

## American Labor And Israel

Last Saturday night, at the Histadrut dinner in San Francisco, the reasons for the strong ties between American labor and Israel became clear.



Raab

That the ties exist was evident by the presence of an impressive cross-section of San Francisco's labor leadership, starting with John Henning, head of the California Labor Federation and Joseph Belardi, president of the San Francisco Labor Council. And they were evident in the tone of voice with which Henning told the audience: "The American labor movement will never abandon Israel!"

His remark also hinted at the importance of these ties with labor: there is no other organized segment of the American community, including perhaps the Jewish segment, which even comes close to being as important in keeping American policy favorable towards Israel. The reasons are most significant. The ties between American labor and Israel are *natural*; they are not superficial public relations gestures.

**It is fashionable in certain American circles to be cynical about the labor movement. Labor is said to have become stodgy and grasping in its own "bread and butter" interests. Indeed, when someone asked one of the early labor leaders what the labor movement was interested in, he answered, simply: "More, more and more!"**

It has also become fashionable to believe that labor has now "made it," and no longer needs "more." That just doesn't correspond to the facts. The average worker with three dependents takes home about \$125 a week. That's better than it used to be, and much better than anyplace else in the world. But it's still quite a struggle to make ends meet. And the working class, with reason, feels very deprived with respect to such fundamental needs as educational opportunity for their children and adequate medical services for their families.

In those circumstances, the cry of "more, more and more" adds up to positive social values. The labor movement has its share of bureaucrats and self-seeking politicians; but as a total body, organized labor in America still stands for and fights for those positive social values, such as open educational opportunity and medical relief for the less affluent, which will benefit the entire community.

These are the kinds of social values which the labor movement of Israel has built into the state of Israel, and American labor recognizes that. The American labor movement also recognizes that Israel is therefore a force in the world for labor-oriented social values. This is not a small matter. The American labor movement is concerned about the state of labor in other societies for a practical reason.

In the multi-national-corporation world economy which is developing, the bread and butter state of American labor can be severely depressed by inferior working wages and conditions in other countries. This is one reason why the American labor movement has always been concerned about the suppression of the labor movement in the Soviet Union. The "foreign policy" of the American labor movement has been shaped by this social-value consideration.

**So, here is Israel, which is indeed a citadel and model of the free labor movement—in a developing part of the world which badly needs such a model. And here is Israel whose presence stands against the hegemony of the Soviet Union, with its built-in concept of a captive labor market.**

All this points up, in passing, the importance of a strong free labor movement in America to the strength of our entire democratic system, much less our economy.

And the importance of all Americans supporting the basic thrust of the American labor movement, without necessarily blinking its specific deficiencies. And it explains why a hundred black trade union leaders made a statement during the Yom Kippur war in support of Israel, which read in part: "Israel is a society that breathes the spirit of democracy without which free trade unions could not exist."