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Nationalism and the making of dock labour in British-ruled Palestine*

David De Vries

Introduction

The following chapter focuses on the period of the formation of dock labour in Palestine between the two World Wars. While before World War I there was a significant growth of demand for dock work and of a stratum of dock workers, it was only following the British conquest of Palestine, in 1917–1918, that this growth turned into a significant 'take-off' of port activity. Palestine's general economic development was more rapid than the development of the port's economy, a structural feature that in itself restrained more intensive sectoral economic growth. It reflected the character of pre-Mandatory Palestine as a focus of self-interested activity of the Great Powers, and that of international companies, the economic activity of which contributed only indirectly to local economic structural development. This, and the restraints on the development of foreign trade, determined the small number of port workers, and even the lack of a separate occupational category of the docker. We shall return to this important imperial contextualisation of dock labour later. The chapter ends with the outbreak of World War II, when an independent occupational category of the dockers was already in existence and various organisational structures among porters and stevedores had become well developed. However, while significant changes occurred during the war, and following the Arab-Jewish war in 1948 and the establishment of the state of Israel in the same year, the general patterns and characteristics of dock labour were determined before these political transformations. In the light of this emphasis on the two decades of the formative phase of dock labour, the following discussion focuses on a relatively small number of dockers in Palestine; and therefore a treatment of more than one port was in order.¹

* Sources in Hebrew are specified (H).

¹ *Statistical Handbook of Palestine, 1947*, (Tel Aviv, 1947); Biger, G., *Crown Colony or National Homeland? British Influence Upon Palestine, 1917–1930*, (Jerusalem, 1983, H); Fine, Y., 'Imperial and Local Components in the Molding of British Policy Towards the Possibility of Developing the Port of Haifa, 1906–1924', unpublished MA Dissertation, Department of History, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, (1990, H); Smith, B.J., *The Roots of Separatism in Palestine: British Economic Policy, 1920–1929*, (Syracuse, 1993).

The formation of Palestine's dock labour is in fact a story of at least three ports, economically interconnected and mutually influenced by municipal and national politics. The first is the old shallow-water port of the largely Arab town of Jaffa, which began to be active during the early phases of the Ottoman period in the sixteenth century. While during the nineteenth century the port of Acre was more active than that of Jaffa, the latter became more important during the formative phase under discussion. The gradual decline of Acre from the end of the nineteenth century, was part and parcel of the rise in importance of the Jaffa port and the formation therein of dock labour.²

The second is the port of Haifa. In the early twentieth century the old port of Haifa competed with the port of Acre, and following the establishment of British civil rule over Palestine in 1920, it turned into one of the major centres of British imperial and economic operations. In many ways the decline of activity of the Acre port introduced new commercial competition between the ports of Haifa and Jaffa. Around the mid-1920s, after long debating in British circles over the question of priorities between Jaffa and Haifa, it was decided that Palestine's first modern deep-water port was to be built in the mixed Arab-Jewish town of Haifa. The construction of the latter began in 1929, and at its opening at the end of 1933 it became one of the most important ports of the Middle East and a focus not only of local and regional economic activity but also of national rivalry. The volume of port activity during the 1930s, shown in the Table 11.1, reflected this economic transformation. In terms of competition between commercial centers the rivalry would focus from the mid-1930s onwards almost exclusively on Haifa and Beirut. The fact that these latter ports were under the sovereignty of two rival imperial powers, Britain and France, had important implications for the general context for the formation of dock labour.³

² Tolkowsky, S., *The Gateway of Palestine: A History of Jaffa*, (London, 1924); Tolkowsky, S., *They Took to the Sea*, (New York, 1964); Ram, H., 'The Jewish Settlement in Jaffa From Mid-18th Century to the Early Years of the British Mandate', unpublished Ph.D thesis, Bar Ilan University, (1982, H); Agmon, I., 'The Development of Palestine's Foreign Trade and Its Impact on Economy and Society, 1879-1914', unpublished MA Dissertation, Department of Middle Eastern History, Haifa University, (1984, H); Kark, R., *Jaffa - A City in Evolution, 1799-1917*, (Jerusalem, 1990, H); Shaylan, S., 'The 'Conquest of Labour' in Jaffa Port, 1920-1936', unpublished MA Dissertation, Department of Labour Studies, Tel Aviv University, (1998, H).

³ De Monicault, J., *Le Port de Beyrouth et l'Economie des Pays du Levant Sous le Mandat Français*, (Paris, 1936); Casto, R.E., and Dotson, W.O., 'Haifa the port city of Palestine', *The Journal of Geography*, 37, (1938); Shattner, Y., 'Haifa - The port town', *Ha-Teva Ve-Ha-Aretz*, 5-6, (1938-1940, H); Nedava, Y., (ed.), *Haifa, Oliphant and the Zionist Vision*, (Haifa, 1977, H); Carmel, A., *History of Haifa Under the Turks*, (Jerusalem, 1977, H); Agmon, 'The Development'; Buheiry, M.R., *Beirut's Role in the Political Economy of the French Mandate, 1919-1939*, (Oxford, 1985); Herbert, G., 'Crossroads: imperial priorities and regional perspectives in the planning of Haifa, 1918-1939', *Planning Perspectives*, 4, (1989), pp. 318-20; Naor, M., and Ben-Artzi, Y., (eds), *The Development of Haifa, 1918-1948*, (Jerusalem, 1989, H); Yazbak, M., *Haifa in the Late Ottoman Period, 1864-1914: A Muslim Town in Transition*, (Leiden, 1998).

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The third focal point of dockers' experience under discussion is the small port of the largely Jewish town of Tel Aviv, operating from 1936 onwards. Its activity was comparatively small (see Table 11.1), and was made possible only in the context of the Arab-Jewish conflict, and the Arab economic boycott of the mid-1930s which shut down the Jaffa port. While compared with Haifa both the Jaffa and Tel Aviv ports were small, their stories and that of their dock labour were closely linked to these general political developments.⁴ During the 1930s these three ports were the centers of dockers' activity. They were largely dependent on Governmental activity, on commercial activity shared by Arab and Jewish merchants and contractors, and on incoming waves of Jewish and Arab immigration. These features turned the ports from an economic location, where dock labour experience was evolving, into highly politicised arenas of conflict.⁵

In the 1950s a new phase in the history of port and dock labour began. It was exemplified in the intensive activity of the Israeli state and the development of the Haifa, Eilat and Ashdod ports. The focusing of the discussion on the period prior to these developments, and on an integrated treatment of three different port-towns, only emphasises the close interrelations between dock labour on the one hand, and the political economy of Zionism and the Arab-Jewish conflict on the other.⁶

Writing an integrated three-port chapter set particular problems, not only because of difficulties of comparison of different port towns, but also because of historiographical lacunae. The urban history of Palestine has not been written yet, and the story of the three port-towns under discussion, in particular, still awaits its historian. Moreover, the writing of the labour history of Palestine is currently in its initial stages. While some social-historical works have been published in recent years, most labour history has been either biographical, institutional or political.⁷

This one-sided emphasis on the political history of Labour and on the Jewish Labour Movement (centred around a dominant political party, Mapai, and the politically-led workers' organisation – the Histadrut), determined the paucity of studies on the social history of Arab and Jewish workers in general, and of

⁴ De Vries, J.J.W., *Preliminary Project of a Deep-Water Harbour in Tel Aviv*, (Tel Aviv, 1937); *The Port of Tel Aviv, 1936–1946*, (Tel Aviv, 1946, H), pp. 5–6; Yam (April 1948, H); *Twenty-Five Year Anniversary of the Tel Aviv Port*, (Tel Aviv, 1961, H), p. 165; Stern, S., 'The port of Tel Aviv – An episode in the history of the Yishuv', *Cathedra*, 25, (1982, H); Shchori, I., *The Dream That Turned Into a City: Tel Aviv – Birth and Growth*, (Tel Aviv, 1990, H); Lockman, Z., *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906–1948*, (Berkeley, 1996), chapter 5.

⁵ Smith, *The Roots*, chapter 7; Seikaly, M., *Haifa: Transformation of a Palestinian Arab Society, 1918–1939*, (London, 1995), chapter 11.

⁶ Shalev, M., *Labour and the Political Economy in Israel*, (Oxford, 1992), 'Introduction'; Karmon, Y., *Ports Around the World*, (New York, 1973); Keyder, C., (ed.), *Port Cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, 1800–1914*, (Binghamton, 1993).

⁷ Shafir, G., *Land, Labour and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914*, (Updated edition. Berkeley, 1996); De Vries, D., 'Proletarianization and national segregation: Haifa in the 1920s', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 30, (1994); Lockman, *Comrades*; Bernstein, D., 'Porters and stevedores: Jewish workers' entry to work at the Haifa port', in Ben-Artzi, Y., (ed.), *Haifa: Local History*, (Haifa 1998, H).

dockers in particular. This chapter was written, therefore, almost entirely on the basis of primary archival material. However, a crucial imbalance in the primary sources should be noted. While Arab dockers were the majority during this formative period, most of the material found relates to Jewish porters and stevedores. In this sense the chapter, together with some other works in progress, serves as an initial phase in a larger project still to be undertaken.⁸

Despite these limitations it should be noted that the sources on dock labour, albeit on Jewish ones, are very rich. Structural material, minute details of organisational problems, and perspectives of labour market behaviour are well founded. Qualitative material is more informative though, and quantitative data are either sparse, or to be handled with caution. All in all we were able to extract quite a clear picture of the labour market experiences of Jewish dockers. Much more research still has to be done in order to construct demographic and cultural aspects of daily lives. The actual richness of labour market sources, compared with all other aspects, reflects to our mind the centrality of labour market problems, and their political aspects. The extent of the impact of the economic-national complex on the availability of the sources should also be noted: the reason why the sources are so rich has to do with the political significance of the ports for Jewish political and Labour elites.⁹

Based on primary sources, the chapter presents a historical approach that attempts to interweave social and political histories. Because of archival limitations emphasis is laid on the minority of Jewish dockers. However, the starting point of the discussion is imperial politics and the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is argued that the experience of dock labour cannot be understood without this political and conflictual contextualisation. The formation of dock labour, and development of work strategies was highly politicised, and cannot be detached from political events. These strategies were mostly an outcome of a learning process of the system of relations consisting of many forces developing in relation

⁸ For examples see Tsipper, R., 'The conquest of Hebrew labour in the port of Haifa, 1920-1936', Unpublished Paper, Tel Aviv University, (1972, H); Vashitz, Y., *Jewish-Arab Relations at Haifa Under the British Mandate*, (Givat-Haviva, 1973); Rosen, A., 'Joint Jewish-Arab Unionism in 1920s Palestine', unpublished MA Dissertation, Department of Sociology, Haifa University, (1987, H); Abud, N., 'The Palestinian-Arab Workers' Association, 1925-1947', unpublished MA Dissertation, Department of Middle Eastern History, Haifa University, (1988, H).

⁹ The main archives consulted were the Archives of the Labour Movement (The Lavon Institute), hereafter cited LA. The main collections used were The Histadrut Executive, The Haifa Labour Council, The Tel Aviv Labour Council, The Histadrut's Department of Statistics, and Personal Collections. At the Israel State Archives (ISA) the main collection consulted was The Colonial Office collection. Extensive use was made of the Haifa Labour Council, *Annual Reports*, 1923-1934 (H). The main Hebrew newspapers consulted were: *Davar*, 1920s to 1940s, *Ha-Aretz*, 1920s to 1930s, *Ha-Poel Ha-Tsair*, 1910s to 1930s, and *Yam*, 1940s. Useful also were quaternaries sources: Mills, E., (ed.), *Census of Palestine, 1931*, (Alexandria, 1933); *Sikumim* - Statistical Data of the Histadrut, 1930-1946 (H); *Statistical Handbook of Palestine, 1929*, (Jerusalem, 1930); *Statistical Handbook of Middle Eastern Countries, 1945*, (Tel Aviv, 1946); *Statistical Abstracts of Israel, 1949-1953*, (H).

to each other: the dockers, the employers, political forces, the British Mandate, and the Histadrut organisation of the Jewish Labour Movement. Our focus on the period between the two World Wars allowed detailed analysis of the mechanism interrelating dock labour experiences with Zionist segregationist history.¹⁰

The formation of the port labour market

The formation of dock labour in Palestine should be first contextualised in the political history of the region. The British conquest of Palestine at the end of World War I put an end not only to the rule of the Ottoman Empire, but also to the forces that impeded Palestine's economic growth. Port activity, closely related as it was to import and export activities, was one of the main arenas where this transformation was taking place. The old small ports of Jaffa and Haifa were the first to enjoy this change. The British forces used both ports for military activity, and with the set up of civil rule, in the early 1920s, the ports became an important focal point for British importing activity of materials for railroad construction. It is this linkage between imperial needs, port renewed activity and Palestine's inland economy, that propelled the crucial phase of dockers' formation. This linkage was extremely important for later developments as well, as it influenced cyclical changes that in turn affected dock work.¹¹

The role of the British Mandatory rule in dockers' formation was further reflected in the structural developments of the ports themselves. The British decision to focus their administrative and economic operations in the north of the country was at the background of the imperial decision to build the modern port of Haifa, and determined the superiority of Haifa over Acre. In turn this affected Jaffa too, which suffered from competition with Egyptian ports. Moreover the British were influential also in the construction of the small Tel Aviv port during the 1930s, in conjunction with the Arab economic boycott during the Arab-Palestinian rebellion. In many ways, therefore, the fate of Palestine's foreign trade, economic development and structural location of port activity cannot be understood without this imperial contextualisation. Moreover, the British decision to support, directly and indirectly, the building of a Jewish national Home in Palestine, and their self-interested decision to support the more advanced economic sector of the population (the Jews), were significant for the national-ethnic character of dock labour structuration. This impact was reflected also in urban development: during the 1920s and 1930s the growth of Tel Aviv and Haifa was in many ways a corollary of their development as commercial centers (as in the case of Tel Aviv), and industrial centers (as in the case of Haifa). The formation of dock work and dock labour was part of this urbanisation process.¹²

¹⁰ For Labour and segregation see Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy*, pp. 34–44; De Vries, 'Proletarianization'; Shafir, *Land, Labour*, chapter 3.

¹¹ Gross, N., 'The economic policy of the British Mandatory Government in Palestine', *Research in Economic History*, 9, (1984); Biger, *Crown Colony*.

¹² Kenworthy, J.M., 'Haifa harbour and the British Empire', *Palestine and Near East Economic Magazine*, 4, (1929); *Twenty-Five Year Anniversary*; Reichman, S., 'The

Zionism, Jewish immigration and the 'import of Jewish capital were the second structural factor that transformed Palestine's port activity. Before the British occupation of Palestine Jaffa's and Haifa's dock activity was the monopoly of a very small number of Arab contractors. Jewish immigration following the Balfour declaration brought about the growth of Jewish commercial activity, largely in reciprocal relations with British imperial activity, needing the ports for realising British imperial needs.¹³

The lack of any significant presence of Jewish dockers in the early 1920s meant that the increase in Jewish economic activity favoured first and foremost Arab porters and stevedores.¹⁴ However, with the growing association between private Jewish economic ventures and the Zionist project the role of the Jewish Zionist docker became important. Moreover, the fact that the ports turned into gates for incoming Jewish immigration, mainly from Eastern Europe, strengthened this national-economic complex, and the mutual dependence of Jewish private and Zionist national capital in Palestine's port-economy. The various forces operating in the framework of the new Jewish urban settlement – the Zionist Movement, private capital and Jewish public companies – prepared the basic economic infrastructure for the entry of Jewish workers into the Jaffa and Haifa docks.¹⁵

The impact of the Zionist factor on initial formation of a stratum of Jewish dockers was crucial also in another sense. Economic cycles of boom and depression, occurring within the Jewish sector of Palestine, had widespread implications for both Jewish and Arab dockers. During economic slow-downs Jewish import activities, particularly those of private capital decreased, and brought about a sharp increase of unemployment of all dockers.¹⁶ In many ways it was this economic aspect of British and Zionist presence in Palestine, and not only its political implications, which was often more influential on dock-formation and conditions of dock work.¹⁷

Finally, during the period under discussion the evolution of the national conflict became a crucial influential factor on the formation of dock labour. In the first place the conflict influenced port activities. During the violent events of 1921 and 1929 in Jaffa and Haifa the docks became important military arenas. Smuggling of arms and munitions by Jewish defence forces, guided by the

evolution of land transportation in Palestine, 1920–1947', *Jerusalem Studies in Geography*, 2, (1971); Shchori, *The Dream*; Smith, *The Roots*; Seikaly, *Haifa*; Bernstein, D., 'Expanding the Split Labor Market Theory: between and within sectors of the split labor market of Mandatory Palestine', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 28, (1996), pp. 259–262; Bernstein, 'Porters and stevedores', pp. 119–126.

¹³ LA-250-72-1-1831; Hayam, Z., *Telling Ships*, (Tel Aviv, 1968, H); Stern, 'The port of Tel Aviv'.

¹⁴ LA-250-27-1-1392; Yazbak, *Haifa in the Late Ottoman*, ch. 1.

¹⁵ *Ha-Aretz*, 12 Apr. 1948; *Twenty-Five Year Anniversary*, p. 165.

¹⁶ *The Histadrut in Haifa, 1933–1939*, (Haifa, 1939, H); Cohen, A., *The Economy of the Arab Sector in Mandatory Palestine*, (Givat-Haviva, 1978, H); Biletski, E., *In Creation and Struggle: The Haifa Labour Council, 1921–1981*, (Tel Aviv, 1981, H).

¹⁷ LA-250-27-1-618; LA-250-27-1-619; LA-250-27-1-663; Avitsur, S., *The Jaffa Port – Rise and Decline*, (Tel Aviv, 1972, H).

Labour-Zionist perception of the importance of the ports for state-building, depended on the presence of Jewish workers and on Labour's co-operation with Jewish employers. Arab opposition to Jewish immigration in the early 1930s turned the ports, the gates of incoming immigration, into political battlefields. In 1936 the shut-down of the Jaffa port was effected largely with the active participation of Arab dockers. Furthermore, the activation and operation of the Tel Aviv port during the latter part of the 1930s could not have occurred without the impact of the economic boycott triggered by the 1936–1939 Arab rebellion.

The second aspect of influence of the national conflict over dockers' formation was national competition in the labour market. From the early 1920s Jewish workers attempted to enter work in the ports – either as construction workers, or as dockers, stevedores and lightermen. Facing the majority of Arab dockers and their domination of the dock labour-market, and lacking the latter's tradition of working under low wages and harsh working conditions, these attempts turned quickly into organisational and political issues. Attempted competition, much more than bi-national union co-operation, was the only strategy available for the Jewish worker to enter this occupational category, and, as we shall see later, was impossible to be carried out on an individual basis. In this sense Labour-Zionist collective action at the docks characterised the formation of Jewish dock labour. Only in Tel Aviv the role of national competition was less central because of the unitary Jewish character of the town and the port. After the 1948 war, which occasioned a dramatic decrease of Arab dock labour, this would be true also for other ports as well. As far as can be gauged from the sources Arab dockers in Jaffa were hardly affected by this competition, while in Haifa the Jews were perceived as a real threat to the Arab docker. Paradoxically where Jewish entry to the dock-economy was more successful, such as in 1930s Haifa, bi-national organisational links between Arab and Jewish dockers were made easier.¹⁸

Dock labour: some characteristics

Dockers in Palestine originated mainly from three sources: local Arabs, large groups of Arab (mainly Hawranies from Southern Syria) and Zionist-oriented Jewish immigrants, and specific Jewish portorage and stevedoring groups (Greek and Polish in particular) who were purposefully brought over by the Zionist Organisation and Jewish Labour Movement in order to compete with Arab dock labour. These groups were not homogenous, and competition was widespread, both within the ranks of Arab dockers (Hawranies, Egyptians and locals), and between Ashkenasi and Sepharadi Jews. As dock labour was formed in the context of pre-modern port technology, and a changing economy that initiated some technological advance, the main characteristic of dock labour was the physical capabilities and skill of the individual docker. Each docker, lighterman and stevedore was dependent on either an individual evaluation of his work

¹⁸ *Twenty-Five Year Anniversary*, pp. 165–69; Shapira, A., *Futile Struggle: Hebrew Labour, 1929–1939*, (Tel Aviv, 1977, H), ch. 2; Lockman, *Comrades*, ch. 5; Shaylan, 'The conquest of labour'.

abilities, or on the advantages stemming from work in groups. The physical dimension was structured along familiar lines, such as carrying heavy loads, endurance of long working-hours at the docks under the blazing sun, or in the stuffy atmosphere of the ships or the warehouses. Often this influenced the ability of the individual to sustain long periods of work, and consequently the persistence of casual work at the docks. This was accentuated by national divisions, as the majority of Jewish dockers could less sustain the hard physical work, the low wages and the long working hours.¹⁹

The seasonal character of dock work eased the weight of this problem, but not in any significant measure. Likewise certain technological improvement, introduced by Jewish dockers in order to overcome their 'work inferiority', did not bring about any meaningful change in the relative share of Arabs and Jews at the docks. In Haifa for example the increase in Jewish employment in harbour works increased from 10 per cent in 1933 (at the opening of the port) to more than 50 per cent in 1939 mainly due to changing political circumstances (the 1936-39 Arab Rebellion). The experience at the Tel Aviv docks was somewhat different because of the dominant presence of Jewish dockers. Here the main limitation on Jewish work-persistence were working conditions and technological backwardness. The weakness of the Jewish Labour Movement to affect a limitation on the market was evident from the start. For these reasons the role of the characteristics of the dockers themselves were no less crucial for these entry attempts. The whole project of attempting to set a Jewish stronghold at the docks was largely influenced by these characteristics.²⁰

Consequently group work and group solidarity, even family ties, especially among incoming Jewish Thessaloniki stevedores, developed into a major feature of portage and stevedoring. The high status of the powerful and skillful individual was dependent on his position in the dockers' group or recruiting-gang. The small groups of lightermen setting out to unload the ships, the stevedores handing over to the porters at the docks the cargo materials, and the warehouse workers – all developed various forms of group-work and solidarity that affected the performance of work and social relations at the docks. This group culture was crucial for the survival of the individual docker in the dock labour-market. It affected his chances of entry to the market, his position vis-a-vis the contractor, his re-employment across seasonal work or economic cycles, and his ability to endure the tough working conditions. Moreover, because of the labour-market

¹⁹ LA-250-27-1-128; *Census of the Histadrut, 1923*, (Tel Aviv, 1923, H); *Census of Workers in Palestine, 1937*, (Tel Aviv, 1937, H); Gelbert, M., *The Jews and Seamanship*, (Tel Aviv, 1940, H); Yam, Apr. 1948, (H); Taqqu, R., 'Arab Labour in Mandatory Palestine, 1920-1948', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, (1977); Yazbak, M., 'Arab Migration to Haifa, 1933-1948', unpublished MA Dissertation, Department of Middle Eastern History, Haifa University, (1986, H).

²⁰ LA-250-72-1-1831; Himadeh, S., (ed.), *Economic Organisation of Palestine*, (Beirut, 1938); *The Histadrut in Haifa*; Dekel, E., *The Heroic Stories of the Jewish Defence Force*, (Tel-Aviv, 1965, H); Avitsur, *The Jaffa Port*; Metzer, J., 'Technology, labour and growth in a dual economy's traditional sector: Mandatory Palestine, 1921-1936', in Jorberg, L., Rosenberg, N., (eds), *Technical Change, Employment and Investment*, (Lund, 1982); Bernstein, 'Porters and stevedores', pp. 122-23.

inferiority of the Jewish docker a particular group culture sprouted among them, singularising this kind of Jewish worker from his Jewish counterparts in the town. Often it was a piece-work grouping, a type of employment vital for easing the entry of the Jews into the port system. As getting work dependent on collective practices and wages were not distributed individually, the group's inner order became a cultural system. In this system solidarity, mutual responsibility and respect, and a sense of common 'enemies' (employers, union bureaucrats, Arabs), became crucial assets. Furthermore, in this system the cultural construction of boundaries was essential for solidarity. This was partly the role of dockers' slang and nicknaming, in which derogative expressions were designated to particularly harsh types of work and to unskilled stevedores. 'Glasses' for example referred to those who did not perform well enough, and 'Donkeys' to those who failed altogether.²¹

It is against this background that the patterns of wages and working conditions were structured. The low wage level was determined by the dominant presence of the individual Arab docker, and his weak position in relation to the Arab contractor, the British employer and Arab and Jewish merchants. The organisation of piece-work group among Arab dockers was initially small in scale, despite some attempts by the Histadrut to initiate organisation among Arab dockers. Working conditions were harsh, and, as shown by the paucity of labour disputes, hardly any possibility of protesting in favour of improvement of conditions was in sight. Work was largely unstable, both in the structural sense, and on a day-to-day basis. Health hazards and work accidents came to be associated with the realities of working at the docks. Furthermore, the employment structure was fragmented into numerous groups of competitive Arab and Jewish contractors who set independent wage levels. These characteristics of dock work further impeded the entry of Jews. Organisational efforts of the Histadrut (which will be touched upon later), and the emergence of Jewish contractors eased small-scale Jewish entry, and a consequent limited raise of wage levels and improvement of conditions. Throughout the period under discussion the docks remained an exemplary locus of the Palestine labour-market where the low levels of wages and of working conditions were determined by the Arab labour majority and by the preference of Jewish contractors for Arab workers, and where the impact of Jewish organisational presence was minimal. Essentially this was the crucial component in the construction of the labour-market superiority of the Arab docker over his Jewish counterpart.²²

²¹ LA-250-72-1-1831; *Twenty-Five Year Anniversary*, pp. 78-100

²² LA-250-72-1-1831; LA-250-27-1-128; Sussman, Z., 'The determination of wages for unskilled labour in the advanced sector of the dual economy of Mandatory Palestine', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 22, (1973); Metzger, J., and Kaplan, O., 'Jointly but severally: Jewish-Arab dualism and economic growth in Palestine', *Journal of Economic History*, 65, (1985), pp. 327-45.

Dockers in town society

At the present state of research it is difficult to outline the reciprocal impact of dock labour on the port-towns, and town society on dock labour. However we should bear in mind that in all three cases under discussion the town-communities were relatively small, and any economic or political change was bound to affect the community at large.

While the British Government was closely involved in port economic activity it almost totally abstained from interfering with labour relations. The British refrain from labour legislation had general implications for the whole labour force, but it impinged significantly on the dockers themselves. Labour conditions in the port reflected this abstention, as did the total control of indirect employment through contractors. For this reason, and for the political structure of Palestine, we should pay attention to political relationships in each sector separately. Because of archival imbalance more is said on the Jewish sector.²³

The first aspect that should be mentioned is the importance of the docks for political relations in the towns. In Jaffa in 1921 and 1929 dockers were instrumental the supply of arms for the warring groups. During the 1936-39 Arab rebellion dockers took an important part in shutting down the port. The construction of the Tel Aviv port in the mid-1930s was directly influenced by events at the Jaffa docks. Furthermore, the number of Jewish dockers employed in Haifa at the end of the 1920 was a function of the political power of the Jews in the town, and of the ability of the local Labour Council to harness the Histadrut to exert pressure on the British Government. However we should pay attention to the fact that at the beginning of the Arab rebellion in 1936 the Haifa port was not shut down for Arab fear of loss of workplaces, but for two other reasons: the British presence (stemming from Haifa's importance for the Empire), and certain co-operation and solidarity emerging between veteran Arab and Jewish dockers. In this sense dockers' experience at the ports reflected differences of politics and social make-up between Jaffa and Haifa.²⁴

The second aspect related to internal politics of the two national sectors. The Muslim majority of Arab dockers, employed and controlled by Christian commercial elites and a small number of Muslim contractors, suffered from harsh labour conditions partly due to the weakness of the Muslims in the politics of Jaffa and Haifa. In the Jewish sector in Haifa the Histadrut was very influential but could not succeed in convincing Jewish merchants and contractors to prefer Jewish dockers over Arabs. While Jewish dockers were instrumental in military activities, specifically during the 1921 and 1929 riots, this instrumentality was not reflected in any consequent economic advantages. Furthermore, it raised British suspicions, and it created on-the-spot tensions between Arab and Jewish stevedores closely acquainted with each other because of joint experiences at work. This relative weakness of influence of dock labour over town-society was

²³ Smith, *The Roots*, chapter 7.

²⁴ LA-250-27-1-128; Slutski, Y., *From Defence to Struggle*, (Tel Aviv, 1959, H), p. 541; Avitsur, *The Jaffa Port*, p. 151; Dar, L., 'The attempt at Jewish-Arab joint organisation at the port of Haifa in 1932', *Me'Asef*, 14, (1984, H), pp. 45-79.

well reflected in the fact that Jaffa and Haifa were more identified as immigration gates, and immigrants' centers, than as port cities. Haifa to some extent was different, but still its renown as a centre of heavy industry had the upper hand.²⁵

The third aspect reflected the reciprocal economic links between the docks and the towns. As unemployment in Palestine was generally chronic, interrupted only twice during the period under discussion (during the economic booms of 1924–25 and 1932–34), the docks served as outlets for many unemployed immigrants and workers. In certain years the pressure of the unemployed on dock work supply was reflected in the integration of many workers, unskilled in dock work, in the ports. In itself this pressure allowed employers to keep wages down, and not to respond to demands for improvement of working conditions. On the other hand the seasonal and cyclical nature of dock work brought many Arab and Jewish porters and stevedores to search for alternative work in the inner town economy. The casual nature of dock work was well reflected in this short-time passages from the docks to construction, street cleaning and agricultural work outside the towns. In both cases of labour pressures on the dock economy, and on the town economy, the separation of the former from the latter was largely impossible, thus exposing the dock's wage and condition levels to those of the urban economy at large. Furthermore, the passage of dockers from one Palestinian port to another was part of a larger mobility pattern characterising Palestine's workers generally. This mobility, stemming from the economic incapacity of the port-towns to employ the growing labour force, and absorb incoming immigration, was one of the factors integrating Palestine's labour market as a whole. The economic role of the ports for the country's economy, the political influence of events at one port on the other, and the dockers' participation in intra-town mobility, made dock labour an important factor in this integration.²⁶

The fourth aspect refers to the culture of work and particularly to Zionist ideology. If any impact of dock labour on society in general was recorded at all it concerned the metaphoric role of the physical dimension of dock work on Zionist ideological thinking. The incapacity of Jewish workers to enter, in significant numbers, the dock labour-market was a mere validation of the difficulties of the inversion of the social pyramid and of productivisation enshrined in the tenets of Labour-Zionism. Any entry was thus perceived as an heroic realisation of a larger social project, a conquest, a crucial aspect of building a 'healthy nation' of workers. No wonder therefore that in Histadrut circles the most favoured candidates among organised Jewish workers to carry out this mission were loyal members of Kibbutz groupings, who worked in the urban sector, young workers who could sustain hard physical work, and particular types of Jewish immigrants equipped with the tradition of dock work before their immigration to Palestine. However, it should be emphasised that skill and physical ability were not enough. The sources reveal a tendency of cultural paternalism directed at many Sepharadi-

²⁵ Slutski, *From Defence*, p. 451; Dekel, *The Heroic Stories*, p. 51; Smith, *The Roots*, ch. 7; Seikaly, *Haifa*, ch. 11.

²⁶ *Twenty-Five Year Anniversary*, pp. 80 and 218; De Vries, D., *Idealism and Bureaucracy in the 1920s: The Origins of 'Red Haifa'*, (Tel Aviv, 1999, H).

Jews. This inner Jewish social-ethnic tension demonstrated the non-unitary nature of the images mentioned.²⁷

Dock work was thus integrated in a larger set of social and national images which revered the productive and the constructor. Hebrew seamen, porters and stevedores were idealised as those who could overcome the physical and mental limitations set by Jewish traditional occupational structure, by Arab domination of the labour market, even by the violent atmosphere and the images of disease, dirt and vice occasionally characterising the docks. These images also constructed dock labour as a men's world, as an occupational sector to which women could not enter, where the practice of gender equality, ideologically (though not practically) espoused by the Jewish Labour Movement, could not be attempted. As far as can be gauged from the sources no parallel imagery and specific ideological roles were attached to the Arab docker in Arab-Palestinian society.²⁸

Patterns of collective action

The analysis of collective action among dockers during the British Mandate is closely connected with the economic and social patterns of the political contextualisation outlined above. The point of departure for such analysis is the inferiority of Jewish dockers in the dock labour market. This inferiority characterised the two formative decades under discussion, but should be understood as a part of a learning process in which various strategies to cope with this inferiority were attempted. The following discussion attempts to analyse these strategies thematically.

It should be emphasised first that the inferiority of the Jewish dockers consisted of various elements. Arab dock labour was generally cheaper for all the employers working at the docks. The British employers in the construction of railroads, and in the Customs department, themselves working mostly through Arab contractors, generally preferred cheap Arab labour in order to minimise labour cost, and to prevent any tackling with organised labour that might have pressed for demands for improvement of labour conditions. Arab employers and contractors preferred Arab porters and stevedores for the same reasons, but added to it their opposition to working with Zionist-oriented workers. Jewish merchants and contractors showed some signs of support for Zionist causes, such as absorption of Jewish immigration through employing Jewish dockers; but because of their own economic weakness they generally preferred the Arab worker. In terms of the general employment pattern an interesting alliance was in the making

²⁷ LA-250-72-1-1832-b; *Twenty-Five Year Anniversary*, pp. 135-36 and 175; *Hebrew Seamanship*, (Tel Aviv, 1935, H); Sheffer, E., *Volunteering*, (Jerusalem, 1949, H); Studni, Z., 'The Salonikai'im', *Me'Asef*, 8, (1976, H), pp. 153-56; Eshel, Z., *The System of the Jewish Defence in Haifa*, (Tel Aviv, 1978, H).

²⁸ Hayam, Z., *The History of Israeli Seamanship*, (Tel Aviv, 1972, H); Vashitz, *Jewish-Arab Relations*; Rosen, 'Joint Jewish-Arab'; Abud, 'The Palestinian-Arab'; Bernstein, D., 'The Palestine Workers' Alliance - Dynamic of contact', in Pappe, I., (ed.), *Arabs and Jews in British Mandatory Palestine*, (Givat-Haviva, 1995, H).

during this period in which politically different employers practised a common policy of minimisation of labour costs which usually meant abstention from employing Jews.²⁹

However it should be remembered that this structural inferiority of the Jewish docker could not have developed without the participation of the Jewish dockers themselves. Only a minority of Jewish dockers were willing to engage themselves, except during periods of severe economic downturn and high unemployment, in kinds of work which demanded such physical effort, which promised only low pay, and in which the possibilities of improving working conditions were minimal. This minority attempted to get absorbed in dock works spontaneously through reduction of their cost to the employers, and even through independent organisation in piece-work labour groupings. These attempts succeeded only partially. In an indirect way, therefore, the majority Jewish dockers joined this unwritten alliance between the various employers in the persistence of their own market inferiority.³⁰

Against this background it is possible to understand the centrality of the Histadrut in patterns of collective action in the dock labour market. Since its creation at the end of 1920 by workers' political parties, and supported by the Zionist Movement, the Histadrut – the organisational expression of the Jewish Labour Movement in Palestine – patterned its policies and actions in the labour market on the notion of artificially limiting the market forces that determined the structural inferiority of the Jewish worker vis-a-vis his Arab counterpart (known as the The Conquest of Labour strategy). Almost all the organisational structures and tools developed were oriented towards this cause, including the construction of Zionist-Socialist ideological tenets which purported to serve ideologically labour market practices. In each town a Labour Council was set up, working under direct political control, and assigned at constructing the tools to realise this policy. In the context of dock labour this meant working concurrently on internal and external front.³¹

The first attempts of the Histadrut to set a foot in portering and stevedoring was through creating of closely disciplined groups of Jewish workers purported to obtain piece-work. The Labour Exchange in each Labour Council would attempt to approach Jewish merchants and contractors operating at the docks, and receive jobs for these groups. When succeeded these jobs were allocated to a group of porters or stevedores through a labour bureaucrat who received orders from the Secretariat of the Labour Council. At the same time attempts were made to persuade Jewish dockers to join in setting up local dockers' unions that would be loyal to the Histadrut, and in which the organising of labour recruiting groups would take place. This policy of unionisation, partly purported to assure the dockers' performance of military roles, and based on work groups assigned with nationally-oriented economic roles, meant to assure the control of the Labour Council over jobs allocated to Jews. Even the attempts of the Histadrut to

²⁹ Shafir, *Land, Labour*, chapter 3; Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy*, chapter 4.

³⁰ LA-250-72-1-1832-b; *Twenty-Five Year Anniversary*, pp. 204-205; Lockman, *Comrades*, pp. 194-195.

³¹ LA-250-72-1-1831; LA-250-72-1-1392.

unionise Arab dockers were carried out in the same orientation. As tension among Jewish workers, often on ethnic grounds, was sometimes greater than between Jews and Arabs, the role of the bureaucrat on the spot was to assure that loyal groups prevented the entry of spontaneous groups; and that work allocated was completed in the terms fixed by the contractors and the Labour Exchange. In practice this meant that any form of Jewish collective action at the docks was controlled 'from above', and that any sign of entry-attempts by unorganised labour or union enclosure practices were immediately taken care of.³²

In reality this attempted system of collective organisation failed. Either because of employers' economic preferences, or because of the intransigence of Jewish dockers. The story of dock labour of the 1920s and 1930s was in fact a story of the failure of the Labour Councils, particularly those operating in Jaffa and Haifa, to successfully limit the forces that determined the inferiority of the Jewish docker and the inner rivalry among Jewish dockers. Among the latter there were those who were willing to respond positively to the Histadrut, either because of their dependence on the Labour Exchange for survival in the market, or because of political loyalty to Mapai, the party that dominated Labour and the Histadrut. This was clearly seen in the mid-1930s when the number of organised Jewish dockers (mainly porters and stevedores) more than doubled (from 909 in January 1933 to 2116 in 1937). But it seemed that the majority demanded that any co-operation with the Histadrut's bureaucracy would not limit their own freedom of action at the docks. These failures were a crucial factor in the persistence of the Arab domination of work at the ports, particularly of stevedoring.³³

Against this background it is possible to understand the unceasing attempts of the Histadrut town organisations to discipline various spontaneous grouping of Jewish dockers. These disciplinary measures, developed through the 1920s and early 1930s into a cultural system, in which Jewish dockers and Histadrut organisers were negotiating questions of freedom of action, militancy and organisational and political loyalty. The internal arbitration tribunals of the Histadrut at each Labour Council, known as Members' or Comrades' Justice Courts, and the meetings of the Labour Exchanges, became the arenas where the fate of the Jewish dockers was to be decided upon. Extreme measures were attempted, such as favoring loyal Kibbutz groupings, ousting rebellious members from the Histadrut (particularly Communists), or violently preventing them from entering the ports.³⁴ However these measures were less effective than the daily negotiations with, and attempted on-the-spot organisation of the dockers who resisted social control. It is from these unceasing negotiations that we could learn

³² LA-250-72-1-1192; LA-250-72-1-1392; Haifa Labour Council 1921-1971 Report, LA-250-27-1-273-a and LA-250-27-5-40-57-13; Dekel, *The Heroic Stories*, p. 51.

³³ On Tel Aviv see LA-250-72-1-1832-b; the number of workers at the Haifa port (during season) in 1932 was 578, only 58 of them Jews. In 1936 the number rose to 2300, 478 of them Jews. In 1939 the number of workers was the same, 2300, but the number of the Jews increased to 1300. See LA-208-1-788-b; LA-250-27-2-319; *The Histadrut in Haifa; Statistical Handbook*, 1947.

³⁴ LA-250-27-1-618; LA-250-27-1-619; LA-250-27-1-663; Ben-Avraham, *What is Going On in the Port of Tel Aviv*, (Tel Aviv, 1938, H); Biletsky, *In Creation*, chapter 8.

not only of the extent of the failure of the Histadrut to effect its attempted influence on dock labour, but also on the central role played by these negotiations in the making of dock culture. Negotiated order was central to this culture no less than the nature and characteristics of dock work itself.³⁵

In the light of this organisational weakness any collective organisation initiated by the Histadrut's Labour Councils and Labour Exchanges was thus bound to include a series of attempts to influence the dock-market involving forces outside the organisation itself. Four aspects are emphasised. The first external front was the British Government. The Labour Councils initiated a series of pressures on the Government through higher political channels. The leadership of the Histadrut was asked to put pressure on the leadership of the Zionist movement in order to negotiate with British authorities over allocating dock work to Jews, particularly in early 1930s Haifa. In each port-town the Labour Councils tried to mobilise Jewish political and municipal establishments to exert influence over local British officials. This pattern of collective action was not particular to dock work, but it seems that because of the importance of the ports and the docks for the British authorities dock labour was high on the list of intended pressures.³⁶

In many instances the fate of Jewish dockers, and the proportion of Jewish and Arab dockers at one port, was decided politically far beyond the docks. These pressures were often unfruitful. For British officials any political preference for Jewish dockers (at the Customs warehouses for instance) could mean either increasing the cost of dock work for the British tax-payer, or enraging Arab political elites who opposed Zionist influence over Arab-dominated labour markets. This political failure of the Histadrut was one of the causes for the ambivalent loyalty of Jewish dockers towards organisational and collective action by the Histadrut.³⁷

The second issue which necessitated collectively-led action in the dock labour-market was to bypass the inferiority of the Jews in the docks through, what can be defined as, creation of the desired docker. This policy was part of the general scheme of the Jewish Labour Movement in Palestine to create a working class, a social basis that could bring about the realisation of Labour Zionism. In terms specific to dock work it meant, first of all, the training of Jewish workers to dock work. Such training could have been operated only through the Kibbutz groupings loyal to the Histadrut, who were willing to enter physically hard and low-paid dock work. Such attempts characterised particularly the periods when all other attempts at introducing Jewish work into the docks failed.³⁸

³⁵ LA-250-27-1-618; LA-250-27-1-619; LA-250-27-1-663; LA-72-1-1392; Ben-Avraham, *What is Going On*.

³⁶ LA-208-1-321; LA-208-1-608; LA-208-1-615; Smith, *The Roots*, pp. 155-159; Seikaly, *Haifa*, ch.r 11.

³⁷ Stern, S., 'The struggle over the building of the port of Haifa during the British Mandate', *Cathedra*, 21, (1981, H); Fine, 'Imperial and Local'; Smith, *The Roots*, chapter 7; De Vries, *Idealism and Bureaucracy*.

³⁸ LA-250-27-1-1192; LA-250-72-1-1392; Hayam, *Telling Ships*; Studni, 'The Salonikai'im'.

Furthermore, this constructive policy dictated 'importing' to Palestine suitable Jewish porters and stevedores from the Jewish Diaspora. This turn to an external reservoir of Jewish labour force in order to exert an influence on a local labour market was particular to this economic sector. The most obvious location was Thessaloniki, Greece, where a community of Jewish dockers was developing since the beginning of the twentieth century. The episode of the bringing to Palestine Thessaloniki Jewish porters and stevedores in the early 1930s should be understood as a continuation of the Histadrut traditional policy of selective Jewish immigration oriented towards the creation of a Jewish working class and a desired character of a Jewish hand-labour worker. This policy, moulded already in the early 1920s, was operated through Zionist immigration centres in various locations in the Jewish diaspora.³⁹

In the case of Greece an assertive approach was undertaken. The secretary of the Haifa Labour Council, himself an old-time labour organiser at Haifa's docks, was sent to Thessaloniki to pre-select Jewish dockers for immigration and settlement in Haifa. These immigrants were supposed to enter dock work through the system of the Labour Exchange, and set a challenge to this Arab-dominated work-place. Some 400 Thessaloniki families were brought over to Haifa, financed by the Zionist movement and absorbed in the Haifa workers' community which was organised around the Labour Council. The men were efficiently placed in portage and stevedoring, and it seemed that a new phase of Jewish presence at Haifa's dock began, in which the local Labour Council artificially interfered with selection and entry processes at the docks.⁴⁰

However within a short period some of the 'imported' Salonica dockers left the docks. Some realised that Haifa's town economy could better sustain them for longer periods; others protested against Ashkenasi paternalism and the lack of Histadrut backing promised in the first place. Individual Salonica dockers also attempted setting up contracting port firms and began to identify themselves as employers. The attempts to prevent what was considered at the time as an abdication failed, and alternative efforts were exerted to bring over other skilled dockers. The episode reflected the weakness of the Histadrut to effect its policy, backed by the Zionist organisation of the Jewish Agency, to artificially change the market realities at the port.⁴¹

The third type of attempt to influence the dock labour-market was rapprochement with Jewish employers. This alliance policy, featuring particularly in the portage of oranges export, was characteristic of the nationally-oriented Jewish Labour Movement. The Labour Councils approached Jewish merchants, construction builders and fruit companies, and attempted to convince them, on

³⁹ LA-208-1-608; LA-208-1-615; LA-208-1-616; *Twenty-Five Year Anniversary*, pp. 205-219.

⁴⁰ LA-208-1-616; LA-208-1-615; LA-208-1-608; LA-208-1-788-b; LA-250-27-2-581; LA-211-2-91; Molcho, R.Y., *Thessaloniki Seamen in Israel*, (Jerusalem, 1951, H); Studni, 'The Salonikai'im'; Karmon, Y., Shmueli, A., and Chorowitz, G., *The Thessaloniki Jewish Community and the Seamen*, (Tel Aviv, 1983, H); Bernstein, 'Porters and stevedores', p. 130.

⁴¹ LA-250-27-2-581; LA-208-1-788-a.

national grounds, to prefer Jewish porters and stevedores over Arabs. Jewish contractors at the docks, working either for the British Customs Department or for those Jewish employers, were approached by Labour bureaucrats on the ground in order to convince them to introduce more Jewish porters into their piece-works. These approaches often took the form of alliances in which the Labour Council, backed by the Histadrut, promised contractors either to 'subsidise' differences in cost, through responsibility and control of the docks, or to co-operate on municipal and national matters, such as the military security of the Jewish settlement.⁴²

In many cases these approaches concealed an informal understanding regarding restraint of potential labour militancy, and thus were not always favoured by the rank-and-file dockers. However, it should be emphasised that on the whole the docks only seldom saw large-scale militancy. This could be explained by the seasonal nature of dock work, the fragmentary social make-up of the dockers, the weakness of organisation, and the general fear of the British authorities. Specifically on the Jewish side the attenuation of dockers' collective struggles was closely connected with the national roles assigned to them, such as the smuggling of arms and munitions for the Jewish settlement, and provision of goods and food in times of national tension. This cross-class Jewish alliance also impeded cross-national class solidarity among Arab and Jewish dockers, and determined the overriding weight of Zionist-nationalism in the Jewish workers' work culture.⁴³

The fourth and final aspect of collective action was the most problematic of all, namely bi-national co-operation. Similar to the matters discussed above the ideas and practice of such co-operation were based both on work experiences and on ideological perspectives formulated by Jewish Labour leaders beyond the docks. Labour Leftists even advanced the idea of Arab-Jewish dockers' co-operation in combating competition from incoming Hawrani workers. In general however, as much as the experience of co-operation was perceived in some sectors of the Histadrut as a meaningful political option, it was short-lived, lacked a significant social basis, and turned into a politically manipulative venture to assure a certain Jewish labour-market influence.

One form of co-operation was between the dockers themselves. Sometimes dockers' groups intermingled, exchanged information and technological know-how. At other times Jewish dockers sympathised with striking Arab dockers, as in the case of the Arab lightermen strike of 1932. In Haifa and in Jaffa serious attempts were made by Labour Council's leaders to establish union co-operation in the framework of what was called at the time The Alliance of the Workers of Palestine. Ran by the Histadrut, and directed more to co-opt the Arabs at the docks, the project was short-lived and demonstrated more the limitation of such action than its potential merits. While some Arab dockers responded positively to the Histadrut's attempts at co-operation, the majority quickly realised the extent

⁴² LA-250-72-1-1192; LA-208-1-788-b.

⁴³ Dekel, *The Heroic Stories*; Avitsur, *The Jaffa Port*, p. 18; De Vries, 'Proletarianization'; Lockman, *Comrades*, chapter 5; for a later example see the 1951 strike in Eshel, N., *The Seamen Strike*, (Tel Aviv, 1994, H).

of the advantages of such co-operation for the Jews, and rejected joint organisation outright. The differences between Jaffa and Haifa were significant here. In Jaffa any form of dockers' cross-national co-operation was never viable, while in Haifa some short-term success could be demonstrated. The difference was reflected in 1936 when Arab dockers in Jaffa participated wholeheartedly in the Arab general strike, while in Haifa the port shut-down was prevented.⁴⁴

This was related also to the second form of co-operation, namely the joint economic venture of the Histadrut in Haifa and Arab individual contractors. Based on the monopoly of these individual contractors over Haifa's docks on the one hand, and the capacity of the local Labour Council to raise financial backing for Labour economic ventures on the other, such co-operation showed some signs of viable economic survival. However, the joint venture did not result in a deepening of association between porters and stevedores of the two nations. It seemed that in the context of political events and tensions of the late 1930s small-scale economic co-operation could not have been translated into any significant cross-national workers' solidarity.⁴⁵

Conclusions

The formation of dock labour in Palestine was therefore an economic and a social process closely integrated in political events and national conflict. Dockers' labour history in this sense was both a reflection of many patterns of the conflict, and an arena where the national conflict was evolving. The fact that market segregation, based as it was on Zionist and Histadrut conceptions of bypassing the problem of Jewish workers' market inferiority, was becoming impossible to realise, was however a specific feature of dock work and dock labour. For Arab dockers, under-represented in this chapter because of archival and historiographical reasons, the experiences of work and nationalism were more separate, thus allowing, so it seems, the development of an autonomous work-culture. The small-scale presence of Jewish dockers introduced some elements of national culture into this sector of the labour-market, but only to a minimal extent. Within the ranks of Jewish dockers, the weakness to enter in significant numbers into the port economy (except in Haifa), necessitated much stronger organisational and political interventions. These interventions were crucial for the formation of the Jewish docker; but their failure to exert large-scale impact on the larger framework of the economy of the ports were no less significant.

It is against this background that the political changes during the 1940s would become meaningful to the history of Palestine's dock labour. For Arab dockers the departure of British authorities, and the breakdown of the Arab-Palestinian community – following the 1948 war and the establishment of the state of Israel – politicised the dock labour experience. For Jewish dockers, who took an active part in this transformation, and who now enjoyed a certain solution to their

⁴⁴ LA-208-1-608; LA-208-1-788-b; *The Histadrut in Haifa*, pp. 443-458; Dar, 'The Attempt'; Lockman, *Comrades*, chs. 4-5.

⁴⁵ LA-250-2-244; LA-208-1-788-b; LA-208-1-4489; Biletski, *In Creation*, chapter 8.

labour-market inferiority, the dock labour experience would be gradually depoliticised. For them the way was now open for the creation of a dock labour culture, specifically connected to work itself and less to the experience of national labour-market competition. These changes thus require a separate scholarly treatment of the fate of dock labour in the new context of Israeli state formation.⁴⁶

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⁴⁶ *The System of the Workers of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, 1948–1955*, (Tel Aviv, 1957, H); Biletski, *In Creation*, chapter 6; Eshel, Z., *The Haifa Port – From Hand-Labour to Advanced Technology*, (Haifa, 1984, H), chs. 8–9.

Table 11.1 **Cargo movement: Jaffa, Tel Aviv and Haifa ports,
1933-39 (000s of tons)**

	Jaffa		Tel Aviv		Haifa	
	Unloading	Loading	Unloading	Loading	Unloading	Loading
1933	348.8	96.9	-	-	401.4	71.6
1934	486.8	121.0	-	-	589.2	99.7
1935	402.3	171.8	-	-	787.3	138.4
1936	135.5	115.3	27.5	1.9	756.7	165.0
1937	126.8	152.4	97.3	26.8	698.4	294.4
1938	113.0	147.8	139.4	57.0	502.8	291.4
1939	112.7	153.9	161.8	48.2	653.2	343.2

Sources: LA-V-343-7; LA-208-1-608; LA-208-1-788-b; LA-250-27-2-319;
Statistical Handbook of Palestine, 1947, (Tel Aviv, 1947); *Yam* (Apr. 1948),
 p. 4; Smith, *The Roots of Economic Separatism*, pp. 22-23.