regard to fascism. He said "I was not elected a Member of this House as a Jew". However, he contended that the stage had now been reached at which "in order to properly represent the people in my constituency, I must voice the opinions which many of them hold". He said that, as a member of the LCC, he was aware that head teachers of elementary schools and evening institutes were very disturbed about recent events. Apparently, many Jews were afraid to attend classes because of the comments made in the institutes by non-Jews. Frankel's speech provoked an indignant reaction from one constituent who

91. JC, 19 June 1936, p.9.
93. Ibid., Vol.315, Col. 1706, 30 July 1936.
94. Ibid., Vol.317, Col. 162, 4 November 1936.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid., Col. 164, 4 November 1936.
wrote to the East London Advertiser protesting against Frankel's misleading statements "in which he blatantly declared that there was a large amount of 'hysteria' among the Jewish people during the tense period of September/October". The correspondent also pointed out that Frankel was in America at the height of the disturbances. His absence from his constituency during this crucial period did further harm to his standing among the Jewish East End population. Speaking at a meeting of the Mile End Labour Party in 1937, Frankel said that 1936 had not been a happy year for him in Parliament because he felt "he always wanted to go further than it was possible to go: to do more than was being done". This statement was a clear contradiction of Frankel's actions in 1936. He certainly never gave his constituents the impression that he cared about their plight. In July 1937, Frankel asked the Home Secretary whether he was aware that the BUF had held a meeting in Stepney Green "which resulted in grave disorder and a number of arrests; and whether the police gave permission for the holding of this meeting in an area where disorder was likely to arise". However, Frankel's concern could not compensate for his neglect of constituency duties during the previous year.

Helena Roberts's record, as mayor of Stepney during the Blackshirt disturbances in 1936, provided a striking contrast

97. ELA, 14 November 1936, p.2.
98. Ibid., 23 January 1937, p.3.
with Dan Frankel's role in the events. Although she had become Christian on her marriage, the Jewish Chronicle ran an article on the 'New Jewish Mayor of Stepney' when she was elected the first woman Labour mayor of the borough in 1935. However, Helena Roberts had no official involvement with the local Jewish community in either a secular or in a religious sense. Her strenuous efforts on behalf of the East End Jewish community, despite threats to her person, must therefore be seen in the context of her own political principles and humanitarianism. In an official interview with the superintendent of 'H' Division of the Metropolitan Police, Helena Roberts was given an assurance that all possible measures would be taken to ensure that the inhabitants of the borough would be fully protected against any "interference and against provocative verbal insults in particular". In the aftermath of the Battle of Cable Street she persuaded Sir Philip Game, the Commissioner of Police, to provide special police night patrols in Stepney Green, remarking that "there is a state of nervous tension" in the area. When her year as mayor came to a close a number of tributes were made to Helena Roberts's efforts during the Fascist disturbances. Issy Vogler said she had "bombarded the Government with appeals, letters, telegrams, telephone calls and

100. JC, 15 November 1935, p.12. For additional information about Helena Roberts's Jewish background I am grateful to her daughter Dr Babette Evans.
102. JC, 16 October 1936, p.30.
deputations".\textsuperscript{103} She had alerted the national press to the dangers of the situation and was instrumental in urging the Police Commissioner of the need for greater vigilance and more police protection.

Official Labour Party policy towards BUF marches and meetings was that anti-Fascists should avoid these gatherings. However, local trades councils were encouraged to hold their own anti-Fascist rallies. One particularly large anti-Fascist demonstration in July 1936 was attended by about 3,000 people who marched to Victoria Park from various meeting points in Bethnal Green and Stepney. The march was organised by the Bethnal Green, Hackney, Shoreditch and Stepney Trades Councils, Labour Parties and co-operative organisations. According to the \textit{Jewish Chronicle} many Jews participated.\textsuperscript{104} However, not all Jews involved in the organised workers' movement sought to combat fascism within the framework of the Labour Party. Many of those who searched for a more radical solution to political anti-semitism and fascism believed that the defeat of the BUF could only be achieved by a strong trade union movement and strong Communist Party.\textsuperscript{105} In line with the Popular Front policy being pursued by European Communist parties under instruction from Moscow, the Stepney Communist Party actively urged a united front against fascism. This was the thrust of the plea made by Joe Jacobs, secretary of the

\textsuperscript{103} ELA, 31 October 1936, p.5; ELO, 31 October 1936, p.7.
\textsuperscript{104} JC, 17 July 1936, p.32.
\textsuperscript{105} ELA, 18 September 1937, p.6. This view was expressed by M. Applebaum, treasurer of the ULTTU.
Stepney Communist Party, in a letter which he addressed to East End Labour parties and the three Stepney MPs.\textsuperscript{106} The offer to form a united front was rejected outright by the Stepney Labour Party. As well as all the international and national factors standing in the way of an alliance, the Communist Party's policy of direct confrontation on the streets with the Blackshirts was anathema to the Labour Party. It was this policy which later led Phil Piratin to claim:\textsuperscript{107}

> Only the Communist party stood out as the forthright opponent of fascism ... No one in East London and particularly Stepney, in those days, was unaware of this fact. A number of Labour members acknowledged this leadership of the Communist party and regretted the weakness of their own leadership.

The Communist Party's tactic of direct confrontation with the Blackshirts had the effect of attracting large numbers of Jewish youth to the party in Stepney during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{108} Stepney Communist Party's relatively low membership disguised the fact that there were many East End Jews who supported the party's stand against fascism but did not become party members. This was either because they did not feel sufficiently ideologically committed to join the party or because they were unwilling to take on the burdens which party membership entailed. Realising the potential reservoir of Jewish support for the party, Communists made specific appeals

\textsuperscript{106} ELO, 13 June 1936, p.7.
\textsuperscript{107} Piratin, \textit{Our Flag Stays Red}, p.17.
to Jews by, for example, issuing leaflets in Yiddish.\textsuperscript{109} The Communist Party also distributed English-language material in the East End which was aimed at a Jewish audience. For example, in June 1938 the party issued a leaflet which stated that it would provide "solid mass resistance to all attempts at Fascist provocation in Jewish areas such as Philpot Street, Bloom's Corner, Mount Street, Bethnal Green, etc".\textsuperscript{110}

Many of those involved in social work in Stepney at the time commented on the phenomenon of Jewish support for the Communist Party. The warden of Toynbee Hall Universities Settlement, J. J. Mallon, who was an outspoken opponent of the BUF, remarked of the Stepney Jew that "in a state of excitement he was tempted to join the one political party which would be very glad to have him - the Communist Organisation".\textsuperscript{111} He said that Mosley counted on the Jews, especially Jewish youth, joining the movement so that he could "with some plausibility associate the Jews with the Communists".\textsuperscript{112} However, many of the Jews who joined the Communist Party in the 1930s were not ideological Marxists. Basil Henriques, a leading Anglo-Jewish establishment figure and warden of the largest Jewish youth club in the East End, drew attention to this fact when he asked some of Stepney's Jewish youth why they had joined the Communist Party. Their reply was "We are

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{DW}, 6 September 1934, p.3.

\textsuperscript{110} Commissioner's Monthly Report, June 1938, MEPO 2/3043/111A.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{JC}, 8 January 1937, p.16.

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Ibid.}
not Communists, we are anti-Fascists, and what else can we do?" Henriques's wife Rose, who was warden of the Oxford and St. George's Girls' Club, was equally concerned about Jewish girls joining the Communist Party, "not because they are Communists, but because they feel that the Communists were the only people who were trying to fight the Fascists". The Jewish Chronicle agreed that there was a danger that some Jews might be drawn into affiliation with the Communist Party not because they approved Communist doctrines but "in the desperate belief" that the Communist Party was the only party which was carrying on a vigorous fight in their defence. The paper believed that this development was dangerous because it played into the hands of Fascists who would like nothing better than to point to it as evidence of the allegation that "Communism is a Jewish movement". The tendency of certain sections of Stepney's Jewish population to identify with the Communists was also a source of concern to the Board of Deputies. The issue was thoroughly debated at a meeting of the Board shortly after the Battle of Cable Street.

113. Ibid., 15 January 1937, p.17. Henriques also addressed the issue in a letter to The Times, 10 October 1936, p.8. Solly Kaye, a leading Jewish Communist in the East End, has confirmed that he joined the party solely because of fascism. (Interview April 1986).

114. Circular letter from Rose Henriques to the mothers of absentee girls of Oxford and St. George's Girls' Club, 28 October 1936, James Parkes MSS., 17/16, Southampton University Library. For a succinct explanation of the appeal of the Communist Party to Jewish youth in the East End see the memorandum prepared by the Association of Jewish Youth, 30 June 1936, HO 144/21378/502735/114.


116. Ibid.
During the meeting two East End members of the Board, Miriam Moses and Alfred Kershaw, were both at pains to emphasise that very few Jews present at the demonstration were Communists.\textsuperscript{117}

The events of 4th October 1936 which became known as the Battle of Cable Street epitomised the diversity of opinion within the Jewish community about how fascism should be tackled. Two days before the demonstration the \textit{Jewish Chronicle} issued a warning to Jews urging them to stay away from the route of the Blackshirt march.\textsuperscript{118} In addition, Neville Laski, the president of the Board of Deputies, had posters displayed in the East End warning the Jewish community against the danger of becoming implicated in disorders in connection with the march. He also circulated messages to the same effect to East End synagogues.\textsuperscript{119} By contrast, the Communist Party advertised the counter-demonstration and urged trades councils, trade unions and Labour parties to participate.\textsuperscript{120} There is no doubt that this active stance was more in tune with the sentiments of Jewish East Enders who regarded the planned BUF march through the East End as an act of extreme provocation. It should be mentioned, however, that even within the Communist Party opinion was not monolithic. A small group of Jewish Communists in Stepney centred around Joe Jacobs did not believe that the party was sincere in its

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[117.] Ibid., pp.13-14.
\item[118.] JC, 2 October 1936, p.12.
\item[119.] Ibid., 9 October 1936, p.24.
\item[120.] Piratin, \textit{op.cit.}, p.20.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
efforts to oppose fascism in the East End. As evidence of this, Jacobs later pointed out in his autobiography that the London leadership of the party put all its energy into organising a Young Communist League rally in support of the anti-Fascist cause in Spain which was also to be held on 4th October. According to Jacobs, it was only as a result of continual pressure from the Stepney branch that the leadership was eventually persuaded to cancel the Young Communist League rally in Trafalgar Square and instead rally Communists to Cable Street.¹²¹ This tension between the local branch in Stepney and the London leadership of the Communist Party should not be treated as a conflict between Jewish political interests and Communist Party interests. The 1930s was, in fact, a unique decade for Jewish Communists in the sense that there was no obvious conflict between Jewish interests and Communist interests. It needs to be emphasised that Jacobs's policies were opposed by other Jews within the Stepney Communist Party, notably the group around Phil Piratin. In his account of the events, Piratin stated that he had no doubt that the London District Committee of the party had taken the lead in initiating a plan of action to combat the Fascists.¹²²

The disagreements between Piratin and Jacobs over the Communist Party's response to the Battle of Cable Street was part of a wider schism within the Stepney Communist Party.

Jacobs was the leader of the group which favoured "street work". According to Piratin this meant "Bash the fascists wherever you see them". Jacobs's concept of "street propaganda" involved making speeches which contained detailed references to the international situation but which, according to Piratin, were irrelevant to the local situation in Stepney. Piratin's idea of "street work" was quite different. It involved making and maintaining contacts in the local community by helping people to form tenants' committees and distribute literature. It was these different approaches to tactics which led to the power struggle within the Stepney Communist Party in 1936 between the followers of Jacobs and those of Piratin. The defeat of the Jacobs group in this struggle led other Communist Party members to claim that Jacobs had an axe to grind when he later criticised the London District Committee of the party for leaving the preparations of the Cable Street demonstration to the last moment. Whether or not this was true, there is no doubt that the Communist Party played a leading role at Cable Street. It was the Communist inspired slogan "They Shall not Pass" which served as the rallying cry for the demonstrators.

The call to demonstrate was answered by a whole variety

123. Ibid., p.18.

124. Interview with Phil Piratin (June 1985).

125. Ibid. For the conflict between Jacobs and Piratin see also Branson, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, p.162; Fishman, 'A People's Journée: The Battle of Cable Street (October 4th 1936)', History from Below, pp.385-7.
of groups and individuals, not all of whom were Communists. It has been estimated that 50,000 people rallied to Gardner's Corner (a well known East End landmark and meeting place) while the Communist Party nationally had just 11,500 members. In addition, it would be inaccurate to suggest that only Jews participated. Irish dockers and ex-service-men's organisations both played a prominent role in the Battle of Cable Street. However, as far as the Anglo-Jewish establishment was concerned, numbers were irrelevant: it was the fact of Jewish participation which was so worrying. An editorial in the Jewish Chronicle, criticising the actions of those Jews who had confronted Mosley, believed their actions to have been "profoundly mistaken". In letters to the East End press Joe Jacobs defended the Communist Party and, by implication, Jewish participants at Cable Street against this sort of attack. He said that attempts were being made to class the Communist Party along with the BUF as a "gang of extremists" and "trouble makers" but "we have no private army or uniforms; we do not organise terrorist outrages, or preach race hatred. We are a section of the great British Labour Movement".


128. ELO, 17 October 1936, p.9; ELA, 24 October 1936, p.2.
The trade union movement in the East End also played an important role in mobilising Jewish workers against fascism. Like Jewish Communists, Jewish trade unionists did not treat anti-semitism as a specifically Jewish problem but as a threat to democracy in general. They continually insisted that Jewish workers could only fight fascism effectively by joining a trade union and uniting with non-Jewish workers. This was the view put forward by Morris Jacobs when he addressed an anti-Fascist demonstration in Victoria Park in July 1934:129

I want to say speaking from this platform as an uncom­promising Communist that this last year or two has shown that the Jewish worker has got to show to his non-Jewish comrades that the workman standing at the side of his bench whose opinions may be of a different shade to his own has more in common with himself. You have got to show to the non-Jewish worker that you recognise that your struggle is in harmony and exactly the same as that of the mass of the people of whatever creed or colour.

Jacobs's view was shared by the predominantly Jewish Hounds­ditch and Whitechapel Branch of the Shop Assistants' Union which, in January 1935, formed an anti-Fascist section.130

The non-Jewish secretary of the Eastern Area of the union endorsed this action:131

The salvation of the Jews rests not in their setting up purely Jewish Organisations to deal with Fascism, but in breaking down the isolation existing at present which divides them from other workers, and which tends, among other things, to promote the growth of Fascism. The trade union movement affords this medium.

To this end, various initiatives were started, mainly by

129. Police report of demonstration held at Victoria Park, 22 July 1934, HO 45/75383/532978/59A. It was also the view of the East End Communist, Israel Rennap. See DW, 16 November 1936, p.1.


131. Ibid., 18 May 1935, p.(i).
Jewish trade unionists, which aimed at bringing Jewish workers into the wider anti-Fascist movement. For example, in May 1933 the Workers' Circle invited the United Clothing Workers' Union to send delegates to a conference, the aim of which was to form a committee of Jewish and non-Jewish working class organisations to fight anti-semitism and fascism.132

In November 1934 a conference of Jewish trade unionists, also held under the auspices of the Workers' Circle, formed the Jewish Labour Council. The specific purpose of the Council was to combat fascism and anti-semitism. A Press Committee was established to refute Fascist and anti-semitic propaganda and to publish leaflets on fascism and anti-semitism. A General Information Committee was also formed to gather a panel of lecturers capable of responding to Fascist and anti-semitic propaganda.133 Aaron Rollin was the main driving force behind the Jewish Labour Council. Under his direction, the East End branch of the NUTGW put forward a resolution at the founding conference which urged "all Jewish workers to enter the recognised trade unions, and to fight along with their English comrades against capitalism and

132. S. Potashnik and B. Rosner (secretary and chairman respectively of the Workers' Circle) to the United Clothing Workers' Union, 8 May 1933, uncatalogued MSS., NUTGW Archive. For the Workers' Circle belief that trade unionism was the best defence against anti-semitism see The Circle, February 1937, p.3.

reaction". 134 In fulfilment of this policy, the Council pledged itself to give assistance to trade union recruitment campaigns amongst English workers. 135 Despite the detailed plan of action formulated at the founding conference, even Israel Rennap, the secretary of the Jewish Labour Council, later admitted that support for the Council had been very poor. Delegates failed to attend meetings regularly, organisations who had been asked to elect delegates failed to respond, and appeals for funds met with a meagre response. 136

As well as Jewish involvement in general anti-Fascist initiatives, there also existed specifically Jewish organisations which specialised in communal defence work. In the aftermath of the Cable Street disturbances the Jewish Chronicle noted with some alarm that there were at least six Jewish defence organisations in existence. 137 Some of the Jewish anti-Fascist organisations were numerically tiny and insignificant in their impact. The Jewish Council of Action was one such organisation. It emerged briefly in August 1936

134. The Circle, December 1934, p.6. See also The Provisional Committee of the Jewish Labour Conference to combat Fascism and anti-Semitism, typescript, n.d., uncatalogued, Aaron Rollin MSS. A Jewish Labour Council pamphlet, Sir Oswald Mosley and the Jews (London 1935) demonstrated the extent to which the Jewish working class were in the same economic position as the rest of the working class. The conclusion drawn from this fact was that the solution to anti-semitism lay in the close "co-operation and solidarity of all workers, irrespective of race or creed".


137. JC, 16 October 1936, p.10.
but failed to reappear.138 The Legion of Blue and White Shirts which had its headquarters in Whitehorse Lane, Mile End, appeared at about the same time.139 This organisation claimed to be non-political and non-sectarian but there is evidence to indicate that it was not an entirely genuine anti-Fascist body.140 The Legion of Democrats was similarly tainted by accusations of improper use of funds.141 In August 1937 the Police Commissioner reported that most of the small anti-Fascist organisations had ceased to function.142

More significant anti-Fascist bodies were the two ex-servicemen's organisations: the Jewish Ex-Servicemen's Legion and the Ex-Servicemen's Movement against Fascism and Anti-Semitism. Both organisations were based in Whitechapel. The Legion, which was regarded as the official representative body of Jewish ex-servicemen, had been active in the fight against Mosley since 1934.143 It found favour with the Board of Deputies since it advocated the centralisation of defence work

138. Ibid., 28 August 1936, p.16.
139. Ibid., p.15; DW, 14 December 1936, p.5.
140. JC, 28 August 1936, p.15. In his biography of Mosley, Robert Skidelsky produces evidence from the Metropolitan Police files to show that the Legion was controlled by two men, Schwartz and Bateman, who were "only concerned with monetary gain, to be obtained by exploiting more or less wealthy Jews". R. Skidelsky, Oswald Mosley (London 1976), p.403.
142. Ibid., August 1937, MEPO 2/3043/67B.
143. The Jewish Ex-Serviceman, December 1934, Vol.1, No.1, pp.1, 10, 22.
in the hands of the Board.\textsuperscript{144} The Legion's claim that its
only concern was with anti-semitism and not with fascism
further endeared it to Neville Laski.\textsuperscript{145} The Ex-Servicemen's
Movement against Fascism and Anti-Semitism was formed in the
summer of 1936 at Circle House, the headquarters of the
Workers' Circle.\textsuperscript{146} Although the movement claimed to be non-
political and non-sectarian, it was left-wing and predominant-
ly Jewish. At its formation it had 1,000 members, 700 of whom
were Jews, including the chairman and organiser.\textsuperscript{147} Reports
in the Metropolitan Police files suggest that the organisation
was "controlled by Jews, most of whom were in close contact
with the Communist Party".\textsuperscript{148} In the summer and autumn of
1936 the Ex-Servicemen's Movement held large outdoor meetings
at Duckett Street in Mile End and Mansford Street in Bethnal
Green. The Movement also organised a large anti-Fascist
demonstration in Victoria Park in which it was estimated that
10,000 people participated.\textsuperscript{149} The organisations represented
at the demonstration included the Young Communist League, the

\textsuperscript{144} L. Sarna (general honorary secretary of the Legion) to N.
Laski (president Board of Deputies), 8 September 1936,
BDA, El/11; \textit{JC}, 10 July 1936, p.18.

\textsuperscript{145} Sarna to Laski, 14 September 1936, BDA, El/11. On the
Legion's participation in the Board's anti-defamation
campaign see \textit{JC}, 23 October 1936, p.19.

\textsuperscript{146} \textit{ELO}, 1 August 1936, p.3.

\textsuperscript{147} \textit{JC}, 31 July 1936, p.25.

\textsuperscript{148} Commissioner's Monthly Report, August 1936, MEPO
2/3043/10A. See also \textit{ibid.}, October 1936, MEPO
2/3043/21B; June 1937, MEPO 2/3043/61A.

\textsuperscript{149} \textit{JC}, 4 September 1936, pp.15-16. The demonstration was
also recorded in a Home Office report entitled \textit{Instances
of disturbances in connection with political meetings or
demonstrations}, 4 December 1936, HO 144/20710/695679/74.
London Jewish Bakers' Union, the East London Hairdressers' Association, and Zionist youth groups such as Poale Zion and Habonim. A further demonstration was held after the Battle of Cable Street in which the participants included the local branch of the Communist Party and the East London branch of the furniture trade union. 150

The Ex-Servicemen's Movement offered to place its services at the disposal of the Board of Deputies to prevent overlapping of defence work. However, it was unrealistic to expect the Board to co-operate with an organisation which was in sympathy with the methods pursued by the Communist Party. Moreover, the Movement had chosen to affiliate with the East End based Jewish People's Council against Fascism and Anti-Semitism (JPC). This was the most controversial of all the Jewish defence groups and the one which provoked the most fervent denunciations from the Board of Deputies because it challenged the legitimacy of the Board in its claim to be the sole official representative of the Anglo-Jewish community. At the founding conference of the Council in July 1936, Israel Rennap contended that the "Board of Deputies, constituted as it still is, on an obsolete and often farcical basis of representation, does not represent the widest elements of the Jewish people in this country". 151 In other words, it was felt that the Board excluded sections of the community, especially working class Jews. This fact was seen by many

150. JC, 16 October 1936, p.28.
151. Ibid., 31 July 1936, p.22. See also JPC Conference Report, 15 November 1936, p.6, Parkes MSS., 17/16.
political activists in the East End as one of the Board's main shortcomings in presenting itself as Anglo-Jewry's official representative in the fight against political anti-semitism and fascism. At a conference organised by the Board's Co-ordinating Committee, which was held at the Bernhard Baron Settlement in Stepney, Jacob Fine regretted that there were no representatives of the Jewish masses on the Board. By this he meant that the Board's constitution did not provide for trade union representation. Similar complaints were made by the normally conservative Jewish friendly societies. In December 1936 The Leader, which was the journal of one of the largest Jewish friendly societies, urged the Board to give representation to the Jewish trade unions in the interest of communal unity against anti-semitism:

The Board, as at present constituted, is mainly representative of the older and more conservative Jewish institutions. There is, to-day, a large body of Jews not directly represented at the Board. The Board's constitution must be widened to include all non-political Jewish organisations that have some locus standi in the community.

The trade unions and youth associations, who form a considerable and important part of Jewry, should be brought within the ambit of the Board's activities.

The Board did contain East End members but they represented either synagogues or friendly societies. Miriam Moses, for example, who represented the New Synagogue in Stamford Hill, pointed out the dangers of the Board's

152. JC, 20 November 1936, p.19.
alienation from the Jewish working class.\footnote{JC, 24 July 1936, p.28; 23 October 1936, p.14.} Her concern that "we cannot hold the youth of East London" was borne out by Jewish participation in the Battle of Cable Street and, less spectacularly, in heckling by Jews at weekly BUF meetings despite exhortations by the Board of Deputies to stay away.\footnote{Adolph Brotman (secretary, Board of Deputies) to Morris Myer, 27 September 1935, BDA, E3/96. Brotman referred to the "undesirable practice of Jews attending Fascist meetings". See also Co-ordinating Committee minutes, 21 June 1938; 26 July 1938, BDA, C6/1/1.} The question inevitably arises as to whether the JPC was, in fact, a more representative body than the Board of Deputies. Contemporary supporters of the JPC pointed to the success of a bazaar which it held in December 1937. However, this is insufficient as an indicator of broad popular support among the East End Jewish population for the JPC.\footnote{On the bazaar see JC, 10 December 1937, p.20; 17 December 1937, p.33; 14 January 1938, p.23.}  

The JPC was formed from a conference convened by Aaron Rollin and Israel Rennap of the Jewish Labour Council.\footnote{The Workers' Circle Golden Jubilee Bulletin, p.20; ELO, 25 July 1936, p.6; DH, 27 July 1936, p.2.} Nearly 200 delegates attended, representing 86 Jewish organisations including Workers' Circle branches, trade unions, friendly societies, synagogues, Zionist bodies, youth organisations and ex-servicemen's organisations.\footnote{JC, 31 July 1936, p.22.} All seven members of the first executive committee of the JPC were Workers' Circle members. Support from Circle branches was...
crucial for the survival of the JPC. It levied its members to provide the JPC with funds and provided much of the Council's personnel.\textsuperscript{159} A number of historians have labelled the JPC a Communist front body.\textsuperscript{160} Although individual Communists, notably Jack Pearce, Julius Jacobs and Israel Rennap, were the key figures in the JPC, it cannot be stated with any degree of certainty that the Council was a Communist front organisation. There is evidence to indicate that the East London Area Committee of the Communist Party held several meetings to discuss the formation of the JPC.\textsuperscript{161} However, the Council conducted its anti-Fascist campaign independently of the Communist Party from its premises in Commercial Road, Stepney.\textsuperscript{162} The JPC organised mass meetings, distributed thousands of leaflets and produced a monthly bulletin called \textit{Vigilance}.

In common with the line taken by trade unionists and other anti-Fascists, the JPC firmly believed that the attack on the Jews was "only a prelude to the attack on the rights and liberties of all the democratic people in the country". Anti-semitism was therefore as much the concern of "the

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161. Phil Piratin was present at these meetings and has confirmed that the Communist Party decided to offer full support to the JPC. (Interview, June 1985).
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British people as a whole as of the Jews".163 A statement made by Rennap at the founding conference of the JPC indicated the line which the Council was to take in the fight against fascism. He said "we must at all costs break down the wall of Jewish isolation".164 In pursuit of this policy, the JPC co-operated with non-Jewish anti-Fascist bodies, in particular the National Council for Civil Liberties, with whom it organised a joint conference in April 1937. The speakers at the conference included the Haham Dr Moses Gaster, as well as prominent non-Jewish figures such as the Dean of St. Paul's and the secretary of the London Trades Council.165 In addition, the JPC agitated for the prohibition of political uniforms and conducted a campaign against racial incitement.166 It organised deputations to East London mayors and to the Home Office protesting against Fascist provocation.167

The Council's most spectacular achievement was to collect


165. DH, 5 April 1937, p.3; JC, 30 April 1937, p.20; ELO, 1 May 1937, p.4; Vigilance, July-August 1937, No.2, Parkes MSS., 17/16; London Trades Council, 78th Annual Report, 1937, p.19; Ronald Kidd (secretary, National Council for Civil Liberties) to Secretary of State for Home Affairs, 7 June 1937, MEPO 2/3112.

166. A JPC leaflet, Jewish People's Council against Fascism and Anti-Semitism and the Board of Deputies (London 1936), listed the Council's main activities. Uncatalogued, CPGBL. For the JPC's parliamentary bills against political uniforms and racial incitement see DH, 19 October 1936, p.2; DW, 16 October 1936, p.5; The Times, 3 November 1937, p.10; Fascist Hooliganism! JPC leaflet, n.d., uncatalogued, CPGBL.

100,000 signatures in 48 hours for a petition which was presented to the Home Secretary urging him to ban the Fascist march through Stepney on 4th October 1936. The JPC's actions during the turbulent month of October won it considerable popular appeal in the East End. For example, after the Battle of Cable Street, the Jewish Chronicle reported that local shopkeepers were very grateful to the JPC for providing them with legal aid. The JPC also conducted a vigorous campaign in the weeks leading up to the LCC elections in March 1937 in an endeavour to counteract Blackshirt canvassing. A large number of meetings were held during the election period, leaflets were printed urging Jews to vote anti-Fascist and, on polling day, members of the JPC called at the home of virtually every Jewish elector in the three districts putting up British Union candidates, reminding them of the necessity to vote. In November the JPC campaigned during the borough council elections, once more appealing to Jews to vote anti-Fascist.

168. JC, 2 October 1936, p.10. For a full discussion of the JPC's role in the anti-Fascist opposition to Cable Street see The Workers' Circle Golden Jubilee Bulletin, p.20; Jewish People's Council against Fascism and Anti-Semitism and the Board of Deputies, op.cit. See also Stop Racial Incitement in East London! JPC leaflet, n.d., uncatalogued, CPGBL.

169. JC, 16 October 1936, p.28.


All of these activities were a source of considerable concern to the Board of Deputies and did nothing to allay the Board's fears that the JPC was presenting itself as a serious rival to the Board. Neville Laski, the Board's president, was particularly critical of the JPC for sending a deputation to the Home Office. He believed that the Board's defence work had been hampered "by the setting up of self-constituted bodies of Jews who had taken upon themselves work that had been entrusted to the Co-ordinating Committee by the community". This Committee had been formed by the Board in July 1936 with the express aim of unifying the Board's defence campaign. The Board was prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to de-legitimise the JPC, even urging the Central Committee of the Workers' Circle to ignore it as "independent, sporadic and undisciplined"; something which the Workers' Circle was hardly likely to do. The Co-ordinating Committee also decided that if reports of the JPC's activities appeared in the press, the Board should issue a communique

172. JC, 20 November 1936, p.26. Laski had also expressed this view in his statement on the work of the Co-ordinating Committee. See President's Statement, September 1936 in the Board of Deputies Co-Ordinating Committee minutes, BDA, C6/1/1. See also Commissioner's Monthly Report, September 1936, MEPO 2/3043/16A. This contained a report of a public meeting organised by the Board of Deputies at Shoreditch Town Hall. During the meeting Laski attacked "Jewish mushroom organisations". The JC supported Laski's view commenting that "The very title of the JPC is misleading and mischievous". 6 November 1936, p.8.

173. The Circle, May 1937, p.3. This instruction for the Workers' Circle to ignore the JPC first appeared in a circular letter from Neville Laski dated 5 November 1936, Parkes MSS., 15/53.
denying their claim to represent the Jewish community.\textsuperscript{174} In November 1936, the secretary of the Co-ordinating Committee reported that the Board had approached the BBC urging it to give no further publicity to the Council.\textsuperscript{175}

For its part, the JPC made it clear that it believed that the Jewish community should be united in the fight against fascism and to this end advocated co-ordinating its work with the Board. However, its initial approaches to the Board were rejected.\textsuperscript{176} According to Jack Pearce, the secretary of the JPC, the major reason for this was that the Board found the JPC's attitude to fascism unacceptable. The Board believed that organised anti-semitism, propagated by the BUF, could be fought by concentrating solely on the defamation of the Jews.\textsuperscript{177} Indeed, Laski stated quite clearly that: "I am not concerned with Fascism as such, but with defamation of the Community from whatever quarter it may come".\textsuperscript{178} The Board

\textsuperscript{174} Co-ordinating Committee minutes, 29 October 1936, BDA, C6/1/1.

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 25 November 1936, BDA, C6/1/1.

\textsuperscript{176} Jewish People's Council against Fascism and Anti-Semitism and the Board of Deputies, op.cit.: An Open Letter to Every Jewish Citizen (December 1937), JPC leaflet, uncatalogued, CPGBL; Jack Pearce to London Area Council secretary, 29 March 1938 in Co-ordinating Committee minutes, BDA, C6/1/1; JPC Circular, 30 March 1938, ULTTU Archive, D/S/24/51.

\textsuperscript{177} For example, the Board produced two books; Jewish Rights and Jewish Wrongs (London 1939) by Neville Laski and The Jews of Britain (London 1939) by Sidney Salomon which aimed at refuting the charges made against the Jews.

\textsuperscript{178} Laski to Sarna, 9 September 1936, BDA, E1/11. See also Co-ordinating Committee minutes, 12 November 1936, BDA, C6/1/1.
believed that Jews themselves were largely responsible for creating anti-semitism by their own actions and behaviour. Jewish communal leaders such as Neville Laski and Hannah Cohen, president of the Jewish Board of Guardians, asserted that vulgar displays of ostentation and 'crowding' of Jews in certain professions were a major contributory cause of anti-semitism. By contrast, the JPC argued that political anti-semitism was an integral part of fascism and therefore a struggle had to be waged against the BUF.179 As Barnett Bagnari, president of the Workers' Circle and member of the JPC executive put it, the Board was prepared to fight anti-semitism but it "refused to recognise that anti-semitism and Fascism meant the same thing".180 The JPC contended that the Board's anti-defamation campaign was insufficient to defend Jewry and was the result of the Board's failure to realise that anti-semitism was central to BUF ideology.

As shown earlier, one major reason for the Board's reluctance to oppose fascism was its determination to remain neutral in British party politics. In other words, the Board wanted to avoid any action which might suggest a Jewish attitude to a political party.181 In addition, Board leaders


180. JC, 13 November 1936, p.17.

181. See, for example, Percy Cohen memorandum, Fascist Parliamentary Candidatures, 23 November 1936, Parkes MSS, 17/16.
were anxious not to antagonise the Fascist powers and pointed to Italy where, at the time, Jews were not persecuted. A further reason for the Board's reluctance to co-ordinate its defence work with the JPC was the Council's connections with left-wing bodies, particularly with the Communist Party.\(^{182}\)

Julius Jacobs's denial that the JPC had any connection with the Communist Party, and his assertion that it was not the intention of the JPC to influence only left-wing organisations, failed to convince the Board.\(^{183}\) However, the Board of Deputies was not a monolithic body. Thus, the stance taken by the leadership did not necessarily reflect the attitudes of the members. In 1938, for example, Laski referred to "some of our wild men" mentioning Barnett Janner.\(^{184}\) Even a Board member as respectable as Janner was among those who continued to call for a ban against 'community libel' in defiance of the Board's decision that no action should be taken in regard to the government's Public Order Act which became law in 1937.\(^{185}\)

In addition, Redcliffe Salaman, who was a prominent figure in the Jewish establishment, was critical of the way in which the

\(^{182}\) Laski to Dr Redcliffe Salaman, 8 December 1936, \textit{ibid.}, 15/53.

\(^{183}\) \textit{ELO}, 27 May 1939, p.9; 15 October 1938, p.7.

\(^{184}\) Laski to Sir Percy Harris, 22 June 1938, BDA, E3/247.

\(^{185}\) For the Board's decision not to take any action see Law, Parliamentary and General Purposes Committee minutes, 19 November 1936, BDA, C13/1/12. For a summary of the main provisions of the Public Order Act see Benewick, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.239-241; C. Cross, \textit{The Fascists in Britain} (London 1961), p.161; Holmes, \textit{op.cit.}, p.197; Lebzelter, \textit{op.cit.}, p.130.
JPC had been treated by the Board. 186

More acceptable to the Board of Deputies' leadership than the JPC's political campaign was the anti-defamation campaign conducted by the Association of Jewish Friendly Societies. Initially the friendly societies conducted their campaign independently of the Board. They levied their members to fund speakers classes and open-air meetings. 187 Speakers classes were organised under the guidance of Frank Renton, a prominent member of the Achei Brith and Shield of Abraham Friendly Society. 188 Local Jewish politicians such as Alfred Kershaw and Marcus Lipton spoke from friendly society platforms. The friendly societies' meetings campaign was, in many senses, bolder than the JPC's campaign since the societies held their open-air meetings in Fascist strongholds such as Duckett Street, Stepney; Victoria Park Square, Bethnal Green and Ridley Road and Amhurst Road in Dalston. 189 By contrast, the JPC held the majority of its meetings in predominantly Jewish areas such as Bloom's Corner and Philpot Street. Pearce's defence of the JPC's policy was to state that "one speech to a trade union branch, co-operative guild, or to any other democratic political organisation" was of greater value than a

186. Salaman to Laski, 2 December 1936, Parkes MSS, 15/53. Salaman held a number of positions in Jewish communal life. Most importantly he was president of the Jewish Health Organisation.

187. For the friendly societies' levy see The Leader, September 1936, p.188; November 1936, p.228.

188. Ibid., September 1936, p.189.

189. Ibid., November 1936, p.231; JC, 4 September 1936, p.18; 18 September 1936, p.18.
meeting in Victoria Park Square "with its attendant rowdyism". However, the initial success of the friendly societies' meetings in Fascist strongholds suggested that the JPC might have something to learn from its rival.

In common with the Board of Deputies the Association of Jewish Friendly Societies appealed to young Jews not to become involved in clashes with Fascists. However, the relationship between the Board and the Association was not always a harmonious one regarding defence work. In July 1936, for example, the Association criticised the Board for its passivity in the face of growing Fascist violence. The following month a commentator in *The Leader* referred to "the hesitant and over-cautious attitude" of the Board leaders. In October the Association complained of the Board's "shabby response" to requests for adequate supplies of speakers' notes. Despite friendly society criticisms of Board inactivity, the two bodies realised that an effective defence campaign required co-operation. The friendly societies thus provided the speakers for open-air meetings while the Board supplied the anti-defamation literature which was distributed

195. Memorandum giving details of the scheme of the Association of Jewish Friendly Societies for holding open-air meetings, 29 October 1936, BDA, C6/2/2.
at the meetings. The logical outcome of the increasingly close working relationship between the two organisations was the Association's decision in July 1937 to relinquish its responsibility for the defence campaign and place its services under the direct control of the Board's Co-ordinating Committee. The result of the friendly societies' agreement with the Board was the formation of the London Area Council (LAC) in August 1937. This new body operated under the auspices of the Board and included representatives from the friendly societies. A branch office of the Council was opened in Whitechapel to organise open-air meetings.

The friendly societies' initial attitude to the JPC was ambivalent. On the one hand, The Leader denounced the Council as a "rebel army" and denied that any friendly societies were affiliated to the JPC. On the other hand, friendly society representatives held a number of interviews with the JPC as early as August 1936 in an attempt to find a way whereby the JPC could co-operate with the friendly societies. However, these talks failed since the friendly societies found the JPC's political campaign against fascism unacceptable, just as the similar early attempts to achieve unity between the Board

196. Reported in The Leader, March 1938, p.58.
197. Co-ordinating Committee minutes, 1 July 1937, BDA, C6/1/1; JC, 20 August 1937, p.15. For the purpose of the London Area Council see The Leader, January 1938, p.4.
198. The Leader, December 1936, p.249.
199. Memorandum giving details of the scheme of the Association of Jewish Friendly Societies for holding open-air meetings, op.cit.
of Deputies and the JPC had failed for the same reasons.\textsuperscript{200} It was not until April 1938 that a further opportunity to discuss unity presented itself. In that month, the Management Committee of the JPC unanimously gave a mandate to its representatives urging them to work for the merging of the two organisations.\textsuperscript{201} A meeting subsequently took place between the JPC and the LAC at which agreement was reached on a number of important points, in particular that one defence organisation was desirable and that this organisation should function under the Board of Deputies.\textsuperscript{202} The LAC was satisfied that the effect of the agreement would be "the liquidation of a sometimes troublesome body and its subordination to the Board of Deputies".\textsuperscript{203} However, neither the Board nor the JPC could persuade a majority of their members to accept a unification of the two bodies which, in practice, would have entailed the liquidation of the JPC. Some Workers' Circle members feared that if the JPC merged with the Board it would lose its identity and its principles.\textsuperscript{204} Meanwhile, some members of the Board's Defence Committee, as the Co-ordinating Committee had been re-named in 1938, remained concerned about the JPC's

\textsuperscript{200} The two organisations initially met in November 1936. See \textit{The Circle}, November 1938, p.7.

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., pp.7-8. The JPC took the initiative in starting the merger talks. See J. Pearce to H. Solomons in Co-ordinating Committee minutes, 29 March 1938, BDA, C6/1/1.

\textsuperscript{202} Memorandum on joint LAC/JPC Conference, 26 April 1938, contained in Co-ordinating Committee minutes, 24 May 1938, BDA, C6/1/1.

\textsuperscript{203} Memorandum on LAC negotiations with the JPC, July 1938, contained in Co-ordinating Committee minutes, 26 July 1938, BDA, C6/1/1.

\textsuperscript{204} \textit{The Circle}, November 1938, p.5; August 1939, pp.4-5.
programme for combating anti-semitism in which they saw dangerous left-wing tendencies. These fears existed even though the Board had, by 1939, revised its attitude towards fascism. This important change in the Board's policy was due partly to the irrefutable evidence of the suffering caused to the Jews of Europe as a result of Fascist policies and partly to the increasing likelihood of war with Germany. A memorandum sent by the Board to the JPC in March 1939 indicated the extent to which the Board now felt it appropriate to attack fascism:

It is the view of the Defence Committee and of the LAC that it is perfectly possible to combine the campaign against anti-Semitism with the attack on Nazism and Fascism without necessarily yoking the Jewish Community to the chariot of those political parties who attack Fascism as such.

The Board's eventual realisation that anti-semitism was central to Fascist ideology and that it was therefore acceptable, indeed imperative, to attack fascism, meant that there was no longer any major difference between its defence campaign and that of the JPC. Despite attempts by activists on both sides to illustrate how far their respective campaigns now ran parallel, a formal union of the two bodies was never achieved. However, from the summer of 1938, when the secretary of the JPC spoke from a London Area Council platform, there did take place a regular inter-change of speakers as well as a common distribution of anti-defamation

205. Jewish Defence Committee, Minutes of Special Meeting, 30 March 1939, BDA, C6/1/1.
206. Board of Deputies memorandum to the JPC, March 1939, BDA, C6/1/1.
This co-operation prevailed until the JPC closed its office in October 1939.

The variety of actions taken by the East End Jewish population to organise their own defence against political anti-semitism and fascism is an indication of the strength of political pluralism in the community. The extent of this political pluralism may seem surprising in a homogenously working class community. However, even within the East End Jewish working class there were gradations of social status and wealth. This explains why local political leaders such as Morry Davis and Dan Frankel, who were professional politicians and wished to cultivate a moderate, 'respectable' image, had no desire to be associated with the more radical Jewish political activists in the East End. For their part, Jewish Communists, trade unionists and organisations such as the JPC, ignored the advice of right-wing Jewish Labour leaders. Prompted largely by the perceived unwillingness and inability of the Board of Deputies to act effectively in the face of Fascist attacks and by the passivity of the elected local leaders, these left-wing Jews mounted their own defence campaigns. Even the Metropolitan Police, who were sympathetic to the Board's 'responsible' anti-defamation campaign, commented that the Board's meetings were poorly attended and

207. JC, 26 August 1938, p.16; Jewish Defence Committee, Secretary's Report, October 1938, BDA, C6/1/1; The Circle, November 1938, p.8.

that very little progress was achieved. In 1939 a member of the Board's Defence Committee produced a report which was highly critical of the LAC meetings campaign. The report estimated that of the 89 different meeting places selected in 1938, in "not less than 50%, and perhaps 75%" of these places, there had been virtually no audience.

It was true that much of the Board's defence work was un-publicised and conducted in private. For example, a series of meetings was arranged with Home Office officials and with the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. However, this secrecy only served to reinforce the belief held by many East End Jews that the Board was doing little to remove the threat of fascism and political anti-semitism. As one member of the Board's Defence Committee noted in July 1938 after attending an LAC open-air meeting in the East End: "The bulk of the Jews appeared to know nothing, or very little of the Board and


210. Gellman memorandum on LAC, April 1939, BDA, C6/1/1. See also Jewish Defence Committee minutes, 24 April 1939, BDA, C6/1/1.

211. Co-ordinating Committee minutes, 15 July 1937, BDA, C6/1/1; ibid., 21 June 1938; Report on Laski's interview with Sir Russell Scott (Home Office Minister), BDA, E3/245; Report on interview with the Home Secretary concerning Fascist activities, 8 July 1936, BDA, E3/245; Report on Board of Deputies deputation to the Home Secretary, 8 July 1936, HO 144/21378/502735/114. On the Board's belief that its anti-defamation campaign should not be publicised see The Jewish Defence Committee: Retrospect and Prospect (December 1938), BDA, C6/1/1; Jewish Defence Committee minutes, 13 February 1939, BDA, C6/1/1.
still less of the anti-defamation campaign - they felt they were abandoned and left to their own devices to cope with a very serious menace".212 Such dissatisfaction with the Board was conducive to the fostering of a local autonomous political leadership in the East End. This leadership was itself divided between Labour moderates and Communist radicals. It was the radical leaders who challenged the hegemony of the Board. Thus political anti-semitism and fascism, far from uniting the Jewish community, threw into sharp relief the social, economic and ideological differences between working class Jews in the East End and middle class Jews in the West End and the suburbs.

Chapter Six:  
Sunday Trading in the East End: A Case Study in Ethnic Political Mobilisation

The Sunday trading issue encapsulates some of the major themes of this study. Most importantly, it shows how one section of the Jewish community not normally noted for its political activism mobilised as an ethnic group to protect its economic interests. At the same time, the issue also provides graphic illustration of inter and intra-ethnic conflict in the economic life of the East End. Trade rivalry between Jews and non-Jews exacerbated the already antagonistic atmosphere which prevailed in the East End in the inter-war years. In addition, there were also intra-ethnic conflicts between Jewish shopkeepers who wanted to remain open seven days each week and Jewish assistants who understandably favoured restrictions on opening hours. The fact that Jewish traders, in common with most other Jewish East Enders, were an essentially secular group, further complicated an already highly complex situation. In particular, the secularism of Jewish traders seriously hampered efforts by the Board of Deputies to secure legislative exemptions on their behalf which would permit them to trade on Sundays as compensation for supposedly not trading on the Jewish sabbath. The conflict which ensued when it became clear that most East End Jewish traders did indeed open their businesses on the Jewish sabbath provided yet a further layer of intra-ethnic antagonism.
Sunday trading had been prohibited by an Act of 1677 but Jewish traders believed they were entitled to trade on Sunday because they closed on the Jewish sabbath from sunset on Friday and all day Saturday. They were able to trade largely unhindered on Sundays since the Act had long been a dead letter, rarely enforced because of the very inadequate penalties provided. However, non-Jewish traders in the East End believed that Jewish traders were deriving an unfair advantage by trading on Sundays. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when anti-alien sentiment was at its height, non-Jewish traders claimed that their Jewish competitors observed neither the Christian nor the Jewish sabbath. They therefore did everything possible to secure a strong Sunday trading restriction law. Their efforts were unsuccessful and in the years immediately after the First World War Sunday trading was increasingly perceived as a growing national evil. Thus, during the 1920s and 1930s, various attempts were made to overhaul the archaic Sunday trading law. It was generally agreed that it would be impractical to abolish Sunday trading completely. Therefore, various Bills were introduced which aimed, as far as possible,


to restrict such trading. A 'conscience clause' was normally included in these Bills which made special regulations for orthodox Jews who closed on the Jewish sabbath but wished to open on Sunday.

Jewish traders presented the promoters of Sunday trading restriction Bills with a particularly vexatious problem; namely, should Jews be expected to conform to English law even where this conflicted with their religious beliefs, or should they be given special privileges and allowed to open on a day when most non-Jewish traders would be required to close? This question preoccupied the promoters of all Sunday trading restriction Bills and was of considerable concern to Jewish traders and their official representatives. The public stance taken by Jewish shopkeepers and street traders was that they opposed legislation to curtail Sunday trading on religious grounds. They pointed out that because Jewish religious law required them to close on their sabbath, which began at sunset on Friday and terminated at sunset on Saturday, they should be entitled to open all day Sunday as compensation for their missed sabbath trade. However, there is ample contemporary evidence to indicate that many of the East End's Jewish shopkeepers and street traders opened on both the Jewish and Christian sabbaths. This widespread practice considerably undermined Jewish arguments that Sunday trading restrictions would deprive Jewish shopkeepers of the bulk of the lucrative weekend trade. The extent to which Jewish traders were open for business on Saturdays was widely reported in the local press. In 1927, for example, one correspondent to the East
London Advertiser said that any visitor to the Mile End Waste (a Stepney market composed mainly of Jewish traders) would be shocked at the lack of Jewish sabbath observance there. In an editorial the following week the newspaper drew attention to the fact that many Jews ignored their sabbath completely. Thus, the decision of many Jewish traders to open on the sabbath was part of the general decline in religious observance among second generation Jews in the East End. This decline was commented on by Joseph Emden, a shop manager and local Jewish Conservative. He argued that as orthodox Jewry was dying out, Jewish traders could have no objection to trading on Saturdays.

The fact that many Jewish traders were not sabbath observant placed the Board of Deputies in an almost impossible position. On the one hand, it was the Board's duty to defend orthodox Jews; on the other hand it did not want to encourage anti-semitic feeling by being seen to obtain special privileges for Jewish traders simply because they were Jews. Major Gluckstein, an MP and member of the Board, summed up the Board's position when he said that the Board was interested: Only in the conscientious, orthodox Jews who desire not to trade on their Sabbath but to trade instead on the Sunday; and to make it as difficult as possible for any other person who belongs to the Jewish community to take advantage of the provisions of this Bill [the Sunday Trading Restriction Bill, 1936] for economic reasons.

3. ELA, 8 January 1927, p.6.
4. Ibid., 15 January 1927, p.3.
5. Ibid., 21 September 1935, p.7.
The Board was vigorous in its condemnation of those traders whom, it believed, created anti-Semitism by their unfair trading practices. As one Jewish observer in the East End, referring to Jews and Sunday closing put it, "Anti-Semitism is bred not because a Jew is orthodox, but because there are in every community a type that will prostitute their religion to gain a few bob off their competitors". This comment appeared particularly relevant to the situation created by a group of traders in the Houndsditch whose practice of seven day trading was a cause of considerable concern for the Board throughout 1935. Although the majority of traders in the area (about forty Jewish firms) had adopted the practice of six day trading, a small minority of traders continued to open seven days a week. Even after a conference between the seven day traders and the president of the Board, a number still refused to close for one day a week. Gentile traders were only too well aware that many Jews traded on both the Jewish and Christian sabbaths. There was, in addition, a general conviction on the part of non-Jews that English Jews should be grateful for the freedoms which they enjoyed in England and should be thankful that they did not live under a Fascist dictatorship. Furthermore, the majority of the opponents of special Sunday trading privileges for Jews believed that Jews should abide by the laws of the country in which they lived. As an editorial in the Grocers' Gazette put it: "when in a foreign country one is expected to comply with the national

7. ELA, 16 April 1938, p.6.
customs and is compelled to abide by the action of the nation's laws".9

In the main, Sunday trading was not the concern of the local borough council because any change in the trading laws was a matter for Parliament and not for the local authority. Nevertheless, one aspect of street trading was the concern of the council which, under the terms of the LCC General Powers Act of 1927, became the authority responsible for issuing trading licences. The Markets Committee of Stepney Borough Council, set up under the terms of the LCC Act, became involved in a number of disputes with Jewish street traders over such licences. An examination of one of these disputes provides an indication of the local political power wielded by street traders and the potential which existed for political mobilisation along ethnic lines. For example, in 1928 'street trading rights' became an important issue in that year's municipal elections. During a meeting held by the Stepney Street Traders' Protection Association, which was Jewish in all but name, bitter complaints were made at the way traders in Whitechapel and St. George's had been treated by the Markets Committee. It was stated that the council had refused to grant licences to the fish sellers in Wentworth Street market and that these traders would therefore be forced to trade in a small side street.10 The speakers were unanimous

9. Grocers' Gazette, 1 December 1928, p.1955. This was also the view of a Home Office factory and workshops inspector. See DH, 4 March 1930, p.4.
in their fear that the change would entail their economic ruin. Elias Saltiel, the president of the Traders' Association, said that although the Association was not political it would support any candidates at the election who promised to protect the interests of the street traders.\textsuperscript{11} The Association clearly had considerable local political influence because in Spitalfields West ward the three Peoples' Party candidates pledged their support to the street traders, while in Whitechapel Middle ward the three Labour candidates did the same. Miriam Moses and Ida Samuel in Spitalfields East also confirmed that they would be prepared to support the street traders and a Jewish Communist candidate said that he "sided whole-heartedly with the street traders".\textsuperscript{12} The dispute was finally settled in the following year when the Markets Committee recognised that the fish traders had been seriously inconvenienced and had suffered considerable loss of trade. The Committee even agreed to pay the Street Traders' Protection Association £100 to cover expenses incurred by the summonses which forty-one traders had brought against the council for refusing to grant them licences in Wentworth Street.\textsuperscript{13} As well as indicating the political strength of street traders and providing the Stepney Street Traders' Association with valuable experience in political lobbying, the episode also illustrated the latent potential of ethnic mobilisation.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. See also ELO, 27 October 1928, p.5.
\textsuperscript{12} ELO, 27 October 1928, p.5.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 6 July 1929, p.5; 7 September 1929, p.5.
Although Sunday trading questions were ultra vires for local borough councils, individual Jewish councillors in Stepney did take an interest in the problem of securing uniform Sunday closing hours for Whitechapel's Jewish traders. In July 1929, for example, a meeting of Jewish traders was held to secure better regulation for Sunday closing in Stepney. Those present included councillors Morry Davis, who was the first chairman of Stepney Council's Markets Committee, and Abraham Magen. The meeting marked the beginning of a movement to restrict Sunday opening hours in Stepney. Morry Davis confirmed that any organisation the traders formed would be largely Jewish in composition. He considered this advantageous because members could meet "in friendly and social intercourse". In 1934 Stepney Council actually attempted to restrict trading on Sundays by issuing licences to street traders permitting them to trade only until 3pm on Sundays. This move prompted the Stepney Street Traders' Protection Association to write to the Board of Deputies pointing out that licences had previously been issued until 4pm, 6pm and even as late as 8pm in some markets. The Association also stated that many of the traders closed early on Friday and did not open on Saturday. The following month the Law and Parliamentary Committee of the Board reported that information had been received indicating that the complaints of Jewish

14. Ibid., 20 July 1929, p.5; 27 July 1929, p.4; ELA, 27 July 1929, p.3.
15. ELA, 27 July 1929, p.3.
16. Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 9 January 1934, BDA, C13/1/11.
street traders in Stepney had been "satisfactorily settled".17 The minutes of the Committee did not explain exactly how the matter had been resolved but it would appear that Stepney Council had bowed to the wishes of the Jewish street traders. Thus, ethnic mobilisation had once again proved itself as an effective political weapon.

Jewish traders found it considerably more difficult to preserve their Sunday trading rights in a national context. When a Sunday trading restriction Bill was presented before Parliament, the usual procedure was for Jewish representatives of a trade or group of traders to approach the Board of Deputies with a view to the Board acting on their behalf. If the Board thought that the traders had a valid case (in practice this meant that the Board considered the traders in question to be sabbath observant and therefore eligible for their assistance) they would use their influence, either directly or indirectly through sympathetic MPs, to try and ensure that the interests of orthodox Jewish traders were safeguarded in any Sunday trading legislation. The East End baking trade provides a good example of the sort of relationship which representatives of a group of Jewish traders cultivated with the Board. In 1928 representatives of the Jewish Master Bakers' Association had an interview with members of the Board to convey their concern about the

17. Ibid., 13 February 1934, BDA, C13/l/11.
possibility of legislation to restrict Sunday trading. The Association comprised sixty Jewish master bakers in the East End. It was estimated that there were a further sixty to eighty Jewish master bakers in the area who were not members of the Association. The Association's representatives contended that all their members strictly observed the sabbath. This meant that they did not bake on Friday night. Instead they baked on Saturday night and sold their bread on Sundays. They argued that if Sunday labour was forbidden, they would be unable to bake on Sunday night. Their customers would therefore be without fresh bread for three days each week. The Board's response to the bakers' anxiety was not very reassuring since no guarantee was given that the bakers would be supported. In the event, no legislation was introduced.

In 1931 the Board received a deputation from the Jewish Master Bakers' Association stating that the London Master Bakers' Association were once more contemplating the introduction of a Bill to prohibit the baking and delivery of bread on Sundays. The Jewish Bakers asked for the Board's assistance in obtaining the necessary exemption for those Jews who did not bake or deliver bread on Saturdays. Major Isidore

19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 10 March 1931, BDA, C13/1/11.
Salmon, a member of the Board's Law and Parliamentary Committee, explained that the main aim of the London Master Bakers' Association was to prevent Jewish bakers from injuring the trade of their non-Jewish rivals by making deliveries on Sundays. In the event, the Master Bakers did not take any action, but the problem did not disappear and in 1934 the Board received another deputation from the Jewish Master Bakers' Society (formerly Association) to discuss the sale and delivery of bread on Sunday. It was now estimated that there were 200 Jewish bakers in the East End who were not members of the Society and a number of these traded seven days a week. The Board made it clear to the deputation that if any legislation to prohibit the sale and delivery of bread were introduced, they could only ask exemption for those Jews who, on religious grounds, did not bake or sell bread on Saturdays. The representatives of the Jewish Master Bakers' Society were urged to use their influence with Jewish bakers outside their organisation to stop the practice of delivering bread on Sundays to non-Jewish customers who were not part of their regular clientele.

The Board had some success in their endeavours to exert influence on the policy of the Jewish Master Bakers because in June 1934 the Society passed a resolution supporting the London Master Bakers' Protection Society in their attempts to

22. Ibid., 31 March 1931, BDA, C13/1/11.
23. Ibid., 13 March 1934, BDA, C13/1/11.
24. Ibid.
suppress seven day trading. Inevitably, their support was to be "subject to an exemption in favour of Jewish traders who close their shops on the Jewish Sabbath to whom shall be given the privilege of Sunday opening and trading".\textsuperscript{25} The Jewish Master Bakers also stated in their resolution that they disapproved of any trading on Sunday by any Jewish baker outside his normal area of trading, with anyone other than a Jewish customer. At a joint meeting of Jewish Master Bakers and the London Jewish Bakers' Union held at the Board of Deputies in October, the Master Bakers reiterated that their Society was united on the principle of a six day week.\textsuperscript{26} However, as in previous years, no attempt was made to press for legislation.

In 1936 H. J. Keen, in his presidential address at the annual conference in London of the Amalgamated Union of Operative Bakers and Confectioners, uttered "a grave warning" to Jewish bakers urging them not to jeopardise the Sunday rest-day.\textsuperscript{27} Referring to the Sunday Trading Restriction Bill introduced in that year he said it would remove a standing grievance in the baking industry regarding the effects of unrestricted Jewish competition. In response the Jewish Master Bakers' Protection Society issued a statement denying Keen's allegation that Jewish bakers worked seven days a week. "We have always pressed", their statement said, "for the

\textsuperscript{25} Resolution passed by the Jewish Master Bakers' Protection Society, 7 June 1934, BDA, B5/4/17.

\textsuperscript{26} Report of joint meeting held by Jewish Master Bakers' Protection Society and the London Jewish Bakers' Union, 9 October 1934, BDA, B5/4/17.

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{The Leader}, September 1936, p.190.
elimination of seven days trading not only by Jews but by non-Jews". An editorial in The Leader confirmed that "in spite of the disabilities the Bill inflicts on them, Jewish bakers will welcome it as a harbinger of happier relations between those engaged in the trade". No such remark could be made of the Jewish master bakers' reaction to the Bakehouses Bill of 1937. The aim of this Bill was to prevent sweating in the trade and to this end the Bill advocated the complete prohibition of night work in bakeries. The Bill was supported by the non-Jewish National Union of Operative Bakers and by the Jewish Bakers' Union. Thus, just as the Jewish master bakers appeared to have resolved their dispute with the non-Jewish master bakers, a conflict arose between the Jewish Master Bakers' Protection Society and the Jewish Bakers' Union. The Jewish Master Bakers' Protection Society asked the Board of Deputies whether it would be possible to secure an exemption for Jews to permit them to bake on Saturday night since the Bill prohibited baking from 11pm to 5am. The Jewish master bakers complained to the Board that if the prohibition of night baking was to operate according to the present terms of the Bill, they could only start baking at 5am on Sunday and

28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Report of Board of Deputies meeting with delegation from the Jewish Master Bakers' Protection Society, 9 March 1938, BDA, C13/3/1.
the bread would not be ready until midday at the earliest. This would give them no opportunity to sell their bread in the two hours that remained for the purpose. It was stated that small bakers (and the Jewish Master Bakers' Protection Society pointed out that the majority of their members were in this class) would suffer the most serious hardship. In the event, the Baking Industry (Hours of Work) Bill which was passed in July 1938 contained "special exceptions" permitting night work in certain cases. This meant that Jewish master bakers could continue to bake on Saturday night for the Sunday morning trade.

The relationship between East End hairdressers and the Board was marked by a far greater degree of mutual hostility and antagonism than had ever marked relations between Jewish bakers and the Board. The hairdressers resented any attempt by the Board to interfere in legislation affecting the hairdressing trade. The primary reason for the hairdressers' dislike of Board intervention was that, on the whole, Jewish hairdressers and barbers were not a religious group of traders. Indeed, the situation which prevailed in the East End prior to the passing of the Hairdressers' Sunday Trading Restriction Act of 1930 was for Jewish hairdressers to be open on both Saturday and Sunday. Until the Act of 1930 this was not illegal because hairdressers were not subject to the

32. Report of Board of Deputies meeting with delegation from the Jewish Master Bakers' Protection Society, 9 March 1938, op.cit.

Sunday Observance Act of 1677. The reason for their exemption from this Act can be traced to a court decision of 1900 which stated that barbers were not tradesmen within the meaning of the 1677 Act. The basis of this decision was that at the time when the Sunday Observance Act was passed a barber was also in many cases a surgeon. Therefore, he was not considered a tradesman but a member of one of the professions. Consequently, it was perfectly legal for him to open on Sundays. In addition to their Saturday and Sunday opening, there was a further reason for the poor relationship between East End Jewish hairdressers and the Board. This was the absence of a Jewish hairdressers' association. The lack of a representative Jewish hairdressers' body in the East End meant that the Board had to negotiate with a nominally non-Jewish body of hairdressers. This situation considerably complicated matters for the Board in its capacity as the official spokesman of orthodox Jewry. Undoubtedly, the East London Hairdressers' Association, which was the representative body of master hairdressers in the East End, was a Jewish association in all but name. Indeed, its chairman admitted that the membership was mainly Jewish. However, the Board pointed out that it would not interfere in the efforts of the Association to fight hairdressers' and barbers' shops Sunday trading restriction Bills, and that it had no interest in the Association because it was


a non-Jewish body. Nevertheless, the Board acknowledged that it was its duty to secure some provision for those religious Jewish barbers who wished to close their business on the sabbath.

The East London Hairdressers' Association was founded in 1916. During the inter-war years almost all its executive officers were Jewish. The long standing chairman of the Association was Charles Freeman, who occupied that position from 1921. The Association's membership underwent only minor fluctuations during the period. In 1926 it was estimated at about 200 and in 1930 it was stated to be about 230. Although it was the biggest hairdressers' association in the country, its membership was fairly small when set against the total number of hairdressing shops in the East End which was variously estimated at between 420 and 600. Membership of the predominantly Jewish Hairdressers Assistants' Union, which later became the East London Hairdressers' Branch of the Shop Assistants' Union, was even smaller in proportion to the total number of assistants in the East End. In 1926, for example, it was estimated that the

38. Ibid., 12 November 1927, p.3732.
39. For membership of the Association in 1926 see ibid., 24 April 1926, p.1378. For membership in 1930 see Ibid., 6 September 1930, p.2952.
40. Ibid., 6 September 1930, p.2952. See also 26 July 1930, p.2523.
union had a membership of 146.\textsuperscript{41} By contrast, it was suggested just four years later that there were "probably 2,000 assistants" in the East End.\textsuperscript{42} Although their interests were normally in conflict, the East London Hairdressers' Association and the Hairdressers Assistants' Union did, on occasions, co-operate. A rare example of such co-operation occurred at a joint meeting held in 1926 in connection with the employment of trade union labour and the enforcement of the 4pm Sunday closing rule. At this meeting, it was agreed that all masters who were members of the Association should be instructed about the employment of trade union labour.\textsuperscript{43} It was also agreed that, as far as infringements of the Shops Act were concerned, the LCC as the responsible authority should provide a greater number of inspectors. To achieve this aim, a joint deputation was to approach the LCC. The more usual state of affairs, however, was for Jewish masters and assistants to be in conflict. Nowhere was this more clearly shown than in the issue of Sunday trading. In contrast to the masters, the assistants consistently supported the various Sunday closing Bills.\textsuperscript{44} In February 1926, for example, the East End Hairdressers' Branch of the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers, appointed a deputation to lobby local MPs in Parliament on the Sunday Closing Bill,

\textsuperscript{41.} Ibid., 24 April 1926, p.1378.
\textsuperscript{42.} Ibid., 26 July 1930, p.2523.
\textsuperscript{43.} Ibid., 20 March 1926, p.988.
\textsuperscript{44.} Ibid., 13 February 1926, p.535.
introduced later in that year.45

The main advocate of Sunday closing for hairdressers was James Stewart, a Labour MP. He first introduced his Hairdressers' and Barbers' Shops Sunday Closing Bill in June 1926. This Bill was promoted by the Hairdressers' Trade Parliamentary Committee and provided for the compulsory closing of hairdressers' and barbers' shops on Sundays.46 It made no provision for safeguarding the rights of orthodox Jewish barbers who wished to close on Saturday.47 If the Bill was passed, therefore, orthodox Jewish barbers would be restricted to five days labour per week.48 However, as the secretary of the Association of Jewish Friendly Societies informed the Board of Deputies, Jewish barber shops in the East End were, on the whole, open all day Saturday, while on Sundays they opened until 4pm.49 The Board itself recognised that it was unlikely that the hairdressing trade would, in any event, appeal to orthodox Jews since Saturday was regarded as an important day for the trade.50 One reason not cited by the Board, why the Saturday trade was so crucial was because hairdressers and

45. Ibid., 27 February 1926, p.730.
46. Ibid., 12 June 1926, p.1769. See also House of Commons Debates, Vol.196, Col.1299, 8 June 1926.
47. Board of Deputies Annual Report, 1926, p.31.
48. Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 6 July 1926, BDA, C13/1/10.
50. Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 6 July 1926, op.cit.
barbers supplemented their income by acting as illegal bookmakers. As most horse racing took place on Saturdays, this was the most important day for the hairdressers' illegal 'trade'. Despite the economic importance of Saturday, the consensus opinion among Jewish members of the East London Hairdressers' Association, as expressed at the Association's annual meeting in 1927, was that Sunday was the most important day for the East End hairdressing trade. Indeed, one member asserted that Sunday was the busiest day of the week for Jewish hairdressers because this was the day that most Jewish weddings took place.51 Similar views were expressed at the Association's annual meeting in 1929 when the chairman appealed to Parliament not to "touch Sunday because that is the day we make money".52 The members passed a unanimous resolution at this meeting opposing Sunday closing because it would interfere with the livelihood of members of the trade.53 This resolution provided incontrovertible evidence that the Jewish hairdressers of the East End opposed Sunday closing on economic and not on religious grounds. The extent of the Association's concern for their Sunday trading rights was indicated when a deputation from the Association visited John Scurr, MP for Mile End. The deputation explained to Scurr how hard they would be hit by Sunday closing. Scurr said that he could not help them because the Bill was purely for Sunday closing and did not prevent orthodox Jewish barbers from

52. Ibid., 9 March 1929, p.846.
53. Ibid., p.847.
closing on Saturday. The deputation also visited Percy Harris, MP for Bethnal Green South-West, but he too commented that since the Association was not a body representing orthodox Jewish hairdressers he could not help them.54

The Association's chairman, Charles Freeman, believed that at least part of the blame for their predicament lay with the hairdressers themselves. He said that although it was a rule of the Association that all members should close not later than 4pm on Sunday, many remained open until 7pm or 8pm.55 Freeman confirmed that he had canvassed several shops for 4pm closing and was told that the occupants would only close at that time if it was compulsory. Several months later, Freeman had become so exasperated with the members of the Association that he declared himself in favour of the Sunday Closing Bill for the simple reason that he was "disgusted with the way the East End hairdressers had played about with Sunday closing".56 Instead of closing at 4pm, as the Association had asked, many only opened at that time. The president of the Hairdressers' Trade Parliamentary Committee confirmed that the Committee would do all it could to help the Association but he made one significant stipulation. He asked that any amendments to the Bill which were proposed should be made privately on the grounds that there were men both in and out of the trade "who had their knives into the East End

54. Ibid., p.846.
55. Ibid., 24 July 1926, p.2240.
56. Ibid., 8 January 1927, p.94.
largely on the ground of race and religion". 57 This early indication of popular anti-semitic feeling foreshadowed what was to become a serious problem in the 1930s when Sunday trading in general came under massive assault from powerful pressure groups and ultimately from Parliament.

In the event, there was no need to mount a campaign against Stewart's 1926 Bill since the Bill never went before committee as the parliamentary session of that year was disrupted by the General Strike. Stewart reintroduced his Bill the following year. 58 On this occasion, the Board of Deputies submitted an amendment which, had it been accepted, would have given the Bill an exempting Jewish sabbath clause. By the terms of the Board's amendment, Sunday closing would not apply to a Jewish barber or hairdresser who did not work between sunset on Friday and sunset on Saturday, and who employed only Jewish assistants on Sunday. 59 The amendment was rejected and the Bill too was withdrawn. Undaunted, Stewart proceeded to introduce his Bill twice in 1928. 60 This time he inserted an amendment to meet the needs of Jewish hairdressers and barbers. However, this exemption did not cover the entire Jewish sabbath since the terms of the clause stated that any

57. Ibid., 7 August 1926, p.2377.


person of the Jewish religion could trade as a hairdresser or barber on Sunday on condition that he did not open on Saturday. 61 No special provision was made for Jews who closed from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. The Home Office was unwilling to restrict the exemption to Jews who were fully sabbath observant partly because, as Sir Vivian Henderson, under-secretary to the Home Office explained, it would be extremely difficult to have shops inspection dependent on a moveable hour. More importantly, he pointed out that during the winter months, sunset was at about 4pm or 4.30pm. Therefore, if the Jewish barber was allowed to open at 4.30pm on Saturday, he would get not only the whole of the Sunday trade but the whole of the Saturday night trade as well. This was felt to be unfair to non-Jewish barbers who would be compelled to shut on Sunday. Therefore, the government decided that it would be much fairer to suggest to Jewish hairdressers that they choose Friday as the early closing day under the Shops Act of 1912. 62 The effect of this would be to enable Jews to observe the sabbath when it began early on Friday afternoon in winter, but would not enable them to open after the termination of the sabbath on Saturday. Under this Bill, therefore, both Jewish and Christian barbers would be entitled to open for five and a half days each week; the non-Jewish barbers shuttling for a half-day on some other day of the week. The Board of Deputies agreed that this proposal was

reasonable. However, the Hairdressers' Parliamentary Committee opposed any exemption for Jews, "which instead of advancing Sunday closing so far as hairdressers were concerned, would have imperilled the retention of Sunday closing in many districts".

Much to the Board's surprise, the East London Hairdressers' Association also did not want any exemption made for Jews, but for a quite different reason. The Association, in a protest made to the Board concerning the Board's support of the Bill providing Saturday was made the alternative day, stated that although 95% of their members were Jews, they did not want provision made enabling Jews to close on the sabbath. Instead, they wanted to keep open on both the Saturday and Sunday. The secretary of the Board informed the Association that the Board considered it to be its duty to obtain exemption for orthodox Jews who desired to observe the sabbath, and could not assist the Association in endeavouring to secure Saturday and Sunday opening. One Jewish member of the Association summed up the situation for the Association when he said that it was not a Jewish association and he did not see why the question should be a Jewish one. A representative of the Hairdressers' Educational Society (a

63. Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 13 February 1929, BDA, C13/1/10.


65. Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 16 April 1929, BDA, C13/1/10.

pressure group which supported Sunday closing) who was in close contact with the Association, replied that for the purpose of legislation it was a Jewish question:67

The LCC in their regulations had considered them in the light of being a Jewish question and the Jewish MPs put down an amendment which was obviously a Jewish one ... If they [the East London Hairdressers' Association] looked through the history of parliamentary laws they would find that contracting out of an Act was usually on conscientious or religious grounds.

"If you say it is not a Jewish question", added the Hairdressers' Educational Society representative, "and only a hairdressers' question, then you would stand no chance with the rest of the country".68 The Society advised the East London Hairdressers' Association to support a proposed amendment which would exempt all hairdressers in the boroughs of Stepney and Bethnal Green from total closing on Sunday, and which would provide for the closing of such shops from 2pm on Sunday until the following Tuesday morning.69 In this way, it was hoped that anti-semitic feeling could be avoided. Contrary to Freeman's advice, the Association refused to support the Bill which in any case was eventually dropped.70

Stewart presented his Bill again in January 1930. As on previous occasions, the Bill made the closing of hairdressers' and barbers' shops on Sunday compulsory.71 It was a non-party

67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., 19 October 1929, p.3558.
70. Ibid., 21 December 1929, p.4420.
Bill and was supported by the National Federation of Chambers of Trade, the various traders' organisations, the trade unions, the Anglican and the Free Churches, the National Federation of Brotherhoods and the Early Closing Association. Clause 3 of the Bill, the so-called 'Jewish clause', made exemption for Jews to open on Sunday if they complied with three conditions. Firstly, they could not open on Saturday; secondly, they had to give prior notice to the local authority of their intention to open on Sunday; and thirdly, they had to have a notice posted in the shop stating that it was open on Sunday but not Saturday. Nevertheless, the Bill was not welcomed by the East London Hairdressers' Association. Freeman pointed out that "We in the East End object to the Bill from a financial point of view". This sort of comment, publicised in the Hairdressers' Weekly Journal, confirmed for many non-Jewish hairdressers the true motive for Jewish opposition to a Sunday closing Bill. The president of the London and Provincial Hairdressers' Association, speaking at the Association's annual conference in 1930, said that when the Bill was before Parliament, East End hairdressers based their opposition on religious grounds. Now, he said, they knew the real reason for their opposition to the Bill: it was purely business and not religious.

72. Ibid., Vol.78, Cols.355-64, 9 July 1930.
74. Ibid., 1 March 1930, p.716.
75. Ibid., 15 March 1930, p.902.
The Bill, with its Jewish clause intact, was finally passed in 1930. Neither any Jewish MPs nor any MPs representing East End constituencies participated in the only debate on the Bill. At a subsequent meeting of the East London Hairdressers' Association protests were raised against the Bill, pointing out the hardships which its operation would entail for hairdressers. The meeting passed a resolution by a large majority strongly objecting to the religious principles of the Sunday Closing Bill and imploring sympathetic members of the House of Lords to reject it. However, the Association reserved its most severe criticism for the Board of Deputies, a body which it believed was responsible for ensuring that the Bill contained a religious clause. A typical response of the Association's Jewish members was the view expressed by the vice-chairman, E. Levene. He believed that the Board had "done them a bad turn by butting in, because speaking generally on behalf of the Trade in the East End, he knew that no good would be done to anyone having to close on Saturday". The chairman also believed that as Sunday closing was law, they should abide by it, "irrespective of the Jewish people [viz. the Board of Deputies] who had butted in on a Trade question about which they knew nothing". Freeman's view was that they should adhere to

78. Ibid., p.2104.
80. Ibid., p.2954.
Sunday closing because it was well known that Saturday was "the day of trade for hairdressers in general". He also believed that there were very few observant Jews among hairdressers and that the few who would choose to open on Sunday would be held up to ridicule by the majority of the trade: "There is one reason why they want to open on Sunday and close on Saturday: it is not religion but a desire for financial gain".

Two years later, Freeman was still reiterating this point. He considered that the Sunday Closing Bill had been badly drafted, and that "the Jewish People had been too well protected by the Jewish Board of Deputies". At the same time, according to Freeman, the action of those who closed on Saturdays and opened on Sundays was not due to any desire to be orthodox or attend a synagogue. Shortly after the passing of the Bill in 1930, the vice-chairman of the East London Hairdressers' Association said they must persuade members to have a uniform closing on Sunday. The Association's committee took up this request and issued an appeal urging members to "Be loyal to your Trade and class. Close on Sunday". The Association listed a number of advantages to be gained by closing on Sunday and opening on Saturday. It

81. Ibid.
82. Ibid., 13 December 1930, p.4832. This was also the view of the JC. See JC, 26 December 1930, p.6.
84. Ibid., 23 August 1930, p.2812.
85. Ibid., 6 September 1930, p.2952.
was pointed out, for example, that Saturday's trade was consistent throughout the year and that Saturday was a longer day for work.\textsuperscript{86} Evidently, this campaign was successful because when the matter of deciding the closing day came before a large meeting of the Association, it was decided by forty-five votes to eleven to close on Sundays.\textsuperscript{87} The culmination of the Association's campaign was the passing of a resolution which stated that Jews should not take advantage of the Jewish clause contained in the Hairdressers' and Barbers' Shops Sunday Closing Act.\textsuperscript{88} One member asked whether a hairdresser would be allowed to continue his membership of the Association if he decided to close on Saturday. Freeman's reply suggested that a tolerant view would not be taken of any members who broke the Association's code of conduct. He said that "there was every possibility that the management would take drastic measures with those who did not conform to the wishes of the Association".\textsuperscript{89}

In contrast to the line taken by Freeman and the East London Hairdressers' Association, Ashley Coren, the Jewish chairman of the predominantly Jewish East End branch of the Hairdressers' Assistants National Craft Association, supported the Sunday exemption for Jews. His view was that since the government had recognised their religion and given them the

\textsuperscript{86. Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{87. Ibid., p.2935.}
\textsuperscript{88. JC, 26 December 1930, pp.5-6.}
\textsuperscript{89. Hairdressers' Weekly Journal, 6 September 1930, p.2954.}
option of allowing them to have a free sabbath, it would be a shame if they did not accept the concession. He appealed to the younger members to accept the opportunity of a proper sabbath. He also pointed out that they were the first trade to get a five and a half day week fixed by parliamentary legislation and that other trades were now trying to emulate their example. However, a number of Jewish members of the Association preferred Saturday opening and Sunday closing. Indeed, the first stated aim of the Hairdressers' Assistants National Craft Association was for Sunday closing.

In January 1931, shortly after the Sunday Closing Act had come into operation, a reporter from the Hairdressers' Weekly Journal visited the East End one Sunday and found that an overwhelming majority of the shops were closed, suggesting that most hairdressers' and barbers' shops continued to open on Saturdays. One case in particular highlighted the disregard with which most Jewish hairdressers and barbers in the East End treated the exempting clause in the Sunday Closing Act. The case originated from a complaint which the Board of Deputies received from a Stepney hairdresser who was trying to defend the Jewish clause in the Act. The complaint was against an order issued by the LCC under the Shops Act of 1912 which insisted on the closing of barbers' shops in Stepney at 7pm on Sundays. The effect of this order was to diminish the

90. Ibid., 9 August 1930, pp.2670-2671.
91. Ibid., 18 October 1930, p.3986.
92. Ibid., 17 January 1931, p.173.
value of the Jewish clause in the Hairdressers' and Barbers' Sunday Closing Act because hairdressers who opened on Saturdays instead of Sundays were permitted to do business until 9pm.\(^\text{93}\) The Board took the case up with the LCC and in an interview between the secretary of the Board and the chief assistant of the LCC's Public Control Department, the secretary pointed out the incompatibility of this order with the Jewish clause in the Hairdressers' and Barbers' Sunday Closing Act.\(^\text{94}\) The LCC agreed that its order meant that barbers who closed their shops on Saturday were deprived of the benefit of two hours trading. Since as many as seventy Jewish barbers, out of an approximate total of 200 in Stepney, had intimated their desire to take advantage of the special provision for Jews in the Hairdressers' and Barbers' Act, the Board suggested to the Stepney hairdresser who had made the complaint that she and her colleagues who were similarly affected by the operation of the order, organise a petition to the LCC asking that the order be rescinded.\(^\text{95}\) The Board itself drafted the petition.\(^\text{96}\)

However, the petition was never presented to the LCC because, as the Stepney hairdresser who had made the original

93. Extract from Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 10 February 1931, BDA, E3/115.


complaint confirmed, many Jewish barbers who had initially opted to open on Sundays evaded the regulations anyway and therefore could not with honesty sign the petition. 97

Admittedly, there were a number of loopholes in the Act which made evasion possible. For example, the Act did not state that if those who had been granted the special concessions under clause 3 subsequently desired to revert to Sunday closing and Saturday opening they were again required to notify the local authorities. Neither did the Act specifically state that the same special concessions must apply to all businesses owned by the same proprietor. The Act did not exclude either Jewish or non-Jewish assistants from working in one establishment six days and working a seventh day in an establishment specially permitted to open on Sunday. Finally, the Act did not prevent a Jewish hairdresser from working as an assistant Monday to Saturday, and opening an establishment on Sunday as his own master. 98 These loopholes were taken full advantage of by Stepney's Jewish hairdressers and barbers. The failure of the petition to get the LCC order rescinded only served to highlight the extent of the evasions. The Board commented: 99

It is certainly an eye-opener on Saturday observance in the east end. Obviously those whom we expected to sign the Petition on the ground that they gave up Saturday trading for Sunday could not with honesty sign the Petition.

97. Mrs. Spunberg to the Board of Deputies, 1 October 1931, BDA, E3/115.
The Board had thus been proved wrong in its belief that Jewish hairdressers, if given the opportunity of trading on an equal basis with their non-Jewish colleagues, would gladly accept the opportunity of observing the Jewish sabbath. Charles Freeman provided further confirmation of the continuing disregard of sabbath observance among East End Jewish barbers and the extent of the evasions of clause 3. He said that those Jews who closed their shops on Saturday did not do so on Friday afternoon and he believed it was no exaggeration to say that there were no orthodox hairdressers in the East End. He said he knew of only one who closed on Saturday before the Act came into force and claimed that there were "at most 100 out of 420 Jewish barbers in the East End who opened on Sunday, and of this number, 30 to 40 had evaded the Act".100

The situation was regarded as sufficiently serious for the Hairdressers' Parliamentary Committee to send a deputation to the Board of Deputies to discuss the abuses that had developed out of clause 3.101 Some of the most common abuses involved cases of hairdressers who had applied as Jews to close on Saturdays and afterwards reverted back to Sunday closing, and cases of Jews who changed the closing day as they pleased. There were also cases of family arrangements whereby one member of the family opened on Saturday and others of the same family on Sunday, cases of assistants working elsewhere


during the week and opening as Jews on Sunday, and cases of proprietors of two or more shops opening some on Sunday and some on Saturday. The Board felt that, if persisted in, these abuses would not only give rise to an agitation for the repeal of the exemption for Jewish barbers, but would also adversely affect any efforts by the Board to provide safeguards for orthodox Jews in any future legislation affecting their economic interests. In 1934 Neville Laski sent a letter to all Jewish hairdressers in the East End who had been evading clause 3 of the Act. Stressing the vulnerable position of Jews everywhere vis-à-vis anti-semitism, Laski believed that it was undesirable to publicise the evasions in the press or to advocate an amendment of the law which would make such breaches punishable offences. He therefore thought it best to reach the offenders by letter in the hope that the danger to Jews generally which existed in the continuance of such practices had only to be pointed out for it to be realised and for such practices to cease.

Deepening concern about the evasions led to at least one independent initiative which aimed at ending the abuses. Dr.


104. Circular letter from Neville Laski to all Jewish hairdressers and barbers who had given notice to the LCC of their intention to open on Sunday, 11 June 1934, BDA, E3/115. At a Board meeting with Jewish hairdressers later in the year the Board again stressed the anti-Jewish feeling that the evasions caused. See Report of Board of Deputies meeting with Jewish hairdressers and barbers, typescript, 6 December 1934, BDA, E3/115.
Bernard Homa, a member of the Board's Law and Parliamentary Committee, echoed Laski's fears in a letter to the chairman of the Committee. He pointed out that the abuses were causing considerable dissatisfaction among non-Jewish barbers, especially as the evasions were extending from the East End to other areas.\footnote{Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 16 May 1934, BDA, C13/1/11.} The East London Hairdressers' Association, meanwhile, had already committed itself to working for the repeal of clause 3 on economic grounds.\footnote{Hairdressers' Weekly Journal, 11 March 1933, p.988.} The Association even decided to send a deputation to the Home Secretary to point out how clause 3 was being exploited, and to ask that a uniform closing day be enforced.\footnote{Ibid., 16 December 1933, p.5170.} The Board was fervently opposed to any attempt to have the clause repealed. At an important meeting which the Board held with Jewish hairdressers and barbers in December 1934, representatives of the Board pointed out that the deletion of the clause would imperil the chances of exempting clauses for Jews which the Board would urge in any future Sunday closing Bills. Barnett Janner expressed his consternation that Jews could themselves initiate a petition against a Jewish exemption clause. Such Jews, he said, were not aware of the great harm they were doing, not only to themselves but to the whole Jewish community.\footnote{Report of Board of Deputies meeting with Jewish hairdressers and barbers, 6 December 1934, op.cit.} As a result of the meeting, the Law and Parliamentary Committee recommended to the Board that no
encouragement should be given to the Jewish hairdressers' attempts to have clause 3 repealed.\textsuperscript{109}

The predominantly Jewish East London Hairdressers' Branch of the Shop Assistants' Union also agreed unanimously on the deletion of clause 3 but their opposition was on quite different grounds from the East London Hairdressers' Association.\textsuperscript{110} The chairman of the East End branch pointed out that when clause 3 came into force there was a fall in the wages of all assistants.\textsuperscript{111} The branch therefore conducted a vigorous campaign against clause 3. Initially, a deputation visited Janner but achieved no result.\textsuperscript{112} Later, there took place an intensive lobbying of MPs to persuade them to support the deletion of the clause.\textsuperscript{113} In addition, demonstrations calling on the public not to patronise hairdressing shops open on Sunday were held in Stepney and Bethnal Green.\textsuperscript{114} Ultimately, however, the efforts of both the East London master hairdressers and the assistants in trying to secure the repeal of clause 3 were irrelevant since the Act of which the clause had been such a contentious part was itself repealed under the terms of the Sunday Trading Restriction Act of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{109} Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 10 December 1934, BDA, C13/1/12.
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 4 August 1934, pp.3278-3280.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 12 January 1935, p.122.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 11 August 1934, p.3370.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 3 August 1935, p.3620. See also extract from DH, 11 February 1936, BDA, E3/115.
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Hairdressers' Weekly Journal, 26 October 1935, p.4905.
\end{itemize}
1936.115 The secretary of the East London Hairdressers' Association wrote to the Board of Deputies soon after the new Act had come into operation, informing him that many members of the hairdressing trade were preparing to evade the Act.116 However, the promoters of the 1936 Act had learnt from earlier mistakes, and were equipped with a number of precedents to guide them and to help them produce a better Bill.

The government had always made quite clear its unwillingness to promote legislation restricting Sunday trading. Its usual response was that the question was very controversial and no solution had been found which would command general agreement.117 In the absence of any government action, Sunday trading restriction Bills were promoted by influential pressure groups such as the Federation of Grocers' Associations and the Early Closing Association. Both organisations lobbied MPs of all parties. Their primary aim was to protect traders from the unfair competition of those who opened their businesses on Sundays. Sunday trading restrictions were also supported by the Shop Assistants' Union and by the National Union of Distributive Workers. Their concern was with the welfare of workers employed in the retail trade, whom, they believed should be able to enjoy a full day of rest each week. This motive for Sunday trading restriction


was emphasised with particular vigour in 1936 by MPs of all parties. For example, Colonel Goodman, Conservative MP for Islington, believed that the growth of Sunday trading represented a great threat to the efforts to obtain for shop assistants in the smaller establishments adequate time for rest and recreation.118

Various attempts were made to restrict Sunday trading in the late 1920s by means of Private Members Bills. In 1928 the Grocers' Association promoted the Shops Sunday Trading Restriction Bill. This Bill stated that all shops, except certain exempted categories, should be closed on Sundays. No provision was made for the exemption of orthodox Jewish traders.119 For this reason, the Home Secretary warned that the Bill could not make any progress.120 However, the Bill's ultimate failure owed little to Jewish lobbying. The Board of Deputies' explanation for this was that it had "all along encountered great difficulty in obtaining information as to the wishes of Jewish shopkeepers themselves, as they have no organisation to formulate their views".121 This was not entirely true since the East London Observer reported in June 1928 that the implications of the Bill had been discussed by the Whitechapel and Spitalfields Costermongers' and Street

118. Ibid., Vol.308, Col.2167, 21 February 1936.
120. Ibid., 26 May 1928, p.23.
121. Circular letter from the Board of Deputies to the Association of Jewish Friendly Societies, 11 May 1928, BDA, C13/3/1.
Sellers' Union, in co-operation with the Street Traders' Federation. The former body was Jewish in all but name. Therefore, the most likely reason for the Board's statement was that it did not recognise the Costermongers' and Street Sellers' Union as a Jewish association. The Board had taken a similar view of the East London Hairdressers' Association. It was less easy for the Board to ignore the Sunday Traders' Protection Association. This body was formed specifically to resist the Sunday Trading Restriction Bill of 1928. The Association was intended to be non-sectarian but by the Board's own admission had only Jewish members. Its president was P. Freeman and one of its vice-presidents was Mike Stern, later to become the major figure in the Association. Nevertheless, the Board still felt it necessary to make clear to the Association that "if the Association demanded the right of keeping open on the Jewish Sabbath, or part of it, as well as on Sunday, it could expect no support from the Board and would, in fact, be injuring our efforts on behalf of orthodox Jews." 

The following year Morry Davis, speaking at a meeting of Whitechapel traders, agreed that those who closed on Saturdays

122. ELO, 9 June 1928, p.6.
123. Board of Deputies report of interview with I. Monnickendam (vice-president Sunday Traders' Protection Association) 30 October 1928, BDA, Cl3/3/1.
125. Board of Deputies report of interview with I. Monnickendam, 30 October 1928, op.cit.
should be allowed to keep open on Sundays. However, he advised Jewish traders to avoid the religious aspect of the issue and instead to persuade public opinion to support fewer hours of trading. He believed that the traders should reach agreement among themselves on the question of a limited number of hours for trading on Sundays. This treatment of the Sunday trading question as a secular issue was unacceptable to the Board of Deputies, hence the Board's statement to the Sunday Traders' Protection Association that it could only defend orthodox Jewish traders. A letter sent by the Board to the Union of Hebrew and Religion Classes confirmed the Board's awareness that Jewish members of the Sunday Traders' Protection Association did not close on Friday night, even though it was the sabbath, because this was a profitable trading period. In these circumstances, the Board said that it could not offer the Association any support.

A Sunday Trading Restriction Bill, making special provision for Jewish traders who closed on Saturdays, was introduced in 1931 by the Labour MP E. F. Wise on behalf of the Federation of Grocers' Associations. Wise pointed out that it was customary for Jewish businesses to be opened on Sunday, "and it used to be customary, though often the custom is no longer observed, for such businesses to be closed on

126. JC, 2 August 1929, p.11.

127. Board of Deputies to the Union of Hebrew and Religion Classes, 14 November 1929, BDA, C13/3/1.

Nevertheless, Wise was prepared to include an exemption for Jewish traders. The Board of Deputies, while acknowledging Wise's efforts to give Jewish traders a fair deal, asked if he was prepared to accept an amendment which would exempt Jewish traders who observed the sabbath. The Board's efforts to obtain a sabbath exemption clause for orthodox Jews, difficult under any circumstances, was made even more difficult by James Hall's statement in the House of Commons that Jewish traders in Whitechapel opposed a Saturday exemption on business grounds. According to Hall, it was the opinion of the small Jewish traders in Whitechapel that the Bill would give an advantage to the multiple shopkeeper who, having more than one shop, would be able to close one on Saturdays and the other on Sundays, whereas the one man business would be forced to decide on which day to close. Therefore, Hall argued, the small Jewish trader would be at a great disadvantage compared with his wealthier competitors.

The eventual rejection of Wise's Bill proved to be of less long term importance than the public dissemination of views such as those expressed by Hall. This confirmed for many non-Jewish traders that the real reason Jews sought exemption from Sunday trading restrictions was on business rather than on religious grounds.

129. Ibid., Vol.252, Cols.761-81, 8 May 1931.
130. Board of Deputies to E. F. Wise, 21 July 1931, BDA, C13/3/1.
The Sunday Trading Restriction Bill of 1936 was promoted by the Early Closing Association and supported by influential trade organisations such as the National Federation of Grocers' Associations, the National Chamber of Trade, the Drapers' Chamber of Trade, the National Federation of the Boot Trade and trade unions such as the Shop Assistants' Union and the National Union of Distributive Workers. In its original form the Bill made provision for Jewish traders to remain open until 1pm on Sunday provided they closed on Saturday and made a declaration to the effect that they objected on religious grounds to opening on the Jewish sabbath. This was regarded as discriminatory by Jewish traders in the East End who pointed out that the bulk of their Sunday trade was done in the afternoon and evening. They explained that this was because many of their Jewish customers who had moved away from the East End continued to travel back to the area on Sundays in order to do their shopping. The Jewish traders in the Wentworth Street and Middlesex Street market area, known as Petticoat Lane, felt particularly threatened by the proposed new legislation since traditionally this market, which was the biggest in the East End and almost 100% Jewish, remained open until 5pm on Sundays. However, there was not a great deal of sympathy among MPs of any party for East End

133. JC, 27 March 1936, p.17.
Jewish traders. One Labour MP insisted that "Petticoat Lane is not going to lay down the law for all shopkeepers and shop assistants in this country". Other MPs opposed the concept of a Jewish clause on principle. Their opposition was most succinctly expressed by Sir Arnold Wilson, MP for Hitchin. He believed that any attempt to establish by law what constituted a conscientious Jew and then to segregate conscientious Jews by means of declarations to local authorities was bound to create what he called "dangerous feelings", in other words anti-semitism. The East End press was equally opposed to special exemptions being made for Jews. In an editorial, the East London Observer stated that Jews should view the Bill as the price of their "privileges and liberties" in England. It was felt that the economic hardships suffered by Jews under the Bill would be minute compared with what they had to endure in Poland and Germany.

The only MPs whom the Jewish traders of the East End could with certainty rely upon to defend their interests were their own local constituency MPs. These MPs made it clear that they were in sympathy with the aims of the Bill and it was not upon these grounds that they were opposing it. James Hall, for example, believed it was unfair that those Jews who were not prepared to make a statutory declaration that they objected to working on Saturdays because it was their sabbath,


136. Ibid., Vol.311, Col.457, 24 April 1936.

137. ELO, 4 April 1936, p.4.
should lose both Saturday and Sunday trading in Middlesex Street since the market itself was closed on Saturdays. Dan Frankel's main opposition to the Bill was based on his belief that it did not represent the best interests of trade unionism. He claimed that the Bill had been promoted by "the big shopkeepers and trade interests of the country", and that it would adversely affect the small shopkeeper and the street trader.  

As far as the Jewish aspect of the Bill was concerned, Frankel took the unconventional view that the "conscientious religious" clause was unfair because it attempted to "mix business and religion". He pointed out that a trader might be "of the Jewish race but not of the Jewish faith". He could therefore arrange to open on the Sunday instead of the Saturday simply because it suited his business better. Frankel also drew attention to the position of non-Jewish traders in the East End. These traders were surrounded by Jewish competitors who would be allowed to open on Sunday. Frankel therefore believed that one of the most pernicious results of the Bill would be an increase in anti-Jewish feeling.

In line with his views, Frankel proposed a number of amendments to the Jewish clause. One was intended to give local authorities the power to prescribe districts where shops could or could not open on Sundays. The aim of this amendment was to prevent Jews enjoying an unfair trading advantage over


139. Ibid.

140. Ibid., Vol.308, Col.2191, 21 February 1936.
non-Jewish traders.\textsuperscript{141} Another amendment proposed by Frankel would have had the effect of deleting the requirement of a statutory declaration by Jews that they conscientiously objected on religious grounds to trading on Saturday.\textsuperscript{142} According to Frankel, the object of this amendment was to make provision in the exempting clause for Jews who were not orthodox. The exemption from Sunday closing would not therefore be on religious grounds but on economic grounds.\textsuperscript{143} Both of Frankel's amendments were heavily defeated.

Frankel was not the only Jewish East Ender to argue that orthodox Jews should not be granted special exemptions under the Bill. Joseph Emden believed that, with the exception of traders selling foodstuffs, everyone should be compelled to close on Sunday "irrespective of religion".\textsuperscript{144} Miriam Moses, herself an observant Jew, went even further. She believed that Jews should behave according to the laws and customs of England and should not therefore expect special treatment with regard to Sunday trading.\textsuperscript{145} However, there were two Jewish pressure groups in the East End which took a different view. The Sunday Traders' Protection Association was revived in 1936 in direct response to the new assault on Sunday trading. The Association had a membership of approximately 2,000 which was

\textsuperscript{141} Market Traders' Review, 14 March 1936, p.28.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 21 March 1936, p.27.
\textsuperscript{143} ELO, 21 March 1936, p.5.
\textsuperscript{144} Market Traders' Review, 10 April 1937, p.20.
\textsuperscript{145} Interview with Fay Stern (May 1985).
confined primarily to the East End. It was an exclusively Jewish organisation and had as its president Mike Stern, an English-born Jew of Dutch descent and himself a trader in Petticoat Lane. Stern believed that the 1936 Bill would force Jews to open on Saturdays. Under Stern's leadership the Sunday Traders' Protection Association undertook a high profile lobbying campaign against Sunday trading restrictions. A petition organised by the Association was signed by 10,000 people in Stepney at the beginning of 1936. The Association also arranged a meeting to protest against the Bill which was attended by James Hall, Dan Frankel and Barnett Janner.

The Orthodox Jewish Traders' Association was an East End based organisation formed specifically to meet the situation created by the Sunday Trading Restriction Bill. Membership was confined to sabbath observant Jewish traders, that is, those who closed throughout the Jewish sabbath commencing Friday at sunset. The Association claimed to have just under 2,000 members distributed over eighty trades. However, it was estimated that there were as many as 5,000 orthodox Jewish traders in the East End who would be affected by the Bill. In April a deputation representing the Association met with

146. Sunday Traders' Protection Association to the Home Secretary, 11 May 1936, BDA, E3/82.
147. Interview with Fay Stern, (May 1985).
the Board of Deputies and explained to them the economic
effects of the Bill vis-à-vis orthodox Jewish traders. The
deputation informed the Board that the most damaging effect
would be the loss of virtually all their weekend trade since
most Sunday trade was done in the afternoon and evening.\textsuperscript{150}
The Association therefore asked the Board to put forward their
request that orthodox Jewish traders should be allowed to
remain open until 8pm on Sunday. Their request was unanimous-
ly supported by the Board of the Federation of Synagogues.\textsuperscript{151}
However, the Association was aware of the danger of alienating
public opinion and therefore asked that the conscience clause
be drawn as stringently as possible. In practice, this meant
obligatory closing on all the Jewish holy days as well as on
the sabbath.\textsuperscript{152}

The Board could not ignore such requests when they
emanated from bona fide Jewish pressure groups. Although
aware of the futility of pressing for an extension until 8pm
the Board did enter into negotiations with the promoters of
the Bill with a view to getting the opening hour extended
beyond 1pm. The result of the Board's efforts was Home Office
agreement that opening hours for orthodox Jews on Sunday could
be extended until 2pm.\textsuperscript{153} The Board considered that this

\textsuperscript{150}. Ibid. See also Statement to the Board of Deputies by a
deputation representing the Orthodox Jewish Traders' Association, typescript, 26 April 1936, BDA, E3/82.

\textsuperscript{151}. Board of Federation minutes, 22 April 1936, FSA.

\textsuperscript{152}. Memorandum prepared by the Orthodox Jewish Traders' Association, \textit{op.cit.}, BDA, E3/82.

\textsuperscript{153}. Interview with Dr. Bernard Homa (January 1986).
concession could have only a limited value and that it would involve "more than a reasonable economic sacrifice". According to the Board, it might also have the unfortunate effect of forcing Jewish shopkeepers to face the alternative of breaking the sabbath or losing their livelihood. However, the Market Traders' Review believed that any exemption which allowed Jews to open while non-Jews could not, was a form of discrimination against non-Jewish traders which might easily give rise to racial animosity.

The prospect of a Jewish trade monopoly on Sundays was feared particularly in London's Sunday morning markets. As the Market Traders' Review editorialised, the Bill amounted to handing over the Sunday morning markets to those of the Jewish faith. Neither the two Jewish pressure groups in the East End nor the Board of Deputies made any response to this very serious grievance. It was left to an individual Jewish MP acting on his own initiative to propose an amendment which, he hoped, would reduce the resentment which might arise if Sunday trading was made the exclusive monopoly of Jews. Percy Harris's clause empowered the LCC and the Common Council of the City of London to authorise the opening of shops until 2pm on Sundays in districts where it had been customary to hold


155. Ibid.


157. Ibid., 28 March 1936, p.21.
street markets on Sunday or in Bethnal Green, Stepney and Shoreditch where the majority of shops had been open on Sunday.\textsuperscript{158} The clause applied to both Jewish and non-Jewish traders in the areas designated for Sunday trading. Harris later commented that if "some concession had not been made to the non-Jewish trader, there would have been bitterness and bad blood, and for the first time in London something very near to racial riots".\textsuperscript{159} The clause was incorporated into the Bill but there were voices of dissent. The MP for South Tottenham, for example, believed that on the borders of the exempted street markets there would be cases of Jews who, because of their faith, would be able to open on Sunday, while next door non-Jews would be unable to open.\textsuperscript{160}

The incidence of protest, both against Harris's clause specifically and the Jewish exemption generally, did not deter James Hall from introducing his own amendment to the Bill which, if passed, would have had the effect of extending Sunday opening hours for orthodox Jews from 2pm until 6pm.\textsuperscript{161} Although acting on his own initiative, Hall pointed out that his amendment had the approval of the Board of Deputies.\textsuperscript{162} However, no Jewish MP backed Hall in Parliament by speaking for the amendment. In the event, Hall's amendment was

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{158}JC, 10 April 1936, p.5.
  \item \textsuperscript{159}House of Commons Debates, Vol.311, Col.2091, 8 May 1936.
  \item \textsuperscript{160}Ibid., Vol.311, Col.452, 24 April 1936.
  \item \textsuperscript{161}Ibid., Vol.311, Col.483, 24 April 1936.
  \item \textsuperscript{162}Ibid., Vol.311, Cols.485-6, 24 April 1936.
\end{itemize}
rejected by a large majority. This may have pleased Jewish workers employed by Jews in the East End who favoured 2pm closing but the decision was a blow for the Sunday Traders' Protection Association.\(^{163}\) The Association wrote to the Home Secretary informing him that the Bill as it now stood would cause incalculable economic hardship to genuinely religious traders.\(^{164}\) Although the Association's protests were directed at the Home Secretary, blame for the situation was levelled squarely at the Board of Deputies. At a Board meeting in May Janner, who had developed a close working relationship with Mike Stern, complained of the "dilly dallying" attitude of the Board.\(^{165}\) The following month The Leader confirmed the strong feeling of dissatisfaction among Jewish traders at the manner in which the Board's Law and Parliamentary Committee had handled the situation arising out of the Sunday Trading Restriction Bill. Apparently, the promoters of the Bill were under the impression that the opening of Jewish shops until 2pm on Sundays would meet the wishes of Jewish traders. The Leader believed that if this was the case, there had not been sufficient co-operation between the Law and Parliamentary Committee and the promoters of the Bill.\(^{166}\)

\(^{163}\) Ibid., Vol.311, Col.491, 24 April 1936.
\(^{164}\) Sunday Traders' Protection Association to the Home Secretary, 11 May 1936, op.cit., BDA, E3/82.
\(^{165}\) JC, 1 May 1936, p.14. For details about Janner's relationship with Stern I am grateful to Fay Stern.
\(^{166}\) The Leader, June 1936, p.131.
Criticism of the Board's apparent disinterest in the plight of Jewish traders in the East End and frustration at the Board's perceived inactivity was expressed in a number of letters which were received by both the Board and the *Jewish Chronicle* in March and April 1936. One correspondent from Mile End felt it was a "scandal that the Board of Deputies has not given more publicity to this matter and not organised a proper public protest".\(^{167}\) Another correspondent, who was the owner of a well-known furnishing retailers in Whitechapel, wrote that it would be the task of the Anglo-Jewish historian, "in analysing the causes of religious decadence ... to record that the sheer clumsiness of the Board of Deputies, in its approach to this problem, dealt a more cruel blow to the cause of religion than was ever perpetuated by deliberate persecution".\(^{168}\) Two East End rabbis also stepped into the controversy. Rabbi Rapoport of Old Castle Street Synagogue in Whitechapel said, in a letter to the *Jewish Chronicle*, that in order to avoid the economic ruin of many sabbath-observant Jews, no effort should be spared to ensure that the opening hours for orthodox Jews on Sundays should be extended "as far as possible".\(^{169}\) Rabbi Harris Cohen, president of the Sabbath Observance Employment Bureau, expressed the hope that the

\(^{167}\) D. Lebon to Laski, 17 March 1936, BDA, E3/82. A large number of similar letters, equally critical of the Board, were sent to Laski. See, for example, H. Kaye to Laski, 19 March 1936; L. Bryman to Laski, 17 March 1936; E. Goldberg to Laski, 17 March 1936; G. Hamerman to Laski, 17 March 1936; J. Goldring to Laski, 17 March 1936; B. Kaner to Laski, 23 March 1936, BDA, E3/82.


Board would work energetically to secure the right of observant Jews to trade all day Sunday, otherwise he feared that a large proportion of the orthodox community would be forced to abandon the basis of their religious faith.  

The chairman of the Board's Law and Parliamentary Committee defended the Board's record by claiming that the Board had done its utmost to obtain an extension of the Sunday hours of trading but Parliament had not been willing to make any further concession. Certainly, it was true that the Board had circularised all members of the Lords pointing out the hardships which would be suffered by orthodox Jewish traders if they had to close at 2pm on Sundays and asking the Lords to support an amendment which would extend Sunday opening to 6pm. In addition, personal approaches had been made to individual members of the House of Lords, the Home Office and the promoters of the Bill. As a result of a personal discussion between Lord Marley and Neville Laski, Laski said he would be prepared to accept 5pm on Sundays as the closing time. Marley subsequently moved an amendment in the Lords which would extend Sunday opening for Jews from 2pm to 5pm. The amendment was firmly rejected, even though Lord Swaythling had pointed out the consequences for Jewish traders if they were compelled to close at 2pm. According to Swaythling, they

170. Ibid., 24 April 1936, p.20.
171. The Leader, July 1937, p.189.
172. Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 14 July 1936, BDA, C13/1/12.
would either go bankrupt or they would have to break their sabbath and close on Sunday instead. The majority view in the Lords was the one expressed by the Marquess of Dufferin and Ava who was in charge of the Bill there. He used the well-worn argument that orthodox Jews who would only be allowed to trade until 2pm on Sundays would have a trading monopoly during that time. He also believed that in the "present state of feeling in London" it would be very unwise to allow Jewish traders to remain open until 5pm. This was an oblique reference to the Blackshirt disturbances which had been occurring in East London since the beginning of 1936. The growth of political anti-semitism was an important factor in determining the Board of Deputies' cautious approach to the Bill. Neither the Jewish pressure groups in the East End nor those correspondents who wrote indignant letters of protest to the Board and the Jewish Chronicle were sympathetic to the self-imposed constraints which political anti-semitism imposed on the Board's activity. As far as they were concerned, the Board's timid response to the Bill was part and parcel of its overall policy in the 1930s which was for the Anglo-Jewish community to keep a low profile and draw as little attention to itself as possible.

The Sunday Trading Restriction Act came into operation on 1 May 1937. The Act stated that a Jewish occupier of a shop or stall had to have it registered with the local authority if

175. Ibid., Vol.101, Col.430, 2 July 1936.
he wanted to take advantage of the Jewish exemption clause which allowed Sunday opening until 2pm. The application had to be accompanied by a declaration stating that the occupier conscientiously objected on religious grounds to trading on the Jewish sabbath. If it appeared to the local authority that the occupier did not have a genuine religious objection to trading on the sabbath then the local authority could submit the case to the Jewish Tribunal. This Tribunal was set up by the Home Secretary in consultation with the Board of Deputies. If the Tribunal reported that a conscientious objection was not genuinely held the local authority could cancel the registration of the shop. The Tribunal did not take a lenient view of those Jewish shopkeepers brought before it, even in cases where shopkeepers claimed they were driven to trading on Friday night by economic hardship. In fact, of the first sixteen cases heard by the Tribunal, only two were decided in favour of the traders. The Jewish Tribunal took an even harder line against such traders than the secular courts. For example, the LCC summoned a number of Jewish traders who were alleged to have traded on Friday night after the commencement of the sabbath. The cases were heard by the magistrate at Old Street Police Court. He decided that the words 'Jewish sabbath' meant Saturday only and so

176. Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 14 June 1938, BDA, Cl3/1/12.
177. Board of Deputies Annual Report, 1937, p.36.
178. Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 5 July 1938, BDA, Cl3/1/12.
179. Ibid., 14 June 1938, BDA, Cl3/1/12.
dismissed the summonses. The chairman of the Law and Parliamentary Committee explained that in similar cases which had come before the Tribunal, a different interpretation was put on these words and it was decided that the traders did not genuinely hold a conscientious objection to trading on the sabbath.

A sabbath observance conference held in June 1937 concluded that only the full observance of the sabbath justified claims for Jewish trading on Sunday. The conference resolution also stated that the growing neglect of the sabbath by Jewish traders damaged the efforts which had been made to obtain alternative hours of trading on Sunday. In the same month, The Drapers' Record commented that the resurgence of Blackshirt activity had prompted "responsible leaders" to advise Jewish traders in East London against taking advantage of the exemption clause "as it might provide an excuse for anti-semitic feelings". Many Jewish traders, however, did not even bother to seek exemption. For example, in July 1937 the LCC informed the Board of Deputies that just 283 applications for registration had so far been reported to the LCC. Many Jewish traders simply contravened the Act by opening on both Saturday and Sunday. This trend was reflected in the number of summonses which were brought against Stepney

180. Ibid., 5 July 1938, BDA, Cl3/3/12.
181. JC, 11 June 1937, p.35.
182. The Drapers' Record, 26 June 1937, p.11.
183. LCC to the Board of Deputies, 28 July 1937, BDA, E3/82.
traders in 1937. The situation prompted the Jewish Chronicle to comment that the Act, which had been passed to restrict the opening of shops on Sundays, had become a Sunday trading and not a trading restriction Act. The paper also noted that because so many of the offenders in East London were Jews, there had occurred a serious deterioration in relations between Jewish employer and non-Jewish employee. The BUF was the beneficiary of this situation and exploited workers' antagonism to the full during its renewed campaign against the Jews of the East End in the years 1937 to 1938.

This volatile situation was not made any easier by the decision of the LCC and the City of London to issue local orders permitting shops in Stepney, Shoreditch and Bethnal Green to open on Saturday and Sunday, making Monday the closing day. The Board of Deputies was concerned that many Jews in the East End would take advantage of these orders by closing Monday and opening Saturday and Sunday. The Board therefore recommended to the LCC that the alternative closing day for those who traded on Sunday should be Saturday. For once, Dan Frankel was in agreement with the Board. Speaking at a meeting in the East End to discuss Monday closing, he

184. See, for example, ELA, 6 November 1937, pp.1, 5; 13 November 1937, p.3; 4 December 1937, p.3.
186. Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 10 May 1937, BDA, CL3/1/12.
188. JC, 11 June 1937, p.27.
told an audience of predominantly Jewish shopkeepers that trading on both Saturday and Sunday was unwise and would be used to foster anti-semitic feelings by Fascists. Frankel also said that he feared the consequences if traders in different parts of London were treated differently, as the new recommendations proposed. Jealousies would develop between different districts and there would be competition between traders in East and South London. Frankel later claimed that his advice to Jewish traders calling on them not to open on both Saturday and Sunday had been taken. However, the gradual hardening of feeling in the East End against the Monday closing order owed little to the advice of any one individual. There was a spontaneous realisation by Jewish traders in the East End that the orders could have no long term benefits and indeed could only bring problems. At a second meeting of East End shopkeepers against Monday closing, a unanimous resolution was carried calling for the abolition of the orders. A. J. Lyons, a Jewish trader and organiser of several protest meetings against the orders, said that the passing of the resolution was the only way to make clear to people outside the East End that the traders in the district, supported by the Jewish community, were opposed to any legislation which gave Jewish traders privileges which other traders did not enjoy. Of course, it was not only Jewish

190. JC, 18 June 1937, p.18.
192. Ibid., p.5.
traders in the East End who would benefit from the new orders, but since so many traders in the area were Jewish it was inevitable that Monday closing would be perceived as a specifically Jewish privilege.

Opposition to Monday closing was not confined to shopkeepers. Shop assistants in East London also protested against the choice of Monday as the alternative closing day. Reuben Silkoff, the chairman of the Houndsditch and White-chapel Branch of the Shop Assistants' Union, commented: 193

We do not wish to penalise individuals with religious scruples, but we consider that the opening of shops on both days of the weekend will lead to a great deal of opposition, discontent amongst employees, and possibly anti-semitism amongst non-Jewish shopkeepers.

Stepney Borough Council also opposed the new scheme and registered its disapproval with the LCC. 194 In the face of such widespread opposition to Monday closing, the LCC and the City of London issued new orders which required traders in Stepney, Bethnal Green and Shoreditch who opened on Sundays to close on Saturdays, thus ending Monday closing. 195 Despite the implementation of the new orders some shopkeepers in Stepney continued to open on both Saturday and Sunday. 196

This situation caused great concern to those traders who

193. JC, 4 June 1937, p.20.
194. ELO, 29 May 1937, p.7; JC, 4 June 1937, p.20; Stepney Borough Council minutes, 26 May 1937, Vol.XXXVII.
195. ELA, 19 June 1937, p.1; ELO, 19 June 1937, p.1; JC, 18 June 1937, p.10; Law and Parliamentary Committee minutes, 20 July 1937, BDA, C13/1/12; Stepney Borough Council minutes, 27 October 1937, Vol.XXXVII.
196. ELA, 16 October 1937, p.1; ELO, 9 October 1937, p.1.
obeyed the regulations and led to the creation of a new organisation, the Eastern District Traders' Association, which opposed seven day trading. Significantly, this Association was founded by a Jewish trader, A. J. Lyons, and included a number of East End Jewish traders among its members.197

Jewish traders in the East End invariably felt that they had been unjustly treated by both Parliament and the Board of Deputies. They believed that unless they could trade all day on Sunday they would face economic ruin. The mainly non-observant Jewish hairdressers did not even want a specifically Jewish clause allowing them to open on Sundays. Although they admitted that Sunday was an important day for their trade in the East End, their representative body preferred to advise its members not to take advantage of the Sunday opening clause, but to open instead on Saturday and close on Sunday. No other section of Jewish traders in the East End took such an anarchic line on the Sunday trading question. The general tendency was for Jewish traders to organise themselves into associations which insisted on the right of orthodox Jewish traders to be able to open all day Sunday. The possibility of legislation to restrict Sunday trading therefore mobilised a normally apolitical section of East End Jewry into vigorous political activity.

Neither the Sunday Traders' Protection Association nor the Orthodox Jewish Traders' Association had representatives

197. ELA, 16 October 1937, p.1.
from their organisations serving on the Board of Deputies. Despite their lack of official representation on the Board, the traders forcefully brought their case to the notice of the Board's Law and Parliamentary Committee by means of effective lobbying tactics. Both the traders' representatives and the Board were careful to emphasise that they were interested only in obtaining special exemption for those Jews who objected on religious grounds to trading on the Jewish sabbath. Since it was well known that these Jews constituted only a tiny minority of all East End Jewish traders, the Board's task in pressing for any Sunday exemption for Jews was extremely difficult. The worsening political situation for Jews in Europe and the rise of Mosley's Blackshirt movement in England did not make the Board's task any easier. However, these considerations were not taken into account by Jewish traders in the East End. They felt that the Board had let them down in settling for 2pm as the closing time for those orthodox Jews who traded on Sunday. Therefore, as far as East End Jewish traders were concerned, the Sunday trading controversy did not have a satisfactory conclusion.

In the wider context, however, the Sunday trading issue had given Jewish retailers in the East End the opportunity to show their capacity for organised campaigning along ethnic lines on an important political issue which affected all of them economically, irrespective of their religious observance. Indeed, in the light of the available evidence it must be concluded that most Jews wanted to be allowed to continue trading on Sundays for economic and not for religious reasons.
The fact that East End Jewish traders, in common with the general trend in the Jewish East End, were overwhelmingly secular was not lost on the Board of Deputies who were therefore extremely unwilling to defend the Sunday trading rights of Jewish traders on economic grounds.

The Sunday trading issue also illustrated a further point about the nature of Jewish society in the East End. This was that an issue which could unite Jews along ethnic lines could also divide them along economic lines. Thus, the Sunday trading question highlighted a significant conflict of interests between Jewish employers and Jewish employees. While Jewish traders were constantly striving to ensure that they could trade on Sundays, Jewish trade unionists were campaigning to ensure that their members had a properly regulated working week. Jewish trade unionists were only too well aware that few Jewish traders were sabbath observant. They were therefore among the most vocal critics of those Jews who violated the Sunday Trading Restriction Act of 1936. For example, in November 1937 a deputation from the Houndsditch and Whitechapel Branch of the Shop Assistants' Union urged the chairman of the LCC's Public Control Committee to prohibit the Sunday opening of shops in East London. The deputation pointed out that virtually all the shops in the Whitechapel and Commercial Roads were kept open all day Saturday and until 2pm on Sunday with the result that many assistants had to work seven days a week.198 Similar complaints about working hours

198. DH, 3 November 1937, p.15. See also The Shop Assistant, 4 December 1937, p.987.
had earlier been made by the Jewish Bakers' Union and by the various associations which represented hairdressers' assistants in the East End. The Sunday trading issue thus clearly divided East End Jews according to their position in the local economic structure.

Such intra-ethnic conflict provides an indication of the very real tensions which existed within the Jewish East End, even at a time when the community was having to confront the serious external threat of political anti-semitism. An examination of the Sunday trading issue therefore highlights the fact that the Jewish East End was a highly pluralistic and diverse community, both in economic and in political terms. Although crucial in helping us to appreciate the complex socio-economic structure of the Jewish East End, these intra-group distinctions should not detract us from the essential fact that Jewish East Enders had a collective identity which transcended differences of wealth and social status within the community. It was this sense of themselves as a working class ethnic group which ultimately determined the way in which they were perceived by non-Jewish society.
Conclusion

The period from 1918 to 1939 was a unique moment in Anglo-Jewish history. These were the decades when the Jewish immigrant communities of the major urban centres came of age. The second generation Jews who remained in the various immigrant colonies during these two decades created a small, personal world where their social, political and working environment was based on a network of close ethnic ties. But these were not only ethnic communities. They were also communities based on class loyalties. United by their common experience of poverty and unemployment, these Jews of the inner urban centres were divided from the economically successful and upwardly mobile middle class sections of the community by income, lifestyle and, increasingly during the period, by geographical distance.

This study has examined these developments in relation to the East End Jewish community. In particular, the thesis has focused on how secular working class Jews in the East End expressed their ethnicity through political action. The thrust of the argument has been that although they constituted a separate ethnic group, East End Jews went out of their way to emphasise that the political causes which they pursued were not, in any sense, parochial but had a wider relevance for the whole of society. In other words, East End Jews were determined to achieve political integration while at the same time maintaining their distinct ethnic identity. This identity was, in large part, a product of the East End Jewish
community's settlement pattern in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The residential concentration of Jews in particular streets facilitated the development of an intense social and cultural life based around a network of close family ties and friendship bonds. This network was reinforced and strengthened in the workplace as Jews were often employed in the same workshops as their relatives, friends or neighbours. In economic terms, this community was located firmly within the working class and yet it remained quite distinct from the non-Jewish proletariat by the very fact of its ethnic characteristics and the existence of 'Jewish trades'.

The Jewish experience in the East End of London in the 1920s and 1930s was, in a number of respects, similar to the experience of second generation Jews in other immigrant centres in the West. The value of highlighting these similarities is that it allows us to transcend the local focus of this study and to view the East End Jewish experience in the inter-war period as part of the general experience of a transitional group of second generation Jews who stood between an immigrant Jewish culture on the one hand and a modern urban culture on the other. The second generation was a transitional generation in the sense that, though second generation Jews had embarked on the process of becoming Westernised, they were still deeply rooted in the immigrant world. The influence of family, friends and neighbourhood all combined to reinforce the immigrant roots of second generation Jews.
Since the beginning of the twentieth century New York had been the largest Jewish centre outside of Eastern Europe. The development of the New York Jewish community provides a number of valuable comparisons with London's Jewish East End. As in the East End of London, New York's Jewish immigrants were concentrated in a particular geographical area: the Lower East Side. Such residential concentration became the hallmark of Jewish neighbourhood life in New York. In her social history of second generation New York Jews, Deborah Dash-Moore has contended that "Neighbourhood living provided the context for ethnic Jewish identification" and that "neighbourhood life encouraged many Jews to develop a sense of Jewish identity independent of any formal Jewish organisational association".1 This process was duplicated in London's East End where the Jewish neighbourhood functioned as an ethnic community which was based on family and friendship bonds rather than on formal associations and organisations.

A further similarity between the New York and East End Jewish communities was the extent to which Jews were concentrated in particular occupations. Thus, in both New York and in the East End most Jewish immigrants were employed in the tailoring trade. Industrial unrest in the trade was manifested in the form of bitter intra-ethnic conflicts as Jewish workers demanded better wages and conditions from Jewish

employers. Social, cultural and political institutions during the inter-war years in New York such as the Workmen's Circle and the Jewish trade unions, also mirrored the Jewish experience in the East End of London and confirmed the second generation's ambivalent status as a community in transition.

As well as these similarities there were also a number of important differences between the East End and New York Jewish communities. In particular, London did not possess a multi-ethnic environment of the same magnitude as New York's which could serve to encourage and nurture expressions of ethnicity. The Irish Catholics, who comprised the other major ethnic group in the East End, may have been respected by some local Jews for the political power which they wielded, but the size of the East End Irish community was tiny compared with its New York counterpart. Even a rabbi observed that a factor which "makes for the conservation of Jewish life in America is the presence in the body politic of a large and powerful group (the Irish Catholics) that insists upon remaining unassimilable". In addition, upward mobility among New York Jews in the 1920s and 1930s occurred much more rapidly than it did among East End Jews in the same period. Therefore, while the present study of the East End has focused on the politics of a

2. For the East End see Chapter Three above. For New York see Dash-Moore, op.cit., p.8.


4. Quoted in Dash-Moore, op.cit., p.5.
working class Jewish community, a similar study of New York's Jews would have to take into account the far more dramatic changes in that community's socio-economic status. Thus although there were important parallels between the two communities, we should also acknowledge their essential uniqueness. Ultimately, this uniqueness was founded on the differences between British and American society. As minority groups within these societies it was inevitable that the development of the Jewish communities should be profoundly influenced by the nature of the host societies.

This study has established that during the inter-war years East End Jews constituted an assertive ethnic working class community. These Jews were a constant thorn in the side of the middle class leaders of the community. By refusing to submit to communal discipline, as the Board of Deputies would have liked, East End Jews stubbornly and relentlessly pursued their own independent style of high profile political activity. It was not only the style of this political activism which so irked the Board but also its ideological content which tended to be overwhelmingly left-wing. This created the fear among the Anglo-Jewish leadership that the whole community was in danger of being branded Communist and therefore inherently unpatriotic and even traitorous. To appreciate the extent of this fear one must place it within its contemporary political context. The popular belief that Jews had been in the forefront of the Russian revolutionary movement reinforced the impression that Bolshevism was a
Jewish movement. Any Jewish activity in the Communist Party in Britain was therefore seized upon by right-wing elements and anti-semites as validation of their claim that all Jews were Bolsheviks. For this reason, Anglo-Jewish leaders were anxious to avoid any association of Jews with communism. However, despite official discouragement, the Board was powerless to stop East End Jews from supporting the Communist Party in the 1930s.

The schism between working class Jews in the East End and middle class Jews in the suburbs was intensified by the lack of a communal forum where conflicting ideas could be thrashed out. The fact that Anglo-Jewish communal institutions remained largely the preserve of middle class Jews who defined their Jewish identity in terms of religion did nothing to help bridge the gulf between the two increasingly polarised sections of the community. By rejecting the Jewish religion and instead committing themselves to a secular ethnic identity, East End Jews were estranged from the middle class leadership. The notion of a pluralistic community in which East End Jews made their own decisions and took independent actions was unacceptable to communal leaders. These leaders were anxious to ensure that all Jews should conform to their required standards of behaviour and conduct. Any deviations from this (and indeed there were plenty in the inter-war Jewish East End) were viewed with concern and even with alarm.

Thus, for example, many young East End Jews rejected calls for them to give their political allegiances to Zionism as fervently as they rejected attempts aimed at urging them to be observant Jews. Zionist ideology, which was based on the belief that all Jews shared a common history, culture and destiny which should be worked out in a Jewish nation-state, was anathema to most Jewish socialists. The Zionist solution was therefore rejected by left-wing Jews in the East End as an impractical, utopian dream which misled Jewish workers into believing that their interests were the same as the interests of Jewish capitalists.

At this juncture it is worth re-iterating the view of the non-Zionist Jewish left in the East End which was quite distinct from the political philosophy of the Zionists. Jewish socialists believed that working class Jews would only find solutions to the problems of poverty, unemployment and fascism in the countries where they lived by uniting with their fellow non-Jewish socialists and trade unionists. In other words, in the scenario envisaged by the Jewish left, the common class position of Jewish and non-Jewish workers would override ethnic and cultural differences and lead ultimately to complete integration. However, this did not occur and total unity with the non-Jewish labour movement was not achieved. Even when Jewish trade unions amalgamated with general unions Jewish workers, on the whole, remained in their local Jewish branches. This was largely because Jews and non-Jews were not integrated in their social and working lives. As has already been discussed, residential and occupational
segregation obstructed Jewish integration. The persistence of Jewish segregation was the result of a number of factors, some of which were internal to the Jewish community (voluntary factors) and some of which were external to it (involuntary factors). The internal factors were related to the strength of Jewish kinship and friendship bonds which meant that Jewish family and social life was conducted in an ethnic milieu. The external factors were related to the hostility of the host population. Sometimes this hostility was expressed explicitly in the form of physical attacks on Jews. At other times it was implicit in the desire of the native population to keep its distance from the Jewish community. This combination of forces emanating both from within and outside the Jewish community served to reinforce and perpetuate the existence of a separate and therefore distinct Jewish community in the East End.

Despite the existence of a vigorous Jewish ethnicity in the inter-war East End there was no clear Jewish political agenda. Sunday trading restriction laws, for example, remained virtually the sole concern of the Jewish traders who they affected: Jewish political activists were hardly involved in efforts to protect Sunday trading. Although fascism was, of course, a particular threat to Jews, it was also a serious public order problem and, as such, was of concern to the non-Jewish authorities as well. In addition, many politically active East End Jews, especially those involved in the labour movement, regarded anti-semitism and fascism as universal issues affecting all sections of the
community because of the threat which they posed to democracy. By assigning a universal meaning to ethnic issues and concerning themselves with non-ethnic issues, East End Jews hoped that they would be accepted as fully integrated participants in the local political culture. At the same time, however, it is clear that East End Jews continued to display a particular concern for the welfare of other Jews, both in Britain and abroad. Indeed, East End Jews could see no contradiction between their desire to participate in the local political system as equal members of the general working class and their desire to retain close ethnic links with fellow Jews.

The fact that most East End Jews conducted their political activities in a Jewish environment, associating primarily with other Jews, in no way detracted from their interest in general political issues which were certainly debated as intensely as Jewish issues. Indeed, East End Jews were politically divided on almost every major contemporary issue. The community was not, therefore, politically homogeneous. This mistake has often been made by commentators of the Jewish East End who have tried to impose on the area their own convenient ideological labelling. Clearly, the political complexion of the inter-war Jewish East End was overwhelmingly left-wing but this term is meaningless without a fuller elucidation of what being left-wing could actually mean in practice. In fact, the East End Jewish left encompassed a wide range of political activism from right-wing Labour Party supporters to Poale Zion Zionists through to Communists who
were so militant that they even rejected the dictat of the British Communist Party. This study is punctuated by instances of political disagreement and debate within the left. To mention just three examples, there was the opposition to Morry Davis, antagonism between Jews in the trade union movement and the divided Jewish working class response to fascism. In addition to these divisions on the left, there were also class divisions within the East End Jewish community. These were either based on the employer/employee relationship as in, for example, the distributive and manufacturing trades, or on the landlord/tenant relationship as in the rent strikes. Yet above and beyond these political and class divisions all East End Jews were united by their shared sense of belonging in the East End. This sense of place and neighbourhood ultimately proved stronger than and therefore overrode internal divisions. Indeed, in the absence of a clear Jewish political agenda East End Jews were able to maintain their ethnic distinctiveness by the very fact of their rootedness in a small, highly personalised neighbourhood.

The Second World War irreversibly altered the face of the Jewish East End. The combined impact of evacuation, conscription and bombing, together with the re-location of traditional industries to new development areas meant that the Jewish population of the East End was dramatically reduced. Many who left the area during the war never returned. The war therefore ensured that there could be no re-creation of the kind of close-knit community which had existed in the East End.
since the period of mass immigration in the 1880s. In 1945
the total Jewish population of Stepney, Poplar and Bethnal
Green was estimated at just 30,000. However, the demise of
the Jewish East End did not signal the demise of Jewish
ethnicity in Britain. On the contrary, a new middle class
ethnicity was established in the suburbs. In this way,
residential concentration continued to provide the basis for a
Jewish ethnic community in London. The 'sense of place' which
had been created in an economically deprived inner urban
neighbourhood was thus reconstructed in the suburbs and in
time came to serve as the basis for a third generation Jewish
community remodelled along class and ethnic lines.

A. PRIMARY SOURCES

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3. Interviews*

* Not all of the people listed here are mentioned in the footnotes, but they all enriched my understanding of the inter-war Jewish East End and therefore deserve to be included in the bibliography.

Louis Appleton: January 1985. Former member of the Central Committee of the Workers' Circle and secretary of Branch 3.

Sam Cohen: June 1985. Former chairman of the Workers' Circle and mayor of Hackney.

Phyllis Gerson: May 1985. Former chairwoman of Stepney B'nai Brith Settlement which she ran for many years.


Wally Gold: April 1987. Chairman of the Federation of Zionist Youth in the 1930s.

Monty Goldman: April 1985. Member of the Hackney Communist Party.

Dr. Bernard Homa: January 1987. Grandson of Rabbi Avraham Aba Werner of the Spitalfields Great Synagogue (the Machzike Hadath: 'Upholders of the Religion'). Dr. Homa was himself president of the Machzike Hadath and was a Labour member of the LCC, representing Hackney Central (1934-1955).


Sam Klein: April 1985. East End correspondent for the Jewish Chronicle in the 1930s.


Dr. Schneier Levenberg: October 1985. Former chairman of Poale Zion in Great Britain.


Mick Mindel: June 1985, January 1987. Chairman of the ULTTU (1938-1939) and a Communist Party activist in the East End in the 1930s.

Jack Moss: June 1986. Lifelong member of Branch 15 of NAFTA and editor of the furniture trade union journal, FTAT Record.


Moshe Rosette: April 1987. Prominent figure in Poale Zion in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1948 he became the first Clerk to the Knesset (Israeli Parliament).


Danny Silver: June 1986. Former shop steward convener and branch committee member of the NUTGW.


Bessy Weinberg: June 1987. Wife of Issy Weinberg (see below).


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iv) Theses


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