

**Conscious of the past,  
 building a better, more peaceful  
 future is what unites us«**

**50 YEARS OF THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT  
 BETWEEN THE DGB AND THE HISTADRUT**



3.9.1975

...schaftsbund

...arbeit zwischen dem israelischen  
 ...en Gewerkschaftsbund sowie ihre Part-  
 ...des Freier Gewerkschaften haben sich  
 ...beitrag zur Überwindung der Belastungen  
 ...it zwischen den beiden Völkern aufgebaut  
 ...und gemeinsames Eintreten für eine fried-  
 ...ten hat die engen Bande zwischen den Orga-  
 ...republik konnten sich durch Besuche in Israel  
 ...von den großen Erfolgen der Entwicklungs- und  
 ...in Arbeitnehmer Überzeugen, wie die vielzähligen  
 ...Bundesrepublik Zeugen wurden des Aufbaus eines  
 ...ormationsflusses und Erfahrungsaustausches zwischen  
 ...die aktuelle politische und wirtschaftliche Situation  
 ...er gemeinsamen Möglichkeiten engerer Zusammenarbeit so-  
 ...der bilateralen Beziehungen wie auch im Rahmen der Inter-  
 ...nen soll die bestehenden guten Beziehungen weiter fördern.  
 ...besondere dazu beitragen, das Verständnis für-  
 ...ntauschen auf den Gebieten der weiteren  
 ...fortschrittlichen Sozialpolitik,  
 ...irtschaft und des Genos-  
 ...sollten diese

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Messe Dorf, den 2. Dezember 1975

Israelischer Gewerkschaftsbund dankt DGB

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ה ס כ ח

בין

ההסתדרות הכללית של העובדים בארץ-ישראל

ובין

ברית האגודים הסקצוניים הגרמניים

הידידות המתמידה ושתוף הפעולה ההדוק בין ההסתדרות הכללית של העובדים בארץ-ישראל לבין ברית האגודים הסקצוניים הגרמניים וקרבתם במסגרת הברית הבין לאומית של האגודים הסקצוניים החפשיים הוכיחו עצמם רבות ותרמו תרומה מכרעת בהתגברות על הסכניד ביחסי עמיתם בעקבות העבר האכזרי. הסולידריות של הגופה העבודה והתביעה המשותפת לפתרון של שלום לסכסוך במזרח התיכון הדקו הקשרים הקרובים של שני האגודים הדוק גוסף.

רבים הם חברי האגודים הסקצוניים של גרמניה הפדרלית שיכלו להרויח בנקוריהם בישראל בשנים עברו מה גדולים ההישגים של עובדי ישראל במאמציהם לפיתוח ולבנין - ורבים הם חברי ההסתדרות אשר נוכחו לדעת בנקוריהם ברפובליקה הפדרלית כי אכן נבנית גרמניה חדשה ודמוקרטית.

פיתוח גוסף של החלפת מידע ובסיון בין שתי ההסתדרויות בבעיות מדיניות וכלכליות העומדות על סדר היום בשתי הארצות וניצול האפשרויות המשותפות לפיתוח פעולה הדוקה הן בעיצוב היחסים הבינלאומיים והן בהחוסם של ארגונים בין-לאומיים יקדמו היחסים הסובבים הקיימים ביניהם קידום גוסף.

מפגשים בינלאומיים יתרום בסיועו להעסקת ההבנה ההדוית ולחלוסי בסיון בשדה הפיתוח של דמוקרטיה כלכלית ומדיניות הברתית מתקדמת וכן בתחום פיתוחו הגוסף של הספק השיתופי והקואופרטיבי.

## FOREWORD

**The partnership agreement between the General Federation of Labour in Israel, the Histadrut, and the German Trade Union Confederation, DGB, has now been in existence for over 50 years. Since its signing, it has been of unique importance to us to this day.**

Since our predecessors, Yerucham Meshel and Heinz Oskar Vetter, signed this agreement in Düsseldorf (Germany) on 3 September 1975, relations between our organisations have broadened and deepened considerably. It has been impossible for us to count the number of reciprocal visits that have taken place since 1975. Aside from the institutional contacts, many personal friendships have also developed that go far beyond the meetings between our organisations. Many of those involved will certainly speak of a genuine friendship between us today.

Partnership is characterised by the fact that it continues to evolve. To do so, it needs a deep core and shared values.

**THESE VALUES ARE A COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE,  
SOLIDARITY AND FAIR WORKING AND LIVING  
CONDITIONS FOR ALL PEOPLE IN A COUNTRY.**

For us, this also means that we stand together today against the enemies within: the Histadrut against political forces that seek to abolish democratic trade union policies and the achievements of democracy, and the DGB against the brash and brazen behaviour of right-wing

extremists and anti-Semites among the general public and in parliaments. We will maintain our commitment to democracy, co-determination and the improvement of working and living conditions for workers in both countries.

On the one hand, our joint attempts to overcome the speechlessness between people through encounters and dialogue have been successful. On the other hand, we will admit that, as in every partnership, there are moments of doubt and scepticism. The fact that we can talk openly with each other about these moments today is a great benefit.

### NEEDLESS TO SAY, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DGB AND THE HISTADRUT DID NOT BEGIN IN 1975.

Many years earlier, shortly after the end of the National Socialist reign of terror, German and Israeli trade unionists had already put out feelers to the other side. And, so it was in 1957, that the first DGB delegation from the young Federal Republic of Germany travelled to the almost equally young Israeli state. At that time, these were truly historic trips – because many in Germany wanted to draw a line under the deeds perpetrated by the Nazis; and the vast majority in Israel wanted nothing more to do with the Germans. Today, we know that, as trade unionists, we have helped to overcome this distance. And we have continued down this path, year after year. Personal meetings on shop floors and in undertakings are still just as much a part of this venture as are joint seminars at memorial sites, such as Yad Vashem, Dachau and Auschwitz.

WHILE GERMAN POLITICIANS WERE STILL HESITANT TO DEAL WITH THE YOUNG JEWISH STATE, THE DGB INITIATED A CAMPAIGN FOR THE INCLUSION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

Several signature lists, poster campaigns and many meetings involving influential political forces later, the time had come: the first ambassadors in Tel Aviv and Bonn took up their work.

And, just as the diplomats found themselves looking to find their way in the new environment, so, too, did the exchange between trade unionists on both sides prove to be anything but easy – with reservations about the other side, at times, running all too deep. While some trade unionists in Israel had lost relatives in the Holocaust, some trade union members on the German side had Nazi ancestors in their families.

TODAY, THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN OUR TWO ORGANISATIONS IS STRONGER THAN THAT OF ANY OTHER INTERNATIONAL PARTNER.

Mutual visits, seminars, workshops and discussions continue to take place on a regular basis, with new partnerships still being forged between the regional districts of the Histadrut and the DGB.

As bad as the slump in face-to-face meetings had been since 2020 due to the Covid pandemic, there were at least virtual meetings, because constant contact is extremely important to both sides. The horrific terrorist attack on Israel perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023 showed that true friendship can withstand even the most horrendous scenarios. Not since the end of the Nazi era have so many Jews

been decimated in one day as on this Black Shabbat. The anti-Semitic statements and actions following this brutal attack continue to this day – and the number is increasing.

THE ANNIVERSARY OF OUR OFFICIAL RELATIONSHIP  
FILLS US WITH PRIDE AND MARKS AN OCCASION FOR US  
TO CREATE SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES TO TALK ABOUT  
WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED AND LOOK AHEAD TO WHAT  
LIES BEFORE US.

We see this close partnership as a commitment for the future. After the mutual visits marking this anniversary come to an end, we want to continue our daily work in order to win over new generations of trade unionists to engage in meetings and exchanges. The first major step in this direction will take place in autumn 2025, when we meet up for the first international Fritz Naphtali Forum in Tel Aviv to discuss new forms of cooperation.



**Yasmin Fahimi**  
DGB President



**Arnon Bar-David**  
Histadrut Chairman

קביעת סדרים קבועים להחלפת שיוע וסיוע הדדי בפעולות ההשכלה  
ההסתדרותיות יסייעו בהשגת מטרות אלו.

כדי להרחיב ככל האפשר את מערכת היחסים בין שתי ההסתדרויות  
רואים ההסתדרות וה-ד.ג.ב. חשיבות - בנוסף לספגשים סוכזיים -  
ביצירת שותפויות בין גרפים אזוריים של ההסתדרות ומחוזות  
ה-ד.ג.ב. ובהעסקת היחסים בין האגודים המקצועיים השונים  
להגברת המגעים הקיימים. יושב ראש ה-ד.ג.ב. והסוכיר הכללי  
של ההסתדרות טטיליס על מחלקותיהם הבין-לאומיות לסכם פרטי  
הביצוע לשתוף פעולה זה.

ההסתדרות וה-ד.ג.ב. תקווה כי יחסיהם הבילטרליים ההדוקים  
ושחנף הפעולה ביניהם במסגרת ה-IC FTU יתרמו לקידום  
השלום בעולם ולהבטחת זכויות וחרויות האדם באשר הוא.



היינץ א. פטר  
יושב ראש

ברית האגודים  
המקצועיים הגרמניים



ירוחם טטר  
סוכיר כללי

ההסתדרות הכללית של  
העובדים בארץ-ישראל

דיסלורף, 3.9.1975



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## **REMEMBRANCE AND SOLIDARITY — MARKING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE DGB AND THE HISTADRUT**

**On 3 September 1975, the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) and the Israeli umbrella organisation, the Histadrut (HaHistadrut haKlalit shel ha'Ovdim b'Eretz Israel; the General Federation of Labour in Israel) signed a partnership agreement that formalised the existing relations between the two organisations, thereby elevating their relationship to a new level. The 50th anniversary of the signing of this agreement in 2025 is a fitting occasion to commemorate past and present relations between the DGB and the Histadrut.**

This brochure therefore provides an overview of their development from the founding of Israel in 1948 to the present day. It clearly shows the particularly close relationship enjoyed by the trade union movements of these two countries, which has remained fundamentally unshaken in spite of their differences, for example with regard to the path to sustainable peace in the Middle East. The DGB's close ties with the Histadrut has also resulted from the great affinity held by many trade union officials for the state of Israel. As far as the DGB was concerned, there was never a question that, following the mass murder of European Jews, after the Holocaust, there was a need for a Jewish state of its own. In addition to this obligation on the part of the DGB, that stems

from the National Socialist past, other aspects should not be ignored in order to understand the close ties between the trade union movement in the Federal Republic of Germany and the Jewish state. For decades after its founding, Israel was governed by the social democratic Mapai party, and the Histadrut general federation of labour had assumed central socio-political functions for society as a whole. Accordingly, trade unionists played an important role in all areas of Israel.

### THE HISTADRUT WAS VIRTUALLY A »STATE WITHIN A STATE«.

In one case in point, David Ben Gurion, who proclaimed Israeli independence on 14 May 1948 and became the first Prime Minister of the new state, was not only a politician from the social democratic ruling party, but also the former Chairman of the Histadrut. In addition, the Israeli economy, with the kibbutzim and moshavim, had a high proportion of co-operatively organised structures and collective forms of ownership.

This brochure aims to provide a more detailed historical explanation of the close relationship between the DGB and the Histadrut and thus contribute to better understanding their current positions. It seeks to commemorate an important facet of the history of the DGB on the 50th anniversary of the partnership agreement and to remind the general public of the important role played by trade unions in bringing the Federal Republic of Germany closer to Israel. It thus makes an important contribution to trade union remembrance policy.



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## **LIBERATION 1945**

**On 8 May 1945, the Nazi regime surrendered unconditionally. It had established a reign of terror for political opponents since 1933. The parties of the labour movement had been smashed, their supporters persecuted and confined in concentration camps. Many trade unionists had gone into exile. Jews were disenfranchised, dispossessed and, ultimately, systematically persecuted and murdered. On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded neighbouring Poland, plunging Europe into the Second World War. After more than five years of war, the continent lay in ruins.**

Only the unified efforts of many countries in the anti-Hitler coalition were ultimately able to stop the Nazi regime, which had also brought destruction to Germany. The cities there were largely destroyed after the war; millions of people were displaced from the former territories in the east; the country was occupied by Allied troops and divided into occupation zones. Germany felt the consequences of the war it had started and the terror it had unleashed. The dismantlement of the Nazi dictatorship was the prerequisite for establishing a different, democratic society. Many anti-fascists and trade unionists returned from exile to help reconstruct the country's political and economic systems.

THE NAZI REGIME MAY HAVE LOST THE WORLD WAR MILITARILY,  
BUT IT FOUGHT ANOTHER »WAR WITHIN THE WAR« ALMOST  
MERCILESSLY UNTIL THE VERY END: THE WAR AGAINST THE  
JEWS IN EUROPE.

The German extermination machinery continued to run until the last possible moment. The extermination did not stem from any form of instrumental rationality nor any real threat to National Socialist rule. On the contrary, the victims were murdered simply because they were Jews according to Nazi ideology; and for no other reason. This mass murder marked a breach of civilisation. It lastingly shook the concept of actions based on rational assumptions as the foundation of modern societies.

In view of this unprecedented destruction, a return to the situation before 1933 was out of the question. Germany should not be left to its own devices, as it had been after the First World War; rather, a new democratic state was to be established. However, the impact of the world war and the extermination of the Jews also had a global knock-on effect, especially in the Middle East.

## THE NEW WORLD ORDER

On 14 May 1948, David Ben Gurion proclaimed Israel's independence. The Jewish state was to be established on a part of the territory under the former British Mandate for Palestine. A good six months earlier, on 29 November 1947, the UN General Assembly had voted by a large majority in favour of partitioning Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. Most European and American countries were in favour of the plan, but it was rejected most notably by Arab states.

With this vote, the long-cherished dream of the Zionist movement of establishing a »homeland« for the Jewish people after thousands of years of persecution seemed to be coming true.

The worldwide approval of the founding of a Jewish state cannot be understood in isolation from the Holocaust. The non-Jewish world had been unable to save the Jews from annihilation. Even their assimilation in the respective states had not saved them from persecution and murder by the Nazi regime. A separate state therefore seemed to be a historical necessity.

However, the Arab side was not prepared to accept a Jewish state. Which is why the armies of five countries attacked Israel immediately after it declared independence. As the propaganda goes, they wanted to wipe the young state off the face of the earth and drive its inhabitants into the sea.

THE JEWISH STATE WAS ABLE TO RESIST MILITARY SUPERIORITY AND ASSERT ITSELF IN THE IMPOSED WAR OF INDEPENDENCE.

In the course of this conflict, around 700,000 Palestinian Arabs left their homeland. Some were expelled by the Israeli army, while others were ordered to flee (temporarily) by the Arab side. At the same time, around 850,000 Jews fled persecution and pogroms from their homes in North Africa and Arab countries. Many of them settled in Israel. In the course of 1949, the Jewish state ultimately emerged successfully from the War of Independence.

Israel's victory and the subsequent establishment of the new state did not permanently calm the situation. Despite the defeat, the Arab countries were not willing to accept the existence of a Jewish state or to integrate the displaced and fleeing Palestinians into their countries. In doing so, they laid the foundations for a conflict that continues to this very day and has escalated time and again.

BUT, IN 1949, IT WAS NOT ONLY IN THE MIDDLE EAST THAT A NEW STATE WAS FOUNDED AND THE GEOPOLITICAL FRAMEWORK CHANGED. NEW STATE STRUCTURES ALSO EMERGED IN GERMANY.

The conflict of interests between the former allies of the Anti-Hitler Coalition, namely between the Western powers, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union, on the other, had increasingly come to a head after the jointly achieved victory. Agreement on a united post-war Germany had become increasingly unlikely. Given this circumstance, two separate German states were ultimately established. On

23 May 1949, the Western-oriented Federal Republic of Germany was founded, followed, six months later, on 7 October, by the German Democratic Republic, which was aligned with the real socialist Eastern Bloc.

Even before this, some trade unionists who had returned from exile after 1945 had set about rebuilding new organisations for workers. As a consequence of the divided and, at the end of the Weimar Republic, organisationally weakened labour movement, which was unable to prevent the rise of National Socialism, trade unions were to be established on a non-partisan basis and according to the principle of industrial associations.

AS AN UMBRELLA ORGANISATION, THE GERMAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (DGB) WAS ULTIMATELY FOUNDED IN OCTOBER 1949; WITH HANS BÖCKLER AS ITS FIRST PRESIDENT.

Ludwig Rosenberg, who came from an assimilated Jewish family in Berlin and had spent the National Socialist era in exile in Great Britain, was also a member of the first Federal Executive Board.

A German Jew, Siegfried Aufhäuser, who had been a Social Democratic member of the Reichstag during the Weimar Republic and the full-time director of the General Free Employees' Association (AfA-Bund), also returned to Germany soon after liberation. In the Federal Republic of Germany, he then became active in the German Salaried Employees' Union (DAG). Other examples could also be listed.

HOWEVER, MANY GERMAN JEWS WHO HAD BEEN ACTIVE IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND WERE FORCED TO FLEE NATIONAL SOCIALISM, DID NOT RETURN TO GERMANY, TO THE LAND OF THE PERPETRATORS.

Some had gone to Palestine, where they played an important role in building Israel. The best-known example is the former economic expert of the General German Trade Union Federation (ADGB), Fritz (Peretz) Naphtali, who had (co-)developed the concept of economic democracy in the 1920s. He was forced to leave his home country after Adolf Hitler's seizure of power, and then fled to Palestine. There, Naphtali initially taught economics at various universities before heading the trade union-owned bank Hapoalim. After the foundation of Israel in 1948, he held various ministerial posts and other high positions. Many trade unionists in the Federal Republic of Germany still knew him personally.

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAEL

**In any case, the Histadrut played a central role in the development of the new state in the Middle East. Founded in Haifa in 1920, the organisation was conceived as a general workers' association, whose members democratically elected the committees. Employees, but also housewives, could join the Histadrut directly. This automatically made them members of the relevant individual trade union.**

The Histadrut was mainly founded by Eastern European Jews who came from the (left-wing) Zionist labour movement. One year after its founding, David Ben Gurion was elected Chairman. Other leading Israeli politicians also came from trade union structures, including Golda Meir, who became the first female Prime Minister in 1969.

On the one hand, the Histadrut performed the traditional tasks of a trade union, fighting for better working conditions, higher wages and shorter working hours. But, on the other hand, it was much more than that. Soon after it was set up, while still under British rule, it took on important social policy roles. Chupat Holim, the health insurance fund it founded, soon became the largest in the country. In 1921, the Histadrut founded its own bank, Hapoalim, which was later headed by Fritz (Peretz) Naphtali. The Histadrut also established cooperative enterprises and settlements, which were repre-

sented by the umbrella organisation Hevrat ha'Ovdim, founded in 1923. For decades, companies owned by trade unions accounted for a very large share of the Israeli economy, especially in the agricultural sector. For this reason, Israel was, for a long time, not a purely capitalist market economy, but rather a mixed economy with a high proportion of cooperatives. In rural settlements, known as kibbutzim, private property was replaced by collective ownership. Moreover, grassroots democratic structures prevailed. The Histadrut fought to enforce such principles and extensive rights of co-determination for dependent employees in all areas of the economy.

However, Arabs were not granted full membership in the Histadrut. In order to organise Arab wage earners as well, it established the Palestine Labor League as a sister union in 1932. Its members were not part of the Histadrut, but were given access to union services, including health insurance. These functions and the socio-political position of the Histadrut became even more important after the state was founded. The organisation was also closely linked to Mapai, the social democratic labour party, in terms of personnel and structure. It also provided the first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion.

THE SOLIDARITY OF THE GERMAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT WITH THE JEWISH STATE WAS THEREFORE NOT ONLY A RESULT OF HISTORICAL OBLIGATION BECAUSE OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST CRIMES AGAINST THE JEWS, BUT ALSO OF SHARED VALUES AND SHARED POLITICAL CONVICTIONS

In hardly any other country have trade unions been so influential in socio-political matters and cooperative and public service structures been so pronounced as in Israel. During its founding phase and well beyond, the country was clearly dominated by (left-wing) Zionist organisations of the labour movement, which pushed ahead with the establishment of a new, democratic society in the face of a hostile environment and considerable resistance. This achievement met with great respect and affinity from the DGB, especially given that the establishment of democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany was taking place under completely different circumstances.

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

**The establishment of democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany took place under difficult circumstances and was only possible under the supervision and control of the Western Allies. After the victory, they had agreed with the Soviet Union in the Potsdam Agreement that post-war Germany had to be denazified and democratised. However, the soon emerging Cold War ultimately prevented a joint, fundamental reorganisation of German society.**

To make matters worse, the twelve years of Nazi rule, its propaganda and its terror had left deep scars on the population. The majority of Germans had not been in opposition to the regime; many had become perpetrators. Quite a few had either been staunch National Socialists or at best passive »followers« until 1945. These attitudes did not simply dissolve after the unconditional capitulation – and this also applied by and large to the clientele of the trade unions. This was one of the reasons why, despite the trade union umbrella organisation's claim to be anti-fascist and the persecution experienced by many of its main officials, coming to terms with the immediate past was by no means a top priority. The first priority was to build new trade unions and a democratic society for the numerous officials who had been in the resistance or in exile during the National Socialist

era. In this respect, the DGB was no different from other organisations in the post-war period.

THE POLICY PURSUED BY THE EARLY FEDERAL  
REPUBLIC OF GERMANY WAS PRIMARILY AIMED  
AT INTEGRATING NAZI PERPETRATORS AND  
NSDAP MEMBERS INTO DEMOCRACY.

Many of them had experienced the downfall of National Socialism as a serious loss and were consequently opposed to the democratic state. This attitude of millions of Germans represented a great potential danger for the young state. Former supporters of the Nazi regime soon began to regroup, which the DGB had always warned against.

Nevertheless, the first democratically elected Bundestag created the legal basis for integrating Nazi perpetrators into society and passed several amnesty laws. For example, the »131 Act« passed in 1951 regulated the re-instatement of civil servants who had been dismissed from the civil service by the Allies for political reasons after the Second World War, as well as former *Wehrmacht* soldiers. Such regulations made it possible for people with serious criminal records to reach high positions in the judiciary, administration and politics. One such example being Hans Globke, the co-author and commentator of the »Nuremberg Race Laws« of 1935, who even became the head of the Federal Chancellery under Konrad Adenauer, the first Federal Chancellor. Theodor Oberländer, a former staunch National Socialist and pioneer of Nazi research into Eastern Europe, was appointed Federal Minister for Expellee Affairs in 1953.

WHILE FORMER NATIONAL SOCIALISTS WERE (RE-)INTEGRATED INTO SOCIETY FAIRLY SMOOTHLY, THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC FOUND IT ALL THE MORE DIFFICULT TO COMPENSATE VICTIMS OF THE NAZI REGIME.

With the votes of the opposition SPD, but against parts of his own governing coalition, the Christian Democratic Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, pushed through the Luxembourg Agreement with Israel and the Jewish Claims Conference in 1953. This provided for payments, services and export goods totalling 3.5 billion German marks to the Jewish state. Their main purpose was to help Jewish refugees from Europe integrate into the new society.

The DGB strongly supported the agreement as a step towards rapprochement with Israel and the necessary reconciliation. Several articles in the union's own newspaper »*Welt der Arbeit*« (»World of Labour«) were in favour of the compensation payments and praised the German government's stance. The Federal Executive Board then received letters vehemently criticising these payments. One author denounced the »oddity« of a state receiving compensation payments for past crimes when it did not even exist at that time. After the war, on the other hand, the Jews were well provided for by the Allies and aid organisations, it was maintained, while »the Germans were starving. [...] But that was not enough for them«. The Jews had engaged in illegal fencing and were responsible for thefts, it was claimed. »No one was more unscrupulous than they were in dealing with the misery of a people.«

HOWEVER, SUCH POSITIONS HELD BY INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS DID NOT PREVENT THE DGB FROM CONTINUING TO GET INVOLVED IN COMPENSATION ISSUES.

It also campaigned for the Histadrut's compensation claims against the Federal Republic of Germany to be recognised. In a letter from Willi Richter, the DGB President at the time, and Ludwig Rosenberg, a member of the Federal Executive Board, to the Federal Minister of Finance in June 1962, it says: »The reason for our letter [...] is that, for political and moral reasons and because of our friendly and close ties with the Histadrut, we have a great interest in this matter being settled as generously and smoothly as possible [...]«.

Despite all the hurdles, the DGB had already formed initial relations with the Histadrut in the course of the 1950s.

## **EARLY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE DGB AND THE HISTADRUT**

**Beyond personal acquaintances, the first formal relations between the DGB and the Histadrut were not established on a bilateral but on an international level. Both organisations were founding members of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the association of non-communist trade unions, in 1949.**

Direct contact between German and Israeli organisations would hardly have been possible at the time, as the resistance to any relations with Germany, just a few years after the Holocaust, was immense among a large segment of Israel's population. This attitude was also evident in the vehement debate about the Luxembourg Agreement, which many Israelis saw as a payment of »blood money» and rejected. It is therefore all the more astonishing that the DGB and the Histadrut nevertheless came closer together in the years that followed.

As a member of the Federal Executive Board, Ludwig Rosenberg in particular worked to expand and strengthen relations between the two organisations. He travelled to Israel at an early stage, cultivated contacts with Israeli journalists, strengthened relations with the Histadrut and paved the way for the first official DGB delegation to be invited by Israeli trade unions to visit in April 1957. This marked the start of regular reciprocal visits in the years to come. Not least in

recognition of this invitation, the DGB declared after the trip that it wanted to equip a kindergarten in Israel. The umbrella organisation earmarked DM 15,000 for this. The organisational details were arranged in cooperation with the Jewish community in Berlin.

IN ANY CASE, THE DGB ATTACHED GREAT IMPORTANCE TO A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THE JEWISH ORGANISATIONS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY AND ALWAYS TOOK A CLEAR STANCE AGAINST ANTI-SEMITISM.

As early as 1952, the DGB took part in the first »Week of Brotherhood«, which promoted Jewish-Christian dialogue and the process of coming to terms with the National Socialist past. The DGB President regularly congratulated the Jews in Germany on the Jewish New Year. Furthermore, the DGB press information service announced on 6 October 1959 that the almanac, »The Jews in Germany«, had been reprinted and could be obtained both directly from the publisher and through the bookshops of the trade union's own *Bund* publishing house.

This year also saw one of the most drastic anti-Semitic incidents of the 1950s. On Christmas Eve 1959, the synagogue in Cologne, which had just been reopened, was desecrated. Two members of the far-right »*Deutsche Reichspartei*« (»German Reich Party«) graffitied it with swastikas and the slogan »Germans demand: Jews out«. This act caused great horror abroad and among Jews in the Federal Republic of Germany.

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THE DESECRATION MADE CLEAR HOW MUCH ANTI-SEMITISM WAS STILL ALIVE IN GERMAN SOCIETY.

Not least in response to criticism from abroad, Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer spoke out in a televised address on 16 January 1960: »To our opponents abroad and to the doubters abroad, I say that the unanimity of the entire German people in condemning anti-Semitism and National Socialism has shown itself in the most united and strongest way imaginable. The German people have shown that these thoughts and tendencies have no basis among them.« Although Adenauer condemned the attack in Cologne, he relativised the wave of anti-Semitic smears that followed the desecration of the synagogue by describing them as »boorishness without a political basis«. In doing so, he played down the political content of the offences.

BY CONTRAST, THE DGB FOUND CLEARER WORDS IN TWO PRESS RELEASES.

On the one hand, the President had addressed the Central Council of Jews directly, expressing his solidarity and assuring them that he would oppose any »racial agitation« with the utmost vigour. At the same time, he called on the Federal Chancellor to take action against right-wing extremist organisations. The desecration of the synagogue proves that there are »well-organised groups whose incorrigible attitude is the prerequisite for a resurgence of criminal fascist sentiment«. The DGB would oppose these tendencies without compromise, he commented.

## **SOLIDARITY WITH ISRAEL**

**In the years that followed, the DGB supported the Histadrut and the establishment of the Jewish state in a variety of ways. In one case in point, it funded the vocational training of young Jewish people making Aliyah with a one-off sum, i.e. those who wanted to emigrate to Israel. Since 1966, the DGB has furthermore organised two scholarships for trade unionists and members of the cooperative from so-called developing countries to enable them to receive training at the Afro-Asian Institute in Tel Aviv. The institute was founded by the Histadrut in 1958 to promote the idea of trade unions and co-operatives in the Global South and to strengthen co-operation with the parts of the world there.**

In 1961, for the very first time, 14 young trade unionists and two full-time officials from the DGB chapter of North Rhine-Westphalia visited the Jewish state. At that time, a visit by Germans to Israel was still considered a political issue. Despite all the rapprochement between the DGB and the Histadrut in the years running up to this, contacts with German organisations in the Israeli trade union movement were by no means met with undivided approval, especially since the Federal Republic of Germany did not even maintain official relations with the Jewish state.

The 1962 Federal Congress held in Hanover proved to be far-reaching in this respect, and for the DGB's future policy towards Israel. There, the delegates unanimously put forward a resolution

calling on the Federal Executive Board to advocate for the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel. They also elected Ludwig Rosenberg as their new President, who had already been actively involved in establishing close cooperation with Israel. This election also attracted attention abroad because, from now on, 17 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, a German Jew would head the West German trade union movement. Accordingly, the New York Times ran a headline on 27 October 1962 that reflected a mixture of recognition and amazement: »West Germans Elect Jew to Head Trade Unions«.

THE NEW PRESIDENT TOOK THE RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE TRADE UNION CONGRESS VERY SERIOUSLY AND STRENGTHENED HIS COMMITMENT TO RAPPROCHEMENT WITH THE HISTADRUT AND ISRAEL.

The call for the West German trade union umbrella organisation to advocate for the establishment of official state relations with Israel was anything but easy to implement given the political climate of the day. At the time of the Luxembourg Agreement in the early 1950s, Israel was not yet ready for diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany for understandable reasons. It is likely that there would have been significant resistance, including within German society and politics. At the time, only the Israel Mission in Cologne was opened as a trade representation, but in fact it also functioned as a political contact point.

As the Cold War between the West and the Eastern Bloc intensified, and in light of Germany's division, the Federal Republic of Germany's foreign policy soon followed the so-called »Hallstein Doctrine«. Its aim was to isolate the GDR in terms of foreign policy. The Doctrine called for the Federal Republic of Germany not to un-

dertake any actions that might persuade other states to recognise the GDR. The Federal Republic of Germany feared, not without good reason, that the Arab states would turn away from it and towards the East German state if diplomatic relations were established with Israel. This foreign policy precept largely dominated the decisions adopted by the Federal Government until the end of the 1960s.

THE RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY AND ISRAEL WAS FURTHER COMPLICATED WHEN, AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1960S, IT BECAME KNOWN THAT GERMAN SCIENTISTS WERE PLAYING A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN BUILDING UP EGYPT'S WEAPONS INDUSTRY AND DEVELOPING MISSILE TECHNOLOGY.

Egypt and its President, Gamal Abd el-Nasser, were declared enemies of a Jewish state and regularly threatened the country with annihilation. Quite a few of the German experts working in Egypt had already worked in the armaments industry during the National Socialist era. As these backgrounds came to light, there was a huge outcry in Israeli society. Links to the National Socialist policy of extermination were drawn. Including in the Federal Republic of Germany, where Social Democrats, for example, criticised the German government for not preventing and punishing such activities. The DGB took a similar line. In May 1964, the Federal Executive Board wrote a letter to Federal Chancellor, Ludwig Erhard. In it, the Board warned of an increasingly threatening situation for Israel, which was being exacerbated by Egyptian rhetoric with Soviet support. In view of the crimes committed against Jews under National Socialism, the support of German scientists in the armament of Egypt could not be allowed to continue. »As much as the Confederation of German Trade Unions recognises the efforts of the Federal Republic of Ger-

many to pay financial reparations to compensate for Germany's guilt against the Jewish people, it also considers it urgently necessary that everything possible be done to render impossible any further activities undertaken by German missile specialists in Egypt that might threaten peace.«

ONLY A FEW MONTHS LATER, THE ARAB LEAGUE, BASED IN DAMASCUS, SYRIA, MOBILISED AGAINST THE TRADE UNIONIST, SOCIAL DEMOCRAT AND CHAIRMAN OF THE BANK FÜR GE-  
MEINWIRTSCHAFT, WALTER HESSELBACH.

The Central Office for the Boycott of Israel demanded that Hesselbach resign from the supervisory board of *Hütten- und Bergwerke Rheinhausen AG*. He was known for his pro-Israeli activities, they claimed, and had taken part in a Zionist conference in Paris at which donations for Israel were collected. Hesselbach was also a member of other pro-Israeli organisations, it was claimed, and that all co-operation with him could and should be suspended; the Arab League's regulations would forbid such a thing, it was maintained. Hesselbach would therefore have to cease his engagement with the company, was the demand. Otherwise, there would be no other alternative but to call for a boycott. The company was given a three-month deadline to act and to implement the measures.

In a curtly formulated letter, *Hütten- und Bergwerke Rheinhausen AG* responded that Walter Hesselbach was an employee representative who sat on the Supervisory Board in compliance with Germany's co-determination law. The letter went on to say that it could not change this circumstance and that the Arab League would therefore have to contact the trade union concerned.

## Dafür zahlen wir nun Entwicklungshilfe

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zionistischen Propaganda betrachten, die unser Vorgehen als Druckmittel gegen Sie oder als Einmischung in die inneren Angelegenheiten Ihrer Firma abstemeln möchte. An etwas Derartiges denkt die Boykott-Organisation überhaupt nicht. Unser einziges Ziel ist es zu vermeiden, daß die geschäftlichen Beziehungen mit Ihrer Firma unterbrochen werden, ohne daß diese vorher eine Gelegenheit hat, die Gründe für ihr Verhalten darzulegen und die Hindernisse aus dem Weg zu räumen, wenn sie dies für richtig hält; denn die ganze Angelegenheit bleibt Ihrem Urteil überlassen.

Wenn Sie glauben, daß geschäftliche Beziehungen mit den arabi-

schen Ländern in Ihrem Interesse liegen, was wir natürlich sehr begrüßen würden, so hoffen wir, daß Sie uns eine von Herrn . . . ausgestellte notarielle Erklärung zuschicken, die von dem nächsten Konsulat oder der nächsten diplomatischen Vertretung irgendeines arabischen Landes beglaubigt ist und aus der hervorgeht, daß er sich einer pro-israelischen oder pro-zionistischen Aktivität enthalten wird, oder uns eine offizielle, in der obigen Weise beglaubigte Erklärung zuschicken, aus der sein Rücktritt vom Management Ihrer Firma und die Annahme seines Rücktritts durch den Aufsichtsrat ersichtlich ist.

Sollten Sie jedoch entgegen unserer obigen Ausführungen innerhalb

von drei Monaten nach dem heutigen Datum keine Schritte unternehmen, die beweisen, daß Sie die Fortsetzung der geschäftlichen Beziehungen mit den arabischen Ländern wünschen und daß Sie Verständnis für deren Gesichtspunkte haben, so wird sich die Boykott-Organisation zu ihrem großen Bedauern gezwungen sehen, entsprechende Maßnahmen gegen Ihre Gesellschaft zu empfehlen.\*

Hochachtungsvoll zeichnet Mohammed Mahmood Mahgoub, Generalkommissar des Zentralbüros für den Israel-Boykott.

Und dafür zahlen wir Entwicklungshilfe! Wie lange eigentlich noch?

In an article published in »Welt der Arbeit« with the following subheading: »A friend of Israel has been called upon to resign from the Supervisory Board«, the DGB took up the content of this letter. The background to the situation is described in a brief paragraph, followed by the almost full draft of the letter, with only the names of the individual concerned and the company omitted. The article commented on the letter laconically but also with great clarity: »And we pay development aid for this! For how much longer?« The DGB thus fully backed Hesselbach and was not intimidated by the threats emanating from the Arab League.

Ludwig Rosenberg ultimately planned another trip to Israel for the autumn of 1964. Ahead of the trip, Hesselbach wrote him a letter outlining the close business relations between the *Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft* (BfG) and Israel and cited potentially interesting dialogue partners. BfG maintained particularly close relations with Bank Hapoalim and also owned a block of shares worth over DM 1 million. It also held shares in other Israeli companies, had granted large loans to various companies, including the airline El Al, and had subscribed to development aid bonds, so-called Israel Bonds. Hessel-

# Und dafür zahlen wir nun Entwicklungshilfe

## Ein Freund Israels soll Aufsichtsratsmandat niederlegen

**WdA K 61 n. Eine deutsche Firma erhielt einen Brief aus Damaskus (Syrien). Absender: Arabische Liga, Generalsekretariat, Zentralbüro für den Israel-Boykott. Der Inhalt ist hahnebüchen.**

Sehr geehrte Herren, schreiben die Araber, die Boykott-Organisation hat Beweise dafür, daß Herr . . . Mitglied des Aufsichtsrats Ihrer Gesellschaft, eine große pro-israelische Aktivität entwickelt und Mitglied der „Deutschen Freundschaftsgesellschaft für die Entwicklung Israels“ ist. Wörtlich heißt es dann:

„In Hinblick auf die gegenwärtige Situation zwischen den arabischen Staaten und Israel und als Maßnahme der Selbstverteidigung, die die Rechte und lebenswichtigen Interessen der Araber Palästinas schützen soll, die von zionistischen Banden von Haus und Hof vertrieben wurden, und es ungeachtet mehrfacher von den Vereinten Nationen zum Schutze ihrer Rechte gefaßten Beschlüsse geblieben sind, werden gewisse, gegen Israel gerichtete Boykott-Bestimmungen von den arabischen Ländern strikt eingehalten. Kurz gesagt, verbieten es diese Bestimmungen Arabern, mit natürlichen oder juristischen Personen israelischer Nationalität irgendwelche Beziehungen zu unterhalten. Sie verbieten aber auch Beziehungen zu ausländischen natürlichen und juristischen Personen, die durch irgendwelche der in den Boykott-Bestimmungen definierten Handlungen die Wirtschaft oder die Rüstung Israels fördern.“

Sie sind sich sicherlich bewußt, daß geschäftliche Abschlüsse einen Vertrag darstellen und daß der Vertrag für die Vertragsparteien das „Gesetz“ darstellt. Jede Vertragspartei hat das Recht, die Aufnahme ihr interessanter Bedingender Bedingungen im Vertrag zu erstreben, während es der anderen vorbehalten bleibt, die betreffenden Bedingungen anzunehmen oder abzulehnen.

Eine der Bedingungen der Araber für die Unterhaltung geschäftlicher Beziehungen zu anderen Ländern ist

nun die, daß die Unterstützung israelischer oder zionistischer Interessen unterlassen wird. Geschäftliche Handlungen werden aber meist von natürlichen Personen vorgenommen, die als leitende Angestellte ihre Firmen (juristische Personen) repräsentieren; zu diesen Personen gehören zweifellos der Vorsitz und die Mitglieder des Aufsichtsrats. Im vorliegenden Falle wird die Handlungsweise der fraglichen Person als Verstoß gegen die Boykott-Bestimmungen angesehen und macht Geschäftsbeziehungen der arabischen Staaten mit den von ihr vertretenen Firmen aus obigen Gründen unmöglich. Ehe sich also die Boykott-Organisation zu ihrem eigenen Bedauern dazu entschließen muß, irgendwelche Maßnahmen gegen Ihre Firma zu unternehmen, möchte sie, um den guten Willen der arabischen Länder zu bekunden, an Sie unmittelbar herantreten, um Ihnen die Sachlage zu schildern und Sie zu bitten, die Dinge den in den arabischen Ländern geltenden Gesetzen anzupassen, damit diese in die Lage versetzt werden, die geschäftlichen Beziehungen mit Ihrer Firma aufrechtzuerhalten.

Dies kann unserer Auffassung nach auf einem der folgenden Wege geschehen:

1. Sie bringen Herrn . . . die obigen Ausführungen zur Kenntnis und fordern ihn auf, im Interesse seiner Gesellschaften, in denen er die Posten eines Vorsitzers oder Direktors bekleidet, seine pro-israelische Aktivität und seine Mitgliedschaft bei der „Deutschen Freundschaftsgesellschaft für die Entwicklung Israels“ aufzugeben;

2. Er gibt seinen Posten bei den betreffenden Gesellschaften auf, damit diese nicht ihre großen arabischen Märkte verlieren, was sicher auch in seinem Interesse liegt.

Ich hoffe, daß Sie für die Gründe unseres Ersuchens Verständnis aufbringen, das in erster Linie darauf gerichtet ist, die geschäftlichen Beziehungen zu Ihrer Gesellschaft aufrechtzuerhalten, und daß sie es niemals im Lichte der irreführenden

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bach's letter to Rosenberg also stated that the union's own housing company, *Neue Heimat*, had close ties to Israel and was planning, among other things, to build new flats there together with Shikun Ovdim, which belonged to the Histadrut.

AFTER HIS TRIP, ROSENBERG WROTE THE  
MUCH-NOTICED ARTICLE »ISRAEL AND US« IN  
»WELT DER ARBEIT«:

He begins by describing the extraordinary diversity of the country, its long history, its significance for the development of religion and, at the same time, its existing view of the future, the »emergence of an old-new people, the establishment of a young state built on ancient soil«. In view of the crimes committed by the Germans against the Jews, he asks whether, from an Israeli perspective, there can be anything at all that connects them to the Federal Republic of Germany. It is astonishing, he writes, that, despite all the understandable bitterness, despite the omnipresent presence of the past in the present, most Israelis are looking forwards, not backwards: »They haven't forgotten anything – but they're looking to the future. [...] [T]hey want a new, a better world. Learning from the past – working for the future: that could be the motto that characterises their attitude towards Germany [...].« According to Rosenberg, there are far too many people in Germany who are not prepared to take Israel's outstretched hand, who believe that enough compensation has been paid and who fail to recognise that physical and mental anguish cannot simply be compensated for financially. »You can't offset mountains of corpses with mountains of gold. [...] Who can »make up« for Auschwitz, Treblinka and the other hells of Nazism by handing over a cheque?



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ROSENBERG THEN AGAIN LEVELS ACCUSATIONS AGAINST THE GERMAN SCIENTISTS IN EGYPT ACTIVELY WORKING TOWARDS THE DESTRUCTION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL AND THE MURDER OF ITS INHABITANTS, AND PROCLAIMS THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S INACTIVITY IN THIS REGARD IS SCANDALOUS.

Rosenberg claimed that, while nothing was being done about this and no legal action being taken, the Nazi crimes and mass murders were in danger of soon becoming time-barred. Rosenberg appealed to members of the Bundestag to take legislative action to prevent this statute of limitations from coming into effect. Finally, he pleaded for the Federal Republic of Germany to recognise Israel diplomatically, arguing that it should not allow itself to be deterred by threats from the Arab side or other (foreign) policy considerations. Conscience dictates that this step be taken, he asserted: »[W]hoever is serious about letting their conscience determine their policy will make a clear decision on all these issues.« In the article, Rosenberg, as DGB President, thus adopted a clear stance on how to deal with the Nazi past, the current threat scenario emanating from the Middle East and the future policy that the Federal Republic of Germany needed to adopt towards the Jewish state.

FOR THIS VERY REASON, HE SOON BECAME THE SUBJECT OF ANTI-SEMITIC HOSTILITY IN THE FAR-RIGHT NEWSPAPER »DEUTSCHE NATIONAL- UND SOLDATEN-ZEITUNG«.

On 20 November 1964, the following headline appeared on the front page: »Never-ending payments for Auschwitz? The head of the DGB and Israel. Is Rosenberg betraying German interests? « The article addressed Rosenberg in a defamatory manner as a »German Jew« who was handing Germany over to foreign interests.

Using typical anti-Semitic arguments, Rosenberg's loyalty to the Federal Republic of Germany was questioned, whilst he was also accused of pursuing Israeli interests and holding Germany's Nazi past against it for financial reasons. He was driven by anti-German hatred, the article claimed, adding that his demand for diplomatic recognition of Israel increased the risk of war for Germany. The article combined motifs of both classical anti-Semitism and the so-called guilt-defensiveness anti-Semitism that had developed in the post-Nazi countries after 1945.

SHORTLY BEFORE, THE DGB FEDERAL EXECUTIVE BOARD HAD, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE TRADE UNION CONGRESS, ALREADY STEPPED UP ITS EFFORTS TO WORK TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY AND ISRAEL.

Together with the Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation, the DGB took part in a nationwide signature campaign to promote this suggestion. The campaign began with a joint kick-off event in Cologne on 24 October 1964, at which a member of the DGB Federal Executive Board, members of the parties represented in the Bundestag at the time and a pastor appeared as speakers. This was intended to emphasise the cross-party and broad social consensus in favour of such a move.

THE HEADLINE ON ONE OF THE DGB'S FLYERS PRO-  
CLAIMED THE »ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC  
RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL!«:

»The German Trade Union Confederation has been campaigning for years for the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel and declared once again, at its last national congress in Hanover, that it should be an imperative obligation for the Federal Republic of Germany to grant full recognition to the young state of Israel by sending diplomatic representatives.« The Federal Executive Board also published this appeal in the union's own press. An advert in the *Bild* newspaper, which was not exactly politically sympathetic to trade unions, was also intended to reach as wide a readership as possible. In mid-November 1964, the DGB Federal Executive Board also informed all chapters and the executive boards of the affiliated unions about the project and called on them to support it with all their might. Signature lists were also sent out widely. However, a preliminary conclusion at the end of the year proved to be extremely sobering. Barely a third of DGB chapters had submitted signature lists, with just over one per cent of members having even signed the list. The effort that had been made was disproportionate to the result. The extremely low number of signatures was an affront to the Federal Executive Board.

There were many reasons why the signature campaign failed. One of these was that the employers' organisations did not participate and some companies prohibited the posting of signature lists on the grounds that it was a political campaign. Most crucially, however, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel was not as popular with ordinary trade union members as it was with officials. Many members were at best indifferent to the suggestion. The

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DGB Federal Executive Board undoubtedly underestimated the extent to which anti-Semitic resentment was still widespread among workers and employees, thereby preventing them from signing in favour of the Jewish state. Many anti-Semitic ideas shifted to the Jewish state following the founding of Israel, thus giving rise to a new form of anti-Semitism – Israel-related anti-Semitism. It was and is found in all political camps, in all social classes and also among trade union members.

In the end, the DGB let the signature campaign expire, partly because it became apparent that talks about a rapprochement between the two countries were already being held at the highest political level. This development took place against the backdrop of a rapprochement between the GDR and Egypt and the question of what significance the »Hallstein Doctrine« should still hold.

ON 12 MAY 1965, THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY AND ISRAEL OFFICIALLY ESTABLISHED DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. ONE DAY LATER, THE DGB WELCOMED THIS STEP IN A PRESS RELEASE AND EMPHASISED THE PART IT HAD PLAYED OVER MANY YEARS.

## **THE SIX-DAY WAR. THE RENEWED THREAT TO ISRAEL'S EXISTENCE**

**Although diplomatic relations had existed between Germany and Israel since 1965, the threat to the country continued to escalate during this time. The pan-Arab Egyptian President Nasser in particular had never accepted the existence of a Jewish state and, after several military defeats, massively rearmed his country with the help of German scientists and Soviet support.**

After Egypt closed the important Tiran waterway to Israeli shipping in May 1967 and amassed tens of thousands of troops and tanks on the border, the Israeli air force attacked the neighbouring country in a pre-emptive strike on 5 June 1967. In the ensuing war with Egypt, Jordan and Syria – which were supported by other Arab countries and the Soviet Union – Israel conquered large areas and also gained control of East Jerusalem. The Jewish state thus achieved an unexpected success against a large, superior force in a matter of days.

Through regular dialogue with Israeli colleagues, the DGB Federal Executive Board was aware of how precarious the situation in the Middle East was for Israel in the early summer of 1967. It therefore issued a press release on 26 May warning against escalation and appealing to the United Nations to fulfil its duty and maintain peace. It also emphasised the right of every population to an independent-

state existence. After fighting broke out, the DGB called on its members and especially the trade union youth, on 5 June, to join democratic parties and church organisations and engage in rallies »to restore peace and save the existence of Israel«. Two days later, for example, a joint event was held in Düsseldorf.

During the war, both the Histadrut and the Israeli embassy in Germany informed the Federal Executive Board promptly by telephone and telegram about the course of the war.

IN THIS THREATENING SITUATION FOR THE JEWISH STATE,  
THE DGB ONCE AGAIN DECIDED TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL  
SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL.

On 6 June, the Federal Executive Board unanimously decided to buy further development aid bonds, so-called Israel Bonds, for three million DM. All affiliates also participated with varying amounts. The Federal Executive Board discussed whether this purchase should be made public. Here, too, there was general agreement. In one case, the Chairman of the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union (ÖTV), Heinz Kluncker, emphasised that the DGB should »express its trust in the state of Israel«, as the minutes state. His brothers, Alois Wöhrle from *IG Metall*, and Karl Hauenschild from *IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik*, supported this position.



Handing over donations for Israel: Siegfried Aufhäuser (DAG), Heinz Galinski (Chairman of the Jewish Community Berlin), Erich Krems (DAG)

**THE UMBRELLA ORGANISATION AND ITS AFFILIATED UNIONS FINALLY EXPRESSED THEIR SOLIDARITY WITH ISRAEL IN A DECLARATION ON THE WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST, WHICH WAS SIGNED BY ALL MEMBERS OF THE DGB FEDERAL EXECUTIVE BOARD AND ALL CHAIRS OF THE DGB'S AFFILIATES.**

In it, they criticise the United Nations and the major powers for failing to keep the peace. The statement continues: »There is no doubt that the declared intention of the Arab states to destroy the state of Israel through a »holy war« and to »drive its citizens into the sea« is an aggression. [...] Israel is a state based on a free, democratic foundation, in which the democratic labour movement and its workers

## Erklärung des Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes zum Krieg in Nahost

Der Ausbruch des Krieges im Nahen Osten hat gezeigt, daß die Vereinten Nationen ihrer Verpflichtung, den Frieden zu sichern, bisher nicht gerecht wurden. Besonders die Großmächte USA und die Sowjetunion tragen vor der Welt eine unabdingbare Verantwortung für die Erhaltung des Weltfriedens.

Die Vereinten Nationen haben Israel als unabhängigen und selbständigen Staat anerkannt. Die USA, Großbritannien und Frankreich haben darüber hinaus den Bestand des Staates Israel garantiert und haben die Verpflichtung, Israel gegen jede Aggression zu schützen.

Es besteht kein Zweifel, daß die erklärte Absicht der arabischen Staaten, den Staat Israel durch einen „heiligen Krieg“ zu vernichten und seine Bürger „ins Meer zu treiben“, eine Aggression darstellt. Die Drohung, einen „totalen Krieg“ zu führen,

größte Gefahr für die Weltfriedensbewegung darstellt.

Die Vereinten Nationen sind verpflichtet, die Aggression zu stoppen und die Sicherheit zu gewährleisten.

Recht und die Mittel zu seiner freien und unabhängigen Existenz gesichert und die Freiheit der Meere gewährleistet sein müssen. Alle internationalen Konflikte müssen nach Auffassung der Arbeitnehmer ohne Anwendung von Erpressung, Drohung und Gewalt gelöst werden.

Israel ist ein auf freier, demokratischer Grundlage beruhender Staat, in dem die demokratische Gewerkschaftsbewegung und ihre Arbeitnehmer eine entscheidende Rolle spielen. Der DGB und seine Gewerkschaften fühlen sich daher mit der israelischen Gewerkschaftsbewegung und dem israelischen Volk in seinem jetzigen Abwehrkampf besonders eng verbunden.

Der Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund appelliert an die Weltöffentlichkeit, die Vereinten Nationen und alle friedenswilligen Kräfte, stärksten moralischen Druck auf die Regierungen der Großmächte auszuüben, damit sie alles unternehmen, um eine sofortige Beendigung der Feindseligkeiten sowie einen gerechten, vertraglich gesicherten

Abbruch des Krieges zu erreichen.

DEUTSCHER GEBIRGS-VERBAND . BUNDESVORSTAND

<p>W. P. ...</p> <p>W. ...</p> <p>S. ...</p> <p>C. ...</p> <p>H. ...</p>	<p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p>	<p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p>	<p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p> <p>... ..</p>
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play a decisive role. The DGB and its affiliates therefore feel closely connected to the Israeli trade union movement and the Israeli people in their current defence struggle.« In addition to this unequivocal statement by the DGB Federal Executive Board, individual regional districts and chapters organised their own solidarity campaigns with Israel, ranging from demonstrations to fundraising. The press reported extensively on these activities and, above all, the DGB's position. The trade union movement's stance was made known across the country through a television programme. As a result, the Federal Executive Board received a number of critical letters and reports from companies in which the DGB's clear stance was met with incomprehension among employees. In contrast, the Histadrut expressed its great gratitude for the support and the Israeli ambassador expressed his thanks for the financial help in this difficult situation.

ISRAEL'S RAPID VICTORY CHANGED  
THE PERCEPTION OF THE ENTIRE  
WEST GERMAN PUBLIC.

The resilient Israeli soldiers refuted the clichéd image of Jews as victims who let themselves be led like lambs to the slaughter. This increased sympathy for Israel among the general public in Germany. The conservative press even drew comparisons between the rapid Israeli advance and the *Wehrmacht*'s campaign in North Africa during the Second World War. The tabloids published by the Springer Group celebrated the commander of the Israeli army, Moshe Dajan, as the new »desert fox« and compared him to Field Marshal Erwin Rommel.

While conservative media in the Federal Republic of Germany celebrated Israel, the New Left reacted differently. It no longer perceived Israel as a country of Holocaust survivors that had to fight for its existence, but as a colonial state. Israel, they claimed, was a bridgehead of Western, American imperialism in the Middle East. While advocates of the traditional left, above all the trade unions, still felt committed to the Jewish state, supporters of the New Left born after the Second World War did not feel this same commitment. They obsessively focused on this regional conflict, which they viewed exclusively through the lens of anti-imperialism, and showed solidarity, above all, with the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, Fatah. They chose their leader, Yasser Arafat, as the symbolic figure of the anti-imperialist struggle. In their positions on Israel and the Middle East, they thus resembled the real socialist countries and especially the GDR, but also the West German neo-Nazis. This eerie overlap between communists and neo-Nazis in commemoration of the Six-Day War prompted the DGB to conduct a more detailed investigation.

THE ELEVEN-PAGE ANALYSIS »EXTREMISTS UNITED AGAINST ISRAEL« (»EXTREMISTEN EINIG GEGEN ISRAEL«) OF JULY 1967 CONTRASTED THE REPORTING ON ISRAEL IN THE EAST GERMAN NEWSPAPERS »NEUES DEUTSCHLAND« AND »BERLINER ZEITUNG« WITH THAT OF THE NEO-NAZI NEWSPAPERS »NATIONAL-ZEITUNG« AND »DEUTSCHE NACHRICHTEN« FROM WEST GERMANY.

The study found a »startling consensus between right-wing extremists and communists in their incitement against Israel«. According to the study, anti-Israeli incitement was fuelled by various ideological roots and political motivations. Historically, however, such an alli-



### ***This page contains an image file***

ance between seemingly opposing forces had previously emerged several times in the past, the study found: »Ultimately, the banding together of these two otherwise hostile brothers in their quest to destroy Israel is reminiscent of the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939.«

THE ANALYSIS THEN PRESENTED ALMOST IDENTICAL QUOTES FROM THE VARIOUS NEWSPAPERS IN ORDER TO HIGHLIGHT THEIR COMMON GROUND IN THEIR INCITEMENT AGAINST ISRAEL.

The very founding of the state of Israel in 1948 was considered a crime, and the state was denied any right to exist, the analysis revealed, noting that Zionist policy was based exclusively on violence, according to the communist and neo-Nazi press, whilst, at the same time, the astonishing nation-building work in Israel was simply ignored. The analysis furthermore found that the provocative policies adopted by the Arab countries, coupled with the constant threats of annihilation, played no role in any of the newspapers examined. While the Federal Republic of Germany's arms deliveries were branded as »warmongering«, the much more extensive exports from the Soviet Union to the Arab states were not mentioned at all. The different motives aside, the effect of the anti-Israeli incitement was the same, since »anti-Semitism is being stirred up on both sides«, the DGB's analysis concluded.

THE COMPLEX SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST WAS ALSO SEIZED UPON BY THE UNDOGMATICALLY COMMUNIST TRADE UNIONIST AND ANTI-FASCIST, THEODOR BERGMANN, IN JULY 1967, IN AN EDITORIAL PUBLISHED IN THE TRADE UNION'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE *GEWERKSCHAFTLICHE MONATSHEFTE*.

The author presents a nuanced view of the various problems facing the region before arriving at the following conclusion: »The DGB's willingness to help Israel overcome a struggle in which it literally stood alone is therefore an exemplary act. But something else could be done to complement this action by building long-term bridges between workers, trade unions and their members in every country in the Middle East. Proposals for a joint solution to the major common problems should be drawn up and submitted to the headquarters of the trade unions on both sides. That is what true international solidarity with those who are calling for peace is about.« The DGB's declaration on the Six-Day War was also printed in this issue of *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*.



Two-day visit to Germany by a delegation from the Executive Board of the General Federation of Labour in Israel, the Histadrut, in June 1967; group photos with DGB President, Ludwig Rosenberg

## THE FORMALISATION OF RELATIONSHIPS

After the exchange programmes, particularly among young people, had gradually intensified since the first visit by a DGB delegation to Israel in 1957 and had experienced a qualitative leap forward with the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1965, the focus then shifted to formalising trade union relations.

Shortly after the Six-Day War, another delegation comprising representatives from the Histadrut and Israeli politicians visited Düsseldorf. The DGB also announced that it would soon make a return visit to Israel. The visit was scheduled so that the delegates could attend the opening of the institute dedicated to Peretz (Fritz) Naphtali at the Hebrew University on 29 October 1967. This German-Israeli trade unionist and economist had died in 1961 and had rendered outstanding services to the establishment of the Jewish state. As an important liaison officer for the DGB, he had furthermore promoted rapprochement with the Histadrut.

A significant step towards formalised relations was taken in 1969. Aharon Becker, the Secretary General of the General Federation of Labour in Israel, announced that he would be paying an official visit to the German partner organisation. This step was made possible by a shift in public opinion in Israel towards the Federal Republic of Germany. The reactions to the Six-Day War in the Federal Republic of Germany, and within the trade union movement in particular, were

central to this. This shift in position was clearly evident in Hillel Seidel, a Holocaust survivor and liberal politician in Israel. He had long rejected any relations with the Federal Republic of Germany, but changed his attitude after a visit, as he explained in a detailed report in an Israeli newspaper published in July 1967. The translation offered by the Jewish Press Service reads: »The President of the German Trade Union Confederation is Ludwig Rosenberg, and the head of the policy department is Otto Kersten. They welcomed us with great warmth and accompanied us throughout our five-day stay in Germany.« Seidel goes on to write about Rosenberg:

»I HAD THE FEELING THAT, FOR HIM, THE STRUGGLE FOR ISRAEL WAS ABOUT MUCH MORE THAN JUST AN ISSUE REQUIRING A DEMONSTRATION OF SYMPATHY BY A DEMOCRAT OR THAT HAD GROWN DEAR TO HIM AS A FRIEND OF A JUST CAUSE.«

Seidel also highlighted his encounter with Hesselbach: »I must especially praise Mr Hesselbach, the head of the German Labour Bank. At the time, he was a member of the Poale Zion movement – even though he is not Jewish – and during the Nazi regime he was arrested for his professional and socialist activities. He began siding with Israel many years ago. There are few people who speak about Israel with such conviction and sympathy as Hesselbach.« Such encounters and, above all, the attitude of young people in the Federal Republic of Germany towards Israel had changed his perspective, as Seidel summarised. The detailed quotes from the report show how important the encounters between Israelis and activists of the West German trade union movement were for understanding the rap-

prochement between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany during those years. The role of the DGB in this regard can hardly be overestimated.

The first visit by a Histadrut chairman in November 1969 should also be understood against the backdrop of this change in Israel's attitude towards the Federal Republic of Germany.

IN VIEW OF THE SCHEDULED MEETINGS WITH THE HIGHEST POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY, AHARON BECKER'S 14-DAY TRIP TOOK ON THE CHARACTER OF A STATE VISIT.

Among others, Becker met with Federal President, Gustav Heinemann, and the recently elected Social Democratic Chancellor, Willy Brandt. However, Becker began his trip at the Hans Böckler House in Düsseldorf with a meeting with the new DGB President, Heinz Oskar Vetter, and his predecessor, Ludwig Rosenberg. Becker's visit to the Federal Republic of Germany elevated relations between the DGB and the Histadrut to a new level. Further steps were soon to follow.

After the DGB had sent the first group of labour relations directors to Israel in 1968, a second delegation followed in 1970. The umbrella organisation asked its affiliates, *IG Metall* and *IG Bergbau und Energie*, to each appoint five people. Cooperation at another level was also strengthened by the Fritz Naphtali Foundation. It had been founded in 1967 by the DGB and the Histadrut together with the SPD-affiliated Friedrich Ebert Foundation and was primarily concerned with development aid projects in the Global South. The foundation's board met twice a year, alternating between Germany and Israel. In the early 1970s, the chair of the board of trustees was



Secretary General, Itzhak Ben Aharon, and DGB President, Heinz Oskar Vetter, at the wreath-laying ceremony at the Jewish memorial in the former Dachau concentration camp as part of a Histadrut delegation's visit to Germany in July 1971

Golda Meir, who later became Prime Minister. Rosenberg and Hesselbach were also members of the foundation's board. At the end of 1972, the first German-Israeli seminar for trade union youth officials took place, which developed into a regular event. In addition, many DGB affiliates and the DGB regional chapters strengthened their contacts with Israeli partner organisations.

**DURING THIS PHASE OF SUBSTANTIAL RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN THE DGB AND THE HISTADRUT, ISRAEL ONCE AGAIN FACED AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT.**

On 6 October 1973, the highest Jewish holiday, Yom Kippur, it was attacked by the Egyptian and Syrian armies. They received extensive support from other Arab countries as well as from the Soviet Union. Despite the extremely difficult starting position, the Israeli army again captured large areas during the course of the conflict. The warring parties concluded a ceasefire between 22 and 24 October in response to external pressure. As early as 16 October, the countries that had joined forces in the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) significantly increased the price of oil. It rose by a good 70 per cent. The OPEC oil ministers also announced that they would cut production by five per cent per month until their political demands were met. This marked the first time that the Arab states had used oil as a political weapon to exert pressure on countries that supported Israel. They imposed an embargo on the USA, the Netherlands, Japan, Canada and the UK. Other states then distanced themselves from Israel in order to avoid being boycotted themselves.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE WAR WERE IMMENSE.  
BOTH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND THE TRADE  
UNION MOVEMENT FELT COMPELLED TO REACT  
PROMPTLY.

In an address of solidarity to the Histadrut on 16 October 1973, the DGB emphasised the unrestricted right of the Israeli people to a peaceful existence within secure state borders. The statement called for »a concrete, binding and credible guarantee by the major powers for the security of the existence of the State of Israel in order to permanently avert the danger of war in the Middle East and open the way to peaceful development«. At the meeting of the DGB's Executive Board on 22 October,

Heinz Oskar Vetter reported on the positive reaction of the Israeli ambassador and the Histadrut.

After the end of the war, former DGB President, Rosenberg, analysed the situation in *Gewerkschaftspost*, the magazine of the *IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik* trade union. In the article entitled »Israel's struggle for existence«, he argued that Israel was once again defending itself against an outright superior power. To accuse the country of having imperialist ambitions, as the New Left and real socialist countries do, for example, fails to recognise reality, because »self-defence is not aggression«, he argued, adding that the Jewish state, as a democratic country, was additionally surrounded by reactionary monarchies and military dictatorships that cared nothing for minority or women's rights. The Arab states were also instrumentalising the fate of the Palestinian refugees in propaganda terms, but in reality did not care about them, he stated. Rosenberg concluded with a pessimistic appeal: »Today, Israel is fighting for its existence – no one can say who will be next. And no one can say who will finally be able to break this ill-fated circle of hypocrisy and mendacity that threatens our world with terror and horror.«

THE DIFFICULT SITUATION IN WHICH ISRAEL STILL  
FOUND ITSELF 25 YEARS AFTER ITS FOUNDATION  
PROMPTED THE DGB TO FORGE EVEN CLOSER TIES  
WITH THE PARTNER ORGANISATION.

Initially, the DGB North Rhine-Westphalia regional chapter concluded a partnership agreement with the Histadrut Tel Aviv-Jaffo district in September 1974. In addition to the ongoing sharing of information, the agreement also provided for more meetings between

sisters and brothers in both countries and a permanent exchange at various levels: from travelling to seminars and sports. In conclusion, the agreement states: »Recognising that the signing of this agreement creates an effective fact that should serve peace and greater social justice in Europe and the Middle East, the heads of both organisations undertake to ensure compliance with this partnership agreement and to bring it to life.« This laid the foundation for a series of agreements.

**THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT SIGNED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL BETWEEN THE DGB AND THE HISTADRUT ON 3 SEPTEMBER 1975.**

This definitively formalised the strong contacts that had existed for a long time. The agreement begins as follows: »The traditionally close relations between the General Federation of Labour in Israel, the Histadrut, and the German Trade Union Confederation as well as their partnership within the framework of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions have proven their worth many times over and have made a decisive contribution to overcoming the burdens that a cruel past had built up between the two peoples. The solidarity of the labour movement and joint advocacy for a peaceful solution to the conflicts in the Middle East have further strengthened the bond between the organisations.« The agreement also called for the exchange between the trade union confederations to be expanded, meetings increased and contacts at district level improved. In closing, the agreement states that the organisations thus want to contribute »to promoting peace in the world and securing the right to life of all people by peaceful means«.



Visit to Germany by Histadrut Secretary General, Yerucham Meshel (centre), in September 1971, here in conversation with Federal Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt (left), and DGB President, Heinz Oskar Vetter (right)

In the years that followed the conclusion of this arrangement, further agreements were reached between the Histadrut district of Haifa and the DGB regional chapter of Lower Saxony; between the Histadrut district of Jerusalem and the DGB regional chapter of Berlin; and, in 1977, finally between the Histadrut district of Dan-Hasharon and the DGB regional chapter of Hesse; and between the Moshav movement, which advocates for the establishment of cooperatively organised villages, and the DGB regional chapter of Rhineland-Palatinate; then, in the early 1980s, between the Histadrut district of Beersheva and the DGB regional chapter of Bavaria; between the Histadrut district of Western Galilee and the DGB regional chapter of Baden-Württemberg; in 1983, between the Histadrut district of Givatayim and the DGB regional chapter of Saarland. There were also agreements between individual DGB affiliates and their Israeli partner organisations. The ties between the German and Israeli trade union movements have thus been forged in an extraordinary way since the mid-1970s.

## CHANGES AND CONSOLIDATION

The second half of the 1970s saw major political shifts occurring in Israel, which also fundamentally affected the social standing of the Histadrut. The outcome of the 1977 election broke the dominance of the left-wing Zionist parties in the Israeli parliament for the first time since the founding of the state. This time, it was the conservative Likud party that came out on top. Its Chairman, Menachem Begin, was elected prime minister.

Politically, the Histadrut had been closely linked to the left-wing Zionist parties of the labour movement. In the internal elections to the trade union committees, this grouping was admittedly able to secure its majority, but the general social environment was becoming increasingly difficult. The conservative government called many of the Histadrut's domains into question – ranging from health insurance to housing – which went beyond the union's core function, and either tightened the framework conditions or cut state funding. The Histadrut gradually lost its central socio-political significance.

In addition to the domestic political upheavals, Israel also underwent massive shifts in foreign policy. In office since 1970, Egyptian President Anwar as-Sadat had freed the country from its previous close ties to the Soviet Union and slowly drew closer to Israel in the aftermath of Egypt's humiliating defeat in the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Following the initial talks that had taken place as part of the

ceasefire agreement, Sadat became the first Arab head of state to travel to Israel in 1977, where he also addressed parliament. This was followed by further talks that were brokered by US President Jimmy Carter.

EGYPT AND ISRAEL ULTIMATELY SIGNED A PEACE TREATY IN 1979. THE MOST POPULOUS ARAB COUNTRY HAD THUS DE FACTO RECOGNISED ISRAEL.

This peace treaty constituted a turning point in the Middle East and shifted the foreign policy dynamic in the region.

Such developments also became a topic of discussion at the joint German-Israeli seminars. The DGB Youth in particular stepped up its commitment on this matter.

In one case in point, the German-language »*Histadrut Nachrichten*« (»Histadrut News«) reported that a total of five delegations from both countries were scheduled to visit the respective other country in 1978. The following meetings were planned: the Histadrut youth were to visit the DGB; young Israeli works council members the German postal union, *Deutsche Postgewerkschaft*; the Israeli metalworkers' youth the *IG Metall* union; young employees the Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union, *ÖTV*; and young works council members from Israel's chemical industry the *IG Chemie-Papier-Keramik* union.

In terms of reciprocal visits, delegations from the DGB regional chapters of Hesse and Bavaria were scheduled to be sent to their respective partner districts; officials from the German postal union to the Israeli state employees' union; and a youth delegation from the Building and Construction Workers' union, *IG Bau-Steine-Erden*, to the Israeli construction workers' union.

An expansion of the joint history seminars was also agreed. The first seminar on historical topics was held in Germany in 1977. Ad-

ditional educational programmes were to follow in the year after that. Among other things, participants at these events engaged in discussions not only concerning the relationship between the two trade union movements, the history of the labour movement and (social) Zionism, but also the role of trade unions and the standing of minorities in Israeli society. Last but not least, peace prospects in the Middle East were also discussed.

**THESE DEBATES BECAME INCREASINGLY CRITICAL IN THE COURSE OF THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR THAT STARTED IN 1975.**

By now, the PLO was based in Lebanon. Supported by Syria and other militias, it carried out repeated attacks on targets in Israel, which was cooperating with competing forces in the neighbouring country. Following another devastating attack perpetrated by assassins on a civilian bus, Israel decided to engage in a more forceful intervention. It occupied the south of Lebanon militarily, but withdrew again under pressure from the USA. A ceasefire agreement did not last long, however. The murder of a diplomat in Paris and an attempted assassination of Israel's ambassador in London, for which various Palestinian groups had each claimed responsibility, as well as the firing of Katyusha rockets into Israel, led Israel to send its troops back into Lebanon on 6 June 1982. Its intended aim was to expel the PLO from the country once and for all. Under Israeli occupation, Christian militiamen carried out a massacre in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, evoking worldwide horror. Against the backdrop of political changes within Israel, the Israeli intervention in Lebanon also led to increased criticism in circles that fundamentally supported Israel, such as the German trade union



DGB President, Ernst Breit (3rd from left), with Histadrut Secretary General, Yerucham Meshel (centre), during a trip to Israel in October 1983

movement. Different views on developments in the Middle East were hotly discussed at the German-Israeli seminars without losing track of the fundamental support for one another.

THE DGB'S REMEMBRANCE POLICY ACTIVITIES BECAME EXTREMELY VISIBLE IN 1988 ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST POGROM AGAINST JEWS IN GERMANY ON 9 NOVEMBER 1938.

The umbrella organisation arranged a commemorative event at the Dachau concentration camp as well as a symposium at the Munich-based trade union house, *Gewerkschaftshaus München*, the following day. The DGB coordinated this project with survivors from various countries as well as with the Israeli partner organisation.

IN ADDITION TO THE HISTADRUT, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE »FREE GERMAN TRADE UNION FEDERATION« (FDGB), THE UMBRELLA ORGANISATION OF THE TRADE UNIONS ASSOCIATION OF THE GDR, WERE ALSO INVITED.

After initial hesitation concerning a fear of snubbing its Arab ally had subsided, FDGB Chairman, Harry Tisch, ultimately agreed to attend and give a speech. This decision came as a surprise in that the GDR had no relations with Israel. Consequently, the GDR trade unions had no contacts with Israeli organisations and an FDGB chairman had never before attended an event together with Histadrut representatives, let alone given a speech. In addition to the commemoration on the camp grounds in Dachau, discussions with Jewish survivors as well as a German-Israeli symposium with historians were organised in Munich.

In his speech at the commemorative event in Dachau, Histadrut Secretary General, Israel Kessar, said: »The realisation of the indelibility of our past, for Germans and Jews alike, has been followed by actions to secure the future in the Federal Republic of Germany, and in the DGB and its affiliates, in particular; today's meeting awakens in me the hope that this path, the only viable one, will continue to be followed, beyond the borders ...«

In his closing statement in Munich on 10 November 1988, DGB President, Ernst Breit, thanked all participants for the open discussion and underscored the special nature of the joint commemoration with Israeli trade unionists.

In view of Germany's crimes and the burden of its National Socialist past, this development was by no means an obvious choice, he stated. He also emphasised the importance of Israel for Jews and the obligation of the German trade union movement to stand for

Israel's security. Breit concluded his speech as follows: »2000 years of Jewish diaspora, accompanied by constant slander and persecution, by pogroms not only in Germany, also accompanied by the greeting »Next year in Jerusalem« [...], should come to an end with the founding of the state of Israel [...]. The Histadrut, which has made significant contributions to the founding and development of the young state, and the DGB have been friends for many years. Since 1975, there has been a partnership agreement between the two organisations, the only one that the DGB has entered into with a foreign organisation. There is one thing we have never done in our diverse relationships: we have never swept the past under the carpet. We also demonstrated this yesterday and today with our events. Conscious of the past, building a better, more peaceful future is what unites us. That is also why I would like to close this event with the Jewish greeting of peace: Shalom.«

THE DGB'S INTERNATIONAL COMMEMORATIVE EVENT  
WAS WELL RECEIVED BY THE MEDIA, INCLUDING BY  
FOREIGN NEWSPAPERS.

Several articles in particular emphasised a demand by Ernst Breit. The DGB President had spoken out in favour of establishing a Holocaust memorial site. In doing so, the German Trade Union Confederation was quick to put forward this demand that was only realised decades later.

## **A BREAK AND A NEW BEGINNING**

**The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the reunification of the two German states on 3 October 1990 fundamentally changed the situation in Germany, Europe and the world. The Cold War was over, the previous post-war order and the division of the continent into two hostile blocs had ended. The DGB had to adapt quickly to this unexpected new situation. The initial developments were encouraging from a trade union perspective. The number of members in the affiliated unions jumped from just under eight million to almost twelve million in 1990 as workers from the new federal states signed up. The DGB opened new offices and established organisational structures in Eastern Germany.**

The economic upheavals, the transformation of the state's planned economy into a capitalist (social) market economy and the associated closure or privatisation of factories and agricultural cooperatives caused unemployment to rise sharply in the so-called new federal states. The economic crisis dampened the euphoria that many East Germans had felt after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The blossoming landscapes promised by then Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, had not materialised; on the contrary: job losses, the collapse of important company structures during the time of the GDR, which had been of great importance to employees beyond their actual work, coupled

with widespread economic insecurity, dominated the lives of people in Eastern Germany for years to come. These phenomena had a massive impact on the DGB and its affiliates. From 1991 onwards, its membership fell continuously throughout the decade.

**THE SITUATION IN ISRAEL ALSO CHANGED FUNDAMENTALLY DURING THESE YEARS. THE HISTADRUT WAS SEVERELY IMPACTED BY THIS.**

After the so-called first Intifada of 1987 exacerbated the situation in the Middle East, the rapprochement between Israelis and Palestinians initially made great strides following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. The 1993 Oslo Peace Process brought a lasting solution to the conflict within reach. The Palestinian organisation PLO had lost its most important backer, the Soviet Union, and had also suffered a massive loss of prestige in the Arab world due to its solidarity with the Iraqi dictatorship under Saddam Hussein following the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. Against this backdrop, Palestinians were ultimately prepared to seek reconciliation with Israel. Added to this, the Jewish state concluded its second agreement with an Arab country in 1994: a peace treaty with the Kingdom of Jordan. Despite these positive foreign policy developments, the domestic political situation for the Histadrut worsened noticeably from the beginning of the 1990s.

The situation for the organisation had already gradually deteriorated over the previous decades. As a typical immigrant society, Israel's demographic structure had already repeatedly changed to a considerable extent since 1948. After mainly Ashkenazi, i.e. (Eastern) European Jews, had immigrated to the territory of the future Jewish state in the

time preceding the founding of the state, the geographical focus shifted towards immigrants from Arab and (North) African countries. Many Sephardic Jews from there settled in Israel from the 1950s onwards after being forced to leave their home countries. For them, the Histadrut was much less important. They regarded the trade union as part of the Ashkenazi elite, which dominated all areas of government and society in the initial decades post 1948. The Sephardic Jews therefore often had to contend with discrimination in Israeli society. The first election of a conservative government in 1977 under the leadership of the Likud party was already linked to these social conflicts. In the years that followed, Likud established itself as the political force and continues to exert great influence on Israeli politics to this day.

FACED WITH CONSERVATIVE ECONOMIC POLICIES AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS OF THE 1980S, THE HISTADRUT INCREASINGLY FOUND ITSELF ON THE DEFENSIVE. THIS WAS COMPOUNDED BY INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES AND MAJOR PROBLEMS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR COMPANIES.

Ultimately, a new health insurance law came into force on 1 January 1995, which, among other things, introduced the free choice of a health insurance fund and increased competition between providers. This ended the link between Histadrut membership and health insurance and the trade union lost its most important resource for recruiting new members. Immediately after the adoption of the new law, it therefore lost around two-thirds of its members in a short space of time. The number fell from 1.7 million to 600,000.

## THE INTERNAL BALANCE OF POWER WITHIN THE ORGANISATION ALSO SHIFTED.

The 1994 Histadrut elections saw the social democrats lose their majority for the first time in the trade union's existence. The now dominant forces endeavoured to bring about an array of changes, which were adopted at the reform congress in the early months of 1995: the close political ties to social democracy were loosened and the Histadrut established as a non-partisan organisation, which, from now on would also limit itself to traditional trade union issues. Health insurance was thus detached from the organisation and the public service companies were sold off. A decision was furthermore made to reduce the level of bureaucracy and to strengthen the individual trade unions within the federation. This fundamentally changed the role of the Histadrut in Israeli society. It no longer had the central importance it had enjoyed in the decades following the founding of the state.

## THE GERMAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT WAS ALSO UNDERGOING PROFOUND CHANGE IN THE 1990s.

The crisis situation that ensued in the aftermath of Germany's reunification and the significant decline in membership ultimately resulted in a number of mergers. Previously independent individual trade unions merged to form new organisations, such as *IG Bau* or *IG Bergbau, Chemie, Energie (IG BCE)*. Other smaller trade unions joined larger organisations. This process of change ended with the founding of *ver.di* in 2001, which reduced the number of DGB affiliates from 17 to eight. This restructuring consolidated the umbrella organisation and the affiliates both organisationally and financially.

Despite these profound changes in the trade union movements in

Germany and Israel, cooperation between the DGB and the Histadrut continued. Joint seminars and reciprocal visits took place, albeit to a somewhat lesser extent. However, this good relationship did not mean that there was agreement on all issues.

THE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION BETWEEN THE GERMAN AND ISRAELI TRADE UNIONS, FOR EXAMPLE, REGARDING THE SO-CALLED SECOND GULF WAR WERE A SOURCE OF IRRITATION.

Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, an international coalition under American leadership came together to re-establish Kuwaiti sovereignty by force of arms, if necessary. A peace movement formed in Germany against this, which mobilised for demonstrations under their slogan »No blood for oil«. The DGB also joined in and pleaded for a peaceful solution to the conflict. Its President at the time, Heinz-Werner Meyer, said: »Better to negotiate for years than wage war for hours.« At the same time, however, the DGB clearly demanded that Iraqi troops withdraw from the neighbouring country and that German arms exports to the region be stopped. Deliveries from Germany had first massively armed Iraq under Saddam Hussein, including with poison gas. Although Israel had nothing to do with the conflict, Iraq threatened to bombard the country with Scud missiles, which are also capable of carrying chemical warfare agents. For this reason, gas masks were distributed to the population in Israel as a precautionary measure. In the end, Iraq fired several conventional missiles at the Jewish state. Nevertheless, the Israeli government reacted cautiously and did not allow itself to be drawn into this war.

**IN VIEW OF THIS THREAT, THE DGB SENT A DELEGATION OF TWO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS, REGINA GÖRNER AND LOTHAR ZIMMERMANN, TO THE ISRAELI PARTNER ORGANISATION IN THE MIDDLE OF THE WAR.**

Several DGB chapters declared their solidarity with their Israeli partners. On 22 January 1991, five days after the first shelling of Israel, the then chairman of the Lower Saxony chapter, Karl Neumann, wrote to the Histadrut district of Haifa: »These days, we are following the acts of war with horror and deep concern. We have learnt with indignation and disgust of the criminal missile attacks by Iraq on Israel, which is uninvolved in the war. In this situation, we would like to express our solidarity and assure you of our support in these difficult times.« At the same time, he emphasised that war cannot be a solution and that negotiations must take place. Many Israelis did not share this view.

The difference of opinion was also evident at a DGB Bavaria press conference involving a two-person Histadrut delegation from the partner district of Beer Sheva in spring 1991, where an Israeli delegate expressed his disconcertment at the extensive peace demonstrations and solidarity with the Palestinians taking place in Germany, including among young trade unionists. The Histadrut delegate stated that, whilst he had found the words of solidarity with Israel to be lacking, he appreciated the Bavarian DGB chair, Fritz Schösser, having paid a solidarity visit to his country. In response, Schösser explained that the two countries had different views of the peace movement. The widespread abstract desire for peace among the young generation in Germany is the result of the experiences of German history, he stated, adding that, in Israel, other consequences

would be drawn from this. According to Schösser, the partnership and friendship between the two trade union movements must also serve »not only to exchange political pats on the back, but also to talk about different approaches to experience«.

A CLOSE TRADE UNION ALLY, THE HANS BÖCKLER FOUNDATION RESPONDED TO THIS NEED BY ORGANISING A SEMINAR ON »GERMANY, ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST« AT SHORT NOTICE IN MARCH 1991.

Israeli and Palestinian academics, Jewish and Arab journalists and a German-Jewish professor were invited as speakers.

In an internal paper published before the start of combat operations, the DGB also stated that a special stance would be necessary if Israel were to be drawn into the war. In an official statement on the situation in the Gulf in March 1991, the DGB Federal Committee reiterated the need for a peaceful solution to be achieved through negotiations. At the same time, it emphasised: »The DGB reaffirms Israel's right to exist and solidarity with its people« as well as their right to live together in partnership with the peoples and states in the region in the future without fear of attacks.



DGB President, Dieter Schulte, and Histadrut Secretary General, Amir Peretz, met as part of the dialogue between the two trade union executive boards in Tel Aviv in April 1997

THE DGB THUS EXPRESSED A FIRM POSITION IN FAVOUR OF PEACE, ON THE ONE HAND, WHILE EMPHASISING ITS UNWAVERING SOLIDARITY WITH THE JEWISH STATE AND ITS INHABITANTS, ON THE OTHER.

This difficult balancing act set the umbrella organisation apart from the majority of the German peace movement, which did not seem to be concerned about Israel in any way.

Such differences of opinion, which stemmed from different historical experiences or divergent perspectives on the Middle East conflict, arose time and again, but were always dealt with in a spirit of solidarity between the German and Israeli trade union movements and did not fundamentally shake the relationship. In 1993, a delega-

tion from the Histadrut executive committee visited Saxony, heralding the establishment of direct relations between the Israeli trade unions and their partner organisations in the federal states of Eastern Germany. To pay tribute to the decades of relations, the DGB also published a brochure on the development of mutual understanding in 1995 to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the partnership agreement with the Histadrut. In the foreword, the then DGB President, Dieter Schulte, emphasised that the partnership agreement signed with the Histadrut in 1975 was of »unique significance« for the German trade union movement. As the only agreement of its kind, it has retained this significance for the DGB to this day. That is why it was honoured 30 years ago with a grand ceremony in Düsseldorf attended by Israeli guests and the then Minister-President of North Rhine-Westphalia, Johannes Rau.

## **SOLIDARITY AND DIFFERENCES**

**The institutionalisation of German-Israeli trade union relations in the partnership agreement between the DGB and the Histadrut in 1975 laid the foundations for a relationship that has carried through into the new millennium. Despite all the difficult external circumstances, the exchange relationships between the two organisations continue to this day.**

The faltering peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, the radicalisation of Palestinian society and the right-wing political developments in Israel have not fundamentally shaken the relationship between the German and Israeli trade unions, despite their differences. Quite the opposite: the German and Israeli umbrella organisations are constantly working to consolidate and develop them further in order to shape this unique transnational cooperation in line with the new requirements.

During the term that Michael Sommer served as DGB President starting in 2002, the importance that the German umbrella organisation has long held for the Israeli partner organisation at the international level became particularly clear. Since the middle of the decade, the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) campaign, which calls for a comprehensive cultural and economic boycott of Israel, had experienced a major international upswing. The campaign is extremely controversial in Germany and dubbed anti-Semitic by its

critics. Nonetheless, the call, including in trade union circles, for a boycott of the Jewish state has enjoyed and continues to enjoy great support in many countries, in both the Global South and Europe. As first Deputy President of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), Michael Sommer spoke out in no uncertain terms against the BDS demands and emphasised that, as DGB President, he would under no circumstances support decisions to boycott Israel. With its clear stance, the DGB is proving to be a reliable ally of the Histadrut.

### THE DGB'S UNEQUIVOCAL SOLIDARITY WITH ISRAEL GOES HAND IN HAND WITH ATTEMPTS TO PROMOTE RAPPROCHEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT AND TO PLAY A BALANCING ROLE TOWARDS THE PALESTINIAN TRADE UNION FEDERATION PGFTU.

In one case in point, the DGB brokered an agreement, concluded in 2008, between the PGFTU and the Histadrut regarding the rights of Palestinian workers in Israel.

Such conciliation efforts were further intensified under DGB President, Reiner Hoffmann, from 2014 onwards. Even before taking on this position on the board of the Fritz Naphtali Foundation and as Deputy General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), his focus was very firmly set on international trade union policy. As DGB President, he set up a steering group with the Palestinian umbrella organisation, PGFTU, and the Histadrut with the aim of improving the poor conditions of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian migrant workers who come to work in Israel every day. Their situation had steadily deteriorated since the Second Intifada at the beginning of the 2000s. The steering group set

up by Hoffmann met several times a year after 2015, often at the German embassy in Tel Aviv. As a result, the DGB has repeatedly played an important brokering role between the Israeli and Palestinian trade union umbrella organisations.

MANY OF THESE COOPERATION MEASURES WERE FINANCED BY THE HANS BÖCKLER FOUNDATION. THE TRADE UNION-AFFILIATED FOUNDATION HAS PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE EXCHANGE WITH ISRAEL FOR DECADES UP TO THE PRESENT DAY.

Since the end of the Covid measures, it has once again intensified its programmes with Israeli partners on various levels. One such example relates to regular joint projects between German and Israeli economists, as well as trips to Israel as part of the non-material support provided to scholarship holders. The main aim here is to convey the complexity of the situation in Israel and to get to know the different perspectives, including through exchanges with Palestinian organisations and visits to the West Bank.

The Leaders at Work programme, organised in collaboration with the Academic College of Tel Aviv-Yaffo and the Macro Center of Political Economics, brings together scholarship holders of the foundation with Israeli fellow students for a year in an intensive exchange in both countries.

For some time now, the foundation has also been organising an annual seminar in cooperation with the central Israeli Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem on the pedagogical approach towards the extermination policy of the Nazi regime and the future of remembrance policy for prospective teachers and those working in education.



Federal Youth Committee (October 2023)

The Hamas massacre on 7 October 2023, when more Jews were murdered in one day than at any time since the Holocaust, and its aftermath also proved to be an incisive moment for the DGB. It issued a clear declaration of solidarity.

In a letter to the Histadrut it states: »In this dark hour for Israel, the German Trade Union Confederation and its affiliates as well as its youth organisation, DGB-Youth, stand by your side.«

It continued: »Our common fight for peace, freedom, democracy and a diverse society is what always unites us and makes us strong. Any form of terrorism, arbitrary killings and enforced disappearances is unacceptable and will meet with our resolute resistance.« The DGB also reaffirmed its continued solidarity with the Histadrut during a first solidarity trip to Israel in February 2024.

The terror attack committed by Hamas also destroyed the exchange between the German trade unions and the Palestinian um-

umbrella organisation, PGFTU, after the latter had not condemned the massacre of 7 October in a statement, but had exclusively criticised the Israeli reaction to it, the military operation in the Gaza Strip.

At the time of this brochure going to press, it was unclear whether and how long the ceasefire agreed in mid-January 2025 would last. The expansion of the conflict into Lebanon by the Iranian-funded Hezbollah, the shelling of Israel by the Islamist Houthi militias in Yemen and the recent collapse of the Assad dictatorship in Syria have further heightened tensions in the Middle East. The future of the region seems more uncertain than it has for a long time, but at the same time open.

However, Israel's military actions and the policies of the current Likud-led government, with its right-wing extremist coalition partners, have led to growing criticism of the Jewish state worldwide. The events in Germany since 7 October 2023 bear witness to this in many ways. This criticism is also echoed in parts of the trade union membership.

**THIS MAKES THE FUNDAMENTAL DECLARATION  
OF SOLIDARITY WITH ISRAEL EXPRESSED BY  
THE DGB AND ITS UNEQUIVOCAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE JEWISH  
STATE EVEN MORE VALUABLE.**

(Photo)

Reception held by the Israeli President, Yitzaak Herzog (2nd from left), for a delegation of high-ranking officials from the DGB, led by its President, Yasmin Fahimi, on 5 February 2025. To her right, the Histadrut Chairman, Arnon Bar-David.

Such a stance in no way means that everything that an Israeli government does should be condoned or that criticism be withheld, for example of its settlement policy. German trade unionists discuss different points of view with their Israeli sisters and brothers in a spirit of solidarity, especially in the context of the various exchange projects.

In 2025, to mark the 50th anniversary of the partnership agreement between the DGB and the Histadrut, an Israeli delegation will visit Germany and a return visit will take place. Moreover, the first Fritz Naph-



DGB President, Yasmin Fahimi, at Israel's central memorial site on 5 February 2025 in commemoration of the Jews murdered in the Shoah

tali Forum is planned as an exchange between German trade unionists and academics and colleagues from Israel. Activities are also being stepped up in some districts. The DGB Youth continues to be particularly active in terms of its relations with Israel.



DGB delegation at the Histadrut on 5 February 2025

THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT OF 1975 AND THE DECADES OF CLOSE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE DGB AND THE HISTADRUT FORM THE STABLE BASIS OF AN EXTRAORDINARY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO TRADE UNION CONFEDERATIONS THAT TRANSCENDS NATIONAL BORDERS.

The aim of this brochure is to remind people of the history, origins and development of this relationship. It emphasises the need for a continuous and active trade union policy of remembrance. Dealing with the past enables a better, more well-founded understanding of the present in all its complexity.

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המשרד  
הקרוני

רבים הם ה  
להוכיח שבק  
עובדי ישראל  
אשר נוכחו לר  
גרמניה חדשה ו

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הסובים הקיימים ביניהם

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נסיון בשדה הפיתוח של דמוקר  
וכן בתחום פיתוח הנוסף של

Vereinbarung  
zwischen dem israelischen Gewerk  
HISTADROTH  
und dem  
DEUTSCHEN GEWERKSCHAFTSBUND

Die traditionell enge Freundschaft und Zusammen  
Gewerkschaftsbund HISTADROTH und dem Deutsch  
nerschaft im Rahmen des Internationalen Bun  
vielfach bewährt und einen entscheidenden  
geleitet, die eine grausame Vergangenheit  
hatte. Solidarität der Arbeiterbewegung  
liche Lösung der Konflikte im Nahen Os  
nisationen weiter gestärkt.

Viele Gewerkschafter aus der Bundes  
im Verlauf der vergangenen Jahre  
Aufbaubemühungen der israelische  
Besucher der Histadroth in der  
neuen demokratischen Deutschl

Ein weiterer Ausbau des I  
beiden Organisationen über  
beiden Ländern, de  
Gestaltung