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CHARITY WORK AS NATION-BUILDING:
AMERICAN JEWISH WOMEN AND THE CRISSES
IN EUROPE AND PALESTINE, 1914-1930

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Mary McCune, M.A.

The Ohio State University
2000

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the international relief activities of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), Hadassah (the Women's Zionist Organization of America) and the Workmen's Circle (or Arbeter Ring in Yiddish) during World War I and the 1920s. The work reveals important ways that American women have contributed to international relief and have thereby influenced political outcomes as well as the construction of ethnic American identity through their voluntarism. Studying these organizations presents the opportunity to investigate a wide range of Jewish women, from upper-class to working-class, assimilationist to Zionist. The first two organizations represent the largest and most prominent Jewish women's groups in the inter-war period. The Workmen's Circle, while not solely a women's association, was a major forum of working-class, secular Jewish activism. World War I and the exigencies of the postwar period provided women with an entrance into international politics, but also facilitated the construction of a modern American Jewish identity intimately connected with philanthropic activities for Jews in other lands. Far from being apolitical, this philanthropic-based identification arising from the war ultimately enabled non-Zionist American Jews to begin to accept the idea of Jewish settlement in Palestine as one refuge among many, although not as a Jewish homeland or nation-state, a decade before the Nazi rise to power in Germany.
In addition to international events, this study also explores the fundamental role played by gender and class in the development of Jewish nationalism and American Jewish identity. Although united by a desire to aid Jews overseas, Americans argued over the best way to achieve this goal. Solutions frequently reflected an individual’s class status and ideological adherence which became increasingly apparent as groups struggled to cooperate. In similar fashion, interactions with male leaders compelled women in all three groups to construct a more distinctly female, if not feminist, consciousness. This dissertation contributes to our understanding of the complex ways in which personal identity shapes public activism. It enables us to see more clearly the connections between women’s voluntary, philanthropic endeavors and the more traditionally male sphere of international politics.
Dedicated to Frank J. Byrne

and

My Family
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Along with him and Frank, this dissertation is dedicated to my entire family. As the youngest child in a large family of Catholics, Protestants, Jews, a Buddhist, and several atheists (some of whom are still in the closet), from my earliest days I could not help but be aware of the complex relationship between personal identity, family or communal allegiance, and public activism. I dedicate this dissertation to everyone in my family but most especially to my sisters and mother:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AJC  American Jewish Committee
AJCong  American Jewish Congress
AJRC  American Jewish Relief Committee
ARA  American Relief Administration
AUAM  American Union Against Militarism
AZMU  American Zionist Medical Unit
CRC  Central Relief Committee (Orthodox)
FAZ  Federation of American Zionists (pre-war Zionist movement)
ICW  International Council of Women
IWSA  International Woman Suffrage Alliance
JDC  American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee ("Joint") -- made up of AJRC, CRC and PRC
JWB  Jewish Welfare Board
JWO  Jewish Women's Organization
LWV  League of Women Voters
NAWSA  National American Woman Suffrage Association
NCJW  National Council of Jewish Women (Council)
NCW  National Council of Women
NWC  National Workmen's Committee on Jewish Rights
NWP  National Woman's Party
PEC  Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs
PJWERA  Palestine Jewish Women's Equal Rights Association
PRC  People's Relief Committee
WILFP  Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WPP  Woman's Peace Party
WZO  World Zionist Organization
ZOA  Zionist Organization of America
NOTE ON YIDDISH TRANSLITERATION

Yiddish names, words, and phrases have been transliterated according to the guidelines of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Words are transliterated exactly as they appear in the original text, except in those instances where a common spelling appears in English ("Asch," for example, rather than the "Ash" of the original). Hebrew words appearing in Yiddish are transliterated according to their Yiddish pronunciation. Foreign words, including newspaper and book titles, are italicized only the first time they appear in the main text. Foreign words in titles are not italicized in the footnotes except where they appear italicized in the original.
INTRODUCTION

Woman's sphere is in the home, they told us. The last thirty years have been devoted to proof of our boast that women's sphere is the whole wide world, without limits.¹

Hannah G. Solomon, founder of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), could well have been describing the achievements of many women's organizations besides her own in the era preceding World War I. From the end of the Civil War through the 1890s, the decade of the NCJW's birth, American women from across the ideological spectrum slowly embraced causes outside their homes, entering into the wider arena of public life. By 1920 substantial numbers of women not only participated in civic affairs but had also turned their attention overseas.² Solomon acknowledged how critical the war had been in altering forever the contours of women's sphere. No longer bound to the confines of domestic, local or even national issues, American women now considered their realm "without limits" as evidenced by the postwar international activities of such groups as the Women's International

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League for Peace and Freedom and the League of Women Voters. The war years affected American Jewish women even more profoundly than it did non-Jews. The unique plight of Jews in Europe and Palestine awakened in American Jews a keen sense of responsibility for their coreligionists overseas on a larger scale than ever before. Women quickly joined men in organizing relief for Jews trapped in the war zones. Once the armistice was reached, Jewish women, like many others, did not heed the call to return to home, to focus solely on domestic affairs. Rather, they opted to expand their wartime programs both nationally and internationally. Like other American women, Jews used their experiences in the war years to claim a permanent place for themselves in the worlds of international politics and global relief and to redefine their relationship to men in the public sphere.

Speaking at the 1923 World Congress of Jewish Women, NCJW leader Rebekah Kohut asserted that World War I proved conclusively how the most pressing issues were not local but global in nature. Women could no longer remain at home caring only for those in their own communities; the world demanded more active female intervention. “Who better than women know the needs of women and children,” she argued, “and knowing them who can and should help in the solution of these problems?” For women like Kohut, relief work -- social welfare activism brought to the international level -- required feminine input. During the war women had contributed to the major Jewish relief campaigns by drawing attention to neglected populations, primarily women and children. In turn, relief work enlivened in these more privileged women a deeper sense of personal and communal identity.

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"If women are not for women," Kohut declared, "how can we hope to advance the cause of Jewish womanhood?"  

The war not only provided women with a wider purview of activism and revitalized their connections with Jews internationally, it also indelibly shaped the contours of American Jewish identity. Indeed, the NCJW and the WCJW were not the only organizations claiming women's time and energy during this period. Because the American Jewish community disagreed on matters of religious observance, class politics, and the proposed establishment of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine as advocated by the Zionists, women created a variety of means by which to express their personal identity collectively. Some, seeking to avoid controversial political or religious discussions, joined the moderate NCJW. Others embraced organizations dedicated to Zionism, socialism, or secular Jewish identity. Women established and joined a wide array of organizations aimed at meeting their individual needs while carrying out programs of action they deemed necessary to better the position of Jews around the world. Personal identification -- as a Zionist, a socialist, religious or secular -- was closely entwined with public activism.

This dissertation explores women's involvement in three American Jewish organizations, the NCJW, Hadassah (the Women's Zionist Organization of America), and the socialist Workmen's Circle (Arbeter Ring in Yiddish) during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The selection of these groups presents the opportunity to investigate a range of Jewish women, from upper-class to working-class, assimilationist to Zionist. The

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first two organizations were the largest and most prominent Jewish women's groups of the inter-war period. The Workmen's Circle, while not solely a women's association, was a major forum for working-class, secular Jewish activism. The women in the NCJW tended to be upper-class and of German-Jewish descent. The organization pursued a broad reformist agenda, yet often held back from taking official positions on controversial issues, like Zionism, which might divide the membership. Hadassah usually appointed middle or upper-class Central European-origin women to leadership positions, although rank-and-file members frequently came from East European backgrounds. The overwhelmingly working-class membership of the Workmen's Circle traced its origins to Eastern Europe and communicated primarily in Yiddish. In this early period, the great majority of Arbeter Ring members were non- (if not anti-) Zionist, embracing instead a form of cultural nationalism most closely associated with the General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia (known simply as the Bund).

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5 Scholars have begun to question the efficacy of the "German-Jewish" versus "East European Jewish" split in American Jewish historiography. Traditionally, historians have separated Jewish migration to the United States into two major waves. The first, beginning in the 1840s, was associated with Jews from Central Europe, the German-speaking lands in particular. By the time the second wave, the East Europeans, arrived from the Russian Empire starting in 1881, "German" Jews as a group were quite well-established. They tended to be middle- or upper-class, spoke English, and were fairly assimilated. East Europeans, on the other hand, spoke Yiddish (although their children would speak English), tended to be working-class or poor, and were often Orthodox or atheistic socialists. For an example of recent work questioning the stark division set up by this paradigm, see Hasia R. Diner, "Before the Promised City: Eastern European Jews in America Before 1880," in An Inventory of Promises: Essays on American Jewish History in Honor of Moses Rischin, ed. Jeffrey S. Gurock and Marc Lee Raphael (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1995), 43-62. Moses Rischin first commented on this possibility. See Moses Rischin, An Inventory of American Jewish History (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954).

6 Until the mid-1930s, Workmen's Circle members were more interested in promoting socialism and Yiddish culture than in "reclaiming Eretz Israel" (The Land of Israel). In response to the Nazi persecutions of the Jews beginning in the 1930s, Workmen's Circle supported individual decisions to move to Palestine, and eventually the state of Israel, yet never officially endorsed the Zionist program. See Judah J. Shapiro, The Friendly Society: A History of the Workmen's Circle (New York: Media Judaica, 1970), 184-185, 195.
At the center of the dissertation is an examination of these organizations' relief work for the Jews of Eastern Europe and Palestine during the First World War and in the inter-war period. How did American Jewish women respond to these events and how did they seek to ameliorate the suffering of others? How did they conceptualize their connection to Jews overseas? What did they hope to achieve politically through their relief initiatives? The dissertation answers these questions by detailing the projects Jewish women launched and analyzing how women's work affected emerging constructions of Jewish identity and nationalism. Jewish women involved in relief did not limit themselves to contemplating that work alone. Their voluntarism led them to consider a host of international matters pertaining to Jews, such as what the Bolshevik Revolution meant for the Jews of Russia. Because the Jewish situation in Eastern Europe did not significantly improve after November 1918, American Jews continued to be involved in international relief well into the postwar period. Often perceived as being removed from the rough-and-tumble world of male politics, women in the world of relief found themselves grappling daily with questions of ideology, nationalism and political statehood.

Women's traditional work in caring for their people provided important rhetorical and practical models for the varying manifestations of Jewish nationalism arising in this crisis period. The American Jewish female tradition of "charity work" served as a critical foundation upon which other U.S. Jewish groups could construct an ethos of caring for world Jewry. Within such a framework, American Jews came to understand their location in the family of world Jewry as that of more fortunate siblings whose responsibility was to help those living in less agreeable circumstances. Participation in the international relief
endeavors brought women into indirect contact with great numbers of Jews in Europe and Palestine and introduced many of them to the world of international politics. Jewish women, like men, sought solutions to the "Jewish problem," solutions that were necessarily influenced by such broader forces as antisemitism and anti-Bolshevism. Relief work, initially aimed at helping Jews weather the storms of war, induced Americans, even the non-Zionists and anti-Bundists, to construct varying notions of Jewish identity, all of which transcended regional boundaries. Such nationalism was expressed by different groups as a "civil religion," as Zionism, or as a commitment to promoting Jewish secular culture.

World War I and the exigencies of the postwar period provided women with an entrance into international politics and simultaneously facilitated the construction of a modern American Jewish identity intimately connected with philanthropic activities for Jews in other lands. Far from being apolitical, this philanthropic-based identification arising from the war ultimately enabled non-Zionist American Jews to begin to accept the idea of Jewish settlement in Palestine as one refuge of many, although not as a Jewish homeland or nation-state, a decade before the Nazi rise to power in Germany. The crises of the Great War and the early inter-war period present the opportunity to study the transition of American Jewish women's traditional role as nurturing "daughters of the people" from the national context

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7 Jonathan Woocher discusses American Judaism as a "civil religion" by which he means that American Jews, "...began to create an American Jewish polity, a matrix of voluntary organizations and associations which carry out functions of communitywide [sic] concern....This faith expressed and sustained the unity American Jews felt among themselves, legitimated the endeavors of the community to maintain Jewish group life while promoting maximal involvement in American society, and inspired Jews to contribute to the support of other Jews and the pursuit of social justice." Woocher discusses the philanthropic endeavors of Jewish men both in the United States and internationally, but fails to address the important role played by women in such work. Jonathan S. Woocher, Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 20. Woocher applied concepts first developed by Robert N. Bellah to the Jewish context. See, for instance, Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," Daedalus (Winter 1967): 1-21.
onto the international level. While global political considerations plainly guided U.S. Jewish activism, women's ethic of caring for fellow Jews simultaneously offered a model of nationalism, broadly defined, for the more conventionally political, male-led Jewish organizations of the period.

Women's entrance into the public sphere revealed the great complexity of modern Jewish identity. In addition to examining the role played by international events and women's activism in the development of Jewish nationalism and American Jewish identity, this study also explores how gender and class affected those constructions, and how women's activism influenced their definition of themselves and their organizations in terms of gender relations. Large-scale relief work introduced Jewish women to international politics and to Jews from foreign lands, but more immediately women found themselves encountering, perhaps for the first time, the diversity of their own national Jewish community. Associating with those who shared many concerns yet who still differed in fundamental ways revealed subtle, and not always acknowledged, divisions among American Jews. The war and the events of the inter-war period demanded that a woman consciously evaluate her stance regarding Zionism, Bundism, Bolshevism, and what all of these could possibly “mean for the Jews.” At the same time it forced her to recognize the rifts that existed in her own national community. Involvement in relief work made women more cognizant of their political beliefs but also of their class status, regional origin, religious affiliation, primary language and more.
In similar fashion, interactions with Jewish men during this period compelled women in all three groups to articulate a more distinctly female, if not feminist, consciousness. Men's all too frequent disregard for their capabilities led women in each group to conceptualize more explicitly a positive female identity, to work vigorously to promote that identity, and to claim for themselves a more activist, feminine role. All Jewish relief groups envisioned a unified global community and advanced solutions to that community's plight based on socialism, liberalism or various forms of Zionism. Yet women's participation in these relief initiatives exposed the fractures lying just under the surface of each unified vision. Just as international Jewry could not unite behind one political program for solving Europe's and Palestine's Jewish "problem," so too did Americans Jews realize that gender, class, language and ideological barriers existed even among their own relatively united national community. Regardless of how they might differ, women in all three organizations nevertheless entered the 1920s with a firm sense of themselves as women, laying claim to a strongly gendered identity. Although women in the NCJW, Hadassah and the Arbeter Ring pursued widely divergent political programs, they all affirmed women's right to public work and to equality with men, however differently they defined "public," "work," and "equality." Jewish women, like other American women, embarked on a new mission during the war years, one that led them out onto the international stage and forever altered the shape of gender politics and American Jewish identity.

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8 These analytical categories are from Nancy F. Cott, "What's in a Name? The Limits of 'Social Feminism,' or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History," Journal of American History 6 (December 1989): 809-28. Cott defines "female consciousness" as an understanding women have regarding their abilities and activities, which are seen as being unique to women. Cott employs "communal consciousness" to describe those endeavors in which women participate along with the men of their group, however "group" may be defined. A "feminist consciousness" is one that challenges male claims to superiority.
American women's involvement in World War I and the relief initiatives of those years have not been studied extensively by historians of the period. Some work has been done on the impact of the war on women workers on the homefront. More recently European historians, particularly Angela Woollacott and Philippa Levine, have begun to examine gender dynamics during the war, looking at the structural, economic and occupational changes that transformed women's lives and analyzing shifts in the gender system. These works, together with those investigating racial dynamics as colonial subjects arrived in Great Britain and France to serve as soldiers and laborers are adding greater complexity to the study of the female experience during World War I. Moving beyond documenting women's participation in war work or evaluating the changing position of women as a result of the war, these more recent pieces reveal the impact of the war years on constructions of gender and race. Similarly, historians have turned their attention to the construction, or attempted reconstruction, of gender systems following the war. Once again, scholars of the European experience have led the way in this endeavor. My dissertation seeks to integrate American

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women more completely into this stream of scholarship. In looking beyond the impact of the war on women workers, it examines the international activities of a wide range of American women. Moreover, it reveals the importance of women's wartime voluntary endeavors in helping to shape the contours of the postwar gender system. As Woollacott and Levine have shown, struggles over gender issues did not occur only when soldiers began to return home from the front. In the American Jewish case these struggles arose when women, in attempting to cooperate with men, grew tired of recurrent attempts to subordinate their autonomous efforts.

Along with integrating American women into the history of phenomena occurring during this period throughout the industrialized Western world, this dissertation also seeks to place Jewish women more centrally within American women's history. In those instances where U.S. women's historians have turned their attention to Jews, all too often their gaze has lingered only on the fiery immigrant, labor activists of the late nineteenth-century. That exciting period of American Jewish history has also been the subject of many Jewish women's historians who have used such studies to document the female immigrant experience, to examine the "world of our mothers." While this research has provided

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critical insights into American labor and women's history, it has resulted in the neglect of other important issues. My work seeks to integrate a fuller picture of the Jewish American female experience into the general women's history narrative. By presenting a more diverse collection of Jewish women and examining their interactions with gentile women's organizations this dissertation helps us better understand the points of similarity among all American women's organizations while also remaining sensitive to the many unique aspects of Jewish women's history.

The focus on labor leaders and the immigrant period has produced fruitful research but has led to a stereotyping of the Jewish female experience. Moreover, much of it, ironically, has overlooked Yiddish-language sources. Studies of labor leaders, in particular, have suffered due to the researcher's neglect of sources in Yiddish, a serious deficiency that can skew the image of the life presented. Leading figures in the labor movement, such as Rose Schneiderman, while interacting with both the English and Yiddish speaking worlds, left substantial documentation in English. Many average women, like those active in Workmen's Circle, fail to appear in such studies because they did not communicate primarily in English. Until the late 1930s most Circle members used Yiddish alone in their correspondence and publications. Even more obscured have been the Orthodox immigrant


women who joined no union and left few documentary records. The use of Yiddish sources in this dissertation uncovers the previously obscured world of Workmen's Circle women, most notably those who never attained national leadership posts and, thus, fail to appear in the standard histories of the group, either in English or Yiddish.

Comparing the differences among Jewish women based on class, language, and national origin is a central part of this dissertation and another topic frequently neglected by scholars. While some works look at the German-Jewish attempts to "Americanize" East European immigrants, few studies examine these groups when they acted on a more equal footing. Some studies do look at middle-class women's involvement in unionization efforts but these tend to center on gentile "allies" and working-class Jews rather than on cross-class Jewish interaction. The major works on the NCJW follow such trends by examining Council's efforts to assist working-class Jews but not its relationship to these people's own organizations. Works on Hadassah do not address in detail the leadership's attitudes toward


or dealings with working-class leftist women, and studies of the Arbeter Ring generally fail to mention female members at all, let alone analyze their relationships with the upper-class. Examining gender and class dynamics is critical for understanding the development of modern American Jewish identity. This dissertation analyzes how these dynamics influenced Jewish women's activism along with their personal and communal identities.

Jewish women did not constitute a monolithic group, and neither were they divorced from trends affecting gentile women in this period. During and after the war both immigrants and citizens participated in relief work and concerned themselves with questions of public policy affecting women. Despite their constituting a minority population, Jewish women frequently behaved in similar fashion to other women of their class, although often the issues that motivated them to action, such as Jewish nationalism or antisemitism, differed substantially from those of their gentile counterparts. Placing a diverse set of Jewish women within the general historical narrative enables a starker analysis of the ways in which ideological, class, language, ethnic, and religious identities influence gender identity and consequently public activism.

Although the focus of much new research, Jewish women have traditionally been overlooked in historical works on Jewish international relief, Zionism, and philanthropy. For example, a considerable amount of work has been done on such male-led initiatives as the

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Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the American Jewish Committee (AJC), but very little scholarly attention has been paid to Jewish women's involvement in such activities. The NCJW worked to raise money for the American Jewish Relief Committee, which funded JDC projects, and actively lobbied on behalf of initiatives addressing the needs of women and children, and yet scholars tend to relegate the NCJW to simply one contributing organization within the larger AJRC/JDC venture. Similarly, works on the Zionist movement in the United States recognize the importance of Hadassah but tend to utilize discussion of the organization as an example of Louis Brandeis' "practical Zionism" and neglect consideration of the organization from a gender perspective. Melvin Urofsky, while following this model, does devote more space to discussion of Hadassah's activities and its importance within the general Zionist movement. He does not, however, consider how gender dynamics influenced how Hadassah's work was received by others. Samuel Halperin's work notes the importance of philanthropy to the general development of American Zionism, adding that philanthropy was an important means by which American Zionists sought to educate the general public about Zionist goals. While he includes Hadassah's work in this discussion of fundraising as a means of building consensus on the


Zionist issue, his focus on the World War II years does not allow him to place Hadassah as central to the development of these methods. Sources on the Arbeter Ring or the Bund also tend to downplay or simply ignore the role of women in those organizations. Yet current work on the Bund in Europe is beginning to analyze that movement from the perspective of gender, as is the most recent scholarship on Zionism in Europe and Palestine. This dissertation contributes to this new sensitivity to the importance of gender issues in the history of Jewish social and political movements.

The general works on Jewish philanthropy in the United States also tend to underplay the important role of women's groups. These works detail the long philanthropic tradition among Jews dating back to the Biblical period and discuss the importance of fraternal organizations such as the B'nai B'rith in providing aid to the immigrants of the late nineteenth century. Finally, these studies discuss the coordination of Jewish philanthropies by the early twentieth century, seen in the development of the Federation of Jewish Charities.

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movement. On the whole, they fail to address the role of women in developing such charities, or how women's leadership positions declined once men began to coordinate and rationalize the philanthropic community work. Studies specifically on Jewish women, however, detail women's critical involvement in the development of relief and social welfare work within the Jewish community. Not only does this dissertation return women to a central location in the history of Jewish philanthropy, it also shows the critical role played by charity-work in the construction of modern American Jewish identity and in the development of modern Jewish politics. This works pulls together disparate literatures on ethnicity, class, philanthropy, and women's activism to reveal the important, if often overlooked, interactions between these concepts.

Although Jewish women, most notably Yiddish speaking women, have tended to fall between the cracks in historical scholarship, it is not for lack of documentation. Jewish women in the NCJW and Hadassah were especially prolific writers, seeming to relish the opportunity to express their organizational point of view publicly. I have been very fortunate

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to deal with groups of women exhibiting tremendous public candor. This study rests primarily on the documents originating with the three organizations, including convention materials, newsletters and periodicals, along with material in the broader Jewish press. All three groups produced a regular organizational publication -- the NCJW's *Jewish Woman*, Hadassah's *Bulletin* and later *Newsletter*, and the women's column in the Workmen's Circle paper *Der fraynd* (The Friend). Each group also published selections from the proceedings of their yearly, or in Council's case triennial, national conventions. These proved quite valuable in the case of Workmen's Circle, where national office documents remain unprocessed and difficult to access fully. The early Arbeter Ring conventions debated a variety of issues relative to women's participation in the organization. Even more critical were the anniversary publications of Arbeter Ring branches. Here one finds a host of "greetings" from *froyen klubn* (women's clubs), which, while quite formulaic, also frequently offer surprising insight into women's perceptions of their organization, especially of its earliest years. National board meeting minutes for the NCJW and Hadassah also proved invaluable in offering a glimpse behind the often sanitized discussions in the published convention proceedings.

This dissertation is organized in a broadly chronological fashion. The first chapter provides an overview of charitable traditions among Jews and gentile women in the United States in order to situate the three organizations historically. Chapter Two details the founding and early years of the NCJW, Hadassah and the Workmen's Circle with particular attention to the role played by gender and class in these groups' formation. Women's adherence to a particular political ideology alone was not sufficient to determine the shape
of their organizational lives, since class status also played a critical role. Women's interactions with the men of their class background eventually produced a distinctly female consciousness. In each organization, interactions with male counterparts led women to articulate more forthrightly their belief in their own abilities.

The war years are the subject of Chapter 3. This chapter examines women's participation in the major relief efforts and in their own projects during World War I. While women cooperated closely with Jewish men they did not abandon interactions with other women, in some cases even gentiles. These ties with other women sustained the female consciousness during a period when they felt a great urgency to subordinate their own needs to the dictates of the larger relief mission. Chapter 4 looks at how the two all female groups, the NCJW and Hadassah, fought after the armistice to resurface from their war-time submergence in male-led endeavors. Both the NCJW and Hadassah struggled after the war to break free of male leadership directives, even though, given their varying organizational ties to male-led groups, each forged a unique path to independence. At the same time both Hadassah and the NCJW increasingly used a rhetoric of female difference and maternalism to justify their move into the public sphere and toward autonomy.

Chapter 5 continues the focus on the NCJW and Hadassah by exploring the organizations' recruitment strategies and the alliances each made with other women's groups during the 1920s. While divided over the issue of Zionism, women in both groups found themselves drawn closer together as members began to acknowledge similarities in organizational projects and language. The final chapter returns to women in the Arbeter Ring, detailing their postwar activism and use of separatist strategies. Although they never
participated in battles for independence like those of the NCJW and Hadassah, many Circle women during the inter-war period did begin to advocate the formation of separate women's groups within the larger organization. Ultimately these groups significantly influenced the changing tenor and focus of the post-war Circle.

Circle women joined other Jewish and gentile American women in making the "whole wide world, without limits" their sphere in the post-suffrage, inter-war period. The war years proved to women that they could participate in public activism on behalf of the Jewish people and women in general. Over the years, as they helped first immigrants and then later war victims and refugees, Jewish women developed an ethic of caring for others, one that shared important features with the voluntary efforts of contemporary, gentile women's organizations. In the process of aiding other Jews, women moved decisively into the public sphere, promoting gender interests and participating in debates about the nature of Jewish identity and nationalism. Their dedication to both these goals, to finding a way to be both Jewish and female in the public sphere, significantly influenced the construction of modern American Jewish identity.
CHAPTER 1

JEWISH CHARITY AND FEMALE VOLUNTARISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Jewish philanthropy in the United States developed alongside that of the mainstream Protestant society. Although the unique conditions of the Jewish minority ensured that certain distinct features would remain, overall much united the Jewish and Christian middle classes in their ideas about the world. Both groups adhered to beliefs developed in the mid-nineteenth century that emphasized the gendered nature of society and the necessity of instilling their own values in the poor. Christians and Jews alike envisioned the world as divided between the private, feminine sphere of the home and male realm of public life. Yet, unlike their Christian counterparts, Jews had to confront antisemitism as well as pressure to convert. Given these constraints, Jews felt a deep sense of responsibility for maintaining their religious community from their very first days in the American colonies. American Jews shouldered the burden of caring for their poor and ensuring the perpetuation of Jewish life in America by supporting religious, educational and cultural endeavors aimed at combating the at-times intense proselytization efforts of the Christian majority.

Middle class Jewish women's benevolence also shared many features with its Protestant counterpart while at the same time remaining distinctly Jewish in outlook and
goals. Like men, Jewish women in the mid-nineteenth century sought both to acculturate to American norms and sustain their Jewish faith. At the same time Jewish women found themselves engaged in struggles with men that closely resembled those occurring among the majority population. Jewish women's groups grappled with the myriad gender, religious, and ethnic dilemmas posed to them. Joining men in communal charitable endeavors, they also formed their own organizations that endeavored to meet the needs of poor women while at the same time providing them an activist realm all their own.

**American Jewish Charity**

Philanthropy has a long history in the Jewish community, reaching back to Biblical and rabbinic injunctions to care for the poor, and American Jews followed these religious directives to tend to the needs of the less fortunate among them. The American philanthropic tradition began with the arrival of the very first Jewish settlers in colonial North America. When Jewish refugees from Brazil landed in New Amsterdam, Governor Peter Stuyvesant initially opposed their permanent settlement. Eventually overruled by his employer, the Dutch West India Company, Stuyvesant nevertheless made the Jewish settlers promise that they would not become a burden on New Amsterdam.¹ Through the next several centuries, in the face of antisemitism, Christian proselytization efforts, and communal need, American Jews continued this ethnic and religious tradition of caring for their own.

The first major settlements of Jews in the United States were in port cities such as Charleston, South Carolina. Such communities were predominantly Sephardic in origin, tracing their ancestry to the Jews of Spain and Portugal. By the mid-1800s the Sephardic population in the United States was surpassed by the arrival of large numbers of Ashkenazim, Jews from Northern, especially Central, Europe. These German Jews, as they were commonly known, quickly became engaged in the nation’s expanding economic life, settling throughout the United States, particularly in the Midwest alongside other German immigrants. In 1855 Cincinnati, Ohio, boasted five synagogues. German Jews oversaw the expansion of philanthropic services to the U.S. Jewish community, and as early as 1868 Cincinnati, Chicago, Philadelphia and New York each had Jewish hospitals. A host of Jewish organizations arose encompassing a wide range of charitable activities, such as assuring proper burials, providing free tuition to poor children, loans for their parents, clothing and fuel during the winters, and matzoh during Passover. In 1874 New York Jews founded the United Hebrew Charities to care for people made poor by the economic downturn of the previous year. Similar city-wide agencies arose throughout the United States, especially in the face of rising immigration from Europe.

The greatest wave of Jewish immigration to the United States occurred in the late nineteenth century as Jews from the lands of Eastern Europe escaping persecution and

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poverty voyaged to the United States. While East European Jews had emigrated to the United States prior to 1881, a year of vicious pogroms and tightened restrictions in Russia, the largest influx occurred in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The arrival of these Jews led to the dramatic increase in philanthropic services as the more prosperous German Jews endeavored to aid their poorer co-religionists. Myriad organizations provided relief, operated hospitals and orphanages, and sought to Americanize the newcomers. Prominent and wealthy members of the German Jewish community, such as Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Company, donated thousands of dollars to institutions helping poor Jews. He, like other men of the Jewish elite, sought not only to aid but also to re-make the poor in their own acculturated image. In 1905, in the wake of yet another wave of pogroms in Russia, a group of these wealthy men decided to form a self-defense organization to coordinate American action and serve as a representative body of American Jews. The American Jewish Committee (AJC), created the following year, intervened with government leaders in the name of American Jewry, although it was far from a representative or democratic organization.  

While united by religious faith, much divided these two American Jewish communities. By the 1880s and 1890s German Jews were far better off, most fitting comfortably into the middle- or upper-classes, owning their own businesses or belonging to a profession. East European Jews, by contrast, tended to be poor and worked for wages in the quickly proliferating industries and sweatshops of the major cities. Frequently, Jewish

workers toiled for German Jewish owners in the garment trades, building on skills learned in Eastern Europe and working in a milieu that allowed them to maintain their religious observances and family cohesiveness.⁴

The two groups were also separated by language and religious custom. German Jews, as had the Sephardim before them, quickly learned the language of their new home. While many continued to speak German, and even learned other West European languages of the educated classes, they quickly acquired English in order to be more successful in business. East European Jews overwhelmingly spoke Yiddish, a language closely related to German but which German-speaking Jews often considered at best a mere dialect and at worst an indication of East European Jews’ lower educational and class status. Living and working in Jewish areas of the major urban areas while lacking access to the same educational opportunities as German Jews, those from Eastern European tended to hold on to their native language for a longer period of time than did their predecessors to the United States.⁵

German Jews acculturated not only in terms of language and business activity but also in religious observance. The majority of German Jews embraced the Reform movement in Judaism, which originated in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century. Reform Judaism formed a part of the larger acculturation of West European and American Jews. Rejecting the notion of the Jews as a nation, adherents focused solely on the religious ties that bound Jews. Reformers sought to “modernize” Jewish ritual by dropping many traditional Jewish


⁵ German-speaking Jews could understand Yiddish but derided it, calling it a “piggish jargon.” See Rischin, “Germans Versus Russians,” 121.
observances, such as kosher meal preparation, and altering the synagogue service to resemble certain Protestant practices. Cincinnati became the center of American Reform Judaism with the establishment of Hebrew Union College in 1873. Conservative Judaism, emerging among people who felt the Reformers had gone too far, envisioned a modernized religion that did not abandon tradition. In 1887 the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York opened in order to train Conservative rabbis. East European Jews, by contrast, tended to maintain their Orthodoxy or, conversely, rejected religion entirely for the secular, radical politics of the era.

These differences ensured that while East European Jews accepted much help from their wealthier counterparts, they did not depend solely upon the assistance of German Jews in their times of need; they also founded their own groups to aid the poor of their community. Along with free loan societies and other mutual aid societies, East European Jews relied upon groups called landsmanshaftn that served people from the same village or region in Europe. Former residents of Bialystok established the earliest the landsmanshaftn in the United States in 1864. By the beginning of World War I approximately 2,060 societies existed in New York City alone, including such “ladies landsmanshaftn” as the Cracower Ladies Society, incorporated in 1868. While some landsmanshaftn were large enough to found branches in several cities, the majority remained fairly small in size. These societies


assisted immigrants in creating a new life in the United States, but also performed a number of functions once carried out by voluntary groups in the shtetlakh (small towns) of East Europe such as the hevra kadisha, or burial society, and similar hevrot for dietary restrictions and marriages. The landsmanshaftn, moreover, provided services that later were to be provided by the state and federal governments, including financial assistance to members’ widows and orphans, free or low-interest loans, and unemployment aid.

**Middle-Class Female Voluntarism in the United States**

At the same time that the Jewish community struggled to meet the needs of its poorer members through charity, mutual aid, and free loan societies, non-Jews also grappled with issues of poverty in American society. Protestant women played a particularly active role in the development of American social welfare. Although scholars of American Jewry debate to what extent middle-class German Jewish women in the United States participated in ideals and activities common to Protestant women of the same class and era, it seems clear that the relatively small Jewish community of the mid-nineteenth century was neither immune nor isolated from cultural trends occurring in the broader society. German Jews sought integration into American society by following middle class manners and mores of their peers yet they continued to preserve their own religious distinctiveness. Like their counterparts in Germany, American Jews wished to achieve a position in U.S. society as citizens of a particular faith, rather than assume a designation as a separate people.

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Therefore, although Jews may have molded Victorian ideals about women to fit their unique circumstances they nevertheless did embrace many of the same beliefs, particularly about gender, and they did participate in societal trends originating among Protestant Americans.

Both groups embraced the idea of “separate spheres,” where women inhabited the “private” realm of the home while men attended to the “public” world of politics and paid labor. The notion of separate, gendered spheres developed along with the rise of free market capitalism and the growth of the middle-class. As middle class men moved into the public domain of politics and paid labor their wives, daughters and sisters remained at home, often hiring the services of other women to perform their household chores. Middle class women were increasingly associated with the care of the home, and in that role they felt they must also be ever vigilant regarding the moral virtue and purity of themselves and their families. According to these ideals, women were to help men achieve a higher moral attitude. Sentimental, virtuous middle-class women were to provide their men with a haven from the cold, capitalist world. Over time people came to believe that women were by their very natures more moral than men. The separation of male and female spheres contributed to the image of a nurturing, caring and morally pure middle-class Victorian woman.  

University Press, 1987).

Closely tied to these ideas were those that associated middle-class women with religiosity. Not unlike their nineteenth century Protestant counterparts, Jewish women were perceived to be more affected by and tied to religious sentiment than were their male co-religionists. Indeed, to an even greater degree than her Protestant contemporary, a Jewish woman was considered to have special responsibility for maintaining the religious life of her family and for passing that faith on to subsequent generations. The home and religious faith closely intersected; historian Jenna Weissman Joselit notes that Jewish leaders “enjoined of the American Jewish woman ‘to make of her home a miniature Temple’ by consecrating it to religion.”

While men and women ideally each had their proper sphere from which to ensure the perpetuation of the faith, with time, again like their Protestant neighbors, Jewish women began to predominate among those people regularly attending religious services. Even though for centuries public worship had been associated with men, by the mid-nineteenth century attendance at religious services, notably among Reform Jews, resembled that of Protestants. The male/public domain contained the professional and work worlds, while the female/private domain, no longer confined solely to the home, now included the synagogue as well. Women's religiosity as well as their increasing numbers in the synagogue prompted the development of the earliest synagogue-based benevolent societies and also led to the eventual creation of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods in the early twentieth century.

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12 Ibid., 211.
While Jewish women adhered to norms designating the home as their personal sphere of influence, communal attitudes toward religion, encounters with antisemitism, and concerns regarding Christian proselytizing led them to a broader conception of their appropriate sphere than that held by many of their Protestant contemporaries. In his study of nineteenth century Jewish women's benevolence, William Toll argues that these women "had a more cooperative sense of their proper sphere. They may have resided in households, but as Jewish women they had to assist each other in reconstructing families and in helping Jewish men in organizing and providing a public face for the new ethnic community. Their haven was as much the community as the family." Early Jewish women's benevolent societies worked in concert with men to care for the needs of the community. Organizing together with men or in their own separate but parallel associations, women supported synagogues, attended to burials, and helped the Jewish poor.13

Rebecca Gratz played a central role in the development of American Jewish women's philanthropy. Born in Philadelphia in 1781, Gratz grew up in a prosperous merchant family. Eschewing the normal route of marriage and childbearing, Gratz opted instead for a career in voluntary, communal service. As early as 1801 she established with other women, both Jewish and gentile, a society to aid wealthy women whose families had fallen on hard times. In the course of her life she went on to found a number of other institutions, including the first Jewish women's charitable society, the first Jewish Sunday school, the Philadelphia Orphan Asylum, and the first Jewish Foster Home in Philadelphia. Her interest in Jewish

charitable associations arose from her encounters with Philadelphia’s Christians who proselytized among the Jewish poor even as the assisted them. In 1819 Gratz established the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society, the first of its kind to be unaffiliated with any synagogue. The Society had a distinctly Jewish outlook and clientele and yet shared features with gentile female benevolence. The Female Hebrew Benevolent Society, like similar Christian enterprises, sought to further “morality and piety” among their clients and worked particularly with poor widows and orphans.\(^\text{14}\)

Even though Jewish women rarely worked in concert with Christian women in early association work, both groups shared many ideals. Like other middle-class women, Jewish women viewed themselves as dissimilar from men and closely bound to other women. The creation of separate spheres and growing attendance of women at religious services affected the American middle class regardless of religious faith, providing the groundwork for the proliferation of women’s associations and charitable organizations at the end of the century, which in turn abetted the transition of women into the public sphere. These early groups provided women not only with separate spaces away from men to meet and organize together, but also with an ideology asserting their centrality to the safeguarding of morality in society at large. Christian and Jewish women formed their own benevolent societies and charitable organizations while seeking through them to impart supposedly feminine,

nurturing qualities to their local congregations, communities, and eventually to the nation at large.¹⁵

In the years immediately prior to the Civil War charitable activity moved beyond the confines of the religious sphere, although it continued to focus on such feminine areas of concern as health, education and social welfare. The shift toward secularism initially resulted in women’s decreasing authority, particularly in mixed-sex organizations. The rise of professionalized philanthropy in the 1850s along with changes in political activism favoring electoral politics over other forms of expression lowered non-professional and non-voting women’s potential to influence others. Women began to assume the status of “volunteer” in a world that valorized the educated, trained professional who was, more often than not, a man. As legislative activity became a necessary component of social change, some previously female-only benevolent associations began to allow men to serve as board members or as advisors to their groups. While this strategy gave women greater access to the centers of political power, it also diminished female influence in their own organizations. Suzanne Lesbock’s work shows that by the 1850s women in Petersburg, Virginia lost the monopoly on charity to men in the community. Women’s groups that continued to exist tended to become auxiliaries to more powerful male organizations, and over time the hiring

of paid "professionals," frequently men, reduced most women to the lowered status of volunteers.\textsuperscript{16}

As philanthropy grew more professionalized, a decline in the use of feminized rhetoric to describe public charity work occurred in an effort to disassociate reform work from the vision of it as the sentimental occupation of volunteer ladies. Secular, charitable organizations also began to focus on specific problems rather than on earlier societies' goals to effect the moral reform of society at large. Virtue became associated solely with women and the private sphere while charity provision became more firmly rooted in the male sphere. Not until the appearance of Jane Addams and other Progressive female reformers late in the century would the notion of female virtue again enter the public arena of social reform.\textsuperscript{17} Yet even their considerable achievements could not entirely undermine negative ideas about female benevolence.

The heightened activity of women in the late nineteenth century occurred, in part, as a result of the explosion in immigration and the rapid advance of urbanization and industrialization. Middle class women grew increasingly concerned with the dramatic changes they saw arising in their neighborhoods and cities. Women's clubs proliferated and

\textsuperscript{16} Lori D. Ginzburg, ""Moral Suasion is Moral Balderdash": Women, Politics, and Social Activism in the 1850s," Journal of American History 73 (December 1986): 604-617. See also Suzanne Lesbock, The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984); Kathleen D. McCarthy, "Parallel Power Structures: Women and the Voluntary Sphere," in Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power, ed. Kathleen D. McCarthy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 1-31. Karla Goldman sees a similar trend in Reform Jewish communities. She argues that from the 1850s-1870s "the charitable role which so many women's groups had assumed in Jewish communities were often subsumed into community-wide charity groups that were not directly affiliated with congregations and did not generally have women as leaders." See Karla Goldman, "Beyond the Gallery: The Place of Women in the Development of American Judaism" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1993), 207-11.

\textsuperscript{17} Ginzburg, ""Moral Suasion is Moral Balderdash,"" 619-622.
began to take an active interest in ameliorating some of the worst conditions of the urban crowding, child labor, disease, and poverty. Jewish women joined in these efforts as the great influx of East European Jews arrived on American shores. Aside from such purely Jewish anxieties regarding antisemitism and the effect that East European presence might have on German Jewish status in U.S. society, the immigrants also presented a variety of problems that were not unique to the Jewish community, including extreme poverty, poor housing, long working hours, child labor, and the fear of prostitution, particularly among women traveling overseas on their own. While Jewish women's activism was distinctive it was not entirely segregated from trends appearing among the Christian population of the late nineteenth century. Lillian Wald, influenced by Jane Addams' Hull House and British reformers, established the Henry Street Settlement in New York City. Other early Jewish activists, including education reformer Julia Richman and the founders of the Clara de Hirsch Home for Girls, also drew on Christian reform antecedents.


Women's voluntary associations played an important role in enabling women to develop skills in organizing and facilitating their move into the public sphere. Anne F. Scott argues that women's participation in these groups and their socialization to be compassionate and caring led them to develop different types of leadership and organizational styles than men. She maintains that women tended to see the negative impact of industrialization and urbanization on the family earlier than did their male counterparts who more actively and directly involved themselves creating such a society. Clubs and associations afforded women, especially married women, the means by which to achieve a certain level of professionalization before such avenues were officially opened to them. Through volunteer work women could meet with others and devise ways to bring their nurturing qualities to larger constituencies. Scott notes that for men philanthropy generally was not their sole occupation -- the male identity stemmed from the dual basis of work and voluntarism, whereas for women their organizations became their very careers, "an accepted extension of their defined roles as wives and mothers." Female volunteers, including Jews, continued to concern themselves with community needs, and as the century progressed these "private" groups increasingly pursued "public" issues as they moved onto the public stage. By the early decades of the twentieth century such volunteer organizations as the NCJW and Hadassah created a role for themselves in a host of national and international, social welfare and political initiatives. Yet unlike suffragists or other radicals, women involved in voluntary

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clubs and associations held more moderate views on women's place. Their "domestic feminism" sought to use women's perceived natural qualities to improve the world. Karen Blair maintains that these clubwomen's brand of feminism did not challenge "myths of woman's instinctive domestic and moral traits." Nevertheless, through their voluntary activity these women did help eradicate the notion that women belonged solely in the domestic, private sphere.21

While women's clubs and other activities such as settlement work widened the boundaries of women's sphere, the transition did not occur without difficulty, particularly in the Jewish world. As German Jews endeavored to aid their poorer co-religionists, tensions arose when East European Jews bridled at the often classist and paternalistic assistance bestowed upon them by their wealthy patrons. While honestly believing that they had the best interests of the immigrants in mind, middle class reformers often perpetuated stereotypes of their clients based on culture and class. East European Jews, most notably radicals, responded with anger and suspicion, questioning the reformers' very motivations. Like other immigrants of the late nineteenth century they also created their own communal institutions to offset the need for middle class care-giving, including such groups as the previously discussed landsmanshaftn, free loan societies, and mutual aid organizations like the Workmen's Circle.22

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22 Considerable literature exists documenting the tense relationship between German and East European Jews in the United States. See, for example, Hertzberg, 177-88; Rischin, "Germans versus Russians,"; Sinkoff; and, Seth Korelitz, "'A Magnificent Piece of Work': The Americanization Work of the National Council of Jewish Women," American Jewish History 83 (June 1995): 177-203. For a fictional account detailing the relationship between women of the two classes, see Anzia Yezierska, Arrogant Beggar (1927;
Tensions also arose within the middle class when men and women involved in charity work and the developing field of social welfare battled one another. In the late nineteenth century as Jewish social work immersed itself in the process of federation, specialization and professionalization, male-led initiatives rapidly replaced earlier benevolence groups associated with rabbis and their female followers. Over time, women’s voluntary contributions were devalued as professionals began to dominate the ranks of Jewish social service. At the 1900 National Conference of Jewish Charities, Dr. E.G. Hirsch spoke to the need for specialization in order to replace “amateurs” in the field with professionals. Yet his characterization of these "amateurs" displays more than a simple desire to professionalize Jewish social welfare work. He described the earlier work as “self-centered benevolence,” by which he depicted middle-class women as particularly invidious:

The well known charity fiend, a very pest and plague always, is of this order, the most striking specimen. Her busy determination to help the poor is to her a source almost of carnal pleasure. She must have her poor to satisfy her own appetite for self-adulation.23

Like Hirsch, other people involved in social welfare provision began to make the distinction between “philanthropy” and “charity” where the former was associated with organization, efficiency and structure, while the latter was often used to refer to the unorganized, unprofessional volunteer activities of middle-class ladies. While this distinction did not

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necessarily exclude the participation of women trained in social service, it nevertheless did paint a very negative picture of the "untrained" volunteer who was, more often than not, a middle-class lady.\(^{24}\)

By the turn of the twentieth century middle class Jewish and Christian women involved in volunteer endeavors had begun to re-evaluate and construct new definitions of their sphere by creatively interpreting its limits and boundaries.\(^{25}\) Rather than remaining subordinate to male professionals and clergy in professional organizations, female volunteers formulated a means by which they could bring their nurturing, feminine qualities to the public sphere. In this way, women attempted to influence the public world prior to the time when they themselves had a direct political voice. Historian Kathleen McCarthy asserts that, "What is clear is that giving and voluntarism have traditionally provided - and continue to provide - the means through which women have grasped, wielded, and maintained public power - not only in America, but overseas as well. As such, philanthropy lies at the heart of women's history."\(^{26}\)

**Jewish Women in the Late Nineteenth Century**

By the 1890s the American Jewish community was comprised of people from various national origins, speaking a number of languages and occupying positions on the class scale

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\(^{24}\) See too Beth S. Wenger, "Jewish Women and Voluntarism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers," *American Jewish History* 79 (Autumn 1989): 29. She states that, "Armed with 'scientific' methods, professional social workers criticized and devalued Jewish women's volunteer efforts. 'The destinies of the poor are too precious to be placed in the hands of persons whose only qualifications are their willingness to act as social workers,' explained one Jewish male."

\(^{25}\) See Kerber, and Beth S. Wenger, "Jewish Women and Voluntarism," 16-36.

\(^{26}\) McCarthy, xi.
from extremely wealthy to destitute. Furthermore, these people maintained different outlooks on their religion and culture, ranging from the integrated Reform Jews of German background to the traditionally Orthodox or radical, secular Jews from Eastern Europe. American Jewish women also reflected the heterogeneous origins of their communities and consequently participated in a variety of activities to help themselves and others. The general poverty of the immigrants arriving from Eastern Europe in the late 1800s prompted a large scale response from those Jews who already resided in the United States. While East European Jews assisted themselves through landsmanshaftn, mutual aid societies and socialist fraternal organizations, the very breadth of their need usually necessitated greater support than they could provide alone. Not infrequently, the immigrants had to turn to their more well-established "brethren," the German Jews, although this relationship was not without conflict and tension.

The situation created by immigrant poverty provided a new outlet for women's volunteer efforts. German Jewish women had participated in local benevolent societies earlier in the century although for most of the 1800s the Jewish community remained quite small and the number of poor requiring assistance meager. The large influx of new immigrants and the host of problems associated with their arrival, both specifically Jewish and those common to all poor immigrants, provided middle-class Jewish women with a new concentration for their endeavors. The scope of immigrant problems facilitated the growth of such organizations as the National Council of Jewish Women.

Middle-class Jewish women felt compelled to care for the poor within their communities, to protect Jewish girls from prostitution, and to provide appropriate job skills.
In pursuing such activities they were following in the footsteps of earlier Jewish women's groups as well as participating in a nationwide phenomenon of female voluntarism, charity work and club formation. Jewish women of all classes and backgrounds felt it was their religious and communal duty to care for the less fortunate, although middle-class German Jewish women, in their desire to integrate into mainstream U.S. society, also found themselves influenced by certain tenets of Victorian era ideology emanating from the American Protestant middle-classes. The German Jewish middle class sought to integrate into American society while simultaneously maintaining its distinctive Jewish character.

For women, this meant accepting such Victorian notions as "separate spheres," which designated certain activities as natural and fitting for men and women. Yet their desire to preserve the Jewish heritage in the United States led women to participate in endeavors linked directly to the Jewish community.

Like other women, Jews felt that as mothers and nurturers they had special talents to help better the ever-changing industrialized and urbanized social landscape. Jewish women felt that charity work, as pursued by women, could serve to heal some of the negative effects of the new industrial order, that public world more commonly associated with the dealings of men. During the 1890s, in particular, due to the combined influence of massive Jewish immigration from the East along with middle-class Americanized Jewish women's beliefs about their proper function in and duty toward society, Jewish women once again began to form organizations appealing to the middle-class Jewish woman. However, unlike earlier benevolent groups, which often came under the tutelage of local rabbis or other prominent male leaders, these new organizations remained in the hands of their female founders. These
groups were also national in scope and grew to achieve a prominence greater than was ever
dreamt of by women in the earliest benevolent societies. Working-class women, too, would
attempt to find a voice for themselves within their organizations. Their efforts, though,
would remain on a smaller scale than that of such women-only groups as the National
Council of Jewish and Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America.
CHAPTER 2

AMERICAN JEWISH WOMEN AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS, 1892-1914

Jewish women in the United States never constituted a monolithic group; this was particularly the case at the turn of the century. Differences in class combined with language and cultural diversity resulted in a rich and far from unified community. Some Jewish women spoke solely English, others Yiddish, and still others were bi- or polylingual. Like men, they had diverse ways of understanding their Jewish identity and contemplated a variety of means by which to improve conditions for Jews in the United States. Some women fervently believed in free-market liberalism, while others vowed to work against capitalism in the pursuit of socialist ends or even revolution. And, after the turn of the century, growing numbers of women from across the political spectrum became intrigued by the Zionist mission to create a Jewish homeland overseas.

Women's organizational affiliations reflected this rich diversity in background and ideological perspective. The foundational histories of the Workmen's Circle, the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) and Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, illustrate the highly varied ways in which women came together to realize their ideas. The life experiences of these women influenced how they conceptualized the Jewish...
community -- its problems as well as the solutions that they, collectively, would devise. So too would women's backgrounds and ideological outlooks shape the way they thought about gender relations in the Jewish community, specifically about women's rights and duties. Some women, seasoned by participation in radical movements, maintained strong beliefs in gender equality and joined organizations, such as the Workmen's Circle, that theoretically supported such equality. Others, most notably middle-class women, grew up in social settings where it was suitable for men and women to inhabit separate, though complementary, spheres. These women often found separatist organizing more in line with their convictions about the gendered nature of society. Indeed, some came to believe that breaking entirely from men's groups gave them leadership opportunities they would never have had in mixed-sex organizations.

The founding and pre-war agendas of the Workmen's Circle, the NCJW and Hadassah reveal what the members of these three organizations thought about women's capabilities and their place in the Jewish community and society at large. Women in these groups all faced similar obstacles in organizing (or in the Workmen's Circle case simply joining) their associations. Men's resistance, sometimes expressed as a trivialization of women's desire for public work, played an important role in spurring Jewish women to action. Male attitudes galvanized women in each group to articulate more clearly their ideas about women's role in the movement(s) for societal reform and to pursue their own self-defined goals. The types of projects women initiated in the years before World War I shows the importance of gender politics in the Jewish community and how women used various separatist strategies to achieve their aims.
Women in a Socialist Brotherhood

The Workmen's Circle was the first of the three organizations to form. In the spring of 1892 a small group of radical workers, including two women, met in New York City to lay the foundation for a mutual aid group for secular Jews who rejected the more traditional fraternal organizations' ritualism and lack of interest in political matters. The order modeled itself in part on the Krankenkasse of the Social Democrats and trade unionists in Germany. Indeed, German was designated the first official language of the organization, despite the fact that most members regularly communicated in Yiddish. American secret societies and fraternal brotherhoods also influenced the formation of the Arbeter Ring as did the long tradition of Jewish mutual aid exemplified in the burial societies of the Old World and the landsmanshaften of the New.¹

The Arbeter Ring's first members were overwhelmingly Yiddish-speaking immigrants from Eastern Europe. In the early twentieth century the working class dominated the order; semi-skilled or skilled workers comprised eighty percent of its ranks.² The Circle required that members join a union if possible and that they pledge to vote for the working-class parties, which in practice meant the socialists. The first person to be expelled from the group


had violated this last mandate by working for the Republicans.\(^3\) Initially socialist internationalists, over time Circle members became ever more concerned with Jewish identity while at the same time remaining committed to working-class unity. The cultural nationalism propounded by the group did not advocate establishment of a Jewish nation-state as did the political nationalism of the Zionists. Rather it promoted the idea that secular Jewish culture, traditions, and most importantly the Yiddish language, be allowed to survive in multi-ethnic (preferably socialist) states. In this paradigm, all ethnic minorities in the state would educate their children in their own "national" language – Yiddish for Jews, not Hebrew. The organization most closely associated with this sort of national sentiment was the General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia (known simply as the Bund), founded in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 1897. The Bund and the Workmen’s Circle strengthened their close ties following the failed 1905 Russian Revolution. After the Revolution’s defeat many Russian Jewish radicals fled to the United States, and more than a few Bundists joined the Workmen’s Circle. The Circle, reinforced by its Bundist allies, held a prominent position in the New York Jewish left alongside the labor unions with high Jewish membership such as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the Yiddish

daily *Forverts* (Forward), and the Socialist Party. These groups had close relations with one another and regularly worked together in pursuit of common interests.

The Arbeter Ring, which considered itself the “Red Cross of the labor movement,” offered crucial services to radical Jewish workers by providing for their needs in times of sickness and death. It dispensed strike funds, sickness benefits (initially without time limits), and burial expenses. Such coverage was especially important for secular Jews who often faced discrimination from the more traditional Jewish fraternal orders. By 1900 the Arbeter Ring had established three branches in New York and Brooklyn. Later in that year these branches resolved to establish a national order. At the first convention in March 1901 delegates from nine branches representing approximately 650 members gathered together in the New York area. Although the group began to expand nationally, it had not yet attained a New York State charter granting it legal status as an insurance provider. The order waited five years before fulfilling the necessary requirements for this charter, all the while adding to its membership and treasure chest. By the end of 1905, the year the group attained its

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4 Labor unions with high Jewish membership included the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. While the Bund and the Workmen's Circle abjured political nationalism, both were committed to personal as well as communal Jewish identity, a commitment that is inadequately conveyed by such terms as “ethnic identification.” Neither the Bund nor the Workmen's Circle called for a geo-political homeland for the Jews in the way that Zionists did, nevertheless they did maintain a strong allegiance to the Jewish people as well as the working class as a whole. See Paul Buhle, “Jews and American Communism: The Cultural Question,” *Radical History Review* 23 (Spring 1980): 12-7.

charter, the Arbeter Ring consisted of 4,713 members in 90 chapters, predominantly located in and around New York City.\(^5\)

Although women numbered among the order's earliest members, the percentage of male members far exceeded that of women; for most of its history the group remained, in the words of one commentator, "in essence, a men's organization." [emphasis in original]\(^6\) Others associated with the Circle attributed the discrepancy in membership rates to the greater numbers of men immigrating to the United States and to the poverty of working families. Women's domestic responsibilities also severely limited women's membership in the years prior to World War I. Many postwar reminiscences describe the trouble that women, especially those who were married, had in trying to leave their homes at night to go to Circle meetings. One male member, writing in 1939, recalled how once women married, even those who had been active in the Bund became so consumed with household duties that they failed to continue their youthful activism. Women, he remembered, tried to attend Circle meetings but most only managed to go from time to time.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) G. Speyer, "35 yor dvinsker bund brentsh 75" (35 years of dvinsker bund branch 75) in *Dvinsker bundisher brentsh 75 arbeter ring, 1904-1939* (Dvinsker bund branch 75 Workmen's Circle, 1904-1939), p. 6, Box 17, Folder 101, YIVO. See also Beki Kohen, "...Ikh dermon zikh..." (I reminisce) in *Tsen voriger yubiley zshurnal pinsker froyen brentsh 210-B arbeter ring* (Ten year anniversary journal pinsk women's branch 210-B Workmen's Circle), 1929-1939, n.p., Box 20, Folder 121, YIVO. In this article Kohen describes how busy women were in the home, unable to attend Arbeter Ring meetings more than once or twice a week.
More subtle, but potentially more significant, factors than immigrant poverty and domestic burdens also curbed female participation. Gender dynamics in particular often left women feeling alienated from this socialist workers' brotherhood. Circle women confessed to feeling out of place when they first began to attend meetings. Yeta Golding, for instance, joined the Circle due to her interest in the diverse programs it offered, but did not feel entirely relaxed at first. "Only one thing irked me," she remembered, "I was the only woman at the meeting! Something made me feel so unheymlekh [uncomfortable]...like a miserable, poor person...a woman!"* Other members also commented on the singularity or absence of female members. One man stated bluntly that women were so rare a presence in Circle life that he sometimes did not know whether a particular member even had a wife. Not only were women not physically present, they seem to have been missing from men's conversations as well.9

Some commentators asserted that more than simple numerical isolation curbed women's desire to attend the meetings. To Golde Shibka, it was "incomprehensible" that more women were not involved in the Arbeter Ring given their prominence in Bundism. She intimated that the cause of low female enrollment had to do with men's reaction to women's participation. Even when a woman had the funds necessary to join, Shibka asserted,

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* Yeta Golding in Der vilner (1909-1939), published by Vilna Branch 367, p. 29, Box 30, Folder 167, YIVO.

9 For example, see 47 vor brentsh 3 arbeter ring (Forty years of branch 3 of the Workmen's Circle) (New York: Arbeter Ring, 1946), Box 15, Folder 90, YIVO; Isidor Kohn quoted in Der vilner (1905-1940), pp. 35-6, Box 16, Folder 96, YIVO. Similar dynamics were recorded in interviews with female members in the Canadian branches of Workmen's Circle. See Ruth A. Frager, Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 105-10.

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"psychologically" the branch persisted in being "a men's branch." The Circle’s own historian, Maximilian Hurwitz, conceded that men persisted in adhering to gender norms brought with them from their native shtetlekh. Hurwitz acknowledged that “despite their radical professions of faith in women's equality to men, [radical Jewish men] regard this as a man's world and think in masculine terms.”

While many women lamented that they had neither the time nor the psychological fortitude to join the Circle, they did manage in these early years to find ways to build community -- especially with women in similar predicaments. Yent Smit remembered many nights when she stayed home alone with the children “until the gray of day” while her husband went out to various gatherings. Smit relied on neighbors to alleviate the sense of isolation brought on by her husband’s absences. She stated that the Circle had exacted a great price from her, but she, like other women of her generation, nevertheless insisted that in the long run it had all been worthwhile. Similarly, members of Women's Branch 244-B looking back from 1938 declared that although at first they could rarely attend meetings with their husbands, “we put up with it because we felt that [the Arbeter Ring] did good work.”

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12 Yent Smit, “Mayn Loyn” (My wages) in 47 vor brentsh 3 arbeter ring (Forty-seven years of branch 3 of the Workmen's Circle) (New York: Arbeter Ring, 1946), n.p., Box 15, Folder 90, YIVO.

13 “Bagrisung fun froyen brentsh 244-B,” (Greetings from Froyen Branch 244-B) in Suvenir zhurnal pruzhiner brentsh 244 arbeter ring (Souvenir journal of Pnizhiner branch 244 of the Workmen's Circle) (1938), n.p. Box 21, Folder 127, YIVO.
Such women continued to maintain faith in the importance of their husbands' organization and in the work that it did regardless of their personal alienation.

The Workmen's Circle provided necessary services to secular Jewish workers and their families. But workers' wives rarely took part in the earliest meetings despite the fact that some of them expressed interest in the Circle and had themselves been radical activists in Europe. Many Circle members, men most prominently, believed that while single women might engage in a bit of youthful radicalism, married women should remain at home. Such ideas would color the Circle's reception of those women who tested their organization's profession of gender equality. The response they received would spur some women in the years before World War I to press even more aggressively for equal rights while at the same time insisting the Circle become more responsive to women's unique needs.

**Jewish Women's Congress to National Organization**

At the same time that working-class women struggled against the isolation they felt in their homes and the alienation they experienced at Arbeter Ring functions, middle- and upper-class Jewish women in the United States had already founded a national Jewish women's organization. The women who developed the National Council of Jewish Women inhabited an entirely different world than that of Arbeter Ring women. While members of both groups expressed frustration at being preoccupied with the home and felt estranged from their male peers, wealthier Jewish woman had an important advantage over working-class immigrants -- the ability to hire domestic servants, thereby freeing themselves to engage
more easily in voluntary activities. An example of just such a phenomenon was the preparation for the 1893 Jewish Women's Congress, held during the Chicago World's Fair. Prominent Jewish women from across the nation gathered at this Congress at which time they laid the foundations for the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW).

Chicago clubwoman Hannah G. Solomon played a pivotal role in organizing both the Congress and the national organization. Raised in a well-to-do family of Reform Jews, Solomon became active in the women's club movement at quite a young age. She and her sister were the first Jews to be admitted to the prestigious Chicago Woman's Club and “probably the only Jewesses many of the members ever had met.” Solomon remained involved in public work during the years she raised her three children. She served on the Board of Chicago's Associated Jewish Charities and later worked with the Bureau of Personal Service, a women's group. In 1910 she assisted in reviving the Chicago Conference of Jewish Women's Organizations, which she later described as a “living refutation of the hackneyed argument that women cannot work constructively and in harmony together.”

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Her efforts to organize a national gathering of Jewish women reveals her commitment to club work and to women's participation in public affairs. As Susan B. Anthony began to arrange for a Women's Congress at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, Solomon, called upon by her Chicago clubwomen friends involved in Fair preparations, formulated a plan for Jewish women to engage in the Parliament of Religions. Because there were so few Jewish women's organizations at the time it proved difficult to identify women of national prominence. Indeed, Solomon herself knew of only a few who fit the bill -- Julia Richman, Emma Lazarus and Henrietta Szold. Moreover, some men expressed doubts about the viability of the enterprise. Not only did they question whether enough women could be rounded up for such a gathering, they also challenged the very idea of Jewish women organizing separately from women of other religions. These men seemingly believed that Jewish women should join together with other women and leave religious matters to men alone.

Despite this attitude, Solomon and her colleagues proceeded in their determination to affiliate with the Jewish Congress of the Parliament of Religions rather than with the general Congress of Women at the Fair. Some historians have seen this action as evidence of the Council's resistance to feminism, since at this crucial moment Council founders


18 “American Jewish Women in 1890 and 1920,” 749; Rogow, 16.
identified themselves as Jews first and not as women. This view, in essence, forces a stark division in identity that these Jewish delegates would not necessarily have made themselves. Moreover, it implies that the women simply acquiesced in their subordination to the general male-led Jewish Congress. In fact the opposite occurred. When Solomon began to work in earnest she found the men responsible for Jewish participation at the Parliament of Religions less than receptive to the notion of female participation. In her memoirs she recalled one planning meeting specifically. The male organizers invited her to attend but proceeded only to quash her suggestions for the greater public participation of women. When she proposed that two women be allowed to make presentations to the Parliament of Religions as representatives of a general Jewish Congress the men simply ignored her. Solomon then put the question to them forthrightly:

'Mr. Chairman,' I inquired, 'just where on your program are the women to be placed?'

'Well,' hemmed and hawed the chairman, 'the program seems complete just as it stands.'

'Very well,' I replied, 'under these circumstances we do not care to cooperate with you, and I request that the fact of our presence at this meeting be expunged from the records.'

15 Elwell, 58; Golumb, 66.

20 Indeed Hannah G. Solomon later accompanied Susan B. Anthony to the 1904 International Council of Women held in Berlin. Solomon served on the convention's nominating committee because she alone of the Americans understood both French and German. Solomon wrote years later, "It was inspiring to deliberate with women of many countries, consecrated to efforts for improving social conditions. But, alas! It was a man's world in which little could be accomplished as long as the lust for power remained an unchecked human passion! Would woman's suffrage act as a check? We worked - we hoped!" Solomon, Fabric, 120. See also Rogow, 10-11. Rogow points out that other well-known supporters of women's rights, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Frances Willard, participated in the Parliament of Religions.

21 Solomon, Fabric, 82-83.
Solomon's granddaughter more explicitly described the slight and its effect on her proud grandmother. She recalled that when Solomon asked if the women could help, the men “came up with one answer, which was, yes...They could be the hostesses. My grandmother was extremely vehement.” This incident, she believed, provoked her grandmother to found a female-only organization “without any cooperation from the men.”

Solomon sought an active role for women in a cooperative partnership with men. When her suggestions were rebuffed, she took the lists of women she and others had painstakingly compiled and forged ahead with a Congress of Jewish Women. At the conclusion of this Congress participants passed a resolution to establish a National Council of Jewish Women. Many years later, Rebekah Kohut, who was unable to attend the Congress due to her husband's ill health, vividly recalled the import of this event for women like herself: “at the time the Council was founded, participation by women in public life was still a new thing, and there was an excitement, a heady sense of independence, a thrill, a feeling that one was taking part in the best kind of revolution, even if it involved nothing...


Other women involved in the planning expressed awareness of patronizing male attitudes. Annie Nathan Meyer had written to Solomon in 1892 stating her belief that rabbis should lead the Jewish Congress and that there should not be a separate women's group. She felt, however, that women should try to convince the men to allow female representatives to the Jewish Congress. Like Solomon, Meyer recognized that this might be difficult given the prevailing ideas about women common among such men: “I quite agree with you that under ordinary circumstances our rabbis are painfully narrow and old-fashioned as regards women's positions...To me it seems very absurd to have a special Com. [sic] for Jewish women.” Annie Nathan Meyer to Hannah G. Solomon, 16 May 1892, Box 3, Folder 2, Solomon Collection in LC. Meyer went on to be a vocal opponent of women's suffrage, in direct contrast to her sister, the well-known suffragist Maud Nathan. See Joyce Antler, The Journey Home: Jewish Women and the American Century (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 54-72.
more at the moment than parliamentary debates about hot soup and recreation for school
children."

Although some historians have suggested that the early NCJW was not a feminist
organization, Solomon and her contemporaries often presented Council’s philosophy and
accomplishments in terms that clearly conveyed their commitment to women’s rights. Like
Kohut, contemporaries of the NCJW founders recognized the major steps taken by these

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1950), 120.

24 Historians who see the NCJW as less than feminist have taken issue with Solomon’s characterization of
events leading up to the Jewish Women’s Congress. Deborah Grand Golumb contends that Solomon’s retelling
represents an attempt in her later years to justify steps the women had already taken in 1893 independently of
their male cohorts. She asserts that because it would have been quite unusual at that time for women of their
backgrounds to initiate a national organization on their own, “Solomon naturally ascribed a role to the men,
even a negative one.” However, women’s experiences in charitable organizations, in Workmen’s Circle and,
as will be shown later, in the Zionist movement attest to the complications faced by those women who sought
major roles in male-led organizations. While Solomon and others may have called a national Jewish women’s
gathering and later created the NCJW for reasons other than their disagreements with male colleagues, it is
certainly possible that such conflicts did, at the very least, contribute to their aspiration for an organization free
of male involvement. See Golumb, 61-2.

While the NCJW claims a central place among Jewish women’s organizations in the United States,
scholars are divided as to whether its activism can be considered feminist or not. Paula Hyman asserts that
groups like the Council can be deemed feminist (although not “hot beds of feminism”) because they
participated in social housekeeping and sought a place for women in the public sphere. She believes groups
like the NCJW were, “feminist in a larger sense, in that they enhanced the self-worth of women and worked
on their behalf.” Other historians, particularly Deborah Grand Golumb reject this view. Golumb states that
if feminism is taken to mean “women identifying primarily as women and working toward programs
specifically related to women’s concerns, then Jewish women’s organizations should not be classified as
feminist whether in a broad or narrow sense” because such groups worked for the entire Jewish community
rather than for women alone. Golumb asserts that Council founders identified themselves “first as Jews and
only second as females when they chose to place their conference in the ranks of the religious rather than the
women’s assemblies.” She feels that the founding Congress in 1893, and implicitly the Council, was “neither
revolutionary nor radical” and consequently should not be considered feminist. See Golumb 61-67; Paula

Faith Rogow also considers the Council a conservative group espousing a brand of “domestic
feminism” that never effectively challenged male power or sought to change women’s status in society. She
contends that Council members justified their forays into the public sphere by relying on arguments affirming
their important roles as mothers. She believes that Council’s ideology of motherhood and community service
maintained the gender-power distribution within the Jewish community, which attempted to keep all women
in a traditionally subordinate condition. See Rogow, 1-7.

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generally well-to-do married women in pioneering new roles for women in public. Philip P. Bregstone’s 1933 history of Chicago Jewry credits Solomon with helping women to break the “fetters that had kept [them] enslaved throughout the ages.” Similarly, Solomon’s granddaughter maintained that Council took “the Jewish woman out of her kitchen and ... [gave] her an important role in society.”25 In 1937 at the request of a reporter for a message to her “sisters,” Solomon herself responded, “let it be this -- that, if women want to keep sane and sweet, let them see to it that they have an outside interest, many interests, outside of even their homes and their families. Seclusion is death -- fellowship is life and life more abundant.”26 Council founders sought ways to augment women’s traditional responsibilities for home and children and did so by employing a measured, somewhat accommodationist rhetoric regarding gender relations. This reformist position located the NCJW firmly within a centrist politics common to women of their class and political viewpoint, but one which also served to offset any potentially negative, and perhaps obstructionist, reactions from male peers. In this way, Council women did not differ so greatly from non-Jewish women active in the various women’s clubs of the period.27


The social milieu in which the NCJW founders operated dictated the necessity of such a position. At best men could trivialize women's work; at worst they might condemn it. A full thirty-five years after the founding of the NCJW, an editorial in the *Reform Advocate* praised Solomon for her club work but in a such a way so as to reassure readers that Solomon still maintained her qualifications as the consummate homemaker: “above all we have the happy thought that while she can make a good speech and handle matters of difficulty with ease and with poise and in the midst of distractions keep her head solidly on her shoulder, she can cook a good meal...[They could verify this because she had cooked for them]. All in all we would say of Hannah Solomon she is the most all round Jewish woman -- a mother in Israel -- that we know.”

Solomon reflected on this rather typical male attitude in a 1935 interview, reflecting keen awareness of the way women like herself had been received in those years. She told the reporter that to be a clubwoman in the early twentieth century:

meant your ideas were too advanced for your own good or anyone else's. It meant you neglected your home, left your stockings undarned and your ice-box uncleaned. It meant, furthermore, you were busy about something besides your business, that you invited the censure of men, as well as conservatives of your own sex.

She felt the support of the clubs had given women more “courage.” In those days an “advanced woman,” especially if she cut her hair, was regarded as a “dreadful creature.” Many considered such a woman to be “in the same category with long-haired men.”

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28 “Editorial” in *Reform Advocate* vol. 74 no. 24 (January 14, 1928), clipping in Box 1, Folder 3, Solomon Collection, LC.
Solomon laughingly added, "of course such a woman couldn't be trusted." Although middle- and upper-class women had the time and energy to devote to volunteer work outside the home, they still had to contend with the negative conceptions about their "advanced" ideas. Women, especially those who were married, relied heavily on the support of their families to pursue their individual interests. Solomon, for instance, admitted that without the backing of her husband, Henry, including his financial support, she would have had neither the time nor the opportunity to participate in Council and other volunteer work. Despite stark differences in means, these women, like those in Arbeter Ring, found themselves constrained by contemporary ideas regarding the proper behavior of married Jewish women. Yet both groups believed in helping women engage in public work together with men and thereby improving society at large.

Participants at the 1893 Jewish Women's Congress, seeking a compromise position between societal strictures on married women's activity and their own desire for personal actualization, created a national organization whose moderate program was dedicated to "Religion, Philanthropy, and Education." They sought to initiate volunteer activities to promote the knowledge of Judaism and Jewish culture, to fight religious and other

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29 Solomon quoted in Hope Ridings Miller, "Coolness to Feminism in Early Days Recalled," The Washington [torn off] (October 24, 1935), clipping fragment located in Box 1, Folder 3, Solomon collection, LC.

30 "Mrs. Solomon's marriage has been a happy one, her husband being entirely in accord with her views and willing that she should give a good deal of time to social and religious work." Herma Clark column "When Chicago was Young," n.d., n.p., fragment located in Box 1, Folder 3, Solomon collection, LC. Clark created imaginary characters, Martha Freeman Esmond and Julia Boyd, whose "letters" describing life in Chicago were published in her column. In this column, Solomon told Martha Freeman Esmond that she couldn't have accomplished so much without her husband's personal and financial support. On Clark and her characters, see Solomon, Fabric, 43.
persecutions, and to involve women in social reform. By 1896 the NCJW had sections in more than fifty cities throughout the United States.31

Like the National Council of Women, the NCJW avoided political and religious issues that could potentially divide the membership, and both groups refused to take official positions on controversial topics. This policy notwithstanding, even before Council was off the ground fissures emerged. The majority of members were middle- or upper-class women affiliated with Reform Judaism. Some Orthodox and Conservative women hesitated to join an organization ostensibly committed to Jewish education and religion but one in which the majority of members held beliefs differing from their own. Henrietta Szold, future founder of Hadassah, felt she could not support any group working to further religious goals, which she believed were fundamentally a private, individual matter. Although Szold had delivered a paper to the Parliament of Religions as a representative of the Jewish Women's Congress, she refused to join the NCJW. As an adherent of Conservative Judaism, Szold anticipated friction between women like herself and those leaders who affiliated with the Reform movement. Disregarding her staunch refusals, women from both the national office and the New York section nevertheless tried to recruit her to various posts in the organization. In 1900 Szold explained to Sadie American, Council's Executive Secretary, that "the Council as a religious organization does and must arrogate to itself representative powers, repugnant to me - equally repugnant if my peculiar religious views or any one else's are the object of its propaganda." She felt that religion must remain a private matter and that an organization

based on religion for “propaganda purposes is foreign, I believe, to Judaism, and certainly to my nature.”

Szold also alluded to the potential class divisions that this representative body nurtured from its inception. In a letter refusing the post as Correspondence Secretary for the New York section, she commented that “as [the Board of the New York Section] doubtless know[s]...I am not a woman of leisure.” She felt that she would be able to give only “rags and tatters of time” to a position she believed demanded a woman’s full-time attention, implying that someone who did not have to earn her own living might be better suited to the job. Indeed, the NCJW did rely predominantly on women of means to staff leadership posts, especially married women, who, unlike Szold, had both financial security and freedom from all but the lightest household tasks. As the organization distinguished itself in the realm of social welfare work, it began to demarcate a stark line between its own membership and those women who utilized its services. Council increasingly considered the working Jewish poor as the object of concern, as cases and clientele, but very infrequently as equals.

The National Council of Jewish Women, created not long after the Arbeter Ring founders first met in a small, crowded New York apartment, grew quickly to become a prominent, national organization devoted to Judaism and social welfare. Despite Council’s desire to involve as many Jewish women as possible, the homogeneity of most members’ backgrounds and the manner in which they developed their organizational program curtailed

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32 Henrietta Szold to Sadie American, 27 March 1900, Record Group 7, Box 19, Folder 231, Hadassah Archives (hereafter cited as HA); See also Elwell, 145.

any significant working-class participation. Certainly not feminist in a radical sense, Council women nonetheless did much to further women's religious education and public participation on issues critical to the Jewish community. Prior to the First World War, Council emerged as the dominant Jewish women's organization in the United States, closely tied to the Jewish power elite but not representative of all American Jewish women.

**Daughters of Zion**

The NCJW considered itself non-Zionist; as an organization it neither opposed nor supported the establishment of a Jewish state. In fact, Council members, and especially the leadership, like most Reform Jews of the period, tended to be anti-Zionists. Before World War I, the Zionist movement in the United States, represented by the Federation of American Zionists (FAZ), failed to attract a following of any significance, particularly among women. Yet pockets of support began to emerge in the early decades of the twentieth century as more Jews grew concerned about the rise of antisemitism in Europe and the perceived decline of Jewish observance in the United States. A small group of middle-class women in New York City, troubled by such developments as well as by female ignorance regarding Zionist ideals, formed a study group devoted to Zionist matters. In time they would transform this tiny circle into a highly effective national women's organization known simply as “Hadassah.”

The study circle from which the national organization emerged was called the Hadassah Chapter of the Daughters of Zion -- groups advanced by the FAZ as a means by

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34 “Hadassah” is Hebrew for “myrtle” and is also the Hebrew name of the Biblical Queen Esther. The New York chapter of the Daughters of Zion first met on Purim, the holiday associated with Esther, and therefore decided to call itself the Hadassah Chapter of the Daughters of Zion. Other chapters were to take on names of other Jewish heroines. See Marlin Levin, *Balm in Gilead: the Story of Hadassah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 16-7.
which to bring middle- and upper-class women into the movement. Daughters of Zion played only a minor role in the initial years of American Zionism. Despite the FAZ attempt to attract women to the movement through these groups, many male leaders still believed that “the organization and propaganda of Zionism interest women less than men.”\textsuperscript{35} This attitude contributed to a generally lackluster record of recruitment among women. One of Hadassah's founders, commenting on the men's stance, recalled that the FAZ had no program for women and “really no place for them.”\textsuperscript{36} Male leaders might concede that bourgeois women could raise money for educational and agricultural projects in Palestine, but many men persisted in thinking that the larger issues of nationalist politics were of little or no interest to women. Because women were not considered sufficiently serious enough about Zionist politics and ideology, less was required of them. Women in these early groups did not pay the shekel membership dues to the World Zionist Organization (WZO) or send representatives to the FAZ conventions.\textsuperscript{37}

At least one prominent Zionist envisioned a more dynamic role for women in the movement. After a trip to Palestine in 1909, Henrietta Szold began to devise a plan by which ordinary women could assist in the upbuilding of Palestine through a focus on practical


\textsuperscript{36} Mrs. A.H. Fromerson to Miss Hortense Levy, 10 May 1932, RG 4, Box 2, Folder 19, HA.

\textsuperscript{37} Kutscher, “From Merger to Autonomy,” 61-3.
Szold's commitment to the Jewish people and interest in serving them through grounded, concrete initiatives had begun early in her life. She was born in 1860 in Baltimore, Maryland. The much-loved first-born daughter of a respected rabbi from Hungary, Szold was personally tutored at an early age by her father in a variety of subjects. As a young woman, she helped found the Russian Night School where immigrants could learn English. She and others at the school quickly realized the wider scope of immigrants' needs and soon modified the school's curriculum to include instruction in sewing, carpentry and plumbing. In 1893 Szold accepted a position as executive secretary to the publication committee of the Jewish Publication Society (JPS). Along with these duties she also served as a volunteer (unpaid) editor and translator for many of the Society's publications. By the time she left the JPS in 1916 she had translated a dozen books and edited countless others.

Szold's interest in Zionism arose in part through her close contact with Baltimore's Russian immigrant community. After speaking with them about Judaism, Zionism and antisemitism, she began to consider Palestine a haven from both the violent anti-Jewish attacks in Europe and assimilation in the United States. She felt this refuge would serve as

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38 “Practical Zionism,” as opposed to more ideological, political or cultural manifestations of the movement, emphasized concrete tasks through which Western Zionists could facilitate the growth of the nation. It is most commonly associated with Louis Brandeis. Indeed, standard interpretations make much of the connection between Brandeis and Hadassah leaders. In contrast to the impression conveyed by standard histories, Carol Kutscher argues that there is no evidence in Brandeis' papers that he ever directly led Hadassah. See Carol Kutscher, “The Early Years of Hadassah, 1912-1921” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 158-9. For more on practical Zionism see Ben Halpern, Clash of Heroes: Brandeis, Weizmann, and American Zionism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 94, 218-9, 256-9; Walter Laqueur, A History of Zionism (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 158-61; Melvin I. Urofsky, American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 123-6, 250-60.

a spiritual foundation protecting Jews in the Diaspora from brutality on one hand and radical assimilation on the other. Moreover, she believed that a Jewish state in Palestine could serve to rehabilitate and revitalize Judaism itself. To Szold, Zionism was neither an entirely secular nor entirely religious phenomenon. She made her first public speech on Zionism in 1896 before the Baltimore chapter of the NCJW, a month before the appearance of Theodore Herzl's influential work, *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish state). By 1910 she had become a leading American Zionist, having been asked to hold the post of honorary secretary of the FAZ.

Several years before this Szold had been recruited into a Zionist women's study circle. In the winter of 1906-1907 both Rabbi Judah Magnes, then secretary of the FAZ, and Lotta Levensohn, his secretary, observed that the Daughters of Zion groups exhibited little interest in substantive matters. Levensohn felt that they had only "vague, romantic ideas about Zionism." The groups might organize fundraisers and tea parties, perhaps read some Zionist writers in English translation, but "sooner or later [women] lost interest and drifted away." Levensohn wanted to organize a more serious study circle and Magnes suggested that she invite Szold, already a prominent women in the Jewish community, to participate. The thought of communicating with such an eminent woman left Levensohn simply

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41 Herzl is considered the founder of "political Zionism," namely the movement to found a Jewish nation-state in Palestine. Herzl was open to the idea of creating a Jewish state in places other than Palestine, considering Uganda for instance, however these plans were rejected outright by Russian Zionists among others.
“dumbfounded” and it fell to Magnes to extend the actual invitation. Szold accepted with the caveat that she be an ordinary member holding no special post.42

After participating in the study circle for several years, Szold made her 1909 trip to Palestine. Upon her return, she presented a report on the condition of Palestinian Jewish life to the study group. Her talk highlighted the lack of Jewish maternity services; the only hospital in Palestine at the time was run by Christian missionaries who insisted on baptizing the babies born there. Szold also described the high rate of disease among children in the urban areas, particularly trachoma, a curable eye disease, which, when left untreated, ultimately results in blindness.43 Over the next two years women in Szold's group discussed various proposals to alleviate the abysmal state of medical care in Palestine that could be undertaken by a national women's Zionist organization.

At about the same time, Senior Abel of the FAZ Executive Committee, who had had contact with Szold through her work with Russian immigrants in Baltimore, proposed to form a national FAZ women's auxiliary. The actual task of organizing women fell to Bernard Rosenblatt who, early in 1912, consulted with Szold and the Hadassah chapter in order to put together such a group. Beginning in January 1912 the women concretized proposals based on the formulations they and Szold had been discussing since 1909.44

42 Lotta Levensohn, “Recollections,” Jerusalem, 1967, pp. 1-2, RG 4, Box 2, Folder 17, HA.


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Szold's plan involved helping women to become educated Zionists while launching a Palestinian program influenced by the settlement houses of Jane Addams and Lillian Wald. Women's work in Palestine, Szold averred, should compliment the European and FAZ focus on establishing agricultural settlements through a commitment to urban public health. Urban centers tended to suffer from the neglect of the World Zionist Organization, which was more interested in a model of national renewal based on “improving” the rural areas.\(^\text{45}\) Szold maintained that the importance of urban public health work lay not only in what it could do for the population of Palestine but also in the impact it would have on American Jewish women. Practical ventures on behalf of the Palestinian population would revitalize Jewish women’s spirituality. In her estimation Hadassah's work did not amount to mere benevolence; it was a critical component of Zionism itself, the “upbuilding” of \textit{Eretz Israel} and the revitalization of Jews in the Diaspora.\(^\text{46}\) Szold also believed it was imperative that the women's organization have some degree of autonomy from the FAZ because, having straightened out the men's finances in 1910, she knew that there was no way the FAZ would have the funds necessary to support the programs she and her colleagues envisioned.\(^\text{47}\)

While developing their program, Szold continually urged the others to be pragmatists, a stance that soon earned the women the respect of Louis Brandeis and his Progressive followers. Szold particularly tried to check the women's unrestrained idealism about


\(^{46}\text{Dash, 110; Goldstein, 22-29.}\)

\(^{47}\text{Dash, 97, 104-5, 149; Urofsky, 107.}\)
beginning to work in Palestine. Gertrude Goldsmith Rosenblatt captured this attitude succinctly in recalling Szold's reaction to the women's initial exuberance over beginning a Zionist project. After the group had outlined their program, Rosenblatt turned to Szold and said, "'Oh that will work very, very well.' Miss Szold answered, 'No, Miss Goldsmith, it will work, that is all.'" Lotta Levensohn also described how Szold's pragmatic manner contributed to the developing organizational ethos: "The dry-as-dust virtues of attention to detail and thoroughness - unromantic efficiency - took on a glamour as the whole design began to be apprehended." These conceptions about efficiency, punctuality and accountability fostered warm relationships between men in the Brandeis faction of the FAZ and Hadassah, and would also rapidly bring their own Palestine projects success. By the first national convention of the women's group in 1914 the organization represented 519

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48 Goldsmith Diaries, p. 2, RG 4, Box 2, Folder 17, HA.

49 Lotta Levensohn, "Miss Szold as a Leader of Women," 17 November 1930, p. 2, RG 4, Box 2, Folder 17, HA.

Much has been made of the close interaction between Brandeis and Hadassah. Rose Jacobs, one of Hadassah's founders, writing about Brandeis in 1941, suggested that the affinity between the Judge and the women's organization arose from his general respect for women and specifically for the work that they did. She pointed out that Hadassah's founding occurred in the same year as Brandeis' public profession of Zionism, both in 1912, and that from then on he always took an especial interest in that organization. While Zionism theoretically advocated women's equality with men, in actuality, Jacobs recalled, women "were not taken sufficiently seriously to be given responsibilities and privileges on the same plane as the men." Judge Brandeis, however, diverged from this stance by considering women equal to men in "intellect, ability and judgement."

She wrote that when she first met Brandeis he left her with the impression that he was "a listener instead of a speaker, one who had respect for punctuality, regard for time and precision, a dislike for personal publicity." Jacobs observed that if other speakers at Zionist meetings went over their allotted time, Brandeis would shorten his own presentation promising to give the rest at a later date. These were qualities not generally associated with the (stereo)typical male Zionist. They were, however, qualities that Hadassah leaders worked to foster in their own organization. They often presented such characteristics as more "womanly" than the assertive, spotlight-seeking demeanor of the most prominent Zionist leaders. See Rose G. Jacobs, "Justice Brandeis and Hadassah," *New Palestine* (November 14, 1941): 17-8, clipping in Rose Jacobs Papers, RG 7, Reel 4, HA.
women in eight chapters.\textsuperscript{50} At this time they also voted to change the group's official name to Hadassah. By 1917 Hadassah claimed 2,710 members in 33 chapters across the United States. During the postwar period Hadassah's membership would increase even more rapidly.\textsuperscript{51}

Hadassah women worked diligently to attract recruits to their new organization. In a report submitted to the first annual meeting in 1913 the board revealed its plan to attract non-Zionists by an appeal to projects and methods that would be especially attractive to women. Specifically, the report referred to Hadassah serving as "a philanthropic agency for those non-Zionists who can be interested in social work among women and children in Palestine." Practical work in Palestine could serve as an effective propaganda tool in promoting Zionism to Jewish women throughout the United States because, Hadassah leaders asserted, all Jewish women would "embrace eagerly the chance of doing in a systematic way what they saw their mothers and grandmothers do in the haphazard way of the tin collection boxes (Pushkes)."\textsuperscript{52} Zionist women, they hoped, would reach non-Zionists by relating their movement to the long tradition of Jewish women's benevolence.

\begin{itemize}
\item Statistics reported in 1917 pamphlet entitled, "Hadassah," p. 11, RG 4, Box 21, HA. This pamphlet reports the following growth in membership: March, 1913 1 chapter/190 members; June, 1914, 8 chapters/519 members; June, 1915, 16 chapters/1,150 members; December, 1916 32 chapters/2,117 members.


\item "The Healing of the Daughter of My People," in the \textit{Maccabaean} 23 (May 1913): 137-138. Reprint located in RG 4, Box 2, Folder 20, HA.
\end{itemize}
Even at this early date Hadassah members gave talks to sections of the National Council of Jewish Women. Despite this group's officially neutral stance, many Council members expressed interest in Hadassah's Zionist projects in Palestine. Gertrude Goldsmith Rosenblatt recalled that in March 1914 Janet Simons Harris, soon to be NCJW National President, wrote to inform her that she was collecting donations for the Hadassah Nurses' Fund and that she had "stimulated similar work in Kansas City."^53

Aside from facilitating membership growth, this cooperation with non-Zionist women served a larger purpose in the Hadassah program. Following Szold, the leaders hoped that their work would awaken American Jewish women to a commitment to Zionism and to the Jewish people in general. Rose Jacobs explained the necessity of reaching those "Yahudim" (literally: Jews, but used to refer to Westernized or assimilated Jews) who behaved so differently than their Zionist counterparts. Such Jews, she felt, were "calm and complacent. They went to Temple because it was proper, just as goyim went to church. They were not interested in the Jews as an entity...Their children went to Sunday School. That was sufficient."^54 The similarities in class backgrounds assisted the Hadassah members in reaching out to women in the NCJW. Attempts to recruit Yiddish-speaking, working-class women garnered less attention in organization publications, although evidence suggests that eventually many rank-and-file Hadassah members came from working-class, East European

^53 Rosenblatt diary extracts, 19 March 1914, p. 23, RG 4, Box 2, Folder 17, HA.

^54 Rose Jacobs, handwritten notes for history of Hadassah, RG 7, Reel 4, HA.
Despite Hadassah's potential contribution to the larger Zionist movement, particularly to increase the overall number of adherents, its initially cordial relations with the FAZ changed in only a short time to reveal larger tensions between the male leadership and the women's group. This occurred increasingly after the women began to chart a course some men deemed too independent.

The women in the Arbeter Ring, NCJW and Hadassah all expressed a certain amount of ambivalence regarding their interactions with the men of their class and ideological backgrounds. Each group of women wanted to commit themselves to work that would further a particular cause, be it socialism, Zionism or the inclusive, reformist program of the NCJW. Their social backgrounds, and especially their class, informed how each group devised their organization and its program. Only the Arbeter Ring overtly focused on class politics, yet the unacknowledged similarity in the backgrounds among the founders of the two women's groups created the potential for close relations right from the start. Early interactions between women of the two groups occurred regardless of these groups' reticence on class politics and despite Council's refusal to take an official position on Zionism. Arbeter Ring women's commitment to socialism, their position as members of the working-class, as well as their use of Yiddish and devotion to secular Jewish identity, limited the interactions they had, or even wanted to have, with women from the other two groups.

55 Only one Yiddish language article appeared in either Hadassah monthly publication from 1914 to 1929. See "Liebe shvester fun hadassah!" (Dear sisters of Hadassah!) Hadassah Newsletter 3 (November, 1922): 4. Carol Kutscher feels that many members were from the working-class; however, very few, if any, women of East European origin held prominent posts in Hadassah during this period. See Kutscher, "Early Years of Hadassah," 110-121. Henrietta Szold stated in 1915 that "for the present at least" Hadassah was not made up of women from the leisure class but of working women such as teachers, shop girls, workers at trade, and stenographers. See "Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention" in Hadassah Bulletin no. 12 (July 1915): 7, located in RG 3, Box 1, Folder 2, HA.
Women in Hadassah and the NCJW also held in common certain ideas regarding gender. Indeed this affinity further strengthened the ties between these two upper-class, and female-only, organizations. Although both the Socialist and Zionist movements espoused gender equality, Hadassah, like the NCJW, opted instead to establish a separate women's organization, generally acceding political power to men. On the surface both seemed to present no threat to male authority or traditional gender relations. The three groups organizational agendas in the years before the outbreak of World War I show that women in the Workmen's Circle, the most radical women, found their energy consumed by the very struggle to find a place for themselves within their organization. On the other hand, those involved in the more rhetorically accomodationist groups rapidly developed a strong set of programs that more quickly facilitated the entrance of women into a variety of social reform enterprises.

**Gendering Membership**

The earliest women in Arbeter Ring most likely had activist histories in a labor union, the Bund, or in both. One Circle member, Fani Soloviov, considered her own introduction to radical activism as representative of circumstances common to many women her age. Soloviov attributed Jewish women's activism in the leftist movements to social and economic conditions prevailing in the Russia of their youth. There, she maintained, a poor girl had only two options: to become a seamstress or a servant. Most Jewish girls assiduously avoided domestic service and opted for the garment trades as Soloviov did. Like thousands of other immigrants, she left Russia for the United States in search of freedom and better living conditions but found only economic exploitation -- long hours and little pay.
This, she believed, compelled hundreds of women to join the garment unions, to which the Arbeter Ring was closely allied. It was not long before such women also sought membership in the socialist mutual aid society. Other women drew similar connections between women’s activism in the Bund, the labor movement, and their subsequent participation in Arbeter Ring. They particularly gave credit to the socialists for leading women out of their kitchens, away from their so-called “backwardness” and into what they considered more productive work outside the home.

But, as we have seen, whatever women’s commitment to the labor movement and socialist party, their domestic responsibilities severely curtailed the amount of time they had to devote to organizations such as the Workmen’s Circle. Informally women relied on one another to help in times of need. Pregnant women, for instance, received help from other wives with their household chores and childcare responsibilities. In general, though, women appeared to receive little support from male radicals. In 1904 members of Branch 1 passed a resolution stipulating that once a week men should stay at home with the children while their wives attended meetings or lectures. Although the resolution reminded men that they could not “free one part of humanity and allow the other to be enslaved,” the meetings

56 Fani Soloviov in 50 voriker vubileum kiever brentsh 25 arbeter ring, 1906-1956 (Fifty year jubilee of Kiever Branch 25 of the Workmen’s Circle), n.p., Box 16, Folder 93, YIVO. On Jewish women avoiding domestic service as well economic conditions in the Pale of Settlement generally, see Glenn, Daughters, 8-49.

57 “Froyen” (Women), in Di geshikhte fun 60 vor arbeter ring brentsh 207/40 vor arbeter ring brentsh 207-b (The history of sixty years of Workmen’s Circle branch 207/Forty years of Workmen’s Circle branch 207-b), p. 6, Box 19, Folder 119, YIVO. See also Khane Klein, “Yorn loyfn” (Years Run), in Tsen voriger vubiley zshurnal pinsker froyen brentsh 210-B arbeter ring (Tenth year anniversary journal of the Pinsker women’s branch 210-b of the Workmen’s Circle), 1929-1939, n.p., Box 20, Folder 121, YIVO. In this article she discusses her early activism in Russia which she continued after emigrating to the United States in 1908. Her U.S. political group evolved into a branch of Arbeter Ring.

58 Shapiro, 30.
to which the wives were "sent" by their husbands were not regular branch meetings, but rather ones intended to build support for separate "ladies' branches." This is one of the few recorded instances of organized male support for women in the early days of the organization.

Like the American socialists studied by Mari Jo Buhle, Circle members disagreed on whether women should join the same branches as the men, the "regular" branches, or form their own separate groups -- the "ladies' branches" and women's auxiliaries. Some, especially women of a more radical mind set, insisted that they join the "regular" branches, disavowing any form of separatist organizing. Because their desire for absolute equality did not obtain for such women prominent posts within the organization, they have left few traces in the historical record.

Other women opted to join the ladies' branches, forums where they might gain organizational skills and public speaking experience in an atmosphere many found more accommodating than that of the regular branches. Similar groups had arisen as early as the 1870s among German socialists in the United States and later among other urban socialists

59 Zaks, Geshikhte, 213-216 [quotation from 215]. Also in A.S. Zaks, "Der arbeter ring: zayn antshteyung un antvikiung" (The Workmen's Circle: Its rise and development), 1926, p. 149 [fragment torn from a larger publication], Box 1, Folder 1, YIVO.

60 Hurwitz, 208. In commenting upon the initial lack of success in recruiting women to the ladies' branches around 1904-5, Zaks maintains that "instead of going it alone/remaining separate, the radical women joined the regular branches." Zaks, Geshikhte, 255. For similar debates in the Socialist Party see Mari Jo Buhle, Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 121-35. For a different arena showing female union members joining auxiliaries, see Melinda Chateauvert, Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 3-16.
as well. As in these groups, women in the Workmen's Circle found that this strategy did not lead to an equitable distribution of power nor did it solve their problems with men in the organization. Some men opposed allowing these separate groups to participate in the Circle as anything other than auxiliaries. Arguing that women became ill more frequently than did men, these leaders demanded that women's insurance funds remain segregated from the general fund. This insistence on women's physical difference as a barrier to their administrative equality guaranteed that prior to the third convention in 1903 the ladies' branches remained "hilfs-organizatsies" (helping-organizations) only, separate but unequal to the general branches. Members in these special branches received no benefits from the Circle itself and owed it nothing in return. Like other female auxiliaries tied to fraternal organizations, married women in the ladies' branches received benefits only through their husbands' memberships or through the limited sums raised by their group itself.

In 1903 the ladies' branches achieved some success when the convention approved a proposal incorporating them into the general order with members gaining the right to a

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61 It is possible that single-women tended to join the regular branches while married women joined the ladies' branches. Unfortunately there is no concrete documentation to verify this probability. On the German Socialist Women's Auxiliaries and Socialist women's clubs, see Mari Jo Buhle, 14-20, 110-2. On the Women's National Committee of the Socialist Party see Mari Jo Buhle, 145-75; and Sally M. Miller, "Women in the Party Bureaucracy: Subservient Functionaries," in Flawed Liberalism: Socialism and Feminism, ed. Sally M. Miller (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 14-35. On women's auxiliaries in other fraternal organizations and unions, see Clawson 178-210; and, Chateauvert.

62 Hurwitz, 209; Zaks, Geshikhte, 215, 253. On the patriarchal nature of insurance benefit provision, see Soyer, 7, 79-80, 86. The term "ladies" (in Yiddish "leydis") could be employed by socialists to communicate derision or to mock women's organizing efforts, particularly those of middle-class women. However, as used in published organizational material on Arbeter Ring women, especially sources produced between 1930-1950, this sense seems not to have applied. Indeed, women themselves proudly referred to their own groups as "leydis brentshes." This does not rule out the possibility that some men and women used the term, especially in private, to mock those Arbeter Ring women whom they felt were aping the pretensions of the middle-class. The Socialist Party also used the term "ladies' branches." See Mari Jo Buhle, 121-2.
limited sum of insurance. The convention also resolved to increase the number of ladies' branches, with the understanding they would eventually attain the same rights and duties as general branches. Soon ladies' branches sprang up in New York, Brooklyn, and a few other cities. Notwithstanding this initial popularity, however, many women still preferred to become members of a regular branch or remain in the auxiliaries, which demanded no financial attachment to the Circle at all.\(^63\)

Despite this significant shift in policy, women's problems did not end at the third convention. Two years later leaders refused to seat ladies' branch members at the fifth convention. Because such groups were not specifically mentioned in the order's new charter, opponents felt they should not be considered a legal part of the Circle. This position infuriated the "ladies." Maximilian Hurwitz maintains that they "flew up in arms" and sent letters to the general branches castigating certain leaders as "reactionaries who were against equal rights for women." When the majority of the branches passed resolutions demanding they be seated at the convention, the women claimed victory. Even though the leadership finally allowed the women to attend the convention, the group remained "perplexed" regarding the women's legal status. However, its efforts to clarify this question were halfhearted at best.\(^64\) In 1906 the order finally moved to address the needs of ladies' branch

\(^63\) The fact that men discussed "women's illness" in general and yet only ruled on the ladies' branches seems to indicate that those women who joined the regular branches at Class I status accepted insurance equal to that of men, meaning insurance that did not recognize differences in needs and conditions. Zaks, Geshikhte, 229, 253-55; Hurwitz, 209-210.

\(^64\) Seeking clarification, the convention proposed that a small committee convene in order to seek a lawyer's advice on ladies' branch membership rights. This committee never resolved the issue, if it ever even met at all. Similarly, a committee arranged by the fifth convention to work with the Circle leadership on codifying the status of the special branches also withered away without a final ruling. See Zaks, Geshikhte, 256-257; Hurwitz, 210-211.
members by instituting a “second class” of insurance for “wives of members, single women, or wives of non-members who were not working against the principles and interest of the Workmen's Circle” and who belonged to the ladies' branches. While this action formally inducted ladies’ branch members into the order, they still lacked voting privileges at conventions. This frustrating situation no doubt contributed to the low number of ladies branches officially installed at this convention; only four groups chose to become ladies’ branches. The other women, having grown tired of constantly battling the regular branches, opted to join them instead. Many more, surely, continued involvement in the informal ladies’ auxiliaries, for which there are no membership statistics.

Despite the low numbers, the ladies’ branch members persisted in trying to be full members of the organization. In the ensuing years such women turned their attention to equalizing insurance benefits, struggles in which the tension between physical difference and desire for membership equality is most starkly presented. The battles with the administration taught ladies’ branch members that their physical and social position as mothers set them apart from the Circle’s vision of the independent, autonomous worker-member. In an organization based upon traditional family relationships, where single people carried their own insurance but husbands provided for their families, ladies’ branch members challenged the very core membership model by demanding to be wives, mothers, and members. Their demands for inclusion in the group and benefit packages suited to their needs brought to the surface the inherently gendered, and until then virtually unquestioned, nature of Circle membership.

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65 Hurwitz, 211; Zaks, Geshikhte, 257.
Initially the women appear to have gained a measure of success. The eighth convention in 1908 voted to allow class 2 members to upgrade their insurance to class 1, the class to which men belonged, although still maintaining the different rules for funeral coverage. Supporters of the measure argued that despite stereotypes about women's health, statistically they made fewer claims than men. They also smoked and drank less and tended to work in less dangerous jobs. The only illness that affected women more frequently, they conceded, were those euphemistically named "special women's diseases." In their opinion this was not sufficient reason to vote against the measure.® Commenting upon the convention's actions, Maximilian Hurwitz later proclaimed that with this measure "the fight of the women members for equal rights in the Workmen's Circle had been won, gloriously and completely."®

Such declarations of victory, upon closer inspection, appear unwarranted. The ability to upgrade to class 1 did not entirely alleviate women's problems. Even though women theoretically now had coverage equivalent to men's, the medical particulars were far from agreed upon. Women still did not receive coverage for those conditions that deviated from the male work-based life cycle. At the 1911 convention delegates struggled to define precisely which diseases the Circle should cover. In the past the National Executive Committee had refused to pay for diseases unique to women, yet this policy, reported the

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66 Arbeter ring: akhter vorlikher konvenshon, (The Workmen's Circle: eighth yearly convention), 1908, p. 34, Box 3, Folder 13, YIVO. At some point Class 2 lost its gendered characterization. For instance, at the 1908 convention the National Executive Committee urged that wives of men in Class 2 should be allowed to join the organization at Class 3 membership. Class 3 membership was for wives of Class 1 members and only provided for death benefits. See Arbeter ring vorlikher report, (The Workmen's Circle yearly report), 1908, p. 57, Box 3, Folder 14, YIVO.

Control Committee, should be overturned because the group's constitution did not delineate exemptions to coverage based on disease. Following the usual Circle procedure, they suggested that a committee study this question to clarify which specific "women's diseases" would be covered and which would be denied. Like previous committees established to investigate women's issues, this one seems to have failed its mission (if it ever met at all), for the issue re-surfaced in 1918. At that convention the Benefits Committee claimed that while everyone knew "women's diseases" did not warrant coverage, confusion still existed regarding precisely which disease constituted a "woman's disease." For example, some women had been denied benefits because they admitted to having tumors, an affliction apparently covered so long as the tumors were not specifically "female" in nature. In order to clarify this muddled situation, the committee recommended that women receive benefits for all diseases not associated with pregnancy and childbirth.

This situation conveys women's awkward status in the organization. Their equality with men seemed limited to those instances when their lives mirrored one another. In those instances when their lives diverged, be it through marriage, pregnancy, or leaving the workforce, women were deemed outside the purview of Circle coverage. The Workmen's Circle, like similar mutual aid societies, based its work upon the patriarchal construct whereby the husband was regarded as the primary breadwinner and therefore, the "regular" member, while his wife maintained a dependent status. Even the United States' Social

68 Report fun arbeter ring tsu der elfter konvenshon (Report of the Workmen's Circle to the eleventh convention), 1911, pp. 37-38, Box 3, Folder 16, YIVO.

69 Der fraynd. Konvenshon numer (The friend. Convention number), May 1919, p. 31, Box 4, Folder 19, YIVO.
Security Administration later embraced similar notions of male centrality and female dependence. The difficulty challenging this model in the Circle became even more evident when the ladies' branches complained about the distribution of funeral benefits. The organization routinely gave such benefits to male members for their deceased non-member wives but frequently denied cases where a ladies' branch member wished to bury her non-member spouse. In 1908 the National Executive Committee ruled that women whose husbands were not members themselves could not file a claim for funeral coverage. At the 10th Convention, delegates from ladies' branch 102 urged that the funerals of non-members, regardless of gender, be paid for on the basis of their spouses' coverage. Women in Branch 102 continued their advocacy on this issue well into the next decade. A cartoon in a 1925 convention publication depicted a rather strident looking ladies' branch proponent, Besi Alinski, pounding her hand on a podium and demanding "equal rights for women" on behalf of ten ladies' branches.

With their energy focused on achieving membership and insurance benefits that were equal to those already provided to men but which also addressed their particular needs as women, Arbeter Ring women did not develop the types of programs initiated during the same period by the NCJW and Hadassah. Hadassah and the Council, by conceding the battle for organizational parity by simply separating from men, focused on creating a special domain
where women could prevail. Arbeter Ring women, on the other hand, chose to pursue equality within their own group. Yet even in light of this commitment, some women in the Workmen’s Circle did not feel that gender equality precluded a certain amount of separatist organizing at the branch level. Such women endeavored to find a means by which to be equal to men without ignoring the way that gender affected their lives. All Circle women initially found their energies consumed by the struggle to find a place for themselves in their socialist brotherhood, whether they joined the regular branches or struggled for recognition in the ladies’ branches.

NCJW and Social Welfare Work

Although the NCJW initially considered itself primarily a religious organization, the group soon undertook charity work on the local level, particularly in trying to serve segments of the population overlooked by existing organizations. Services for women and children, especially to single immigrant women, seemed to be the area of most glaring inadequacy in the leadership's opinion. After the formation of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods in 1913, which focused on the religious sphere, Council increasingly turned its attention to philanthropic matters. This shift away from religion came in the wake of rabbinical aversion to Council's earlier forays into spiritual matters. From the start rabbis attempted to dissuade women from taking too large a part in religious education and theological discussions. In light of the rabbis' obstinacy and the appearance of the NFTS,
Council women entered a field where power, at least for the time being, was not quite so contested.\textsuperscript{72}

Long before this organizational shift became evident, Council leaders expressed special interest in social welfare work with women and children. An 1897 publication announced that "women's work ought first to turn toward the condition of women and children, the two most helpless classes among [the "delinquent, defective and dependent"]."\textsuperscript{73} The Department of Immigrant Aid, organized in the first year of Council's existence, endeavored to protect young women who were considered to be vulnerable as they made the trip from Europe to the United States. In order to shield them from the dangers of traveling alone, particularly of being lured into prostitution, the department distributed leaflets in Europe warning young girls about the hazards one could meet when traveling to the United States. It also placed volunteers at Ellis Island to greet newcomers and to assist them in adjusting to life in their new home. As part of this transition, Council offered guidance on the citizenship process and referred women to Americanization programs.\textsuperscript{74}

Their experiences at Ellis Island alerted Council leaders to the need for women's direct involvement in immigration work. From the outset, Council volunteers noticed that men's groups neglected the problems young girls encountered upon arrival in the United


\textsuperscript{73} 1897 Program of Council of Jewish Women, Convention publication, p. 25, Box 4, Folder 1, Solomon Collection, LC.

\textsuperscript{74} Korelitz, 179-181; Rogow, 138-152. On Jewish involvement in prostitution, especially the criminal underworld in New York, see Edward Bristow, Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight Against White Slavery (New York: Clarendon Press, 1982).
States. When they called this to the men's attention, Sadie American recalled, “the men shrugged their shoulders and said: ‘Why cannot men do all the things that are necessary; why do you need women to look after the girls; what is it that the girls need that they do not get? Prove it to us.’” One of the major problems young married women faced was desertion, and Council felt that men had been less than successful in dealing with this problem. American asserted that men, due to their “conservative” nature, simply could not understand what it was that made the girls’ situation so different from that of boys or why women needed to be actively involved in this port work.75

American provided a few examples to elucidate the sorts of problems immigrant girls confronted when dealing with their helpers at the ports of entry. Although her intention was to illustrate the difficulties men had communicating with young women, her stories ultimately reveal the more general language and cultural barriers separating all port workers from the immigrants. In one instance a male doctor, testing immigrants to make sure they were not “feeble-minded,” asked a young woman what she had worn for clothing in the Old Country. The new arrival replied in English, “paper,” a response that led her examining physician to suspect her of being mentally deficient. It took some time, and the volunteers’ questioning of other people from her homeland, before they discerned that the young woman was using an English translation for a Russian word denoting both “paper” and “cotton rags.” Another young woman, upon being asked by a doctor to count backward from twenty, also replied in such a way so as to raise suspicion about her mental capacities. She responded to

the physician's request with a simple, "Warum?" (Why?) Female volunteers eventually explained to her the necessity for answering all the physician's questions, no matter how silly, and thus saved her from being denied entry.76

As immigration to the United States increased, so too did the Council's interest in philanthropic work among the newly-arriving Jewish population. In addition to port work, Council fervently sought to counter Christian proselytizers who attempted to convert Jews while providing health care services, either at their own centers or through individual home visits. In response Council started its own program of "friendly visiting" that also aimed to improve children's health and accelerate the acculturation process of their parents. Although these visits took place among co-religionists, stark differences in class and culture ensured a certain degree of tension.77

Despite this class friction, the NCJW proved instrumental in furnishing a host of necessary services to the immigrant community. In addition to providing health care, Council also dispensed information and legal advice on the citizenship process, advocated secular education, including sex education in the public schools, supported private religious training for girls, and initiated programs for the often forgotten rural Jews. The NCJW leaders felt it was their duty to help the immigrants maintain a strong religious identity while at the same time providing information on how to become patriotic citizens. The Americanization work particularly intensified following the passage of the Nineteenth

76 Ibid., 179-80.
77 Rogow, 140-3, 150-2.
Amendment in 1920 as Council assumed responsibility for assisting immigrant women to become properly educated American voters.  

Council leaders soon began to advocate for social work professionalization. This support, however, seemed motivated less by any expressed concern for clients' feelings than by the desire to win potential colleagues' respect. As early as the founding meeting in September 1893, Sadie American suggested that the organization could avoid some of the negative stereotypes associated with middle-class women's benevolence if they referred to their work as "philanthropy" rather than "charity." Forty years later Hannah Solomon attempted to explain the divisions that had existed earlier in the century between lady volunteers and those who aspired to professionalize social work. At the time of Council's birth, she asserted, "Lady Bountifuls had tried to disburse [charity] with hearts alone and undervalued planning." Such women feared that partisans for rational methodologies were "devoid of sympathy." Council, however, had been among the first to institute a program where both "heart and brain worked in harmony together." Solomon singled out Jane Addams's work with Chicago's Jews for praise where in 1902 Jews comprised 75 percent of Hull House's clientele. By the turn of the century, Solomon proudly remembered, Council women occupied an important place in the developing field of social work.  

In their endorsement of professionalization, Council leaders did not abandon their conviction that all women, even volunteers, had a natural aptitude for social welfare work.

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78 Korelitz, 188-95; Rogow, 133-54.

79 Elwell, 75-6.

80 Hannah G. Solomon, section of a speech, "C - Welfare Work Forty Years Ago and Today," [handwritten on top of page, "for Council"], p. 2-4, Box 6, Folder 10, Solomon Collection, LC.
They continued to advance women's participation in such endeavors whether they had received professional training or not. Employing language quite similar to that used by many female social reformers and Hadassah leaders, Council leaders proposed a vision of complementary gender roles. Men and women performed distinct tasks but each group remained vital to the overall success of their joint project — the general advancement of Jews in the United States. At the 1914 Council triennial, Sadie American outlined this concept of interrelatedness:

We women have time in the daytime to come together, and the men have time in the evening to come together, and the time will come when we will fully realize that each needs the other, for advice, for their different points of view, male and female, the men contributing that which is virile, if you please, but the womanly influence equally valuable, equally necessary;...we women not looked upon as simply doing women's work, but [both men and women] cooperating for progress.81

By the time of the First World War, Council had become extremely attuned to the ways that male-led social welfare agencies could overlook the special needs of immigrant women and had formulated their own programs to address those needs. Though cognizant of how immigrant women were neglected in the programs of other welfare groups, Council made no significant effort to create a cross-class or even cooperative relationship with the women they aimed to serve. Still, their advocacy on behalf of these women resulted in the NCJW articulating a distinct need for women's public work and in convincing their male contemporaries not only of the necessity for such work, but of women's natural aptitude for it.

Creating a Gendered Zionism

Hadassah's commitment to a specified ideology and movement and its separation from men ensured that it would not have to experiment in its early years with various programs of action as did women in the NCJW and Arbeter Ring. From the very start, Hadassah focused its energy on providing medical services to the Palestinian populations and considered this to be work especially suited to American women. Hadassah's programmatic and ideological foundations seemed secure, yet its semi-independent status soon led to friction with the established male-led organization, the Federation of American Zionists. In the process of dealing with the doubts of male Zionists regarding their capabilities, Hadassah women formulated a gendered Zionism that celebrated what they perceived as women's natural propensity for social welfare work.

Initially larger and more powerful, the FAZ frequently clashed with the upstart Hadassah. The FAZ tended to consider Hadassah a mere collecting agency, a philanthropy, or worst of all, an insignificant charity, despite the fact that such a role was precisely the one that the men had planned for a national women's organization. Henrietta Szold and her fellow board members rejected such characterizations. They quickly moved to ensure a degree of autonomy for the women's group and at the same time distance their work from that of traditional charities. In 1915 Szold told the Zionist publication Maccabaean that Hadassah was not charity. "We go to Palestine equipped as American Jewish women particularly are, with philanthropic and social work, with the purpose of bringing to Palestine
the results of American healing art." Szold believed, not unlike the FAZ men, that American women were more interested in practical projects than in ideological discourse; however, unlike the men, she thought of this as a virtue, not a flaw, in women's nature. Nevertheless, many male Zionists criticized Hadassah as being not quite Zionist enough because they thought the women's group was overly concerned with what seemingly looked to be charity. FAZ leader, Louis Lipsky, contended that because men involved themselves in "all phases of Zionist development" they found Hadassah's narrow focus on social welfare alone "curious."

This Zionist condemnation of "charity" was not merely a quirk of certain male leaders, but rather manifested itself on several interlocking levels. First, the FAZ disparaged charity as well as philanthropy on grounds that it did not further the Zionist program of reclaiming Eretz Israel. In this paradigm one important aspect of Zionism was the creation of the New Jewish Man: to transform the sickly, weak European ghetto Jew into a healthy, strong Palestinian farmer. This required a focus on agricultural projects, physical labor, and "improvement" of the land -- creating farms and orchards from a desert. Charity was

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83 "Address by Mr. Lipsky at Hadassah Convention," 1921, p. 1, RG 3, Box 2, Folder 4, HA.

84 The concept of Muscular Jewry was developed by Max Nordau. He believed that Jews, men most notably, should battle anti-Semitic conceptions of the Jews as physically inferior by engaging in organized athletics and other physical activity. See Anita Shapira, Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948 (New York, 1992), 13. Michael Berkowitz and Paula Hyman discuss the gendered construction of the concept in its focus on masculinity, not the physical health of all Jews. See Michael Berkowitz, Zionist Culture and West European Jewry Before the First World War (London, 1993); and, Paula Hyman, Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representations of Women (Seattle, 1995), 144-5. See also Claudia Prestel, "Zionist Rhetoric and Women's Equality (1897-1933): Myth and Reality," San Jose Studies 20 (Fall 1994): 4-28;
women's work, not Zionist work, and therefore considered inherently unproductive. At first
the FAZ did not even deem Hadassah's work to be especially practical. In a letter to the 1921
Hadassah Convention, Henrietta Szold noted that at its founding “[Hadassah] was
contemptuously charged with being, not practical, - that would have been kindly censure
but philanthropic, which, from a Zionist point of view, was the last word in malice.”*85
Beyond this Zionist element the urban work reminded Zionist men of halukah, or charitable
giving to support those people, generally the elderly, who chose to live out their days in
Jerusalem not from any Zionist motivation, but simply because they wished to die in the land
of Israel. Zionists wanted to distinguish their work of modern nation-building from alms-
giving to the destitute, religious elderly.*86

On yet another level, Hadassah originated at a time when social work generally, but
particularly Jewish social work, was in the process of federation, specialization and
professionalization, all of which, for the Jewish community, despite the efforts of the NCJW,
meant that organized male-led initiatives superseded women’s independent work. Many
practitioners of the developing field of social work dismissed the work of well-meaning
volunteers as unproductive at best and detrimental at worst. Many advocated replacing these
amateurs with social workers trained to handle the needs of the sick and the poor with
professional objectivity. While this tended to reduce the numbers of female volunteers

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85 “Letter from Henrietta Szold,” 26 October 1921, p. 5, RG 3, Box 2, Folder 4, HA.
86 Dash, 105. For an overview of attitudes toward halukah in the United States and Palestine, see Peter
Grose, Israel in the Mind of America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983); and Hanna Herzog, “The Fringes
of the Margin: Women’s Organizations in the Civic Sector of the Yishuv,” in Pioneers and Homemakers:
Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel, ed. Deborah Bernstein (Albany: State University of New York Press,
involved in such work, many women received training in the developing professional field of social work.87

Hadassah women, then, perceived as untrained volunteers interested in social welfare issues, operated within a milieu that at once designated them selfish amateurs disinterested in the larger questions of ideology and politics. If they sought equality with men in the movement on male terms — intense debate and unceasing "wrangling" — the men still dismissed them as mere women, better suited to fundraising and charity.88 When they moved, finally, to accept that responsibility and actually pursue such philanthropic goals, they continually met with resistance because this work remained in the men's view mundane charity pursued by amateurish ladies, not professionals and certainly not true Zionists. Or, as Szold later noted, "there has been constant criticism because [Hadassah] was not political enough, or because it was too political[,] either it didn't think or it thought too independently." She questioned whether it were possible that male leaders simply wanted large numbers of new "recruits" but "not their minds."89 In the eyes of the male leadership, women could not cast off their status as bourgeois helpmates to those better suited to guide the movement. Yet the Hadassah leadership, Henrietta Szold in particular, remained undaunted by this conundrum and created a means by which "amateur" Zionists could


88 Joan Dash describes Szold's frustration with FAZ meetings, asserting that she soon grew tired of the "endless, pointless wrangling" of the men. Dash, 104-5.

89 Proceedings and Speeches at 14th Convention, p. 4, RG 3, Box 6, Folder 2, HA.
promote practical social welfare work in Palestine. The contribution of these female “amateurs,” they believed, could be every bit as important as that of their male counterparts.

For their earliest projects, the Hadassah board chose to send two visiting nurses to Palestine, supported with funds donated by philanthropist Nathan Straus and non-Zionist supporters from Chicago. This non-Zionist benevolence did not improve the perception of the Hadassah mission in the eyes of the FAZ. The early work, however, was important and effective in lowering maternity and infant mortality among the population of Jerusalem. In 1913 Jane Addams and Rabbi Stephen Wise both visited the nurses’ settlement and gave favorable evaluations of the work being done there. At first the local population had little faith in Hadassah. The proponents of modern, scientific methods clashed with those who believed in “myths and magic,” as a later pamphlet published by Hadassah characterized them. This propaganda piece described the people in Palestine as practicing “ancient rites...[including] conjurings, smearings, amulet-wearing, weird incantations and the application of hot irons to affected portions of the body.” Not unlike “lady visitors” struggling to Americanize immigrants back home, this pamphlet claimed that Hadassah arrived in Palestine to face “this medieval setting...with the latest scientific ideas.” Despite the initial cultural clash, over time the local population began to trust the nurses and, through them, Hadassah in general.


91 “A Brief History of Hadassah’s Activities,” pamphlet published in June 1932, RG 4, Box 21, HA.
Along with the nurses' program in Palestine, Hadassah embarked on an educational plan for American women. Articles and announcements in the first several years of the *Bulletin* reveal this interest in educating members in the "Hadassah plan" and in Zionism generally. Early issues contain suggested reading lists, which include such Zionist luminaries as Theodore Herzl, Leon Pinsker, and Ahad Ha'Am. Women were urged to form study circles to read and discuss these works while also striving to raise money for the practical projects.92 The leaders ardently insisted that their activities "be removed from the class of charities into the class into which it belongs - philanthropy in the highest sense of the term."93 Like their counterparts in the NCJW, Hadassah leaders wanted their work understood within the context of professional Jewish social welfare work generally. Yet Hadassah women also desired to show how their work fit into the overall Zionist mission as well.

Hadassah initially allowed non-Zionist women interested in their Palestinian projects to become associate members. Over time the group would do away with this type of membership and also insist upon only one chapter per city, despite the diversity of Jewish women's needs in large cities such as Brooklyn. Both initiatives originated from a desire that Hadassah become a streamlined, efficient and purely Zionist organization. These reform

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93 *Bulletin*, no. 6 (January 1915): 2.
measures also served to bring Jewish women from a variety of backgrounds together on an equal basis to pursue their interest in Zionism.\textsuperscript{94}

Hadassah's membership, like that of the Zionist movement in general, would begin to grow significantly only after the outbreak of World War I. Yet the organization had laid important groundwork in the few short years of its existence. The leadership had instituted a definite program of action, one that enabled American women to take the lead in an area of work neglected by other Zionists. In assuming responsibility for the medical needs of Palestine, especially the urban centers, American Zionist women found a means by which they could assert some degree of independent authority. Publicizing the success of their efforts would be used to increase their membership in the ensuing years. Moreover, the often negative interactions they had with male Zionists, who perceived their work as being more like traditional benevolence than Zionist nation-building, led them to formulate a positive, gendered understanding of their work. In explaining to themselves and others how their work actually did serve the Zionist program, Hadassah leaders relied on a rhetoric similar to that of NCJW leaders. But unlike those other middle-class reformers, Hadassah characterized its work as part of the general plan to upbuild Palestine and to create a homeland for the world's Jews. During and especially after the war, Hadassah would begin to re-conceptualize its Palestine projects as laying the foundation for a haven for the world's persecuted Jews. As the women's desire to protect Jews intensified so too would their use

\textsuperscript{94} Goldstein, 23. Alice Seligsberg recalled that "We were not permitted to have more than one chapter in a city and that chapter had to include rich and poor, Americanized socially elite and foreign born." Quoted in Joyce Antler, "Zion in Our Hearts: Henrietta Szold and the American Jewish Women's Movement," in Kessler, 43.
of maternalist language and imagery to describe their unique contribution to the Zionist enterprise.

**On the Eve of World War I**

At the turn of the century, Jewish women, like their gentile contemporaries, embraced a move toward the public sphere. Women from across the political and class spectrums joined organizations or formed their own during this period. The shape and nature of the groups Jewish women founded depended to a great degree on their own life experiences, not the least of which included interactions with men of their class and ideological viewpoint. While the women in all three organizations believed they had much to contribute to their movements and to society in general, each group forged its own path, devising unique ways of negotiating societal strictures and male expectations of women's capabilities. In doing so Jewish women created a variety of means by which to enter the public sphere, provide for the community, and further their own ideals.

Despite their differences, women in all three groups found that a certain amount of separatism from men afforded them more independence and autonomy over their own actions. Women in the National Council of Jewish Women, who had the greatest financial resources, founded an organization free of male intervention after an unsuccessful bid to join together with men in planning for the 1893 Parliament of Religions. Hadassah women worked more closely with the men in their movement but learned quickly that they too might need to devise their own organizational sphere if they wished to develop plans and create projects dedicated to the needs of women and children. Finally, women in the Workmen's Circle split over the issue of separatism. Some demanded to be members on exactly the same
basis as men while others recognized that, unless membership benefits changed, women would never achieve a meaningful equality in the group. The women who acknowledged the importance of gender difference attempted to incorporate a more subtle, yet still equal, vision of women's place in the Circle by forming the ladies' branches. The attempts of women in all three groups met with stiff opposition from men and some women, who continued to believe that equality prevailed only where women ignored their differences with men. Despite each group's varied attempts to use separatism as a means of better asserting their public presence and promoting their agendas, all three groups maintained a close affiliation with and dedication to the Jewish people. During the war women would find that meeting the urgent needs of the Jewish "nation," variously defined by each organization, would necessitate putting gender politics on the back burner.
CHAPTER 3

THE CRISIS YEARS: JEWISH WOMEN AND WORLD WAR I

The First World War had a profound impact on the American Jewish community despite the fact that the United States did not directly involve itself in the conflict until mid-1917. Overnight, following the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914, American Jewish organizations turned away from their individual projects to large scale international relief endeavors. The intensity and scope of the crisis impelled American Jews to act in concert, cooperating to a degree unknown before the war. Women’s groups, like other American Jewish organizations, immediately responded to the plight of European Jewry and joined in national efforts to coordinate relief fundraising and distribution.

Despite women’s heightened involvement, the war years seemed only to exacerbate male attitudes against which women had been fighting for years. Women from all three organizations discovered that after the outbreak of their war their opinions were even less frequently sought than before, their leadership rarely summoned. In an effort to respond most effectively to the crisis, Jewish women willingly joined together with men’s groups to coordinate the speedy distribution of relief funds. But this cooperation soon resulted in a near total subordination of women’s plans to those devised by the men. In some cases, like
the Workmen's Circle, discussion of gender issues virtually disappeared as men and women joined together to help their "brothers and sisters" in Eastern Europe. The NCJW and Hadassah also momentarily placed their own projects secondary to fundraising for the male-led relief campaigns. Women's experiences in the war-time relief campaigns would soon challenge their faith in men's commitment to gender equality; cooperation, they found, rarely resulted in recognition of women's significant contribution to these efforts. Women's cooperation and continuing, if muted, conflict with men reinforced a strong sense of gender identity -- by 1920 members of all three organizations spoke forthrightly and proudly about women's accomplishments and capabilities.

Women's participation in the wartime relief initiatives and their collaboration with others, both Jewish and non-Jewish, significantly influenced women's personal lives and sense of identity. Not only did women experience a growing sense of gender consciousness, they also began to re-examine their ideas regarding Jewish identity. Women's war work and the alliances they made reveal the development of more subtle, often contesting, understandings of Jewish identity arising during these years. The war uncovered fissures in the normative Jewish identity propounded by elite American Jews. Although all the major organizations rallied to the call to save the "Jewish people," the definition of what precisely that meant was increasingly complicated by gender, class, ideological, political, and religious differences. By war's end divisions within the American Jewish community that many people had previously left unexamined could no longer be ignored.
The Plight of Jews in Eastern Europe and Palestine

When the nations of Europe went to war in August 1914, American Jews viewed the developments with intense anxiety. The vast majority of the world's 15 million Jews lived in those areas of Europe most directly affected by the onslaught of war -- Germany and the Russian and Austrian-Hungarian Empires. As members of the most recent wave of immigration, most American Jews felt a visceral connection to the events in Europe. Although they expressed great affinity for those they left behind, few American Jews, if any, worried about Russia's Tsarist regime, which was responsible for some of the worst persecutions of the Jews in modern times. Therefore, when war broke out between the Central Powers and the Allied nations, including Russia, most American Jews refused to lend support to bolster the Tsar's war effort. At best Jews hoped that France and Great Britain might pressure their ally to change governmental policies affecting that Empire's Jewish subjects.

Within a few short months even these faint hopes died when it became all too apparent that the war had only intensified the Jewish plight, especially of those in the Pale of Settlement, where most Russian Jews lived. In the fall of 1915, as German forces advanced quickly into Russian territory, the Russian military laid the blame for their losses on Jews and other non-Russian populations, calling them conspirators, traitors who loved Germany more than Russia. This military attitude served, in some areas, to inflame local antisemitic fervor, which not infrequently resulted in pogroms or other anti-Jewish actions.

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The Russian government in turn ordered the expulsion of large numbers of Jews from the Eastern front, not to protect them from the violence of their neighbors but rather to prevent any further "sabotage." During the rest of 1915 the government forcibly relocated some 600,000 Jews further East, sometimes with only the briefest of warning, providing Jews with little or no time to pack their belongings or put their affairs in order. These mass evacuations had the unintended effect of weakening Pale restrictions limiting where Jews could live. It had become untenable, in the government's opinion, to allow Jews to remain in the Pale, particularly as the more Eastern cities of that area became congested with refugees, yet to permit them to move even further East required the revision of laws restricting Jewish settlement in Russia proper. Although eventually these measures were taken, the tremendous growth in the population of the Eastern cities, both in and outside the Pale, put an onerous burden on the local Jewish populations. Disease and hunger ran rampant in cities such as Vilna (Vilnius), which sheltered some 22,000 refugees. Given the authorities' prevailing attitude toward the Jews, state-sponsored aid was meager at best. The Central Powers' military successes offered some form of relief to the fleeing Jews; by late 1915 most of the Pale of Settlement lay under their control; in their swift advance they overtook some two-thirds of the refugees, thus enabling many to return home. This did nothing to raise the Tsar's opinion of the Jews nor did it significantly improve their physical plight; one estimate places the value of Jewish material losses at $400,000,000.²

Jews were no safer outside the boundaries of the Russian Empire. Russian soldiers carried their antisemitic beliefs across the border into Galicia, a portion of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire inhabited by large numbers of Jews. While all Galicians suffered tremendously as the various armies battled back and forth across the territory, Jews alone faced the special enmity of Russians who thought they had greater attachment to Germans than to the Slavs. As they had at home, the Russian military attempted to “purify” through violence those areas gained by military conquest. The refugee population in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire rivaled that of the Russian lands. Perhaps as many as half the population of Jewish Galicia, or 400,000 people, fled westward to escape the invading Russian army. In all areas where the Jewish refugees congregated food shortages and inflation soon followed. Although both were typical occurrences during war-time, in this particular case gentiles often laid the blame for these conditions on the Jewish refugees.  

In the fall of 1914 the Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of the Central Powers. At this point the small Jewish population in Palestine, many of whom had only recently moved there from Russia, faced a fate similar to that of their relatives in Eastern Europe. Turkish officials in Syria considered these Jews a serious threat to military security and in December 1914 ordered the expulsion of all Russian Jews living in Jaffa. Within a year some 11,000 Jews fled to Egypt. In April 1917 the Turkish authorities ordered the

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remaining Jews in Jaffa, some 9,000 people, to leave that city. As in Europe, disease and starvation ravaged the refugee populations in Palestine and Egypt.  

The war exposed the uniquely tenuous position of Jews living within the boundaries of the warring nations. Unlike other national groups, Jews inhabited areas on both sides of the conflict and were therefore readily accused as traitors or saboteurs. Antisemitism, easily inflated by war-time exigencies, magnified the already precarious position of Jews in Russia, Palestine and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Local populations in Galicia and elsewhere blamed the economic devastation not on their leaders but on Jewish merchants who had played a large role in local economies before the war. Russians believed that Jews felt closer to the German invaders than they did to their Slavic neighbors. Conversely, Ottoman officials thought Russian Jews living in Palestine retained an allegiance to their homeland and therefore would seek to undermine the Central Powers' war effort. Jews in the United States immediately recognized the dangers facing Jews trapped in the war zones of Eastern Europe and Palestine, and they quickly mobilized to provide whatever aid they could.

American Jews Respond to the War

In October 1914 the Orthodox community founded the Central Committee for Relief of the Jews Suffering Through the War (known simply as Central Relief Committee or CRC). Later in that same month the elite, generally non-Zionist, American Jewish Committee (AJC) called a meeting of some forty Jewish organizations in order to set up a united body for relief collection and distribution, the American Jewish Relief Committee

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Prominent Jews from across the ideological spectrum, including representatives from the CRC, participated in the formation of this new organization. When it became clear, however, that the elite men of the American Jewish Committee would dominate the leadership of the AJRC the Central Relief Committee opted to remain separated from the new entity. In order to maintain the highest efficiency possible in getting relief to the needy, the leaders of these two organizations worked out a compromise allowing for distinct fundraising bodies but unified distribution. In November 1914 the two relief committees established the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) to dispense funds to Jews in the warring nations. In August 1915 a third relief entity, the socialist People's Relief Committee (PRC), joined the other two in contributing to the JDC. Most major Jewish organizations participated in one way or another with these three committees. The NCJW formally joined the AJRC while the Workmen's Circle affiliated with the PRC. Hadassah contributed to AJRC and like other Zionists also raised funds for the Palestine Emergency Fund.

Council women, who had many ties to the non-Zionist, Reform leadership of the AJC, participated in the relief committee's founding conference. The sole NCJW delegate quickly noticed the dearth of women at the gathering and "made a plea in the name of Jewish Womanhood" that more women be included on important committees. She believed that the paucity of women's voices in the founding conference led to impractical fundraising

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5 Bauer, 3-7.

6 Mrs. Nathan Glauber, "Conference of National Jewish Organizations," Official Report of the Council of Jewish Women's Seventh Triennial, New Orleans, 1914, pp. 171-173, Box 4, Folder 5, Solomon Collection, LC. See also Rabbi Max Heller's response to Glauber's report, 173. He reported that other women were present, including the "Women's Council and CCAR."
plans. For example, several men thought women could help the AJRC by making door-to-door collections on Sunday afternoons. The Council delegate responded that women's participation in such activities were not only unseemly but possibly hazardous due to "the dangers lurking therein and the consequences that might ensue if women and girls went house to house on Sundays, of all days, soliciting money." In relating this incident to Council she urged all the sections to found their own AJRC fundraising committees, perhaps with a mind toward offsetting any more "helpful" suggestions from AJRC men.²

Despite these mild criticisms, in general the NCJW publicly expressed unqualified support for the AJRC efforts. Certain board members, though, privately vented their reservations about the unified relief effort. A few leaders feared that the relief funds might never reach the most needy Jews. Others worried that targeting relief funds at Jews alone might send the wrong message to non-Jews both at home and abroad. "It shows a certain narrowness," one women argued, "for the Jews of this country to specify simply Jews as the people to help."³ Such women worried that a targeted initiative could lead others to question American Jews' loyalty to the United States, especially if they participated in activities potentially construed as advocating Jewish nationalism. In countering these apprehensions, Evelyn Aronson Margolis relayed to her fellow board members the confidences of an acquaintance in the Red Cross who told her that targeted relief was absolutely necessary because the general aid "would never, never reach the Jews, at least in Europe." Margolis

² Ibid., 172.

³ Inez Lopez (Mrs. Octavus) Cohen of Charleston SC, cited in Full Proceedings of the Board of Managers of the Council of Jewish Women Session of December 6, 1914, pp. 14-15, Box 1, Folder 1, NCJW Collection, LC.
explained that her friend believed antisemitism to be so great that it led national and local governments to channel relief funds to gentiles alone, thus rendering Jews entirely dependent on the help of the Americans. She added that participating in the AJRC could do much to heighten Council's prominence in the arena of American Jewish organizational life: "I do think that if we want to show ourselves a really big National body of Jewish Women, now is the time to show it by a contribution." In the end her position won out as Council became an active contributor to the AJRC.\(^9\)

This argument, regarding whether or not to contribute to fundraising for Jews alone, would not become an issue of vehement contention among Jewish socialists in the Arbeter Ring until the postwar period. Initially, the Workmen's Circle, like other American Jewish socialist organizations, uniformly reacted to the outbreak of hostilities by asserting that the war would help capitalists alone and therefore should be opposed. This position reflected the working-class, internationalist mind-set of the pre-war socialist movement. But where socialists in Europe soon joined in the nationalist fervor of their lands, American Jewish socialists continued to reject the war because they vehemently opposed the liberal nations' alliance with Russia. Indeed, not a few East European immigrants hoped ardently for the Tsar's demise and openly rejoiced at each Russian military defeat.\(^{10}\) Jewish socialists in the Workmen's Circle also expressed annoyance at the lack of attention given to the predicament

\(^{9}\) Ibid., 14-15. For an example of Council's participation level see “President's Report,” Proceeding of the Board of Managers of the Council of Jewish Women, 26 April 1916, pp. 25-6, Box 2, Folder 1, NCJW Collection, LC. This meeting report notes that Council President Harris attended AJRC meetings on 25 March, 28 September, 5 October, and 12 December 1915.

facing East European Jews. In 1915 Circle leadership criticized the obvious discrepancy between the sympathetic and effusive American media response to the Belgian victims of German atrocities and the relative lack of reporting on the plight of Jews in Eastern Europe. The leaders argued that, unlike the Belgians, East Europeans Jews faced violence not only from invading armies, but also from their own nation's military forces and sometimes even their civilian neighbors. Questioning how many American Christians knew about the Jews' distress much less contributed money to a fund to relieve their misery, the leaders concluded that the crisis demanded "Jewish help for Jewish victims." Along with raising questions about Americans' general commitment to caring for Jewish war victims and about any unqualified Jewish allegiance to Germany, the Circle's position also signaled a distinct shift in its strict Marxist internationalist stance away from focusing on the working-class regardless of national or ethnic boundaries to something more nationalist in tenor. Following the war some Communist members of the group would question whether funds should be sent solely to Jewish workers or to the working-class regardless of national origin, but throughout the war the more nationalist position predominated.

Reflecting this move away from a strictly internationalist program, the Arbeter Ring, in addition to joining the PRC, also assisted in establishing an organization to work for

11 "Di belgishe un yidishe opfer fun krieg" (The Belgian and Jewish victims of the war), Der fraynd 6 (February 1915): 3-4. See also "Di rusishe regierung un di pogromen," and "Di shoyderlikhe noyt in poylen in galitsien" (The Russian government and the pogroms and The horrible hardship in Poland and Galicia), Der fraynd 6 (March 1915): 3-4. The first editorial reported on an extra-session held by the Russian Duma at which the minister of foreign affairs asserted that reports of pogroms initiated by Russian soldiers were just German inventions. The editors of Der fraynd were reluctant to believe the words of the Russian government. As they wrote in the second editorial, they felt that although the war affected all Europeans terribly, the Jews in the East were far from the worst off because they were "encircled by enemies." The editors questioned whether the foreign minister and others thought that pogroms were merely an unfortunate consequence of war, and that nothing at all distinguished the special plight of the Eastern Jews.
Jewish individual and national rights in Eastern Europe. This group, known as the Jewish National Workmen's Committee on Jewish Rights (NWC), included the United Hebrew Trades, the Jewish Federation of the Socialist Party, the Forverts Association, and the Labor Zionists. The NWC undertook to inform the public about the Jewish condition in Eastern Europe and to appeal to the U.S. government, International Congress of Socialists, and the postwar peace conferences to guarantee equal rights for Jews. The Arbeter Ring did not play as central a role in the NWC as it did in the PRC due in part to the presence of a very vocal Zionist contingent in the former. Circle members believed that the NWC should focus its activism for Jewish rights on Europe, while the Zionists were, in the words of one Circle member, "interested above all in the question of Eretz-Israel." Moreover, some members felt the Circle had been "pushed aside into a corner" in matters of NWC policy despite its major role in fundraising campaigns. The war's impact on Jewish life in Eastern Europe led Workmen's Circle to involve itself in relief work and subsequently to re-evaluate its stance on Jewish nationalism, yet the organization remained, for the time being, firmly opposed to Zionism.

When war broke out in 1914 Zionists, like socialists, found themselves on both sides of the conflict. The World Zionist Organization (WZO), headquartered in Berlin, had in its upper echelon of leaders men from both Allied and Central Power nations. In light of this

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situation, the WZO quickly turned to the United States with the request that this segment of the movement take over the management of Zionist affairs for the duration of the war. In August 1914 the WZO established the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs (PEC) based in the United States under the leadership of Louis Brandeis. The relocation of Zionist headquarters, in conjunction with the crisis atmosphere brought on by the war, resulted in the dramatic growth of the American Zionist movement. At the start of the war, the Federation of American Zionists (FAZ) had a membership of only 7,000, yet by 1918 the organization claimed nearly 150,000 members. Individual Zionists contributed to the AJRC as Brandeis and other Zionists leaders actively raised money through speaking tours and other events. But this cooperation between Zionists and non-Zionists soon became strained. Certain wealthy donors, for example, stipulated that they would give money for Palestine relief only if they could be assured that the money would not be used to build Zionist institutions. The final straw came when the AJRC took credit for sending the relief ship, the U.S.S. Vulcan, to Palestine when in reality Zionists had contributed the bulk of the aid. Despite their anger at the AJRC, Zionists knew that they were unable to raise adequate relief funds for Palestine on their own. In the end, they remained involved with the other relief groups by utilizing the JDC to distribute funds in Palestine, but took responsibility for raising the aid themselves. This situation did not lead to total peace between Zionists and

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their opponents. The Zionists shortly began to complain that the JDC refused to divert to Palestine its fair share of the relief funds.¹⁵

Beginning in 1915 Hadassah funneled all its money designated for Palestine through the PEC. This arrangement allowed Hadassah the freedom to work solely on behalf of that group's Palestine Emergency Fund and obviated the need to hold two separate appeals to fund their own work and that of the general Zionist relief.¹⁶ Hadassah did not put its own plans on hold for the duration of the war as was the case, to some extent, with the NCJW and women in the Workmen's Circle. Rather, the number of projects under Hadassah's administration actually increased by the conclusion of the war. Louis Brandeis' position as Chairman of the PEC facilitated this process because he shared with the leaders of the women's organization an interest in practical Zionism, the creation of concrete programs grounded in efficient and fiscally responsible management. Moreover, Brandeis admired the women's dedication and success so early in their organizational life. When it became terribly evident that Palestine required urgent medical assistance on a larger scale than had previously been provided, the PEC would turn to Hadassah women to put such a program in motion.

Women's Work: Forging Gender and Ethnic Bonds

Women in the NCJW, Hadassah and the Arbeter Ring responded to the war in distinctive fashion. All three immediately began to raise funds for Jews in the war zones, and each to a greater or lesser degree expressed a pacifist position in the years before U.S.

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¹⁵ Yonathan Shapiro, 78-79; Melvin I. Urofsky, American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 120, 152-5, 168-171. See also Bauer, 6-8.


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military involvement. In the process of working on relief or peace campaigns, women in these groups established relationships with a variety of organizations working toward similar ends, both Jewish and non-Jewish, single and mixed-sex. The alliances they made and the degree to which they cooperated with other groups depended a great deal on each organization's own ideological stance, its goals and, perhaps most importantly, the general class status of its membership. Although the Circle and NCJW members occupied opposite ends of the class spectrum, and held divergent views regarding the political economy, women in both groups continued to identify strongly as women, thinking of themselves as holding much in common with the non-Jewish women of their own class. Zionist women, on the other hand, pursued a singular course, using relief work to promote Zionism more effectively among all Jewish women.

Unlike women in the other two organizations, Zionists confined their activism to their own movement for a Jewish homeland in Palestine and began actively to recruit non-Zionist, Jewish women into their ranks. Interactions between Hadassah members and non-Zionist women in the American relief campaigns presented Zionist women with a wonderful opportunity to convey their message to potential recruits. Hadassah leaders urged members to work not only for Palestine but for all Jews, including non-Zionist sufferers of the war. One leader, reproaching members who had neglected Hadassah in order to focus solely on local poverty or war relief efforts, commented that “Zionism affects [Zionist women's] poor sisters, and for that matter, their rich sisters in America as much as it does their sisters overseas [sic], and until they come to a realization of this fact they cannot be considered true
Zionists." Women's relief work, such leaders declared, not only alleviated the suffering of the Jewish people throughout the world, but also furthered the larger goal of bringing the Zionist message to all Jewish "sisters," most especially those at home in the United States. Hadassah did successfully draw some non-Zionist women into their relief activities through such efforts as the sewing circle where women would gather to prepare clothing and other items for Palestinian children. During this period two non-Zionist groups of women in Chicago and Pittsburgh organized Palestine Welfare Societies, expressly devoted to assisting Hadassah's work while remaining at a distance from the group's ideology.

Some Hadassah leaders thought that the brutality of the war itself and the way that it exposed the precariousness of Jewish life in Europe would convert many American Jews to the Zionist cause. Early in 1915 Henrietta Szold confided to Augusta Rosenwald, whose husband, Julius, opposed Zionism, that although she believed the war was nothing but a tragedy, she thought it helped to clarify the "anomalous [sic] situation" of Jews around the world. "It is a miracle," she wrote, "that, though we Zionists were not hitherto able to bring many to our way of thinking, nevertheless many in these days of stress think with pity of our little sanctuary." And some, she believed, would eventually begin to support the "little sanctuary" as a palliative response to the enormous tragedy befalling European Jewry, a tragedy she felt the renowned Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz would one day describe as

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18 Convention report in Hadassah Bulletin no. 12 (July 1915): 4, RG 3, issue located in Box 1, Folder 2, HA.
the third “Hurban,” or catastrophe, following the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE.19

Hadassah's powerful commitment to the Zionist movement limited the amount of energy its members expended on interactions with non-Jewish organizations. Several leaders did briefly join the pacifist People's Council for Peace and Democracy, an organization that the Zionist Judah Magnes helped found. In September 1917 members of Hadassah's Central Committee including Henrietta Szold, enrolled in the organization which had grown out of a mass meeting held by the American Conference for Democracy and Terms of Peace. Attendance at the initial meeting, like the organization's membership, consisted primarily of gentiles such as Eugene Debs, Norman Thomas and Oswald Garrison Villard. Louis Brandeis, then leader of the PEC, was greatly irritated that Zionists had participated in this movement because he felt it imperative that Zionists maintain political neutrality in order to avoid potential setbacks in achieving their ultimate goal. Within a month Szold followed Brandeis' wishes and withdrew from the group, and it is likely that other members of the Central Committee, as in other matters, quickly followed her lead.20 This brief cooperation

19 Henrietta Szold to Augusta (Mrs. Julius) Rosenwald, 17 January 1915, RG 7, Box 2, Folder 234, HA. “Hurban” (or transliterated as khurbm) means catastrophe, destruction, or holocaust. Indeed, paralleling the rapid growth of the FAZ, Hadassah's membership nearly doubled in the first year of the war, growing from 700 to 1,150 by mid-1915. “Report of the Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention,” June 1915, p. 1, RG 3, Box 1, Folder 2, HA. The FAZ membership climbed from 12,000 in 1914 to 176,000 in 1919. Urofsky, 145.

20 Carol Kutscher, “The Early Years of Hadassah, 1912-1921” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 162-163. Besides Szold the other Central Committee members to join were Alice L. Seligsberg, Nellie Straus Mochenson, Lotta Levensohn, Jessie Sampter and Gertrude Rosenblatt. Szold remained opposed to U.S. involvement in the war even after the Germans invaded Bolshevik Russia in March 1918. She also disagreed with using Liberty Loans as a means by which to raise money for the war, believing them to be an improper method of taxation. See Kutscher, 164-5. Incidentally, Rebekah Kohut of the NCJW was opposed to Magnes' pacifism because she believed that Germany was a militaristic menace. See Kohut, More Yesterdays: An Autobiography (1925-1949) (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1950), 107. Lillian Wald opposed the People's
with a non-Zionist, predominantly gentile, peace organization proved to be a singular and short-lived experience. Moreover, the women's involvement in the group had been entirely individual and did not reflect an official organizational position. After this, Hadassah focused its energies solely on relief work; in doing so they continued to reach out to non-Zionist Jewish women but curtailed activity outside the world of Jewish politics.

Jewish socialists were far less inhibited than the Brandeis-led Zionist movement in expressing their opinions about the war and any potential U.S. involvement. While the Circle as an organization forged closer bonds with other Jewish working-class groups and began to de-emphasize its former internationalism, the group's paper Der fraynd initiated a woman's column, "Iber der froyen velt," (About the women's world). Usually authored by Adele Kean Zametkin, this column focused on issues affecting working women regardless of ethnicity or religion. Unlike other sections of the paper or other organizational Council because she felt it presented an image of "impulsive radicalism" in opposition to her own group's, American Union Against Militarism's, liberalism. See Barbara J. Steinson, American Women's Activism in World War I (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982), 274, 281. On the American Conference for Democracy and Terms of Peace and People's Council, see Steinson, 265-73.

The column first appeared in March 1915 although individual articles on women's suffrage and other women's issues had appeared (infrequently) in earlier issues. The two most frequent authors of the column during the war years were Adele Kean Zametkin and Esther Lurie. Adele (sometimes Adela or Adella) Kean Zametkin wrote most of the columns from 1914 until 1917. She was born in 1869 in Molev-Podolsk and emigrated to the United States in 1888. In the U.S. she became the personal and professional partner of prominent Jewish socialist and a founder of Forverts, Michael Zametkin. Esther Lurie covered women's issues for Der fraynd beginning in late 1918 and continuing through 1919. She was born in Warsaw in 1877. She became a socialist when she was a student in Bern, Switzerland. She returned to Russia and became an active Bundist. In 1906 she was arrested and exiled to Siberia. She made her way to New York City in 1912 and began to write for the socialist paper Zukunft (Future). Little is known about her life after the 1920s, when she disappeared.

publications, these columns rarely, if ever, referred to Jewish identity. Zametkin presented topics she (and the editors) deemed to be of vital importance to working women, including suffrage, wages, and maternity benefits. In each case she stressed discussion of class over national or cultural identifications. Although these columns do not shed light on the grassroots activities of Workmen's Circle women during the war years, they do reveal the authors' belief that working-class Jewish women should be well-informed on a variety of gender-related issues. As the Circle itself moved closer to developing a program of secular, cultural Jewish identity centered on the Yiddish language, Zametkin began urging women to forge bonds with other working women. Where Hadassah members were encouraged to focus their energies on reaching out to other Jewish women, Zametkin coaxed her readers to consider the primacy of gender to such discussions as political life, wages and working conditions.

An even stronger gender consciousness arose among leaders of the NCJW who affiliated with non-Jewish women's organizations similar to their own at the same time that their organization collected money for Jewish victims of the war. Prior to the American entrance in the war women's organizations ran the gamut of opinion, with some endeavoring to promote peace, while others provided relief and worked for national preparedness. Jane Addams and other feminists founded the Woman's Peace Party, and Lillian Wald with her allies created the American Union Against Militarism. After the German invasion of

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Belgium concerned women formed the Woman’s Committee of the Commission for Relief of Belgians, which later transformed itself into the Woman’s Section of the Movement for Preparedness. Once the United States entered the war women’s activists continued to promote relief efforts although greater numbers of women embraced patriotic initiatives than persisted in the peace movement.\textsuperscript{22}

Long before the war Council had joined both the National Council of Women and the International Council of Women, and women in the NCJW maintained connections to other women’s organizations throughout the war years. In the earliest days of the war the NCJW established ties with groups interested in relief and peace. Wartime Council President Janet Harris served on the executive committee of the National Committee for Relief of Belgians, while Council founder Hannah Solomon was a member of the Women’s Belgium Committee. Local chapters assisted the work of the Red Cross, and altogether Council raised $205,000 for various war relief campaigns.\textsuperscript{23} The NCJW’s Peace and Arbitration Committee, established in 1908, cooperated with the peace initiatives of non-Jewish women’s groups. At Jane Addams’ request, this committee sent a message to President Wilson in 1916 in support of the Hague Conference asking him to call a conference of neutral nations the aim of which would be to create a mediation court to solicit settlement proposals from the warring nations and ultimately bring about permanent peace. In response to an invitation to

\textsuperscript{22} Steinson, 12-218, 299-349.

\textsuperscript{23} Marion M. Miller, “Nearing Fifty: Council Celebrates its Birthday,” The Jewish Tribune, 21 January 1938, p. 3, clipping in Microfilm number 1966, AJA; The First Fifty Years: A History of the National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1943 (n.p.: NCJW, 1943), 41. Although affiliated with the NCW, Council was not averse to the idea of creating another national women’s group. See for example the November 1914 Board of Managers Minutes, pp. 605-606, Box 1, Folder 1, NCJW collection, LC.
become a member of the Women's Department for National Preparedness, President Harris advised her board to decline, because she thought participation in an organization for "preparedness" would appear inconsistent with the Council's peace and arbitration work. She believed that so long as Council worked for peace it should avoid aiding any movement "that seemed to accept war."^24

Unlike their contemporaries in the Woman's Peace Party, many NCJW leaders supported the nation's war effort once President Wilson declared war in April 1917. Rebekah Kohut proudly recalled helping Dorothy Straight, New York society matron and co-founder of The New Republic, to make "war-workers of hundreds of New York debutantes." Kohut also served as the industrial chairman of the National League for Women's Service and was appointed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to represent Jewish women on the United War Work campaign. Other leaders, however, maintained their dedication to peace even if their fervor was muted during the war itself; for instance, after concluding her service as Council president in 1920, Janet Harris went on to active involvement in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).^25

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These various instances reveal Council's close ties to women of their own class despite differences in religious confession. Indeed, many Council leaders believed that Jewishness was best configured as a religious identity only. In their estimation, nothing separated them from their gentile sisters other than their religious beliefs, although this difference alone could at times represent a substantial barrier. Despite their close bonds with such women, Council would find that the plight of European Jewry and their efforts to aid them would broaden their conceptualization of Jewish identity, which prior to the war had downplayed secular or ethnic constructions of Jewish nationhood.

In the end Hadassah, the Arbeter Ring and the NCJW expressed great concern for Jews in Eastern Europe and Palestine. The distinct vantage points of the organizations regarding religious or ethnic identification, gender consciousness, and class status informed not only how they responded to the war but also their concrete efforts to provide relief. In helping Jewish men in these endeavors women frequently took a backseat and relinquished national leadership. Yet although they conceded their secondary status in male-led relief initiatives, this did not result in a total suppression of gender as an issue nor of women as a force in Jewish politics. Women willfully cooperated with Jewish men, all the while continuing to pursue their own agendas and laying plans for post-war initiatives.

The JDC's Gendered Appeals for Relief

With the organizational structures in place, the American Jewish community turned to the critical task of gathering and distributing relief funds. Regardless of women's physical absence from the top leadership of the American Jewish Relief Committee and other relief entities, images of women continued to figure prominently in organizational publications.
The AJRC and JDC both relied heavily on representations of women to convey a feminized vision of European Jewry and its plight. These images sought to personalize the crisis in order to compel American Jews to give as much as they possibly could. All the Jewish relief drives of the war years relied on an immediate rhetoric centering on family to drive home the need for funds. But where the socialists and Zionists most often spoke only of their "brothers and sisters" overseas, the well-to-do men of the AJRC and JDC envisioned a European Jewry that was frail, fearful and feminine. Such depictions not only helped to create a sense of familial bonds between American Jews and those abroad but also influenced how JDC men characterized the problems of East European Jews.

Representations of European Jews in JDC publications frequently presented them as bedraggled women with starving children at their sides. In a singular depiction American benevolence appeared as a statuesque, healthy woman extending her arms across the sea to help her starving European sisters in a drawing curiously entitled "All Israel are Brethren." Such illustrations served to feminize European and American Jewry, highlighting differences in material wealth in the physical bodies of women. Typically only European Jews underwent such a feminization, and this, in turn, helped underscore their helpless situation. The textual exhortations appealed directly to potential donors, reminding them of how close they were to those living abroad: "Had this World-War occurred twenty years ago we might be pleading FOR you instead of TO you." Such images and appeals aimed to personalize the crisis, to bring home, quite literally, the plight of European Jewry. Not too long ago, these images and texts stressed, American Jews themselves lived in those areas now afflicted by the war. How could they then possibly refuse their "brethren," these poor,
defenseless people overseas? American Jews were encouraged to think of the victims as their very own relatives: "Have American Jews become callous to the sufferings of their brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers in the war zones?" Yet in creating this international Jewish "family" the relief organizations most frequently employed female images to show the despair of European Jews especially as the war progressed. One solicitation, centered around the image of a tired old woman without food or support, declared boldly, "Tired of Giving? You Don't Know What Feeling Tired Means!" Another focused on the suffering of "Jewish babes, Jewish mothers, Jewish boys and girls and the Jewish aged," raising the specter of families struggling to survive without young men. Another appeal directly referred to the greater potential for female suffering. "The first to bear the brunt of conditions for which they are in no wise responsible will be our brethren," it reminded readers, "and to an even greater extent than the men, the women and children - the most helpless and defenceless [sic] among the entire populations." In formulating their appeals in this manner, both the ARJC and JDC posited the existence of "family" bonds between all the Jews of the world. The images entreated American Jews to do their part to aid the helpless victims of the war -- the Jewish aged, children and especially women bereft of male protection.

These appeals, based on conjuring up images of persecuted and oppressed women, merged together neatly with the pre-war concerns of the Jewish middle-class that young

women might be lured into “white slavery.” Before the war a number of organizations in Europe and America, among them the NCJW, had worked to help young women avoid a life of prostitution. Because Jewish involvement in prostitution had already figured as a central concern of middle-class American Jews prior to the war, the feminized visions of European suffering only served to exacerbate these anxieties. Reports from Russian relief workers alerting American Jews to the general demoralization of the Jewish population brought on by starvation and want did little to ease these fears. The writer S. Ansky believed prostitution had become widespread because so many Jewish refugees lacked even the most basic necessities of life.

The focus on prostitution also served to displace and silence fears about the rape of Jewish women by soldiers. Although many people feared for women’s safety during wartime, distress about Jewish prostitution, rather than the rape, became the central element in the larger appeal to the international Jewish family. Rabbi Judah Magnes told a large audience at Carnegie Hall that young women in Eastern Europe struggled to maintain their

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“purity” in the face of poverty and the influx of soldiers into their shtetlekh. These virtuous women tried to sell flowers to avoid having “to sell themselves to the handsome officers and soldiers that fill the streets.” Still, Magnes assured his listeners, “the great mass of our Jewish womanhood has remained steadfast, has remained loyal and true to our high traditions of chastity, to our noble heritage of family purity.” While rape went unacknowledged, the sexual danger arising from the war, and admitted to only in the form of prostitution, nevertheless threatened to destroy the Jewish family, both narrowly and broadly defined. In the conceptualization of the major relief entities, vulnerable women needed the assistance of their able, strong relatives in the United States to ensure that they did not succumb to starvation and moral impurity. These methods proved quite successful; during the war years alone the JDC distributed approximately $15 million to Eastern Europe and Palestine and processed some $10.5 million in private claims (money sent to a specific individual or family) from 1914 though 1921.

The NCJW, Workmen's Circle and Hadassah all participated in the major fundraising effort, often utilizing very similar tactics to galvanize the membership. Yet each

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30 Bauer, 6-8.
organization had its own unique focus; while all the groups worried about their “family” abroad, they conceptualized that family from distinct perspectives. The pre-war agendas and ideologies of the groups along with the alliances they made during the early years of the war influenced how the three groups reacted, which Jews they sought to aid first, and what methods they believed would prove most effective in achieving their aims.

National Council of Jewish Women: Concern for Jewish “Girls”

Council cooperated with a number of Jewish men's organizations, including the AJRC, the fraternal order B'nai B'rith and the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB), an entity ministering to the religious needs of Jews in the armed forces. Some Council leaders worried that their group occupied an unequal status compared to the men's organizations. Many prominent men, argued Rebekah Kohut, tried to dissuade women from embarking on their own programs. “Our work was lauded,” she maintained after the war, “but we were asked to serve under these organizations. So the Council....suppressing the identity of its own organizations [sic], took part in the Jewish Distribution Committee.” Kohut was correct to note that Council failed to achieve a position of equality in the JDC, but this did not mean the total abdication of Council's pre-war program. Regardless of men's wishes, the group continued to run projects in the United States while envisioning a plan that would make this work international in scope.

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From 1914 until the U.S. declaration of war in 1917, the NCJW continued its pre-war program at Ellis Island. During these years Council assisted nearly 4,000 Jewish girls and young women through its Department of Immigrant Aid. The heightened tension between the United States and the Central Powers worsened the already deplorable circumstances of would-be immigrants and added to the urgency of NCJW work. Helen Winkler, Chair of the Department of Immigrant Aid, reported in 1917 that over the past three years growing numbers of Jewish women had attempted to immigrate to the United States. The majority of these women, like most refugees, were absolutely destitute. Once the U.S. severed relations with Germany in February 1917, thousands of refugees found themselves stranded in the neutral ports with no means by which to travel abroad. As the likelihood of immigrating became ever more precarious, these refugees, lacking any means to sustain themselves, soon succumbed to hunger and disease. Their debilitation then rendered them "unfit" and thus completely ineligible for entrance into the United States even if they managed to procure proper documentation. Moreover, where a hardy few managed to avoid disease, the newly instituted literacy requirements of the United States raised yet another, for many decisive, barrier to their entrance.

America's declaration of war in April 1917 transformed German immigrats held at Ellis Island into enemy aliens overnight. About 2,000 people, Winkler reported, languished

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at the new detention camp established on the Island, which was horribly overcrowded and disease-ridden. In May the U.S. government forbade nearly all visits to the Island. Winkler and other NCJW women lobbied the Bureau of Immigrant Aid to allow Council to return to its previous work at the newly established detention center. Council succeeded and took its place as the only women's organization allowed to enter the area. This work was important not only because it continued a valuable project and kept the NCJW in the spotlight, but also because it laid critical groundwork for expanding the program abroad after the armistice. Hannah Solomon recalled that NCJW women were “made guardians for all the women and girls and children who arrived at Ellis Island during the war” and Council used this as a model when they started to help refugees in European ports after the war.  

In November the NCJW Triennial unanimously accepted Rebekah Kohut's resolution to send a unit to Europe to investigate how best to institute a postwar reconstruction project. As the JDC was embarking on a similar initiative Kohut approached the JDC to discuss the women's plans. She received the support of that entity but decided that Council should begin its new work as soon as possible, even before the war had ended. To do so would require the approval of the Jewish Welfare Board, which refused to allow women to travel overseas during the war. In opposition to the generally accommodating posture it had taken throughout the war, Council resolved to abjure the assistance of the JWB and “to do reconstruction work under our own auspices after the war.” Kohut, in particular, expressed annoyance at women's treatment by the Jewish Welfare Board: “What a pity that an

35 Ibid., 194-202; Hannah Solomon, “An Expanding Universe” (handwritten on top “Minneapolis - In the 1930s”), p. 4, Box 6, Folder 10, Solomon collection, LC.
organization of women as representative as the Council should not have been welcomed to do its appropriate work!" Women like Kohut began to appreciate the fact that too often cooperation with the men's organizations resulted in the subordination of women. Women were to be helpmates to men, raising money and organizing teas, but they were not supposed to become too involved in developing the projects themselves. Women in the Workmen's Circle and Hadassah faced similar dilemmas, and a coinciding rise in gender consciousness, during the war years.

**Workmen's Circle: Fundraising for Jewish Workers**

Workmen's Circle publications mention the group's actual fundraising tactics far less often than did those of the other organizations, and they reveal little of the precise nature and extent of women's participation in these campaigns. Initially the organization was most concerned with the speedy transmission of funds and the recipients' economic background. At a special conference in 1914 about 100 branches approved several means by which to raise funds. One member urged that, whatever the method employed, the funds should go to those in absolute need first. His appeal was in tune with the general conviction of the group's most socialist elements that relief should be targeted by class rather than distributed to a community indiscriminately. In 1915 the Circle leadership sent a $20,000 check to the AJRC with the proviso that the money go to workers' committees in Galicia and Russia. This dedication to the working-class led the organization to amend slightly its anti-Zionist

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posture. Early in 1916, despite official opposition to Zionist ideals, the Arbeter Ring announced that it intended to help Jewish war victims in Palestine in addition to those in Europe. This shift was explained as a war measure only, one in concert with the Circle’s dedication to Jewish workers, and not as an official endorsement of Zionist goals.38

Despite this policy on targeting aid to the Jewish working-class foremost, some members maintained very close ties to their European birthplaces, wishing to help a particular town regardless of the wealth of its inhabitants. This was particularly the case with the landslayt branches (those branches behaving like landsmanshaftn through affiliation with a specific shtetl in Eastern Europe). These branches contributed to the general fundraising but also worked to assist their hometowns in Eastern Europe. Lubliner branch 392, to take just one example, prided itself on acting quickly once news of Lublin’s distress reached the United States. The landlayt set up a relief committee within a few weeks of Lublin's troubles and worked throughout the war to aid the Jews of Lublin.39 Such intimate ties between Circle members and the Jews “back home” further influenced the Circle’s movement away from strict internationalism toward a more nationalistic ideology. At the same time the group sought to adhere to its socialist principles by focusing the bulk of its relief activity on aiding the working-class, it also pledged support for initiatives to ensure Jewish civil and national

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38 “Der arbayer ring un di milkhome korbones: Der arbayer ring helft oykh di milkhome korbones in palestina” (The Workmen’s Circle and the war victims: the Workmen’s Circle also helps the war victims in Palestine), Der fraynd 7 (January 1916): 50; Herts, 129-130.

rights in Eastern Europe upon the conclusion of the war.⁴⁰ The organization's main concern might be for the Jewish workers in the war-torn nations, but the exigencies of the war years visited upon the Jewish populations and the membership's fears for their loved ones in those areas inspired the development of a limited nationalist philosophy among the organization's leadership.

Along with its own relief work, the Circle also raised significant sums of money for the AJRC, and later the PRC. Local branches organized concerts, picnics, musicals and the selling of relief "stamps." Arbeter Ring members participated in "Flower Days," "Tag Days," and "Jewish Relief Days." President Wilson declared January 27, 1916 "Jewish Day," set aside for raising funds for Jewish war victims.⁴¹ Typical of such endeavors was the Arbeter Ring Tag Day for Jewish War Victims held in 1917 on Washington's Birthday. Some 1,000 volunteers went door to door carrying little boxes printed with the name of the special day and managed to collect over $22,000. A little coercion helped motivate the volunteers: leaders of Branch 367 declared that any member not taking part in the campaign would face a one-dollar penalty. The Circle continued to hold such special collection days for the remainder of the war, even changing an old staple, "Sanatorium Day," into a day for war relief collection. While members never raised the astounding sums of money brought

⁴⁰ "Nyuorker konferents vegen di milkhome-korbones" (New York conference about the war victims), Der fraynd 6 (January 1915): 47-49. Another conference was held in Chicago on December 13th with other radical organizations and unanimously decided to set up a relief committee. See in the same issue, pp. 49-50; also Der Fraynd 6 (February 1915): 4; and, Herts, 124.

in by the upper and middle class associations, they did consistently report impressive amounts in the range of $20,000, no small feat for people earning far less than the average member of the NCJW or AJRC.\textsuperscript{42}

Arbeter Ring, like the NCJW and other organizations, had difficulty sustaining high levels of giving over a period of several years. Although less visually than the AJRC and JDC, the Circle leadership resorted to appeals reminding members of their close ties to those abroad. Early in 1917 the editors of \textit{Der fraynd} urged members to “Keep helping the war victims!” They implored their readers not to forget their duty to those in “our old fatherland,” prodding them to “collect money, collect, collect, do your brotherly duty!” Even after the February Revolution in Russia, the Circle’s leadership continued to press for donations. They reminded their members that although Russian Jews had been freed from oppression, they should still be concerned for those Jews in Germany and Austria, that they should not forget these “brothers.” Unlike the JDC imagery, publications produced by the socialist and Zionist movements relied less on strategies that feminized war victims. Most often they exhorted members to help their “brothers” overseas, mentioning “sisters,” either as organization members or war victims, far less frequently.\textsuperscript{43}

It is hard to discern women's contribution to these efforts given the cursory nature of reporting on the fundraising campaigns even in the “Iber der froyen velt” columns of the war years. Although few women played major roles in the national leadership, there is evidence

\textsuperscript{42} Zaks, 611, 662, 667.

\textsuperscript{43} “Monat tsu monat: helft vayter di milkhome karbones!” (Keep helping the war victims!) \textit{Der fraynd} 8 (February 1917): 4; “Monat tsu monat: fergest nit an unzere hungerende brider!” (Don't forget our hungry brothers!) \textit{Der Fraynd} 8 (April 1917): 4; “Monat tsu monat: ‘relief-day’ anshtat ‘sanitorium-day’” (“Relief-day” instead of “sanitorium-day”), \textit{Der fraynd} 8 (December 1917): 1.
that they were important to local fundraising. An Atlanta froyen klub recalled how Arbeter Ring women throughout the state of Georgia helped in collecting clothing, holding picnics, arranging balls and participating in the general fundraising for the PRC. The JDC also reported that at a “People's Relief Committee Bazaar” held in New York City in 1916, “Women in all stations in life vied with one another in their lavish expenditure of time and effort to aid the cause.” Generally, women's complete cooperation with men in these campaigns resulted in the submergence of their issues during the war years. Yet in a few years this situation would change. Immigration restriction combined with male service in the armed forces led to growing concerns about maintaining membership levels, and late in the war the leadership inaugurated the first of many membership campaigns. In October 1918 the organization announced a campaign specifically targeted at raising female membership, particularly the wives of current members. Eventually campaigns such as these would contribute to a revitalization of women's activism in the 1920s.

Hadassah's Cooperation with Male Zionists

Hadassah actively campaigned on behalf of the general war relief effort but the organization struggled even more assiduously on behalf of the Zionist collection for

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45 “Monat tsu monat: amerikaner ‘hori-op’ in der milkhome” and “di ‘konskripshon’ fun arbayter-ring” (American ‘hurry-up’ in the war and The ‘conscription’ of the Workmen’s Circle), Der fraynd 8 (October 1917): 3; and “Monat tsu monat: di milkhome oyi'n ferten yohr,” and “Der arbayter ring un di milkhom” (The war in the fourth year and The Workmen's Circle and the war), Der fraynd 8 (September 1917): 3; “Akhtsehnter yehrlikher barikht tsu der nayntsehnter yehrlikher konvenshon” (Eighteen yearly report to the nineteenth yearly convention), Der fraynd: konvenshon numer (The friend: convention number) (May 1919): 18, Box 4, Folder 19, YIVO.
Palestine. It even forwarded the funds it raised to support its own projects through the PEC. Hadassah members used a variety of tactics to raise money for their organization, such as house-to-house collections or donating old gold and silver. From 1915 to 1916, at a time when Hadassah’s total membership amounted to just over 1,000, these campaigns brought in nearly $11,000, or one-eighth of the total collected for the Palestine Emergency Fund. Such work contributed significantly to the movement's ability to send a relief ship full of food and medical supplies to Palestine in 1916. Hadassah members, often with the help of non-Zionist women, assembled a variety of materials, including medicine and clothing, for this shipment.46

While Hadassah participated in fundraising for the general relief efforts, leaders clearly did not abandon their own Palestine program. The war had forced the closing of their Nurses’ Stations, but the group quickly formulated new plans aimed at broadening its mission upon conclusion of the hostilities.47 Henrietta Szold urged members to look forward to a time when they would be able to contribute to the “reconstruction of communal Jewish life in Palestine.” At the 1916 FAZ Convention Hadassah’s Central Committee announced plans to send an American Zionist medical unit to Palestine. At their own convention that year, leaders disclosed plans for the group to continue sending contributions to the Emergency Fund while members also raised an extra $25,000 to underwrite the Medical Unit.48 The members worked diligently to come up with this money on their own, but in the

46 Hadassah Bulletin no. 12 (July 1915), p. 4, RG 3, Box 1, Folder 2, HA. See also various pamphlets from the war years in RG 4 Box 21, HA. On Vulcan see Urofsky, 154-155.

47 Kur, 152-153.

48 Hadassah Bulletin no. 23 (July-Aug, 1916): 1, 8-9, 10, RG 3, Box 1, Folder 3, HA.
end the task proved beyond the resources of the still small membership, and leaders turned to the JDC for the bulk of the Unit's original funding.49

Despite enthusiasm for the new project, political and military realities forced a two-year delay before the Unit could set sail for Palestine. The American declaration of war precipitated an outright denial by Turkish authorities to any requests that the Medical Unit be allowed to enter their territory. The Unit sailed only after British forces took Jerusalem late in 1917. Upon seeing the extent of hunger and disease ravaging the local population, the British military authorities permitted the institution of the Medical Unit. After having waited nearly two years, all the while continuing to make preparations, Hadassah and its allies had assembled quite a store of equipment and goods: 400 tons of hospital equipment, several hundreds of cases of drugs, medicine and bandages, six autos, over 100 large cases of clothing, food and dental materials.50 At the very last minute Hadassah leader Alice Seligsberg was nominated to serve as the Unit's administrative head. She had considerable experience for her new position, having founded and then administered the Fellowship House, a New York agency for orphans, from 1913 until 1918. While in Palestine the JDC recruited her to head their own Orphan Committee. Under Seligsberg's lead, the Unit halted the spread of epidemics, opened hospitals in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Safed, and began to work


50 Dash, 125-127.
on various medical and sanitation projects throughout the land.\textsuperscript{51} Hadassah’s wartime collaboration with the Brandeis-led Zionist movement provided the new organization with practical experience in fundraising tactics and membership recruitment, and it also gave them the opportunity, through the Medical Unit, to put into practice their beliefs about women’s potential to contribute to Palestine.

**Gender Dynamics in War: Cooperation and Conflict**

As we have seen, men and women cooperated to a great degree in the collection and provision of wartime relief. Yet the relationships between men and women, particularly between those organizations led by men and those by women, could be difficult. Women voluntarily accepted the fact that they would more often than not follow rather than lead the national initiatives. Women conceded to this arrangement out of concern for those abroad and with the belief that unity would lead to the most efficient fundraising during the height of the crisis. The interactions between men and women during the war years reveal that the seemingly effortless cooperation flourished where women acceded to their secondary roles. But when some women grew frustrated with their status in the major male-led relief endeavors, as they quickly did, significant conflicts arose. Although the most overt battles would await the inter-war period, evidence of women’s growing ambivalence toward male programs and frustration with male attitudes began to surface by the final days of the war.

Women's experience prior to the war had shown them they were highly capable of running useful programs, and they did not entirely abandon their own projects once they began to cooperate with the men's groups. Indeed, the crisis atmosphere and the proliferation of fundraising and relief activities further instilled in many women a sense of their own ability. Some men, notably Louis Brandeis, also recognized women's great facility to contribute to the relief efforts. Brandeis, as we have seen, considered Hadassah's work extremely useful, and he continued to be its advocate both during and after the war. Other men, too, acknowledged the great debt they owed to women for their commendable service in the relief campaigns. David A. Brown, a major leader in the national relief initiative, recognized the significant contribution Council women made in the campaigns he led. His account of these efforts not only shows how highly he regarded women's capabilities, but also reveals the more typical male reaction to women's input.

In 1915 Brown led the Michigan state drive for Jewish war relief funds. Louis Marshall informed him privately that if the state collected only one-third of its quota, that in itself would be a considerable achievement. Brown decided that recruiting a women's committee to coordinate fundraising activities among the female population would make the campaign more effective overall. Yet to his surprise his colleagues responded negatively to the idea. "They thought I was going a bit too far," he recalled, "and indeed, that it would be a waste of effort." Regardless of their reaction, Brown went forward with the plan and put the local NCJW in charge of the women's committee. The special women's campaign
received a great deal of press coverage and proved extremely successful; not only did the women meet their quota of $25,000, they raised an extra $6,000.⁵²

Brown's success in Michigan caught the eye of JDC chairman Jacob Schiff, who requested that Brown head the 1917 national campaign to raise $5 million. Once again Brown insisted on setting up a women's committee. This time Schiff himself opposed the plan, "saying this was a man's job and questioning the possibility of women raising money from women." Refusing to relent on the matter, Brown finally persuaded Schiff to reconsider, even allowing him to name the women's committee chair himself. Schiff chose "that champion of women's champions" Rebekah Kohut of the NCJW. Kohut focused her work on the New York City region and, according to Brown, "did her job with her women associates as thoroughly and as effectively as any men's organization with which I have ever been associated." Kohut, with the assistance of the NCJW, helped to make this campaign a success as well.⁵³ The cooperation between Brown and the Council shows the important role male allies could played in assuring that women's contributions received the recognition they deserved. Without such male support behind the scenes, women were pushed to the sidelines. Yet the interactions between Brown and the NCJW or Brandeis and Hadassah stand out as exceptional. Most men held ideas about women that more closely resembled Jacob Schiff's than those of Louis Brandeis.

⁵² David A. Brown, “It Happened Years Ago...A Story or Two about the National Council of Jewish Women,” American Hebrew and Jewish Tribune vol. 136, no. 17 (8 March 1935): 345-346, clipping in Box 102, NCJW collection, LC.

⁵³ Ibid., 345-346. Brown led many fundraising drives for a variety of organizations, including the first drive ever for the Michigan American Legion. His support for women might have derived simply from his fundraising experience in the past and his desire for these drives to be as successful as possible. See entry in Who's Who in American Jewry (New York: The Jewish Biographical Bureau, Inc., 1926), 84.
As time passed women grew less enthusiastic about men's initiatives, perhaps in response to the subsidiary roles they were usually expected to play in these endeavors. Women's general indifference to the founding of the American Jewish Congress highlights the change in women's reactions to men's new plans. Unlike the creation of the relief committees early in the war, the battles over the Congress, which consumed men for the bulk of the later war years, seemed to have had little effect on most women. Overall they remained uninvolved and, as reflected in their publications, largely disinterested in this movement to form a representative body of American Jews.

American Zionists first spearheaded the movement for a democratically elected national body of Jews that would work for American Jewish representation at postwar peace conferences, fight for Jewish rights as a national minority in newly created East European states, and advocate the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. The wealthy opponents of Zionism who headed the AJC and JDC opposed this Congress movement from the start because they considered the demands too nationalistic. Such men adhered to a conceptualization of Jewish identity grounded in religion alone, and they rejected the idea of a separatist movement of American Jews. Moreover, they refused to consider nationalist solutions to Jewish problems abroad, desiring instead the creation of governments in Eastern Europe modeled on the liberal Western democracies. In response to the Congress movement, the AJC men attempted to organize a national movement of Jewish organizations in line with their own perspective on these issues. The battle between these two sides led to an odd alliance between the patrician AJC and the anti-Zionist Jewish socialists of the Lower East
Side. By late 1916 the leaders of all the factions entered into more serious negotiations on possibly convening a Congress.⁵⁴

Privately, the NCJW leaders expressed great reluctance about the Congress movement from the outset, mirroring the concerns of their male allies in the AJRC and AJC that such an organization would promote Jewish nationalism. In the autumn of 1915 the AJC selected Council as one of several organizations invited to participate in a conference aimed at challenging the Zionist-led Congress plans. Council accepted this invitation without notable deliberation. Yet later, in the spring of 1916, when proponents of the Zionist-dominated Congress invited the NCJW to a preliminary conference, NCJW board members expressed more open division. Echoing the concerns of the AJC men, Hannah Solomon spoke for a number of board members when she said that although Council could easily support the stance of the proposed Congress, as it was then constituted, relative to securing religious and civil rights for Jews abroad, “we would hesitate to endorse” those sections dealing more explicitly with Jewish nationalism. She felt that any note of acceptance Council might send would have to state this view definitively; Council might be able to express sympathy for nationalist goals, but they could not officially endorse them as an organization. Another board member argued that during a time of intense U.S. patriotism, when the nation demanded its citizens’ loyalty and support, it would do Jews more harm than good to organize into distinct political body. If American Jews wanted to secure rights for those abroad, she asserted, they needed to work together with other Americans and avoid

putting up “new walls of separation between ourselves and other peoples.” She, like other ardent assimilationists, believed that Jews should proclaim themselves Jews by religion alone, eschewing all nationalist programs. Other women agreed with her, particularly because they felt that the Congress was “distinctly identified with Zionism.” Executive Secretary Ernestine Dreyfus thought that if Council were to join the Congress then “I think we passively, at least, endorse [the Zionist] movement.” In the end the board passed two resolutions: one declining membership in the Congress and the second expressing Council's support of actions aimed at securing civil but not national rights for Jews abroad.55

When the AJC and Zionist leaders reached a compromise later in that year, thereby uniting the Congress movement and its shadow opposition, Council briefly joined the consolidated assembly, although it soon withdrew in 1917. At Hannah Solomon's instigation the NCJW board included a proviso that authorized future Council executive committees to re-affiliate with the movement. Hinting at women's lack of representation in this new organization, President Harris added that she felt that the Board should inform members that costs to join the Congress had proved to be prohibitive. In her estimation the head tax of $245 for “one lone woman” to serve as a delegate to the Congress was simply too much money. Moreover, she and others believed that the Russian Revolution in February and America's entry into the war in April had rendered the Congress unnecessary by altering the dynamics of Jewish politics in Eastern Europe.56

55 “Proceedings of the Board of Managers of the Council of Jewish Women,” 27 April 1916, pp. 217-279, Box 2, Folder 1, NCJW Collection, LC. Helen Winkler spoke in opposition to putting up walls of separation.

56 “Proceedings of the Outgoing Board of Managers of the Council of Jewish Women Chicago, ILLS., 5 November 1917,” pp. 84-100, Box 2, Folder 2, NCJW Collection, LC. Delegate space to the Congress was allotted by organization. Six seats each went to the large and/or powerful organizations such as the American
Although Hadassah was a Zionist organization, its leaders also expressed a certain coldness toward Congress preparations. They printed only a few brief articles about the Congress by Dr. Dora Askowith, national director of the Women's Organization for an American Jewish Congress. Askowith reported in 1917 that Hadassah had been quite supportive of the Congress movement in some cities, even running their own members as potential delegates. She proudly alerted the women to the Congress movement's support for equal suffrage, informing readers of the Zionist publication The Maccabaean that because of the war "the Jews of America where equality of rights is enjoyed, became the trustees of the Jewish people throughout the world, and the American Jewish Congress the medium of expression." Women, she argued, must now "stand shoulder to shoulder" with Jewish men and take an active part in the Congress movement. She failed to explain why a movement so firmly committed to women's equality required a separate entity focused on drumming up support among Jewish women, Zionists in particular. No doubt the relatively cool reception

Jewish Committee and the Federation of American Zionists. The Workmen's Circle and many other organizations were allowed three seats each. A great number of groups only received one seat each. The NCJW was among this number. The fact that they were the largest Jewish women's organization in America and yet still only received one seat surely galled some members. In comparison, Poale Zion, a socialist Zionist group begun in 1905 and counting fewer members then Council had two seats at the Congress. On allotments see, Morris Frommer, "The American Jewish Congress: A History, 1914-1950," vol. 1 (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1978), 101-2, n. 85. On Labor Zionism, see Mark A. Raider, The Emergence of American Zionism (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

57 Dr. Askowith presentation on the Congress to Third Convention (1916), reported in Hadassah Bulletin no. 23 (July-Aug, 1916): 13, RG 3, Box 1, Folder 3, HA. No action was taken on the issue at this Convention. See also Hadassah Bulletin no. 33 (June 1917): 19. See also Bulletin 4 (November 1917): 3. This last article reports that eight of the 18 women to serve as delegates to the Congress were Hadassah members, including Dora Askowith.

58 "Report of the Fourth Convention," June, 1917, p. 19, RG 3, Folder 1, Box 4, HA.

on the part of Hadassah played no small role in the development of an organization specifically geared toward garnering women's support. Despite Askowith's exhortations, Hadassah's leadership did not wholeheartedly embrace the Congress. This might have been due to the fact that Henrietta Szold and other middle-class leaders had close ties to the men of the AJC. These leaders would be reluctant to take a position that could potentially damage their ability to raise funds from wealthy non-Zionists in the AJC who had an interest in Hadassah's work. On the whole, Hadassah, like the NCJW, reported little about developments in the Congress movement.60

In keeping with her own and the Circle's overriding interest in general, non-Jewish, suffrage and labor issues, Adele Kean Zametkin also neglected discussion of the Congress in her "Iber der froyen velt" columns. Given the Circle's organizational stance against Zionism, there was little reason for her not to do so. Once the compromise was reached between the AJC, socialists and the Congress movement, the Workmen's Circle did begin to express more interest in Congress developments, although the women's column continued to ignore the issue. In May 1917 the Circle's convention protested against the delegate election process arrived at by the Congress organizing committee, which they believed lowered the representation of groups such as anti-Zionist socialists. The NWC briefly withdrew from the movement in the Spring of 1917, although it ultimately did participate in

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60 Kutscher, "Early Years," 199-200. Hadassah was not alone in its ambivalence toward the Congress movement. Yonathan Shapiro argues that the German Jewish leadership of the general Zionist movement, including such men as Brandeis, were also reluctant to found an American Jewish Congress. See Yonathan Shapiro, 86-98. On the other hand, another Hadassah founder, Sarah Kussy, did play a major role in founding the American Jewish Congress. See Lauren B. Strauss, "Sarah Kussy," in vol. 1 of Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia, ed. Paula E. Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore (New York: Routledge, 1997), 769-70.
the Congress, which was held in December 1918. At that time it elected a delegation to travel to Paris to present American Jewish concerns to the postwar Peace Conference.⁶¹

The Congress situation reveals that while the women's organizations might not openly challenge their male counterparts in major national endeavors, they did not blindly or uniformly follow men's lead in every matter. Women's ambivalence about participating in the Congress debates, particularly Hadassah's aloofness, shows that women determined what was best for their own organizations even in a period of cooperation. As the war reached a conclusion women began to look forward to a post-war era of renewed, independent female activism. Not all men were happy with this awakening self-confidence and revitalized desire for autonomy. As the NCJW and Hadassah in particular began to exert themselves more forcefully on the national and international stages, they began to face opposition from those men who felt more comfortable with women's organizations when they behaved as auxiliaries to men's groups.

Rabbi Emil Hirsch, a firm supporter of Council's work, urged the organization in 1917 not to overstep its bounds by turning too far away from religious issues. In his opinion far too many American Jews during the war years had grown overly involved in charity provision to the neglect of spiritual concerns. Moreover, he felt that for many American Jews giving to charity formed the cornerstone of their Jewish identification: "Most of our generation believe that contributions to philanthropy measure to the full the obligations that Judaism lays on their shoulders." Fearing the influence such ideas might have on religious observance, he reminded Council that without a spiritual component charity would soon

⁶¹ Epstein, 62; Janowsky 246-7.
wither away. He believed that during the war there had been too much talk of Jewry and too little of Judaism underscoring his trepidation, shared by many Reform Jews, that the war had led to increased interest in Jewish nationalist sentiment. Moreover, given American rabbis' earlier, cool response to Council's ventures into the arena of religion, his comments seem to imply that at least he now felt women had gone too far in the other direction.\(^{62}\)

In response, President Janet Harris asserted that the war had provided women with new opportunities because women had been forced to take on work previously done only by men. This work, in turn, instilled women with self-confidence and a growing respect for their "sister[s]." Men, too, she felt had grown to appreciate women's capabilities more in light of the service they had performed during the war. Although she did not address Rabbi Hirsch's concerns directly, Harris did express great pride in women's achievements and a strong determination that women not abandon their work in these new fields of endeavor. Her comments show Council's determination to resist complete subordination to rabbis and other male leaders. Additionally, her response indicates that despite Council's official ambivalence regarding Jewish nationalism, growing numbers of members had begun to consider that Jewish identity could encompass more than religion alone. Council's philanthropic activities, particularly those on the international level serving Jews regardless of religious conviction, fostered a commitment among Council members to the Jewish people, however vaguely that concept might be defined. This commitment, nurtured in the

crisis years of the war, would grow even stronger in the inter-war period, leading many Council members into closer cooperation with Hadassah.63

While the NCJW slowly began to loosen its alliance with those male leaders who believed Jewish identity equated foremost with religious confession, Hadassah found itself ever more tightly bound to the male Zionist movement as the war progressed. Although the women's group had dramatically increased its membership and budget and by late 1918 had embarked upon a major new enterprise in Palestine, the American Zionist Medical Unit, this independent status was soon curtailed when the Zionist movement adopted a plan formulated by Brandeis seeking to create a more efficient and responsible organizational structure. In 1918 the FAZ reorganized as the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), and leaders urged all American Zionist groups to adopt its district plan, which organized all Zionist groups into regional sections led by district committees reporting to the ZOA National Executive Committee. The ZOA would be the sole American Zionist group to have contact with the World Zionist Organization (WZO). Members of Zionist societies could also become direct members of the ZOA, and if all the members of a particular society joined the ZOA then that group would be entitled to elect representatives to the District Committee. Proponents argued that this plan would reduce duplication, excessive administrative costs, and gross inefficiency. Hadassah's Central Committee would continue to exist but solely as an advisory body and would work in cooperation with the ZOA's Bureau for Propaganda Among Women. Hadassah lost direct responsibility for its Palestinian projects; while they

would continue to raise money for their projects, the money itself would be channeled to Palestine through the ZOA and WZO.  

Hadassah leaders accepted the reorganization plan but not without some reservations. At the 1918 Convention Szold reminded members that Hadassah still played a unique role in the movement. She felt that “propaganda among women will always require special means, special methods, and I believe that the propaganda for Zionism will always have to be put before women as a series of special, concrete purposes.” But she urged her members to remain loyal to the movement as a whole and to follow whatever dictates the leadership required of them:

As we were ready to take up the work [among women], we are going to be selfless enough to lay down the work when we are no longer the proper agents. We introduced the sex line into Zionism when it had never existed there before. If the time has come to break it, let us do so. You know that in Zionism that woman’s vote is equal to the man’s vote. We only gathered ourselves together because it seemed that the men who had been existing for sixteen years had not been able to get the women in.

Now it seemed that the movement might demand something different from women. Szold told the Convention that whether or not Hadassah continued to function or ceased to exist would depend solely upon the needs of the greater movement. She assured members that this was yet another stage in the growth of the Zionist movement, and that given women’s equality to men in the movement any unification plan would not ultimately prove to be detrimental to women’s participation. Privately, though, Szold was less sanguine about

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64 Miller, 65-72.

65 “Report of the Proceedings at the Fifth Convention,” June 1918, pp. 7, 10-11, RG 3, Box 1, Folder 5, HA.
Hadassah's future. In writing to a friend and fellow Hadassah leader she confided that since the reorganization plan so completely divided up Hadassah's work she had her doubts regarding its ability to maintain itself as an organization. Szold feared, in part, that the Central Committee would have only “illusory” advisory powers, and these fears soon proved all too true. In a matter of weeks Szold wrote to Alice Seligsberg, informing her that Hadassah’s Central Committee was not even being consulted in its advisory capacity. She pointed out that “up to this time [it] has not been called into consultation by the other [ZOA] departments which are now dividing its work among them.” Thus Hadassah willingly submitted to a reorganization plan that resulted in its almost complete dismantling as an organization. The leaders did so in the spirit of Zionist unity and in the belief, soon proven unfounded, that a movement guaranteeing equality between the sexes would certainly ensure women's continued active participation in the restructured body. Yet few women ever achieved prominence in the ZOA; only Szold held a major post as Secretary of Education. Two other women headed ZOA departments but both reported to men. Moreover, one of these appointments was to Hadassah’s rival, the Bureau of Propaganda Among Women, over which Louis Lipsky, who would soon show himself as no great friend of Hadassah's, had final authority. Like women in the Arbeter Ring, Hadassah women found that complete correspondence to the dictates of the larger movement did not always best serve women's interests, no matter how theoretically committed that movement was to the ideal of gender

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66 Szold to Mrs. Benjamin Davis, August 1, 1918; and Szold to Alice Seligsberg, 28 August 1918; both quoted in Miller, 110-111. See also Kutscher, “Early Years,” 208-211.

67 Kutscher, “Early Years,” 211. Mrs. A.H. Fromenson headed the Palestine Supplies Division under Jacob DeHaas of the Palestine Bureau, and Mrs. Ida Danziger served as the Executive Secretary of the Bureau for Propaganda Among Women under Louis Lipsky.
equality. As a result of their various interactions with men, women in all three groups found their sense of gender consciousness heightened during the war years. Consequently each group expressed a stronger commitment to promoting women’s suffrage and the right to engage in the public sphere as the war reached its conclusion.

Growing Support for Women’s Rights

In the late 19th century leaders of the woman’s suffrage movement often expressed anti-Jewish opinions, and as more East European immigrants arrived on U.S. shores many suffragists embraced social antisemitism. Consequently, few Jews participated actively in the suffrage movement and no Jewish organizations existed that worked solely to achieve the vote. By World War I the tenor of the movement changed, however, as younger suffragists reached out to a broader constituency in order to attract growing support for a suffrage amendment. Moreover, Progressive women such as Jane Addams promoted women’s right to vote as a means by which to attain other reform goals that were also close to the heart of Jewish women, including child labor laws, workplace safety measures, and sanitation reform. Progressives like Jane Addams, Florence Kelley and Maud Nathan resisted making the sorts of nativist and racist arguments used by an earlier generation of suffragists, and even Carrie Chapman Catt modified her language after the founding of the International Woman’s Suffrage Alliance and her travels overseas. As the suffrage movement stepped up its lobbying efforts during the war years Jewish women began to take a greater interest in
women's right to vote and to involve themselves in a movement that now did not seem as antagonistic as it had earlier.\textsuperscript{68}

Of the three organizations, Hadassah commented the least on the struggle for the vote, even though it firmly supported this right itself. Any notice the group did take of the issue was placed within a framework focusing on women's status in the Zionist movement or in the new settlements in Palestine. At the 1918 Convention a delegate read a telegram that Hadassah had sent to President Woodrow Wilson urging him to support the federal amendment for women's suffrage. The telegram proudly pointed out that Zionist women had equal suffrage in all Congresses and Conventions as well as in Palestinian Jewish villages.\textsuperscript{69} Other Zionist sources confirmed Hadassah's perception that, at least in theory, women held equal rights to men in the movement and in Palestine. The Maccabaean reported that there would be no need in Palestine for a suffrage campaign because equal suffrage had already been accepted as "a matter of course by pioneers [Jewish settlers in Palestine]." Like Hadassah, male Zionists took it for granted that women had already achieved total equality in the movement: "It is noteworthy that equal suffrage is characteristic of the Zionist organizations throughout the world. Women are so prominently identified with the

\textsuperscript{68} On antisemitism in late nineteenth century woman's movement, see Kuzmack, 38-40; and, Suzanne M. Marilley, \textit{Woman Suffrage and the Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820-1920} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 164-7, 178-80. On Progressive women and changes in Catt's rhetoric, see Marilley, 187-216. For Jewish women and suffrage in the war years, see Kuzmack, 146-54, 158.

\textsuperscript{69} "Report of the Proceedings at the Fifth Convention," June 1918, p. 102, RG 3, Box 1, Folder 5, HA. As early as 1915, the Bulletin had reported: "We must remember that Zionism is a democratic movement, that its success depends on the mass of Jewish women. Unfortunately there is no more serious charge made against Judaism than the charge that women are neglected. The Zionist organization, since it believes in the equality of men and women, must educate Jewish women not only to Judaism, but to a realization of their civic and of their national responsibilities." Bulletin no. 12 (July 1915): 7.
movement that their right to vote at the International Congresses and at the national conventions is taken as a matter of course." Indeed, Hadassah's belief that Zionism proffered equality to women led in part to their acceptance of the District Plan, which ultimately resulted in their near total submergence within the larger movement. In time, Hadassah leaders realized that Zionist statements about gender equality did not resemble practice, either at home or in Palestine. In these conflicts with their movement occurring in the inter-war period, Hadassah leaders would begin to formulate an even stronger advocacy position on behalf of women's rights. But during the war years, as we have seen, Hadassah as a still relatively new and numerically weak organization more frequently extolled the virtues of Zionism rather than criticized that movement's treatment of its female members.

Council leaders followed other American suffragists by making explicit connections between the war and changes in women's lives. During the war the NCJW vocally supported women's rights, not infrequently employing the term "feminism" to characterize its own dedication to achieving women's equality. As early as December 1914 prominent Kentucky suffragist Madeline McDowell Breckinridge addressed the Council Triennial on the topic of "The Feminist Movement." In this presentation, Breckinridge discussed the movement for women's rights historically with a particular focus on the women's suffrage movement. She drew connections between women's work in the public sphere and the suffrage, arguing, like

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other women's rights activists of the time, that since women had proven themselves capable in public endeavors they should be allowed to vote.71

As the war progressed such messages appeared more frequently and employed more forceful tones. Council leaders believed that war work and relief activities enabled women to develop new skills that adequately prepared them for participation in the public sphere. One speaker at the 1917 Triennial told delegates that since the outbreak of the war Jewish women had become involved in "every phase of that world-wide movement of revolt against artificial barriers, which we call feminism." Such women, she averred, had once satisfied themselves with work related only to their homes and families, but the war, particularly the "cry of persecuted mothers and children," had forced many of them to look beyond their private lives. In seeking to protect refugee women and children arriving in the United States, Jewish women had been forced to shoulder more work than ever before. She explicitly connected women's involvement in this new agenda to "the wisdom of those earlier martyrs of feminism, whose dream is now in the dawn of realization." While the war work that had drawn them from their homes centered around serving the needs of Jewish women and

71 Mrs. Desha Breckinridge, "The Feminist Movement," Official Report of the Council of Jewish Women's Seventh Triennial, December 1914, pp. 153-162, Box 4, Folder 5, Solomon collection, LC. On Jewish women and the suffrage movement in the United States, see Kuzmack, 142-58. Madeline McDowell Breckinridge was the sister-in-law of Sophonisba Breckinridge. She served as President of the Kentucky Equal Rights Association from 1912-1915 and from 1919 until her death in 1920. She also served as a Vice President of the National American Woman's Suffrage Association from 1913-1915. As the great-granddaughter of Henry Clay, she was very distantly related to Rebecca Gratz, whose younger brother Benjamin married Clay's niece Maria Gist in 1820. See Anne F. Scott, Notable American Women, 1607-1950; A Biographical Dictionary, ed. Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, Paul S. Boyer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 231-3; and, Dianne Ashton, Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 17.
children, the result was, according to this speaker, to strengthen the ties between Council and adherents of the feminist movement.⁷²

Notwithstanding their rhetoric regarding a commitment to all Jews and women, Council feminism had a decidedly elitist tilt. The feminism of these members did not unite with them with the "persecuted mothers" but rather enabled them to serve those women better. Similarly, Council feminists expressed a certain degree of racism that was not uncommon among suffragists of the period. The 1917 Triennial speaker, for instance, told delegates that since the "negro" had been given the right to vote, there was no reason that women should be made to prove themselves further before they achieved suffrage.⁷³

Regardless of this growing support for feminism and equal suffrage, the majority of Council members were reluctant to endorse such a program as an organization. This same 1917 convention defeated a resolution favoring equal suffrage. Although supportive of women's rights, the group's aversion to controversial issues led Council to sustain its moderate position officially even as many of its members grew more devoted to feminism.⁷⁴

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⁷³ Ibid., 160. On the other hand, Council did support the NAACP over the objections of some of its Southern members. Proceedings of the Executive Board of the Council of Jewish Women November 27 - December 1, 1914, pp. 533-559, Box 1, Folder 1, NCJW collection, LC. On racism in the suffrage movement, see Marilley, 159-86; and, Aileen S. Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920 (1965; reprint, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1981), 163-218.

⁷⁴ Rogow, 78-82; and, Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman and Sonya Michel, The Jewish Woman in America (New York: Dial Press, 1976), 52-3. The group's post-war embrace of women's right to vote reveals the high level of support for women's suffrage within the NCJW. Although concrete statistics on membership attitudes are unavailable, it seems most likely that Council's official refusal to come out in support of the suffrage amendment had more to do with its commitment to avoiding "controversy" rather than the presence of a majority of members in opposition to women's suffrage. The Central Conference of American Rabbis, the organization of Reform rabbis, passed a resolution supporting women's suffrage in 1917, after having twice defeated similar resolutions in previous years. See Michael A. Meyer, Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 285. Jacob Rader Marcus
The Arbeter Ring, so unwelcoming to women in its earliest years had the most developed public discussion of women's issues. Although the organization passed a resolution in favor of women's suffrage at its 1917 Convention, it had not always supported the amendment, according to "Iber der froyen velt" columnist Adele Kean Zametkin. In a column appearing in April 1915, Zametkin noted that the Socialist Party and the Arbeter Ring had discouraged support for women's suffrage. Following the ethos of the Second International, American socialists refrained from endorsing the middle-class suffrage movement, criticizing that movement's dedication to maintaining the economic status quo. The socialist movement supported women's suffrage so long as proponents pursued their goal in concert with class-based organizations. Indeed, in the months following Zametkin's editorial the Socialist party in New York vigorously worked for passage of the 1915 state amendment under the direction of activist Theresa Malkiel.75 Regardless of the Socialist Party's shifting position, female columnists for Der fraynd consistently supported a woman's right to vote.

From its inception, Zametkin's column provided instruction in the history of women's rights movements around the world and sought to influence socialist women's opinions on

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key issues. Along with short lessons in women's history stretching from the Roman Empire to Seneca Falls, Zametkin constructed strong arguments for women's suffrage based on the needs of wage-earning women. She argued that women's consistently lower wages made it imperative that they gain the right to vote in order to effect change in their own lives. Like the Council women, Zametkin argued that the war had facilitated women's entrance into the public sphere especially through taking jobs they had never held before. She repeatedly asserted that it would be impossible for men to continue to deny women the right to vote in light of how capable they had proven themselves during the war. Zametkin situated her arguments in a comparative framework that provided Arbeter Ring women with information on suffrage movements as far away as Japan. Yet unlike Council leaders, she exhibited a strong class consciousness. Zametkin cautioned her readers against simply joining women's suffrage movements without contemplating whether or not they actually had working women's best interests in mind. She was particularly cognizant of the political games played by women's suffrage supporters, observing that Theodore Roosevelt's change of heart on suffrage could be traced to his realization of women's usefulness to him on election day. She urged her readers to avoid acting like middle-class suffragists who did not understand that suffrage was only one part of the larger struggle for women's liberation. Yet, like most women of her time, Zametkin's advocacy of women's issues beyond suffrage did not include


77 "Iber der froyen velt," 8 (October 1917): 16-17. This column does not have a byline but the topics are in concert with those pursued by Zametkin.
an analysis of gender relations in the private sphere; her articles rarely, if ever, discussed male-female interactions or men's role in maintaining the home and raising children.\(^7\) 

Rather than pressing for reform in the private sphere, Zametkin, like other women's activists, socialists most notably, concentrated on proposals that government meet working women's domestic needs. She championed state involvement in protecting mothers and alleviating the burdens associated with childbirth and childcare; to this end she strongly advocated the implementation of maternity insurance. Her very first column in March 1915 had called attention to the women's need for state-funded maternity insurance, a benefit not provided even through the Circle. She also believed that the state should help women whose children were designated illegitimate. In August 1915 she sarcastically commented on the state of England's anxiety over the potentially large numbers of "war babies." The "capitalist morals" of the English, she noted, would be torn in two by these children who would force the government to decide whether they were "kosher" or not. Zametkin believed that the state needed to take care of these pregnant women because charities could not provide for them adequately. Moreover, she feared that money collected by charities usually wound up in the pockets of the administrators rather than in those of the needy.\(^7\)

\(^7\) "Iber der froyen velt," Der fraynd 6 (June 1915): 8; "Iber der froyen velt," Der fraynd 6 (August 1915): 10-12; on bourgeois women see "Iber der froyen velt," Der fraynd 7 (December 1916): 22-23; on women's liberation see "Iber der froyen velt," Der fraynd 8 (February 1917): 7-8; on suffrage internationally see "Iber der froyen velt," Der fraynd 8 (December 1917): 16-17. Socialist Theresa Malkiel similarly refrained from critiquing domestic relations in her political writings. See Sally M. Miller, "From Sweatshop Worker to Labor Leader: Theresa Malkiel, A Case Study," American Jewish History 68 (December 1978): 189-203.

\(^7\) "Iber der froyen velt," Der fraynd 6 (March 1915): 13-16; "Iber der froyen velt," Der fraynd 6 (June 1915): 7; on war babies see "Iber der froyen velt," Der fraynd 6 (August 1915): 11; on mothers' pensions especially the inadequacy of charities to help see "Iber der froyen velt," Der fraynd 8 (July 1917): 9.
Compared to the women in Council or Hadassah, Zametkin espoused the most broadly developed program for ameliorating women's inequality in the public sphere. Like other socialist women, her politics were solidly class-based and she did not foresee much room for cross-class female cooperation; indeed, she more frequently expressed downright suspicion of upper-class, comfortable women. Her columns suggest that Arbeter Ring women, especially those who had fought for equality in the organization prior to 1914, did not entirely abandon their interest in these questions as they turned their energies to raising funds for war relief. Her articles foreshadowed a burst of female activism in the Circle, one which the most radical women, along with the male leadership, would strive to keep centered on class-based, not gender, politics.

All three organizations to a greater or lesser degree expressed a growing interest in women's rights and commitment to gender equality during the war years. Both Hadassah and the Arbeter Ring placed their advocacy of women's rights within the context of their ideological paradigms, Hadassah expressing satisfaction that the U.S. was catching up with the venerable Zionist tradition of equality, and the Workmen's Circle concerning itself not with women per se but with working-class women in particular. Hadassah was the organization least concerned with class politics and its relation to women's advancement. Arbeter Ring and the Council both expressed their commitment to women's equality as a function of their class — Adele Kean Zametkin did this expressly, Council women through implication and omission. This heightened awareness of women's capabilities and growing interest in women's issues led the groups associated with charity, the specifically women's organizations, to characterize that work in new ways. Refusing to be dismissed simply as
benevolent ladies, both Hadassah and the NCJW, influenced by their own experiences during the war, strongly argued that their philanthropic activities be treated with respect and taken as seriously as the work of social welfare professionals.

As they did with feminism, Hadassah leaders centered the re-evaluation of their philanthropic work within the broader context of the general Zionist movement. Building on ideas formulated by Henrietta Szold at Hadassah's inception, the group's leaders argued with greater frequency that Hadassah's practical work constituted a feminine, critical element to the upbuilding of Palestine. Rejecting the division between private philanthropy and the public world of nation-building, the Central Committee reminded male Zionists that even Herzl himself had once stated that “philanthropy to a whole people...is politics.” Hadassah leaders intended to drive this point home by abandoning in the post-war era “all picayune and undignified methods of collection, such as street selling” that had been used to raise money during the war. Their future programs would be based on responsible, not haphazard, fundraising and management.

These leaders posited women's unique qualifications for philanthropic work based on their biological potential to give life and their traditional responsibility to care for children, both of which led them to be more pragmatic than men. The special nature of women, born of their responsibility to nurture and care for infants and children, enabled them to be more steadfast than men. “[The woman] generalizes from experience,” clarified Hadassah's leaders, “it is true that women are more minutely practical than men, with an eye constantly alert to detail, because they are kept close to the facts of life, birth and bread and
shelter and disease." Without this direct maternal commitment, Hadassah leaders feared their entire medical and social welfare project in Palestine would fold under the mismanagement of Zionist men. More importantly, they considered their philanthropic contribution to the movement as distinctly political in nature: "The principles we have laid down for ourselves are the principles of womanliness translated into terms of public service." Hadassah's caring contribution to the upbuilding of Palestine did as much, if not more, to help found the Jewish homeland as did the various projects instituted by men. Such ideas would be even more powerfully formulated during the 1920s when the organization faced direct conflict with the ZOA over its independent status.

While Hadassah conceptualized its work as the feminine contribution to nation-building, Council women sought to find a place for themselves within the developing field of professionalized social welfare. In a 1917 address to Council, Frances Taussig remarked that professional status often meant little more than that one received a salary, which left "all of the unsalaried to languish in the ranks of the volunteers." She recalled that the first "professionals" in Jewish social work had been older men, retired rabbis or businessmen. In her opinion, these men, despite their elevated status, did not perform more useful work than the female volunteers, who had gained valuable training through direct interaction with their clients. In the last several years the numbers of women receiving professional training.

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80 "The Woman in Zionism," Maccabaean 30 (February 1917): 148. This issue was edited by the Central Committee of Hadassah.

81 Ibid., 148.
had increased, and she hoped that even more young women would embark on a career in Jewish social welfare.82

Rebekah Kohut even more strongly expressed pride in the work of female volunteers, and unlike Taussig, did not imply that women should seek professional education. Although Kohut agreed that volunteers needed to have some manner of practical training in social work, she rejected dividing the ranks of women workers into a hierarchy of professionals and volunteers. Instead she urged women to use their wartime experiences to create an international body of "efficient volunteer service." Reflecting on women's subordination to men in the major relief organizations, Kohut demanded that women "show national organizations that it is a mistake to leave us out of their calculations in the work the war has created." Council members must "refuse, as women, to be used merely to raise money and to act as figureheads in the management of sewing societies and ladies' auxiliaries." Women, she insisted, must instead assert themselves with "quiet force."83

The two women's organizations used their experiences during the war years to argue for a continued feminine presence in public life in the future. Both groups supported women's efforts to engage in social welfare work and maintained fervently that women's contributions should not be considered less important than men's. Hadassah women concurred with those in Council by supporting women's contributions but they discerned an additional, and crucial, role for the female volunteer to play in Zionist nation-building.


Although diverging on Zionism, both the NCJW and Hadassah employed language full of maternalist themes that valorized women's capabilities. These common rhetorical strategies promoted the organizations' individual war-time endeavors and would encourage closer interaction during the inter-war period.

Poised for Future Action

As they struggled to assist Jews in other lands over a period of several years, American Jewish organizations utilized language and images that conjured up feelings of kinship to the Jews overseas. By the end of the war American Jews did feel a profound and sustained connection to Jews in Europe and Palestine and they struggled to find an adequate solution to the "Jewish Problem" in these lands, most notably in the emerging nations of Eastern Europe. Yet the united "family" of world Jewry also showed signs of division as gender, class, and ideological concerns began to pull family members apart. American Jewish women also participated in the discussions regarding the future of European and Palestinian Jewry. Their work during the war years had raised their awareness of their own abilities, had involved them in activities that enabled them not only to serve others, but also to prove themselves capable and qualified. Despite the fact that women often took the lead from their male contemporaries, particularly in the opening days of the crisis, by the November 1918 armistice much about women's lives had changed. A growing interest in women's rights, an increasing penchant for associating themselves with the movements to achieve those rights, and a positive re-evaluation of their own work had led women in all three groups to greater confidence regarding their abilities. Yet by the beginning of 1919 only one organization, the NCJW, seemed poised to set off in a new direction, to cut a path
independent of their male allies. Socialist and Zionist women still remained closely tied to the men of their organizations; however, even these women would soon begin to express more vocally their desire for an equality that was more than rhetorical.

The crisis atmosphere, at least for a time, dictated that organizations cooperate toward their common goal. For women in the three organizations this meant an increased awareness of their connection to Jews from around the world, but also, and more immediately, that they followed male directives. This was most notably the case in the Zionist and socialist movements where (competing) visions of Jewish peoplehood were more fully theorized than among the middle-class German Jews of the NCJW. Yet while overt discussion of gender inequality or other conflicts might have been suppressed for the duration of the war, women did not entirely abandon their pre-war struggles. Rather, their experiences in the war relief campaigns profoundly influenced the shape of their post-war activities and strengthened their resolve to aid the Jewish people, battle for women's equality, and promote the value of women's work, however each group defined these concepts. Participation in war work and the temporary suppression of outright confrontation over questions of gender would give way to a post-war flourishing of Jewish women's activism.
CHAPTER 4

THE MOVE TOWARD AUTONOMY:
THE NCJW AND HADASSAH IN THE POSTWAR WORLD

After years of cooperation, by the early 1920s prominent leaders in the NCJW and Hadassah began to reassert a strong organizational and female presence, demanding recognition from and parity within the larger relief and Zionist movements. While these leaders enjoyed broad support, their new position also attracted a good deal of resistance from some male leaders as well as from a number of the group's very own members. In the face of such opposition, NCJW and Hadassah leaders argued ever more forcefully that women's contributions should be accorded a certain degree of attention and respect.

In an era when the professionalization of social welfare work continued apace, activists such as Rebekah Kohut and Henrietta Szold fought for women's right to maintain involvement in this work on a voluntary basis. They quickly discovered that this incipient feminism -- their insistence that women's work be appreciated and adequately funded -- demanded that their groups separate from the men's for their own organizational survival. These leaders determined that if they wished to avoid becoming the women's auxiliaries of the JDC or Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), the postwar regrouping of the FAZ, they
would have to assert a certain degree of autonomy. During the 1920s leaders returned with renewed vigor to those separatist strategies they had utilized in the days prior to the war.

**The JDC in the Postwar World**

With Europe ravaged, the USSR and surrounding lands in turmoil, and the doors to the United States effectively closed to immigration, American Jews realized that their duty to those overseas would not end with the armistice or even with the signing of the peace treaty. Relief activities would have to continue, even in an atmosphere suffused with antisemitism both at home and abroad. The era of “100% Americanism” and the postwar Red Scare negatively affected the Jews of the United States and had even worse consequences for those wishing to emigrate from Europe. The not uncommon antisemitic association of Jews with both capitalist excess and radical extremism intensified following the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917. Many Americans believed not only that Russian Jews had been actively involved in that takeover but also that American Jews were tainted by a similar radicalism. Authorities in Chattanooga, Tennessee, for instance, refused citizenship to several Jews simply because they held membership in the Arbeter Ring, an organization now deemed foreign and on the fringes of acceptable political behavior. Fear of Jewish radicals was not limited to the South; in 1920 Henry Ford’s newspaper, The Dearborn Independent, printed an article entitled “The International Jew: The World’s Problem.” This piece reiterated the major themes of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. 

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forgery circulating in Europe since the late nineteenth-century and purporting to have uncovered a secret cabal of Jews intent upon gaining control of the world. Ford's newspaper continued to print scurrilous attacks against Jews well into the decade.\(^2\)

The fear of Russians generally, and especially of Russian Jews, along with widespread nativism led to the passage of laws severely limiting the number of immigrants allowed yearly from Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Without relatives in the United States who could vouch for them few East Europeans could hope to gain entry. From 1919-1920 nearly 120,000 Jews immigrated to the U.S. but of this number only a paltry 689 arrived without being able to claim relatives already residing in the nation. The most prominent American Jews, wishing to avoid more undue attention being drawn to their community, urged that Jews keep a low profile in these and other public debates. Fearing that Jews had been too visible in recent news and discussions regarding immigration, Louis Marshall requested in 1924 that the JDC endeavor to keep Jews in Europe rather than to lobby assiduously against the restrictive immigration law just recently passed Congress. Given the tenor of the times, from Henry Ford's newspaper to government action in Tennessee, many Jewish leaders felt it wiser to keep a low profile and to avoid drawing attention to themselves. While the restrictive legislation played the major role, all these factors combined to put a virtual end to European Jewish immigration to the United States: in the

\(^2\) Dinnerstein, 80-2. For antisemitism in the United States more broadly during the 1920s, see Dinnerstein, 80-93.
years from 1907-1914 656,000 Jews had entered the country but from 1924-1931 that number plummeted to only 73,000.³

The Jewish refugees in Europe did not heed this sea change in U.S. policy. Thousands had flooded the major European capitals during the war, and these refugees were in no hurry to return to their Eastern homes once the war ended. West European port cities like Rotterdam filled to bursting with Jews hoping to obtain the documentation that would allow them to travel overseas. The situation in the East was even worse. In Poland alone approximately one million Jews were left homeless by the war. Starvation and disease ravaged these desolated communities. Sickness, violence and family dislocation contributed to a tragic rise in the number of orphans, both those whose parents had perished in the war and those abandoned in the hope that someone else might better provide for them. Poland and Ukraine reported having some 275,000 such children within their borders.⁴

The creation of new, independent states in the East as a result of the Central Powers’ defeat also contributed to the turmoil experienced by Jews. The chaos and panic generated by competing groups within these new nations all too often led to violent pogroms against the local Jewish populations. The overthrow of the Tsar and the prospect of national independence did not halt the antisemitic fervor of certain groups in the population. Pogroms broke out across Eastern Europe reaching a furious and violent peak in the summer of 1919. In Ukraine, the anti-Communist White Army and those allied with it played the


popular stereotype of the Jew as Bolshevik to their brutal advantage. Ultimately some 35,000-100,000 Jews perished as a result of the Ukrainian pogroms, with as many as a quarter of a million suffering overall.\(^5\)

Jewish groups including the JDC struggled to address these emergencies, but intergroup disagreements arising during the war continued to plague postwar efforts. The socialist People’s Relief Committee felt that the JDC leadership had too great a commitment to relief work and paid too little attention to the reconstruction of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Communist members of the PRC in particular complained that the JDC targeted minimal funding to labor unions and other worker organizations.\(^6\) The JDC also faced complications in their relations with the U.S. government. At the conclusion of the war, Felix Warburg had immediately requested permission to send a Jewish commission to Eastern Europe for the purpose of providing relief. The government denied his request, informing him that all relief coming from the United States for those areas formerly occupied by Germany should be sent through the American Relief Administration (ARA). The JDC therefore initially funneled money through the ARA, choosing to distribute goods to both non-Jews and Jews in the hopes of offsetting antisemitic reactions against its work.\(^7\) Ultimately the JDC contributed $3.3 million toward the $100 million ARA effort. Because


it agreed to cooperate with the ARA, the JDC was eventually allowed to send workers overseas to begin aid missions to the Jews.⁸

Jewish contributions in the years from 1919 to 1921 reached $33.4 million, much of this money going toward founding soup kitchens, maintaining hospitals and orphanages, and bringing food to the starving in the countryside. The JDC also set up a tracing bureau to help people locate lost relatives. In time the JDC established a more orderly provision of services moving beyond the emergency stage of their relief program. In February 1920 Boris Bogen headed up the first JDC Overseas Unit working with local populations to establish more permanent social welfare provision. The next year the JDC voted to end emergency relief but proceeded with its reconstruction program. Throughout the decade the organization continued to provide services to children and orphans, promote medical care, establish schools, and loan money to the destitute for business start-up.⁹

Working with the ARA immediately following the war paved the way for extended cooperation between the two groups. Invited by the ARA to participate in its mission to the USSR in 1920 and 1921, the JDC eagerly took on this new project. American Jews felt very concerned about Soviet Jewry particularly following the wave of pogroms in Ukraine. Having little experience as farmers and crowded into small towns and cities, Jews in the Soviet lands suffered acutely during the drought and famine of the early 1920s. Boris Bogen, the JDC representative for Eastern Europe, worked under ARA arrangement to distribute some $4 million in relief funds for Soviet Jews through 1922. The ARA pulled out of the

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⁸ Bauer, 9.

⁹ Ibid., 9-11.
USSR that year, but the JDC continued its own activities through a special agreement with the U.S. government. Seeking to end Jews' precarious economic status in the USSR, some JDC leaders suggested Jewish colonization and training as farmers. In July 1924 the JDC, in conjunction with several Soviet agencies, founded the American Jewish Joint Agricultural Corporation, or Agro-Joint. Between 1924 and 1928 Agro-Joint resettled nearly 6,000 families in Ukraine or in the Crimea. By 1928 there were 112 Agro-Joint colonies in Ukraine and 105 in the Crimea, some having such decidedly Zionist names as Tel Hai.10

Socialists and Zionists continued to work alongside the JDC although relationships among the three groups grew increasingly difficult. The JDC forwarded $3.2 million to Palestine from 1918-21 and included in this sum financial backing for Hadassah's Medical Unit, bank loans and support for orphans, religious groups and others.11 Tensions began to rise, however, when Zionists complained that Palestine was receiving less than its fair share of JDC funds. In the period from 1916 to 1926 the JDC raised $60 million but of this sum only $7 million, or 12%, went to Palestine. JDC officials explained that the organization based aid distribution on need alone, not on ideology, and therefore Palestinian Jews received the full amount of aid to which they were entitled. This explanation did not appease Zionists who felt that Palestine was being neglected by the non-Zionist dominated JDC. During the

10 Ibid., 57-61. Tel Hai refers to the famous settlement in Palestine where Josef Trumpeldor died defending it from an Arab attack in 1920.

11 Ibid., 15.
1920s American Zionists themselves forwarded $20 million on Palestine while continuing to donate to other relief funds.\(^{12}\)

Palestine underwent sustained growth in the 1920s but also witnessed an upsurge in violence perpetrated by the Arab population. At the San Remo conference Great Britain officially received the mandate over Palestine, which was formally approved by the League of Nations in 1922. During the same period a number of riots broke out across Palestine leading the British to curtail further Jewish immigration. Following this action Zionists and prominent American non-Zionists who were opposed only to a political state but not to Jewish settlement in Palestine began to unite. The British Mandate allowed for the creation of a Jewish Agency and, spurred by Chaim Weizmann's desire for non-Zionist funding of Palestine endeavors, the two factions worked together to create an Agency, reaching final agreement in 1928.\(^{13}\)

**Breaking New Ground: The NCJW and International Work**

Following the war Council leaders initially believed that the subordinate status to which they had acquiesced during the war would give way to a more equitable partnership with the men's groups involved in the JDC. Prominent Council leaders, most notably Rebekah Kohut, endeavored to assist in planning the postwar reconstruction projects of the JDC as well as to found a special women's mission abroad. As seen in Chapter 3, women's desire for a more active role foundered on male intransigence, such as the reluctance of the


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 323-9.
JWB to allow the women to travel to the war zones. The armistice brought little change to such gender dynamics. Council women continued to comprise only a tiny minority at JDC meetings and conventions and thus were unable to change the organization's policies. At an October 1921 JDC meeting in Chicago, the NCJW representative, Alma D. Cowan, found that she was the “only woman with delegate privileges” in a room of 150 men from across the nation. This recognition compelled her to assert her presence even though she had gone to the meeting with no other goal than to listen to the men's deliberations. When they began to discuss forming a commission to Europe and failed to mention a single female name, Cowan took the floor to request that at least one woman be asked to serve. Later, reporting back to the NCJW board, she admitted her doubts regarding the success of her efforts but was glad that Council's position was at least put on record.¹⁴

This small initial step at insisting on greater female representation was repeated the following year when Council women again tried to achieve a seat on the commission. At the “Victory Conference,” convened in Spring 1922 to discuss the Jewish situation in Russia, conference delegates advocated sending a commission of prominent, respected community leaders overseas to gather information and ultimately report back on the condition of Russian Jewish life. The primary purpose of the commission, though, was to convey to the American Jewish community the urgent need for sustained fundraising. At the conference, Louis Marshall spoke eloquently about the ways that the war had altered American Jewish life. He

¹⁴ Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Council of Jewish Women, November-December 1921, p. 12, Box 2, Folder 4, NCJW collection, Library of Congress (hereafter cited as LC). In January 1922 The Jewish Woman reported that Rose Brenner was asked to serve on the Executive Committee of the AJRC and that she and Estelle Sternberger were chosen to represent Council at American Jewish Committee meetings. “In Woman’s World,” The Jewish Woman 2 (January 1922): 15-6.
told delegates that the war had forced the community to develop "a consciousness of duty and a brotherhood of obligation...we no longer, in our philanthropic life, in our active life, draw lines by geographical boundaries. It is no longer a question as to whether a man's parents came from England or France or Germany or Poland or Russia, but as to whether or not he is a Jew." Once again women were excluded from this vision of Jewish brotherhood; not a single woman's name arose as a possibility for inclusion on the commission. At least one male delegate briefly noted the dearth of women's names. However, his concerns were readily assuaged as he quickly added, "never the less, it does not matter whom we send abroad on this Commission except that they must be big men."

Rebekah Kohut, acting as Council's representative to this conference, refused to let women's participation in a major relief endeavor slip through her fingers once again without at least voicing her frustration. Taking the floor, Kohut implored the delegates not to neglect women. Arguing that women numbered among the most experienced social workers in the United States, she further maintained that the nature of women's skills, both instinctive and acquired, were indispensable to the proposed commission. Unlike male social workers, Kohut asserted, women were not preoccupied with "cut-and-dried scientific methods." Reiterating themes Council women had been espousing since the 1890s, Kohut argued that women "have an understanding of certain things that you men have not." Her passionate

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16 Henry Hirsch of Toledo, OH quoted in ibid., 31-32.

17 Ibid., 87-88.
defense of women’s capabilities won her a round of applause, but it did not significantly change the status of the NCJW in the larger movement.

Despite these attempts to advance their positions at JDC deliberations, Council women continued to be a marginal force in that organization. When it became evident that the JDC men would persist in their foot dragging whenever it came to gender issues, Kohut and others increasingly turned their energies toward the Reconstruction Unit they had first devised back in 1917. Rather than waste their efforts attempting to change the minds of men in the JDC, women like Kohut preferred to devise new ways in which women could serve their “brethren” overseas. Now that active fighting had ceased, barriers to women’s travel overseas were lowered. Still the tasks before them were by no means small. They had to devise a program, make connections with women in Europe, and most importantly, obtain funding for their projects.

Rebekah Kohut was well-suited to the job she willingly shouldered of getting the Council’s Reconstruction program up and running. Born in Hungary in 1864, the third child of a Conservative rabbi, Kohut grew up in the United States living in both the South and West. In 1887 she married the widowed, Hungarian-born rabbi Alexander Kohut and, at the age of 23, became stepmother to his eight children. During the ensuing years, she devoted herself to public work while simultaneously caring for her husband and family, yet it was not until after her husband’s death in 1894 that she stepped into the national limelight. Her public service encompassed an array of interests but her special concern was social welfare.
work. She believed that her devotion to postwar international relief arose, in part, from conversations she had had with her mother years before regarding Southern women's efforts to rebuild the South following the Civil War. Kohut's mother maintained that women had played a central role in the reconstruction of that region. Reflecting on those conversations, Kohut imagined that similar, though far worse, conditions presented themselves to the Jews of Europe, and she believed that it was imperative for American women to come to their aid. She acknowledged that her passionate commitment to volunteer work with women and children led some people to mock her, commenting years later that "because I felt miserable about them and spoke solemnly about them, and the need of doing something, I know I was looked upon by some as that ridiculous thing - a professional do-gooder. Oh yes, I was the funny humanitarian type - just made for caricature and burlesque." Kohut did not allow such opinions to dissuade her from her primary goal -- coming to the aid of Europe's Jews. She endeavored not only to help women and children at home and abroad but also to counter those opinions that belittled the voluntary contributions of American women to public life.

In April 1920, Kohut received approval from the NCJW president to lead a mission to the major European cities to study the refugees' situation and assess how best to meet their needs. Accompanied by her personal secretary, Estelle Frankfurter, Kohut traveled


throughout Europe expressing great alarm at the destitution she found there. Starvation,
fear, and family separation were compounded by the refugees' uncertainty as to what the
future might hold for them. The refugees had tremendous difficulty obtaining the appropriate
documentation necessary to emigrate, particularly if they had fled their homelands in the
midst of war. Antisemitism further ensured that the Jews' already pitiful situation would only
be exacerbated by many nations' reluctance to give them entry regardless of the status of
their paperwork. Moreover, large numbers of Jews feared returning to an Eastern Europe
wracked by unrest that all too easily targeted them as the source of national troubles.\(^{21}\)

The first stop on Kohut's travels was Antwerp, where she found a great number of
Polish Jews who had fled their homeland. Because many had been smuggled across any
number of borders in their desperate journey west they usually could not produce
documentation of their births and resident status. American officials prohibited such people
from traveling to the United States without first presenting a Polish passport and applying
for a U.S. Visa, an impossible request for most of these destitute refugees. Kohut observed
similar conditions in the Hague and Rotterdam -- large numbers of would-be immigrants
forbidden to travel abroad due to lack of proper documentation. In each city, Kohut was
struck not only by the refugees' poverty but also their inactivity, which she felt only served
to intensify feelings of hopelessness.\(^{22}\)

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\(^{22}\) "Report of the Committee on Reconstruction," *Official Report of the Ninth Triennial Convention*,
November 1920, pp. 409-422, Box 5, Folder 1, Solomon collection, LC; Kohut, *My Portion*, 269.
As she moved east, the Jewish plight grew visibly worse. In Berlin Kohut learned that some 70,000 Polish Jews had recently entered the German nation; most of these people hoped to make it to Holland and from there emigrate to the United States. Bertha Pappenheim, the head of the Jüdischer Frauenbund (League of Jewish Women), and other well-known German-Jewish social welfare activists met briefly with Kohut during her stay in that city. They discussed how American women might help in Europe and contemplated the usefulness of holding an international Congress of Jewish Women in the near future. Later in her trip, Kohut would again meet up with Pappenheim. At this later meeting Pappenheim, sounding very much like her American counterpart, “strongly complained of the hindrance the men place[d] on women’s work through their control of the financial end.”

Increasingly Kohut, and through her other NCJW leaders, were coming to understand that if they wanted to run projects on their own they would need to have greater access to and control over relief funds. Cooperation predicated upon women simply following male directives had less appeal now that the war was over. American women in the NCJW, by establishing ties with their counterparts in Europe, forged an alliance that led not only to expanded overseas services for Jewish families but also to the eventual re-birth of an international Jewish women’s organization.

Traveling on to Vienna brought Kohut into contact with the distinguished Zionist and social welfare activist Anitta Müller-Cohen, who had worked vigorously throughout the war

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to aid the great number of Jewish refugees flooding into that city. By the time Kohut met her in 1920, Müller-Cohen had established canteens, nurseries, day care facilities and trade schools for girls, all of which received funding from the JDC and the American Relief Administration. European women, notably those in Vienna, were doing what they could to deal with the plight of the refugees, but Kohut saw that the problems clearly outweighed their ability to attend to them adequately. She believed that American women had much to offer their European allies. Increasingly she was coming to the opinion that infusions of money alone, as important as that was, could not sufficiently resolve the variety of problems facing the refugees, most notably women and girls. Kohut maintained that American women had an active role to play abroad, a contribution that could be as important as the work they had taken on at Ellis Island in the years preceding World War I.

On her return to the United States, Kohut sent a strong set of recommendations to the Ninth Triennial of the NCJW, which met in November 1920. She urged the convention to embrace a Reconstruction program in Europe. Predating the JDC's switch to this policy by several months, Kohut urged Council to work in concert with European women to help the refugees rebuild their lives in Europe, rather than continue to help them emigrate overseas. A certain amount of nativism crept into her request when she suggested that it might be better to assist Poles and Russians in their own nations rather than risk ruining "our" country.

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25 Kohut, My Portion, 269.
with undesirable immigrants.\footnote{\textit{Report of the Committee on Reconstruction}, \textit{Official Report of the Ninth Triennial Convention}, November 1920, pp. 422, Box 5, Folder 1, Solomon collection, LC.} She also managed to scold the men's organizations for their treatment of the NCJW during the war years. Reiterating a common request, Kohut recommended that the JWB and JDC entrust work among female immigrants to the NCJW who better understood their "special needs." But this time Kohut also called her colleagues' attention to the "relatively unimportant recognition and opportunity to function" that they had received in recent years from the JDC and JWB. She especially criticized the JDC for attempting to subvert Council's autonomy during the war years even though the NCJW had "set aside its own desires and needs in order to be helpful in the larger and more important program of the Joint Distribution Committee." That said, she argued that Council should now be considered an equal, rather than junior, participant in the JDC. She recommended that Council ask for "no less than" $100,000 in JDC funds to start Council's Reconstruction program.\footnote{\textit{Report of the Committee on Reconstruction}, \textit{Official Report of the Ninth Triennial Convention}, November 1920, pp. 425, Box 5, Folder 1, Solomon collection, LC.} Tired of waiting for that future day when all the myriad crises would be past, women in the NCJW, led by Kohut, began to demand that their organization's work be accorded the same respect, and equal monetary investment, as the projects of other JDC constituent groups. It would take the men, and even some women in the Council, longer to come to agreement with this point of view.

When the first Unit finally sailed for Europe at the end of 1920, its small group of committed social welfare activists found that the precarious situation of the refugees had not much improved since Kohut's visit. Not only did refugees face poverty and disease during
the long wait for proper documentation, they also had to contend with the anti-immigrant, and often antisemitic, attitudes of government officials, including those from the United States. Unit workers reported that several representatives of the U.S. government referred to the potential emigrants in the Dutch ports as “scum of the earth,” “dregs of humanity,” and “carriers of disease.” In late 1920 the U.S. government ordered that emigrants bound for the United States be quarantined to prevent typhus outbreaks. This regulation was interpreted variously in the different port cities but in all of them it seriously curtailed the refugees' freedom of movement away from the ports, and therefore their ability to obtain paid employment during the waiting period. Council representatives sought to keep the refugees’ minds active during the quarantine and to assist them in learning skills to aid in finding employment. Although immigration restriction severely reduced the number of Jews who would be allowed to enter the United States, Council leaders also wanted to ensure that those who did manage to gain passage held the “right spiritual attitude toward America.” Unit workers sought to “spread the gospel of bodily cleanliness” among potential immigrants, no doubt to counter suggestions that Jews were filthy and diseased. They also began Americanization classes and taught English to those refugees interested in learning. In all their endeavors, Unit workers cooperated with Dutch and other European women, training them to take over the work themselves one day. As envisioned by Kohut and others, the NCJW Reconstruction Unit had several aims: to initiate individual case work

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among the refugee population, to establish Americanization, English and job training classes in the port areas, and to teach middle-class European women how to administer the work Council had initiated. Although still an American organization, the NCJW believed that it could create European national groups in its own image, groups committed to social welfare work and vehicles for Jewish women's voluntary contributions to public life.

A second Unit arrived in Europe in the spring of 1922 followed by a third in spring of 1923. Where the first Unit centered its attention on the West European port cities such as Rotterdam, the second Unit expanded further east to Riga, where it worked with local groups to set up services akin to those begun in the West, including the establishment of a library. The JDC helped fund this work and in November 1922 the Unit turned the project over to local women in Riga.30

Elinor Sachs-Barr, a Unit leader, presented Council members with an intimate portrait of Reconstruction work by relating the story of Mrs. Arnskoff, a 35-year-old "Russian" widow with two children. After having spent a year on the road from Kiev, Arnskoff landed in Bucharest by way of Constantinople. In Bucharest she obtained a passport and traveled to Rotterdam, from which she hoped to emigrate with her children to Canada. But despite having family in Canada, officials declared her Bucharest passport to be illegal and denied her request to emigrate. The devastated woman was at her wit's end, stranded in Rotterdam without employment and refusing to return to Russia or Ukraine for fear of the "pogromszchikes." Unit workers proposed that she take her children to Cuba, an

30 Mrs. Alexander Kohut "Report, Committee on Reconstruction," (read by Mrs. Sporborg), Official Report of the Tenth Triennial Convention, ed. E.M. Sternberger, November 1923, pp. 208-9, Box 5, Folder 2, Solomon collection, LC.
increasingly popular alternative in light of the closed doors of other Western Hemisphere nations. Initially Arnskoff balked at this suggestion, considering Cuba a land far too foreign and strange. Unit workers proceeded to introduce her to other women bound for that nation and eventually managed to convince Arnskoff to join them.\textsuperscript{31}

Sachs-Barr’s retelling of Arnskoff’s tale served dual purposes: to convey to comfortable American women the extent and nature of European women’s suffering and to underscore the importance of the Reconstruction Unit’s work. Once again, as in earlier cases where Council felt the need to prove the necessity of its special program, the leadership stressed the unique, gendered nature of women’s plight and the distinctive means by which American women could come to their aid. Believing as they did that women themselves were critical for the success of these projects, Council leaders continued to work towards the eventual takeover of program administration by locals. Unit women strove to create European Councils of Jewish Women in the cities where a Reconstruction Unit was stationed. By 1925 eleven Council chapters had been formed in Europe and Australia.\textsuperscript{32}

This aspect of the Reconstruction program suggested that the NCJW might one day


\textsuperscript{32} “Our World Work,” report from Annual Board of Managers meeting, The Jewish Woman 2 (December 1922): 17; and, Mrs. A. Salkind (President, Riga CJW), “The Jewish Women of Latvia: Their Progress in Social Work,” The Jewish Woman 3 (February 1923): 2-3. NCJW chapters in Antwerp, Paris, Amsterdam, Arnhem (Holland), Rotterdam, The Hague, Trieste (Italy), Riga, Lodz, Geneva, and New South Wales. See Rich, 13. Evidently, they did not move as quickly as some Council leaders would have liked. At the 1921 board meeting Janet Harris reported that on her trip the previous summer to Europe to increase interest in starting up new Council sections, she felt that European women were moving forward very slowly. Janet Harris, “Report, Committee on Foreign Relations,” Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Council of Jewish Women, November-December 1921, pp. 238-9, Box 2, Folder 4, NCJW collection, LC.
spearhead an international organization similar to its ally the International Council of Women, a development with which not all members were entirely comfortable.

Publicly the NCJW embraced its bold move on to the international stage; privately, some members voiced concern that the organization might be overextending itself. In 1921 as Council prepared to send another Unit to Europe, several board members asked their colleagues to consider whether it was wise for the group to expand so quickly. They worried that the international work, added to their already substantial expenditures on the Department of Immigrant Aid, would deplete funds earmarked for other domestic programs. President Rose Brenner tried to soothe these fears by telling members that the proposed International Congress of Jewish Women would address this very issue, namely how much longer the American Council could continue to fund projects in other nations. Brenner believed that the NCJW had to raise women's awareness abroad, awaken European Jewish women to the need for American-style social work, and assist them in the creating their own national Councils of Jewish Women. In the future, she assured the board, these Councils would deal themselves with the problems arising in their nations. Yet the prospect of an international Jewish women's umbrella organization only further troubled one board member, Evelyn Aronson Margolis, who expressed her firm reservations about Americans launching “an international Jewish organization of any description whatsoever, even a thing as harmless as the Council of Jewish Women.” Alluding to antisemites who envisaged malevolent, international Jewish conspiracies in the most benign of gatherings, she added, “Do you get my point?” Her intimated worry met with cries of “yes,” and the board agreed that any
conference that would be organized with the European women should explicitly be identified as an informal gathering only and not as an “international Jewish group.”

Despite certain members’ apprehensions about taking any active role in founding an international Jewish women’s organization, the NCJW’s postwar work among refugees and in establishing European Councils of Jewish Women significantly advanced movement in this direction. In a matter of only a couple of years Council began to reassert its prominence among American Jewish organizations by loosening ties to the JDC and other male-led relief organizations while at the same time strengthening alliances with Jewish women’s groups in Europe. Rebekah Kohut and others involved with the Reconstruction Unit used gendered characterizations of their work to argue that, as it had done prior to the war, the NCJW offered necessary services to women and children that the male-led organizations failed to provide. Moreover Kohut continued to promote the role of voluntary efforts in a field increasingly controlled by scientific methods and professional practitioners. Rather than allow themselves to be shunted aside by both the JDC and champions of professionalized social welfare, Kohut and others determined that female volunteers still had much to contribute to the Jewish people worldwide. These women insisted that groups like the NCJW should demand and receive the same funding for its projects as was dispensed to similar male-led relief organizations. While not abandoning all ties to the JDC, Council women determined to take a firmer stand, asserting their presence in both the American and European Jewish organizational worlds.

33 Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Council of Jewish Women, November-December 1921, pp. 259-64, Box 2, Folder 4, NCJW collection, LC.
Hadassah and Palestine: “A Joyful Mother of Children”

The other prominent women’s organization of the era, Hadassah, found itself in similar straights as the war drew to a close. International in scope from its very inception and more directly tied to the Zionist men’s organization than the NCJW had ever been to the JDC, Hadassah women devised other means by which to assert their independence. While both Hadassah and the NCJW argued that the voluntary efforts of women were still necessary and useful in the postwar world, their attitudes toward the financial support of these efforts differed. Where the NCJW argued that it was as deserving as other groups receiving funds from the JDC, Hadassah fought for the total control of its own finances, which by the early 1920s filled a significant portion of the general American Zionist coffers.

After the war Hadassah eagerly seized the opportunity to increase services to Palestine even though the leaders initially feared that they would no longer be able to rely on the non-Zionist funding they had received in the past. Reflecting larger tensions between the JDC and the Zionist movement, early in 1922 leaders voiced their suspicions that the JDC planned to stop funding the Medical Unit in favor of a “so-called reconstruction program” in Europe.34 Despite several threats throughout the early 1920s to discontinue the financing of Hadassah projects, the JDC continued its support until 1927. Even in the face of this potential monetary decline, Hadassah expanded its program of medical services in Palestine during the decade. The organization opened a school for nurses in November 1918, the same month that the Medical Unit moved into the Rothschild Hospital in Jerusalem. Within ten years the nurses’ school produced 135 graduates and had instituted course work for male

orderlies who were needed in those areas inhabited by large numbers of traditional Jewish and Muslim men who refused to be seen by a female nurse.\textsuperscript{35}

The extent of disease and malnutrition in Palestine after the war compelled the women to continue to broaden the range of Hadassah's medical services, especially to children. During the 1920s, Hadassah involved itself in anti-epidemic work, including an anti-malarial program funded by Louis Brandeis. As part of this effort the women's organization assisted with land reclamation projects, such as reforestation, aimed at lowering recurrences of malaria ravaging the population. By the time the Mandate government stepped in to take over the routine extermination of mosquitoes in 1931, it relied solely on the professionals trained by Hadassah to assist in this work.\textsuperscript{36} During the inter-war period the organization opened additional hospitals in Safad, Jaffa and Haifa and expanded its medical services for children, including founding several infant welfare clinics, first in the Old City of Jerusalem and in 15 other areas by 1926. Under the leadership of public health nurse Bertha Landsman, Hadassah also sponsored in a milk distribution program called \textit{Tipat Halav} (Drop of Milk) stations. Landsman had been so horrified by the high rates of infant mortality in Palestine that she committed herself to improving conditions for mothers and children. Her Tipat Halav stations produced and distributed the first pasteurized milk in

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\textsuperscript{35} Joan Dash, \textit{Summoned to Jerusalem: The Life of Henrietta Szold} (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), 179-82. She argues that even after Hadassah's tussle with the ZOA in 1921 funding for the Unit remained haphazard. She maintains that the JDC agreed to raise its level of support if Hadassah would relinquish control of their Palestinian projects to the JDC. Henrietta Szold refused what she called a "vile proposition." Marlin Levin, \textit{Balm in Gilead: the Story of Hadassah} (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 69-73.
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Palestine. When too few mothers made use of the program, Landsman devised a means by which to bring the milk to them personally: the Donkey Milk Express. Parents who could afford the milk were assessed a fee to cover the costs of free distribution to the poor. One young woman whose husband balked at paying this assessment managed to convince him to change his mind by abstaining from the Mikveh (ritual bath, in which religious women must immerse themselves before resuming sexual relations following their menstrual periods and after childbirth). “I absolutely refused to go until he gave me the money for milk. He won't refuse again,” she confidently told the nurses.37

Hadassah’s interest in the welfare of children led the organization to initiate such diverse services as school lunch programs and health exams, a variety of aid to orphans and even a children’s mental health clinic.38 The leadership’s commitment to helping local populations regardless of religious confession also led to their involvement in activities aimed at fostering better relations through children’s recreational activities. In 1925 while traveling in Europe Bertha Guggenheimer, the aunt of Hadassah leader Irma Lindheim, decided to open playgrounds in Jerusalem for all children, and requested that Hadassah administer the project. Hadassah accepted the proposal in 1928 and subsequently expanded the program further.39

37 Levin, 84.

38 Levin, 80-8; “Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America: The Achievements of Twelve Years,” copy of speech given by Mrs. Ethel Cohen, p. 2, 1924, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 4, HA.

By the time that the JDC, along with the Keren Hayesod (Foundation Fund) and ZOA withdrew financial support from the HMO in 1927, thereby making the Unit Hadassah's responsibility alone, the women's organization had positioned itself as central to the maintenance of health care throughout Palestine. Reflecting on the change in the Unit's status and in Hadassah's general program, Henrietta Szold commented in 1929 that "The Hadassah Medical Organization came into the country as a war relief organization and remained in the land as a peace organization." This expansion in medical services could not have been undertaken had not the organization also successfully recruited new members and new funding sources back home.

As early as the 1924 Convention, Henrietta Szold alerted members that the group's successes in Palestine demanded ever larger financial contributions. Like other Jewish organizations in the postwar era, Hadassah debated how best to sustain funding sources. Delegates to the 1924 convention deliberated at length whether an increase in dues or a vigorous membership drive would bring in the greater sum of money. They finally resolved to require that "each Chapter form a committee to enlist the interest and cooperation of other organized groups of Jewish women in their respective communities." For years Hadassah women had seen it as their mission to reach out to their non-Zionist sisters in the United States. Now the organization sought to make this standard policy. Szold and other leaders had always espoused the belief that women differed from men and that naturally their understanding of Zionism would also deviate. She told delegates to this convention that "it

40 Quoted in Levin, 64.

41 Proceedings of the Tenth Convention, July 1924, p. 189, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 3, HA.
is the women's Zionist spirit that we mean when we speak of the Hadassah spirit. It is the women's interpretation of Zionism — deep service in which the individual loses himself [sic] in the cause, in which the cause comes directly to the individual.\[42\] Hadassah leaders now urged their members to take that message to other American Jewish women, to relate to them the "women's interpretation of Zionism," one that closely resembled the work and methods of other inter-war women's organizations, especially the NCJW's Reconstruction Unit.

Throughout the 1920s as Hadassah women appealed to non-Zionist women for support, leaders began to articulate ever more distinctly their vision of a woman's Zionism. These special, feminine contributions to the Zionist movement colored women's perception of their mission in Palestine and shaped how they sought to tackle problems. Certain leaders, for instance, argued that Hadassah's medical work, attending as it did to both the Jewish and Arab populations in Palestine, could facilitate better relations between the two groups. In 1921, when Arab hostility resulted in violent attacks against Jews in Jaffa, Szold, in one of her Familiar Letters from Palestine, urged members to see the connections Jews had with Arabs and counseled that all Jews work to remove "every possible admixture of injustice" from their designs on that land. "We shall ally ourselves with the best of our Arab fellows, to cure what is diseased in us and in them. Arukat bat Ammi, and also Arukat ha-Govim! The healing of the daughter of our people, and the healing of the nations."\[43\] Upon returning to the United States in 1923 Szold asserted that Hadassah's medical work was the "best

\[42\] Henrietta Szold's speech to convention, *Proceedings of the Tenth Convention*, July 1924, p. 293, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 3, HA.

missionary work [Jews] could do in the face of our relations to the Arabs” and that it would be a “political blunder” to halt it. Such gendered constructions of Hadassah’s mission found increasing expression as the decade wore on. In 1926 Irma Lindheim, then national president, told convention delegates that

heretofore in this man run world of ours, men have gone into a country to conquer it...The women have said this colonization is unlike any other colonization and that is why Zapotinsky [most likely Vladimir Jabotinsky, the founder of the Revisionist movement] is wrong. When other people have gone they have gone to possess that country; they have gone to take advantage of the natives, but when we went into Palestine Hadassah went in with her hand outstretched, Hadassah went in with a healing, kindly humanitarian spirit and said it did not make any difference if they were Hebrew, Arab or Christian children.

In this way Szold and the Hadassah leadership regarded their work as a means not only of nurturing a healthy population and of upbuilding Palestine but also of curing what threatened to divide the Arab and Jewish populations. Social welfare work meant work designed to promote the general welfare of the entire society. Szold firmly believed that economic opportunity for all inhabitants of Palestine would promote a better understanding between Jews and Arabs. In the late 1920s she joined a small group of men and women in Brit Shalom (Covenant of Peace), a group devoted to the creation of a binational Arab-Jewish state. Although Brit Shalom failed to attract the support of most Zionists, Hadassah leaders continued to espouse their own organization’s potential to ease conflict between the two populations through medical work. This stance on Arab-Jewish relations exemplified the

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45 Proceedings of the 12th Convention, 1926, p. 89, Record Group 3, Box 5, Folder 1, HA.
leaders' belief that their general program of social welfare and medical work, their "womanly" contributions to nation-building, helped advance the general Zionist program. 46

In devising and promoting their vision of a gendered Zionism, the leadership employed candidly maternalist rhetoric. One Hadassah leader, Nima Adlerblum, linked women's interest in maintaining life directly to Hadassah's own work: "It is the beauty of Hadassah that it conceived life from its very inception... for Hadassah translates itself in creation, production and self-development." 47 Henrietta Szold urged that Hadassah as a whole "devote ourselves to motherhood work." She suggested that if the first aim of the group was the development of Palestine, "let our second aim be to make our land 'A Joyful Mother of Children.'" 48 Women's biological potential to give life and their traditional responsibilities to care for children, the leaders believed, led them to be more pragmatic than men. These women expressed their feelings that Zionist men often took up but failed to follow through on specific projects. The special nature of women, born of their responsibility to nurture and care for infants and children, enabled them to be more steadfast than men. The Central Committee informed the male Zionist movement that the woman "generalizes from experience. It is true that women are more minutely practical than men,


47 Adlerblum quoted in Proceedings of the 12th Convention, 1926, p. 37, Record Group 3, Box 5, Folder 1, HA.

48 "Letter from Henrietta Szold," 1921 Convention Proceedings, p. 5, Record Group 3, Box 2, Folder 4, HA.
with an eye constantly alert to detail, because they are kept close to the facts of life, birth and bread and shelter and disease.  

Without this direct maternal commitment Hadassah leaders feared their entire medical and social welfare project in Palestine would fold under the mismanagement of Zionist men. Szold elaborated on this attitude in advising Hadassah members not simply to persevere in the face of male opprobrium but rather to affirm forthrightly the sensible, feminine element inherent in their work. At the 1924 convention she urged the delegates to contrast Hadassah's plans with those undertaken by the male-led organization:

What our lords and masters do not seem to understand is that true pedagogy, a wise insight into psychology, means waiting for results. They want you to utter promises and pious wishes that cannot be carried out. I am not a man-hater, but I would like you, for instance, to compare our resolutions with the resolutions that have been adopted by the men's convention; and you will find that we have uttered no pious wishes, that whatever we have resolved upon is practical and can be carried out, and that it is thoroughly Jewish.

She and other leaders believed that this maternal desire to create and nurture life in Palestine had a distinctly Jewish and explicitly Zionist component. Women's work, while perhaps not consumed by abstract ideology and international power politics, did produce results and contributed significantly to the overall Zionist mission. The projects supported by Hadassah, the leaders argued, were always completed and managed efficiently. Far from being the unorganized volunteers derided by professional Zionists, these women considered themselves even more realistic than their male colleagues and every bit as Zionist.

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49 “The Woman in Zionism,” Maccabaean 30 (February 1917): 148, located in Record Group 4, Box 2, Folder 20, HA. This issue was edited by the Central Committee of Hadassah.

50 Proceedings of the Tenth Convention, 1924, p. 220, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 3, HA.
Hadassah's leaders further articulated their conceptions of women's nature and the
gendered aspects of Zionism in their interactions with other Zionist women's groups. The
European-based Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO) formed in the early
1920s, the same period when Hadassah struggled for independence from the Zionist
Organization of America. Hadassah's leaders sent greetings to the new organization at its
founding convention in Carlsbad, explaining in the short piece published in the Newsletter
why women's concerns and projects proved so critical in peacetime. They referred to non-
Jewish international women's organizations working at conciliation in the postwar world.
The published letter alluded to a comment made by Carrie Chapman Catt regarding the work
of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance: "it was left to women to seat those of French
with those of German birth at one and the same Conference table, as happened in Rome in
the early months of the present year." They concluded that Jewish women's organizations
played an even more critical role in that Zionist women sought not only conciliation but also
creation. The creation they referred to encompassed Jewish settlement of Palestine but also
the re-creation of Diaspora women through their commitment to Zionism.\footnote{\textit{Newsletter}
4 (October 1923): 2.}

The same Newsletter issue described an interaction between Hadassah and a group
of Zionist women in Lithuania in the 1920s, an incident that provides further insight into
Hadassah leaders' ideas regarding men's and women's attributes as well as the sentiment that
women's participation in Zionist causes contributed to their overall success. The article
reported on the formation of a new Hadassah chapter in Yanishik. Apparently, local Zionist
men had included women in a fundraising project that had proven quite successful.
Following the fundraiser it once again became difficult to raise money, leading the men to resolve “to draw women into the work.” Disregarding the men's renewed interest in their capabilities, the women opted to support Hadassah’s work in Palestine rather than to raise more money for the local group. The women sent £16 to Hadassah and turned to the regional Zionist headquarters in Kovno for further guidance. This office never responded to their solicitation for propaganda material on Hadassah's work; indeed, they seem not to have replied to the women at all. After this the Yanishik women turned directly to Hadassah offices in New York, asking that they be considered a new chapter. In responding to the Yanishik women, Hadassah leaders urged them to think of fundraising “as the measure of moral responsibility” and told them that to take up a project and follow it through to completion was to “apply the mother-feeling to a social task.” Rather than have the women continue forwarding money to Hadassah, they advised them to decide on a specific Palestine project that would then become their own. To Hadassah leaders the sustained funding of an enterprise amounted to more than mere philanthropy -- such financial responsibility for the care of others was the expression of women's maternal instincts on a societal or national level.

Hadassah leaders’ conceptualization of women’s natural proclivities and of women’s role in Zionism led to their using language that affirmed gender difference, one that closely resembled the language employed by key NCJW leaders and other women’s groups of the

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53 Newsletter 4 (March 1924): 5-6.
But like Council leaders, proponents of these ideas in Hadassah found that their male counterparts did not always agree with their way of thinking. Throughout the 1920s, at the same time that they began to build up their overseas program Hadassah leaders also launched a battle to regain organizational independence and to break out from under an arrangement that more often than not demanded their willful subservience.

**Hadassah's Struggle for Independence**

Hadassah's emphasis on practical projects and use of maternalist language had made it a success, but also brought the group into conflict with the FAZ and later the ZOA. As described in Chapter 3, following the war Hadassah became part of the ZOA, according to the plan formulated by Brandeis, losing direct responsibility for its Palestine projects. Despite the obstacles this plan presented to its sustained autonomy, Hadassah's membership increased throughout this period while that of the ZOA declined. As early as 1921 one of every three members of the ZOA was a Hadassah lady. In 1920, as the first issue of the Hadassah Newsletter appeared, women began to reclaim their independence, and several key Central Committee members began a struggle to break free of the ZOA. In this battle,

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55 See Carol Kutscher, “The Early Years of Hadassah, 1912-1921” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 208-50; Carol Bosworth Kutscher, “From Merger to Autonomy: Hadassah and the ZOA, 1918-1921,” in *The Herzl Yearbook*, vol. 8, *Essays in American Zionism, 1917-1948*, ed. Melvin I. Urofsky (New York, 1978), 64-7; Urofsky, 344, 351-7. Lipsky quoted in “Address by Mr. Lipsky at Hadassah Convention,” 1921 Convention Proceedings, p. 1, Record Group 3, Box 2, Folder 4, HA. While Hadassah's membership, like that of the FAZ, certainly increased during World War I reflecting American Jews' concern for the plight of Jews overseas, Hadassah's greatest growth did not occur until after the war. Although many women in the 1920s might have had more time to devote to organizational life as their children were older and their families financially secure, this cannot entirely account for Hadassah's growth, particularly due to the fact that membership in Zionist organizations did not require active involvement but only payment of membership dues.
which formed a part of the larger battle enveloping the Zionist movement during these years, gender played a critical role. Each side in the dispute used gender to support their arguments and to underscore their vision of how the complementary nature of men's and women's Zionism should work in practice.

The general struggle in the movement concentrated on financial management and split the movement between those who followed Louis Brandeis and those who followed Louis Lipsky, a man many perceived to be controlled by the European Zionist movement, particularly its leader, Chaim Weizmann. Many issues divided the two factions, including relations to the British Mandatory power and the role of American non-Zionists in the proposed Jewish Agency. The issue of most immediate concern, however, centered around financial management and the Keren Hayesod designed to facilitate development and settlement in Palestine. Typically the Europeans had less interest in the Progressive standards for efficiency and organization advanced by Brandeis and his followers. Brandeis believed that the funds feeding this entity, investments and donations, should remain separate. He also maintained, similarly to Hadassah, that Americans should retain a certain degree of control over the funds they raised themselves and the projects they initiated in Palestine. Initially, the Brandeis faction claimed success, winning a resolution against the "commingling of funds" at the ZOA's 1920 convention in Buffalo. Weizmann arrived in the United States in the spring of 1921 ostensibly to work through a compromise with the
American group, yet he managed to increase support for his own vision of the Keren, aiming to defeat the Brandeis group at the next ZOA convention.56

Hadassah shared many of Brandeis' concerns about the Keren Hayesod and the WZO's financial management. When the ZOA began to transmit Hadassah funds for the Medical Unit through the World Zionist Organization's offices in London after the war, the women and the Unit complained that the distribution became sloppy and irregular. Henrietta Szold, in particular, felt that Menachem Ussishken and other European Zionists in Palestine cared more for politics than for public health.57 Yet Hadassah leader and later president Rose Jacobs believed that the problems between Hadassah and the ZOA became acute only with Weizmann's trip to the United States. According to his plan, the women's group would raise funds for the Keren and it in turn would oversee financial operations of Hadassah's medical services. Hadassah, in essence, would become little more than a simple fundraising group.58 Despite years of trying to counter this perception of their work, many Hadassah women realized that their function in Zionism had changed little in the eyes of the male establishment.

This potential change in Hadassah's relationship with the ZOA and World Zionist Organization (WZO) led some women on the Central Committee to call for a reassertion of

56 For an analysis of the conflict between the Brandeis and Lipsky factions see Ben Halpern, A Clash of Heroes: Brandeis, Weizmann, and American Zionism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 205-69. For a re-reading of this episode placing the issue of fundraising at the center of the conflict see Berkowitz, Western Jewry, 56-6.


58 Rose Jacobs notes for her history of Hadassah in Record Group 7, Reel 3; Urofsky, 343. On Rose Jacobs' background and career in Hadassah, see Antler, 204-14.
their organizational prerogatives. A showdown occurred when Louis Lipsky commanded Hadassah's Central Committee to raise funds for the Keren. Seven members refused and Lipsky immediately requested their resignations. When they again resisted a ZOA directive by refusing to resign, Lipsky had the women expelled and dissolved the Central Committee. However, the seven denied the legality of this expulsion, stating that only Hadassah members had the right to discharge their leadership committee.  

It soon became apparent to these leaders that something more than financial administration was at the heart of Lipsky's actions toward them. Rose Jacobs asserted that Lipsky made "formal" charges against the recalcitrant women in writing, but his other, more damning, charges he conveyed to them verbally:

It was charged that we were philanthropists, not Zionists, that we were seeking power and position, that we were reckless, that we were indifferent to the needs of the Jewish People, that we lacked appreciation for Zionist accomplishments, that we did not have a proper sense of how to evaluate the contribution to Zionism that had been made by the European Zionists.  

Other Hadassah leaders voiced similar assessments of the battle with the ZOA. Like Jacobs, these women also considered the struggle for financial control as inseparable from negative estimations of women's Zionist and administrative capabilities. Irma Lindheim, for example, believed that both the 1921 and the later struggle in 1928 centered around financial and administrative issues that were manipulated by certain male leaders interested maintaining control of the women's group: "These were all basic issues, yet in the hands of those interested in political maneuvering, they were made into an attack on personalities and a

59 Kutscher, "From Merger to Autonomy," 69-70.

60 Rose Jacobs Papers, Record Group 7, Reel 3, HA.
battle of the sexes, a struggle between women and men for domination."\(^{61}\) Years later Jacobs bluntly asserted that Lipsky wanted little more than to eradicate Hadassah’s independent status. “Mr. Lipsky’s attitude toward Hadassah was unnecessarily harsh,” she remembered. “Many times he was ready to destroy it. That arose, I think, from a kind of immaturity. To him it was part of a game -- a game of employing a political machine to attain a desired result.”\(^{62}\) While much united the Hadassah leadership’s position to that of the Brandeis faction in these disputes, and similarity existed between the words used by Lipsky to criticize both, it soon became eminently clear that gender formed a central component of the ZOA leadership’s attacks on the women’s group. Lipsky fought to maintain control over the American Zionist movement and, to his mind, this meant not only keeping the Brandeis’ group out of power but also ensuring the continued dependence of the women’s group.

Lipsky attempted to put his political machine into action when he arrived at the 1921 Hadassah convention with a “strong men's delegation” in tow intending to sway the delegates to his way of thinking. These men gave the chair, the reserved Alice Seligsberg, quite a bit of trouble. Rose Jacobs, seeing Seligsberg’s difficulty maintaining control of the convention, felt obliged to take over the meeting. Far less timid than Seligsberg, she “shouted and gesticulated until order was restored, an executive session was ordered, Mr. Lipsky was compelled to leave and the day was saved.”\(^{63}\)


\(^{62}\) Rose Jacobs Papers, Record Group 7, Reel 2, HA.

\(^{63}\) Rose Jacobs Papers, Record Group 7, Reel 2, HA.
Left to their own devices, leaders and delegates continued the argument among themselves, debating whether or not to seek greater autonomy from the ZOA. The women’s discussions reveal how conceptions about gender fundamentally informed the debate. Both those women who desired autonomy and those who wished to maintain the present arrangement with the ZOA used arguments interweaving ideas about gender, finances and aptitude to bolster their positions. Diligently trying to persuade the opposition to accept the leadership’s position, Pearl Franklin told the reluctant members that “since the purse strings meant power to do good, why shouldn’t we hold those purse strings instead of turning them over to a group in which we had less confidence than we had in ourselves?” Others agreed with Franklin’s viewpoint and expressed frustration that men, in the end, did not consider women capable enough to manage their own projects. A delegate from Chicago argued that women had been trying to achieve some sort of status in the Zionist organization for nearly twenty years and thus far had utterly failed:

We have dissipated our energy on anything from preparing the dinners at functions, selling things, and we haven’t had a definite purpose, women must apply themselves to something definite. It is the sob-stuff that has made HADASSAH [sic] what it is in America, and we want to retain that part of the sentimental work that only women can do and we must maintain that definite work, not that vague thing.

Contrasting Hadassah’s work with the “vague” formulations of men, she affirmed Hadassah’s mission albeit in tones suggesting women’s propensity toward the sentimental. Women, she argued, needed a definite project on which to set their sights; fundraising for no

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64 Rose Jacobs’ notes for Hadassah history, Record Group 7, Reel 3, HA.

65 Mrs. Natkin, Chicago delegate, Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Convention, November 1921, p. 22, Record Group 3, Box 2, Folder 1, HA.
clear and immediate purpose would not serve to build the organization and the movement in the same manner as the methods devised by Hadassah. Not only were women qualified to administer their own projects, they were perhaps even more capable than were the men currently in charge of the ZOA.

Delegates in opposition to secession also used arguments regarding gender and administrative proficiency to support their case. Such women opposed autonomy from the ZOA because they felt Hadassah was unable to maintain the Zionist character of its organization without ideological leadership from the ZOA. Some of these women reiterated a common ZOA complaint about Hadassah by stating that "perhaps the largest number of Hadassah members are really not at heart Zionists" but rather simply philanthropists. Opponents such as these implied that Hadassah needed strong direction from the men's group in order to stay the proper course. Despite the leadership's attempts to present Hadassah's work as women's brand of Zionism, as philanthropy in service to the developing nation, some women and like-minded men continued to de-value the Zionist element of women's contributions.\(^\text{66}\) They strongly implied that since so many women were not true Zionists they must continue to be led by the more knowledgeable men.

Delegates countering these presentations of women's work quickly leaped to the defense of Hadassah's "philanthropic" nature. In one woman's opinion, Hadassah's very success had resulted from its focus on raising funds for social welfare projects in Palestine -- the philanthropic "sob stuff" referred to by others. This delegate conceded that the ZOA

\(^{66}\) Mrs. Minkin of Rochester in Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Convention, November 1921, p. 14, Record Group 3, Box 2, Folder 1, HA.
needed to be supported, but she stressed that it already was supported—“by men.” Why, she queried, should women undertake to finance both the men’s organization and their own work? These debates reflected the longstanding, uneasy position of women in the American Zionist movement. After nearly ten years of very successful fundraising, membership promotion, and the initiation of countless services in Palestine, women continued to feel it necessary to defend their work as inherently Zionist and to reiterate their right to equality in the movement’s ranks. The internal debates of the 1921 convention show that not all women were entirely convinced of the leadership’s position regarding the existence of a woman’s Zionism as distinct from philanthropy. While proponents of women’s autonomy envisioned a Zionist movement predicated upon separate, complementary and yet equal spheres of influence, opponents agreed with ZOA leaders who felt that, left to their own devices, the women’s Zionism would devolve into nothing more than middle-class female benevolence. The maternalist rhetoric that had served the leadership so well in building the movement could also limit their independent action when some men and women advanced different understandings of how this complementarity should work in practice.

Hadassah’s membership was clearly divided, yet the seven leaders and their followers could boast of solid organization and many successful projects. Even pro-ZOA Hadassah members most likely feared pushing this effective coterie of leaders out of the organization.

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67 Phoebe (Mrs. Moses) Ruslander in Proceedings of the Eighth Convention, November 1921, p. 23, Record Group 3, Box 2, Folder 2, HA. Ruslander was also prominent in the NCJW.
entirely. Such fears would not have been unfounded. At the 1921 convention, Alice Seligsberg circulated a confidential memo to key women proposing a secret meeting to discuss the possibility of Hadassah members paying their dues to the WZO but refusing to fulfill their obligations to the ZOA. The letter also urged recipients to speak privately with other members who might be interested in creating a new women's Zionist society. Whether or not Lipsky was aware of this memo, he did stop short of forcing the seven out of the ZOA. His desire to hold on to as many Hadassah members as possible ultimately led him to compromise with the stubborn women. The agreement they reached kept Hadassah within the ranks of the ZOA but gave it the right to be the sole Zionist organization working to recruit American women. The WZO agreed to pass the medical work back to Hadassah thereby restoring women to control over their own work. Finally the agreement gave Hadassah direct representation at the World Zionist Congress for the first time.

The leadership’s success in this first battle was due in no small part to the group’s dramatic achievement in attracting new recruits to Zionism. Hadassah maintained its successful recruitment efforts well into the 1920s, relying on its ideas about women’s Zionism and the interrelated spheres of influence for men and women to increase membership. In 1924 Henrietta Szold wrote her family that she believed “our lords and masters were rather stunned by our appearing [at their convention] with a paid up

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68 Kutscher, “From Merger to Autonomy,” 74.

69 Confidential letter from Alice L. Seligsberg to “like-minded delegates,” 23 November 1921, Record Group 3, Box 2, Folder 4, HA.

70 Dash, 174.
membership of 16,500.” But despite a reduction in overt tension between the men’s and women’s groups, conflict still brewed just beneath the surface.\textsuperscript{71}

Late in 1925 the United Palestine Appeal (UPA) was founded to coordinate American fundraising efforts for the Keren Hayesod and 	extit{Keren Kayemeth L’Yisroel} (Jewish National Fund). Hadassah agreed to participate in the UPA’s first campaign, and Henrietta Szold served as one of the its vice presidents. Under the new agreement, reminiscent of the earlier accord that ultimately raised such ire, all funds raised by Hadassah would be transmitted to Palestine through the UPA. Almost immediately Hadassah leaders began to express dissatisfaction with the high administrative costs of the UPA and complained that too much money was being diverted away from their Palestine projects.\textsuperscript{72} Frustrated with the management of the men’s groups, Hadassah leaders soon called for a review of UPA and ZOA administrations.

At the twelfth convention in 1926 delegates debated whether to continue participating in the UPA fundraising drives. The women were lobbied by several representatives of the UPA who came to the convention full of praise for the delegates. Emanuel Neumann went so far as to call Hadassah the backbone of the UPA drives.\textsuperscript{73} Despite the acclaim, some Hadassah members began to insist that women’s efforts be rewarded with more than mere

\textsuperscript{71} Henrietta Szold to “Dear Family,” 4 July1924, microfilm reel 386B, AJA.

\textsuperscript{72} Miller, 146-8; Urofsky, 345-6. The UPA was founded in October 1925 when American Zionists, angered by what they perceived as a lack of JDC attention to Palestine, broke from the United Jewish Appeal. See Urofsky, 325-6.

\textsuperscript{73} Emanuel Neumann, 	extit{Proceedings of the Twelfth Convention}, pp. 11-3, Record Group 3, Box 5, Folder 1, HA. At the 1927 convention Judge William M. Lewis, Chairman of the UPA, stated that women did most of the “house-to-house hard plugging and getting of funds.” See Newsletter 7 (August 1927): 15, located in Record Group 3, Box 6, Folder 1, HA.
flattery. Like their counterparts in the NCJW, these leaders demanded greater recognition for women's contributions to male-led fundraisers. In particular they asserted that Hadassah's contributions to the UPA should be credited to them as an organization rather than as individual ZOA members. Sounding themes reminiscent of Rebekah Kohut's demands of the JDC, Pearl Franklin contended that if Hadassah were to persist in fundraising for male-led entities it must at least do so as an organization and receive appropriate credit for its efforts. Some delegates quickly objected that demands like this sounded overly aggressive and too much like a renewed call for total separation from the men's organizations. Franklin countered that without a certain degree of autonomy women in the Zionist movement would never be as active as they might be and once had been. A well-defined women's Zionist organization, she maintained, had to persevere in order to provide less assertive women, those who simply refused to speak at even the smallest mixed-sex meetings, with a safe forum to voice their opinions and gain leadership skills. Franklin believed that Hadassah's major contribution in this regard had been its ability "to understand the psychology of the women, which the men, bless them, do not always understand." As in 1921, discussions of administrative and financial matters were laced with references to gender. Some women argued for autonomy on the basis of women's unique needs but, as happened earlier in the decade, they found that this could result in counter-offensives discrediting women's ability to lead by using similar gendered arguments employed toward very different ends.

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74 Proceedings of the Twelfth Convention. June-July 1926, pp. 175-207, Record Group 3, Box 5, Folder 1, HA.
In 1927 Hadassah’s leadership began to express clear trepidation about the continued growth of the UPA. By this point Hadassah members constituted a majority of the overall ZOA membership, and some leaders feared that the UPA would soon entirely overshadow the ZOA, thus further subverting women’s power in the movement. The board worried that the UPA presented a significant threat to Hadassah’s very autonomy in that its further expansion could transform Hadassah into a mere auxiliary. Consequently Hadassah leaders determined to reassert ZOA primacy over the UPA and at the same time to expand Hadassah’s own power within the ZOA itself. Hadassah’s national board urged members to become more directly involved in ZOA administration because Hadassah, as an organization, shared in all actions resulting from ZOA decisions, both positive and negative. Delegates to the 1927 convention pressed for a resolution calling for a reorganization of the ZOA that included the creation of a committee to oversee fundraising. Although committee members would act as Zionists and not as representatives of their home organizations, the Hadassah proposal called for one-half of the committee seats to be accorded to its own members since they comprised more than one-half of the ZOA membership.

Leading the charge in the drive to reorganize the ZOA was Irma Lindheim, who acted on this issue not only in her capacity as Hadassah president but also as a Vice-President of the ZOA serving on both the Executive and Administrative Committees. Henrietta Szold

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75 "Report of the National Board to the 13th Annual Convention of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America," p. 12, Record Group 3, Box 6, Folder 1, HA.

76 "Statement of National Board to meeting July 15, 1927," Record Group 3, Box 6, Folder 1, HA; Newsletter vol 7, no. 10 (August 1927): 9, located in Record Group 3, Box 6, Folder 1, HA. In 1927 Hadassah’s membership equaled 34,371 while that of the ZOA was only 21,806. See Miller, 154.
had previously held these same positions in the ZOA but Lindheim felt that she had been too
easy to ignore given her frequent absences in Palestine. Resolving to make Hadassah’s voice
equal to its membership in the making of ZOA policy, Lindheim asserted that the
organization would “be a token one no longer.” Some men contested this reassertion of
organizational strength, and Lindheim held few illusions about the real source of tension
between the ZOA and Hadassah, having witnessed the earlier struggle between the two
groups. She later recalled that “from the point of view of the men, most impertinently the
tail was trying to wag the dog. A clash of personalities and methods developed which was
costly in time, energy, and effectiveness, a result not unique at the time, when any
organization of women sought to enter territory hitherto controlled by the men.” As in
1921, Hadassah leaders found that while their criticisms of Lipsky and the ZOA closely
resembled those of other Brandeis’ allies, the arguments arrayed against them quickly
devolved into gendered attacks on women’s capabilities.

When the UPA had sunk to such depths that it was forced to rely on a bank loan in
order to cover its expenses, Lindheim decided the time had come to put a stop to the poor
management of both that entity and of the ZOA. Lindheim counseled her board to refuse to
co-sign for the loan. She then relayed to Lipsky that if the ZOA wished Hadassah’s
continued involvement in the UPA a thoroughgoing reorganization would need to take place.
On March 31, 1928 a piece in the New York Times summarized Lindheim’s views on recent
events in the Zionist movement. Although Lindheim insisted that she spoke for herself

77 Lindheim, Parallel Quest, 211-213; quote on 213. On Lindheim’s life, see Shulamit Reinhart, “Irma
alone, Lipsky interpreted the article as a very public attack against him by Hadassah as an organization. He demanded that Hadassah’s board repudiate their president. They opted instead to give her a vote of confidence. Furious about this turn of events, Lipsky attacked his opponents in the New Palestine. Seeking to paint Lindheim and the board as a body of meddlesome women who failed to understand the role suitable for them in the movement, he accused the board of having fallen away from Henrietta Szold’s exemplary model. Szold, he maintained, “recognized the proper role of women within the ranks of the ZOA,” insinuating strongly that the current leadership did not. Hadassah women, he felt, sought only personal aggrandizement and were pursuing this end by cooperating with his sworn enemies in the Brandeis faction.\(^7^8\)

The crisis came to a head during Hadassah’s convention in June 1928. Lipsky sought to have this convention postponed until after the ZOA met although traditionally Hadassah’s annual meeting had been held first. Lipsky also attempted to decrease the number of Hadassah delegates eligible to attend the ZOA convention by a questionable administrative ruling. During the Hadassah convention, as in 1921, the women found themselves debating the relative merits of autonomy versus continued allegiance to a ZOA headed by Lipsky. Arguments not settled earlier in the decade arose again as proponents of restructuring defended themselves against attacks that they were not true Zionists. In the estimation of some, the proper expression of Zionist commitment for women could be realized only by

\(^7^8\) Urofsky, 355; “Head of Hadassah Joins Zionist Split,” New York Times, March 31, 1928. Szold came under her share of fire as well. She and her organization were said to be insufficiently willing to sacrifice for the movement at large. See Berkowitz, Western Jewry, 188-9.
following the lead of the ZOA. Anything else was evidence of their underlying desire for "power," for playing politics, and playing it badly at that.

Lindheim sent greetings to the convention (she could not attend herself due to illness), urging delegates not to allow a complete submergence of Hadassah into the ZOA. If Hadassah were to do that, to accept ZOA standards of administration and lose its own identity, then, she wrote, one could easily say of the Zionist movement, "divided they stood, united they fell." Pearl Franklin reiterated her argument from 1921 that Hadassah's greatest achievement had been to interest such large numbers of women in Zionism. Moreover, she stressed that she did not think the male-led movement could have achieved similar successes among women. Reminding delegates that she was first and foremost a Zionist, Franklin told the delegates that on purely practical grounds she did not think Hadassah would have been so effective had it not been a separate women's organization. A mixed-sex group could never have attracted 37,000 women to the Zionist message. Women, she asserted, did their best work on their own, free from male intervention. Leaders such as Franklin and Lindheim expressed a firm commitment to the continuance of a strong women's Zionist organization. They tied their concerns regarding the administration of the ZOA and UPA to the need for women to maintain some degree of separation from the male-led entities.

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79 "Mrs. Lindheim's Greetings," Proceedings and Speeches at the Fourteenth Annual Convention, June 1928, p. 3, Record Group 3, Box 6, Folder 2, HA. See also Michael Berkowitz, Western Jewry, 70; Urofsky, 355-6.

80 Pearl Franklin in Proceedings and Speeches at the Fourteenth Annual Convention, June 1928, pp. 9-10, Record Group 3, Box 6, Folder 2, HA.
Other women vehemently opposed any move toward what they characterized as the leadership's "separatist policy." One vice president even went so far as to resign her post. This particular woman, Ida Silverman, had been closely involved with the UPA even making several national tours on its behalf. Rose Jacobs, speaking out against Silverman's position, took the opportunity to chide her for holding un-progressive views of women. "We are living in the twentieth century," Jacobs boldly declared. If women supposedly had equal rights to men why do men "all of a sudden" resist women's efforts? "When women want to assert those rights," she asked, why are they told by men that "they have no right to do so?" For years the Zionist movement had proclaimed its respect for equal rights, touting its stance on women's suffrage. Now women like Jacobs insisted on holding the movement to its word, especially since American women had gained the right to vote at home. As in 1921, both sides interpreted Hadassah's mission through the lens of gender. While each asserted that women could make special contributions to the Zionist movement, not all Hadassah members felt that the complementary vision devised over the years necessarily corresponded with a demand for equal rights in the movement at large. Those who followed Lipsky often used traditional gender roles to downplay Hadassah's need for independence. Other women, particularly Lindheim, Jacobs and Franklin, demanded organizational autonomy as well as equality for women in the general movement.

81 Mrs. Kamenetsky, in Proceedings and Speeches at the Fourteenth Annual Convention, June 1928, p.12, Record Group 3, Box 6, Folder 2, HA.

82 Proceedings and Speeches at the Fourteenth Annual Convention, June 1928, p.195, Record Group 3, Box 6, Folder 2, HA.
Lipsky could not keep away from Hadassah’s convention. As he had back in 1921, he arrived once again with a delegation of men appealing to the women to support his position. Alluding to the actions of the Brandeis’ faction, he proclaimed that “the Zionist movement has gone through two years of hell” as a result of guerrilla tactics used by people who would not face him squarely in public. But when he asserted that he came to the convention as a neutral party, he drew laughter from the audience. In light of Lindheim’s absence, Zipporah (Zip) Szold, wife of Henrietta’s cousin Robert, acted as chairperson of the board and Alice Seligsberg served as convention chair, despite her mild manner, because Rose Jacobs refused to do so citing her great animosity toward Lipsky. Zip Szold reported to Henrietta Szold that although applause had broken out upon Lipsky’s arrival, soon “the men started to make a demonstration designed, I believe, to break up our Convention.” As they had in 1921 the women moved to make the session an executive one in order to clear the men from the hall. This proved to be no easy task but the women prevailed and were able to carry on with their business free for the time being from outside agitation.

Although at the time much of this controversy was presented as a only a skirmish in the larger war between Brandeis, Lipsky and Chaim Weizmann of the WZO, privately Hadassah leaders did not mince words about what they thought was the Lipsky faction’s true complaint with their organization. Leaders clearly believed that these men opposed any substantive input from women regarding the management of the American Zionist

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83 Proceedings and Speeches at the Fourteenth Annual Convention, June 1928, p.260-1, Record Group 3, Box 6, Folder 2, HA.

84 Zip Szold to Henrietta Szold, 19 July 1928, Record Group 7, Box 16, Folder 163, HA.

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movement. Women's contributions were admired so long as they remained in the realm of social welfare and fundraising, even if such activities were also commonly dismissed as insufficiently Zionist in character. When women sought to affect the course of the movement at large (and particularly once they made up the larger part of that movement itself), male leaders like Lipsky openly renounced this intrusion into "politics," defined by its very nature as a male preserve. In April 1928 Irma Lindheim informed Henrietta Szold of Lipsky's position that "Hadassah after all was only an auxiliary, and had no right to express itself or have any voice in the policies of the organization."

85 Other leaders heard similar assessments of the relationship between the ZOA and Hadassah. Nellie Straus Mochenson wrote to Alice Seligsberg from Palestine to tell her that she was "appalled" by what she heard was going on in the U.S. between the two groups. "The hatred and malice, the vulgar and stupid tone of the inferiority-complex inspired articles in the New Palestine were beyond belief," she wrote. She maintained that nowhere had she seen a point that "Hadassah could well have made - namely that the Z.O. had decided to crush it as much as a year ago, and was seeking a casus belli." She added that she had seen Joseph Cowen in Palestine and he had told her "very casually 'Hadassah is going in for politics now, and we must crush it.'" Hadassah's own Newsletter bluntly reported the fact that certain men challenged the organization's equal status in the movement and sought to deny women the right to make policy and administrative decisions, to engage in "politics." One report cited the Zionist and Yiddish press as having accused Hadassah of "sull[ying] its skirts with dirty

85 Irma Lindheim to Henrietta Szold, 10 April 1928, Record Group 7, Box 16, Folder 159, HA.

86 Nellie Straus Mochenson to Alice L. Seligsberg, 23 August 1928, Record Group 7, Reel 1, HA.
politics.’’ The article’s author interpreted this phrase as evidence of the men’s lack of respect for women’s ability to participate in public affairs: “This all sounds very much as though the gentlemen were in the habit of saying to their wives: ‘There, there dear, run along to your knitting and don’t trouble your pretty head about these things. These things are men’s work.’”

The stress of this conflict, no doubt exacerbated by the very personal nature of the attacks and the fact that the battle coincided with the death of her husband, nearly drove Irma Lindheim to a nervous breakdown. Yet even in the midst of personal and public turmoil she calmly gauged the nature of Lipsky’s anger. He so resented the challenge women presented to his authority that, according to Lindheim, he referred to their efforts condescendingly as “diaper Zionism.” She told a friend that Lipsky persisted in maintaining that he had tried to cooperate but, in her words, he felt “it has been impossible to work with Hadassah, that they are arrogant, that they nag, that they interfere in things which are none of their business.”

Men like Lipsky, Lindheim felt, refused to consider women worthy to step outside their ordained sphere, to engage in public work on an equal basis with men: “The dignified exercise of Hadassah’s right of suffrage is called ‘politics’ by the ZOA, in order to put it in bad repute; and the women of Hadassah are being told to go home and tend to their tea parties and leave the affairs of Palestine to the men.” Having defined a place for themselves within the movement, Hadassah women still struggled to be taken seriously by some men.

87 Newsletter vol. 8 no. 18 (May 11, 1928): 2. See too “Cleaning the Atmosphere,” Newsletter no. 8 no. 20 (May 25, 1928): 2. This article alerted members to the fact that the Yiddish press in particular had been making statements about Hadassah’s alleged attempts to undermine Chaim Weizmann, the WZO and the Jewish Agency.
The domain of their activism, focusing on work traditionally associated with women, had led to their being highly praised. Yet at the same time the organization was told that its projects had little real, Zionist worth and that its members could not understand, let alone competently participate in, "politics." Nevertheless, Hadassah's leadership prevailed a second time. After acrimonious debate Hadassah leaders, in alliance with the Brandeis faction, eventually forced Lipsky to accept reforms in the administration of the ZOA. Hadassah won a reduction in its payment to the ZOA and a higher delegate allotment to ZOA conventions.**

Women such as Rose Jacobs, Pearl Franklin, and Irma Lindheim recognized that without control of its organizational agenda and finances, Hadassah women remain in secondary positions within the movement, no matter how large a membership they delivered to the ZOA. The battles of the 1920s reflect their desire to be taken seriously in the movement, to achieve a voice comparable to their numbers while at the same time persevering in the development of their special brand of Zionism. The women's Zionism advocated by Hadassah proved an effective tool for raising membership but the battles of the 1920s showed that such gendered strategies could also be used to limit women's activism by those men, and women, who, unlike Brandeis, only reluctantly supported equal rights for women in the Zionist movement.

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88 Irma Lindheim to Pearl Franklin, 8 April 1928, Record Group 4, Box 1, Folder 7. On outcome of battle see Urofsky, 359-60. Kristi Anderson has analyzed the ways in which "politics" was re-defined following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. Whereas women had long engaged in what would commonly be referred to today as "political," in the early twentieth-century that term was most often used to refer solely to partisanship and issues pursued by men out of self-interest. Building on older notions of female activism, women were supposed to be non-partisan and disinterested, working toward the general good rather than their individual advancement. See Kristi Anderson, After Suffrage: Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics Before the New Deal (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).
Benefits and Limitations of Separatism

As World War I drew to a close and Americans looked to the future of Jews in Europe and Palestine, they anticipated the need for sustained relief well into the foreseeable future. Women in the NCJW and Hadassah also recognized the necessity for further monetary investment in those regions, and they looked for ways to expand their own programs abroad. Both groups sought to claim for themselves the special preserve of social welfare work targeting women and children specifically, and each utilized a highly gendered language to justify their heightened involvement in these areas after the war. Meeting no small resistance to their renewed activism, women in the two organizations determined that they needed to separate themselves from JDC and ZOA attempts to maintain control over their programs, future agendas and finances. The NCJW, which had always entertained greater organizational autonomy than Hadassah, moved to expand its overseas work through the establishment of a Reconstruction Unit of its own and fought for this Unit to achieve respect (and therefore funding) comparable to the projects of similar male groups in the JDC. Hadassah, on the other hand, having dramatically augmented its own membership and the scope of its Palestine work, turned to the ZOA requesting greater representation as an organization. Facing stiff resistance from men in Lipsky’s faction, key Hadassah leaders twice allied with Brandeis’ group in an effort to break Lipsky’s control over the movement and, more immediately for them, to attain a modicum of independence for women. Both the NCJW and Hadassah demanded greater respect. The NCJW sought to find that respect through JDC financing of its projects, while Hadassah, whose membership comprised the
larger portion of the ZOA, fought for greater representation but endeavored as well to achieve a certain amount of organizational autonomy.

Both groups relied upon gendered characterizations of their abilities to explain why they should be involved in certain types of work. By utilizing such justifications the women found themselves arguing for equality while at the same time maintaining forcefully that men and women were at heart different. Women advancing this viewpoint soon learned that many men, and not a few women, accepted their notion of complementary spheres but rejected the idea that these spheres were equal. Their opponents argued, particularly in the Zionist case, that if these differences existed then men, who in their minds held the greater capacity for ideological thinking, should be allowed to lead. Using their own arguments against the women's rights activists, opponents contended that women's special nature rendered them unsuited to participate in "politics"; a word whose definition became increasingly vague, conveying foremost those activity related to the traditionally male sphere of public activism. Focusing on social welfare work in a world dominated by trained professionals further frustrated women's efforts to achieve recognition from their movements. Leaders in both Hadassah and the NCJW repeated arguments about women's natural aptitude for social welfare work among women and children, but often found that these arguments, rather than elevating female volunteers to a place of equality with professional and more ideologically inclined men, led to a de-valueation of their contributions.

The struggle to attain respect for the work of their organizations and the difficulties they faced led women in the NCJW and Hadassah to turn attention ever more intently toward other women. At the same time that they distanced themselves from the control of men's
groups and affirmed women's proclivity for social welfare work they also reached out to other women in similar predicaments. The NCJW appealed to middle-class Jewish women worldwide to build an organization modeled on the International Council of Women and also deepened their involvement with other U.S. women's groups. Hadassah, on the other hand, made a concerted effort to augment considerably its organizational base by reaching out to middle-class American Jewish women and urging them to support the Zionist cause.
CHAPTER 5

WOMEN ORGANIZING WOMEN:
GENDER AND AMERICAN JEWISH IDENTITY, 1920-1930

In breaking some of the bonds tying them to male-dominated organizations Jewish women in the 1920s strengthened their own groups at the same time building alliances with other women, both Jewish and non-Jewish, on the national and international planes. Jewish women in the NCJW, having achieved a certain degree of autonomy from men, began to move into the mainstream of American women's political activism. The NCJW and Hadassah shared with other women a continued interest in women's and children's issues, concerns that had motivated them since their very inception, and both groups employed gendered and maternalist rhetoric to justify their move into the public arena.¹ Like other American women's organizations, these two Jewish women's groups struggled to find a place for themselves in a world where "politics" referred to issues deemed self-interested, perhaps controversial, but always masculine. Male Zionist leaders had hoped to dissuade

Hadassah leaders from involving themselves in the movement’s administration by labeling the women’s assertion of influence as a selfish drive for political power. During the 1920s NCJW leaders designated certain issues, especially Zionism, as “controversial” or “political” and therefore outside organizational parameters. At the same time, however, they embraced equally controversial issues such as peace and disarmament that were regarded as more in concert with their gendered, organizational missions, shared with many other American women’s groups.²

While Hadassah and Council leaders moved closer together in rhetorical and organizational style, their fundamental disagreement over Zionism resulted in their espousal of similar, and yet ultimately competing, models for how to be an American Jewish woman. Where the NCJW forged many bonds with others interested in a host of issues associated with post-suffrage women’s activism, Hadassah women focused their energies ever more intently on the Jewish world. Council leaders stressed the American-ness of their organization, its similarity to other women’s organizations of the period, in the process highlighting acculturated Jews’ resemblance to their non-Jewish sisters in other organizations. Hadassah, on the other hand, sought ways to create a Jewish American identity that coincided with its feeling of connection to Jews throughout the world, moving toward what Michael Berkowitz calls in relation to West European Zionists a “supplemental nationality.” Hadassah women, like their counterparts in Europe, did not perceive a

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contradiction between firm allegiance to building a nation-state in Palestine and being a patriotic citizen of one’s land of birth.3

Yet the methods by which Hadassah leaders chose to pursue their goals reveal that even though they committed themselves to an ideology unpopular with many acculturated American Jews, and irrelevant to most gentile Americans, they nevertheless adhered to many ideas held in common with other middle-class American women. Both Hadassah and Council women engaged in similar projects and employed comparable language. The commonality with the NCJW in method and rhetoric enabled Hadassah to present itself as the more Jewishly-identified equivalent of the NCJW. By linking Hadassah’s work to that pursued by Council, and by extension other American women’s groups both at home and abroad, Hadassah was able to recruit large numbers of women to the American Zionist movement, sustaining and building it during a period more commonly known as one of precipitous decline.

Growing Diversity, Common Problems

In the post-war era both Hadassah and the NCJW expanded their organizational agendas, the NCJW by turning its attention overseas and Hadassah by significantly broadening its Palestine program. This growth in work required greater funding and therefore an increase in dues-paying members. Both Hadassah and the NCJW focused on the groups’ interest in mothers and children, stressed the inherent maternalism of all women, and underscored female practicality. These methods proved quite effective for both the

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NCJW and Hadassah, leading to a rise in their membership rolls and finances. Yet as they grew in size and geographical scope, Hadassah and the NCJW faced similar problems in trying to maintain unity among an increasingly diverse membership. During the 1920s Hadassah and Council struggled to deal with the new divisions that surfaced in their ranks over language, generational discord and the regional origin of the national leadership.

Some of the problems confronting the groups were relatively simple. As these large national organizations spread into small towns and rural areas, their leadership became more aware of the distinctive issues facing women in such places. For instance, in 1926 a woman from Springfield, Ohio, writing to the “Section Problems” column of Council’s *The Jewish Woman*, pled for help for her “Kleinstadt” (small city). When local leaders shut out certain members from their dinner parties, she observed, major feuds evolved which often culminated in the rebuffed members resigning from the organization or at the very least refusing to participate further in group activities.\(^4\) Human dynamics, which surely played a role in large city sections, became accentuated in small towns where a meager Jewish population ensured that a membership loss of even one or two would be keenly felt.

As the founding members grew older, age also played a noticeable role in complicating intra-group relations. Both Hadassah and the NCJW sought to attract younger women by forming youth organizations affiliated with the central organization. In 1920 Junior Hadassah was established for women in their teens and early twenties. The Council of Jewish Juniors had been founded much earlier, a year after the NCJW’s own inception.

in 1894. Upon marriage Council Juniors moved into the Senior Section, although in small towns Juniors and Seniors often combined into one. These groups were meant to be a training ground for future members, not a permanent affiliation. Yet as the leadership aged and clung to ideas of the past, more modern, younger women grew disenchanted with the seniors. Sometimes tension could build over such seemingly trivial issues as dress length and hairstyles.

Hadassah women found that young women did not always abandon their youthful ways and mode of dress when they graduated from the Junior organizations. As more young women joined the Senior ranks in the 1920s, some older Hadassah members complained about the new styles these young women donned at meetings and conventions. The older women felt that the modish fashions might be appropriate for the Junior group but upon entering the senior ranks women should attire themselves in something more befitting their age and marital status. Chiding these older members, a Newsletter article concluded that if seniors persisted in clinging to their old-fashioned mores young women might opt to remain in the Junior groups indefinitely. Hadassah depended on maintaining an exuberant growth and needed to draw young women into the senior ranks. If those women chose to continue wearing clothes that did not convey a matronly air of days long past, then the older members should learn to adapt.

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Perhaps because the NCJW had dealt with the junior-senior divisions for a longer period of time than Hadassah, this sort of controversy arose less frequently, or at least less publicly, in the 1920s. Both groups, however, did face problems related to language usage. Although many leaders and long-term members were conversant in French and German, few, if any, spoke Yiddish. As more immigrants and their daughters gained the wherewithal to join voluntary organizations after the war, Yiddish-speaking women became an ever larger presence, albeit as rank-and-file members only. Hints of a growing awareness of the Yiddish contingent appear in the groups’ publications but both seem to have done little substantive work to recruit actively in the Yiddish-speaking community or to groom Yiddish-speaking women for leadership positions.

Hadassah leaders, especially Henrietta Szold, urged their followers to learn Hebrew, but did little to reach out to women who spoke Yiddish. This was not unusual for a Zionist organization; Zionists generally prized Hebrew as the language of the Jews, dismissing Yiddish as a product of the Diaspora. Nevertheless, Yiddish-speakers did appear at Hadassah meetings. In 1925 a delegate addressed the convention in Yiddish on the subject of producing Yiddish propaganda about Hadassah for distribution. Presumably, she utilized a translator to get her thoughts across to the crowd but as the organization itself did not employ a transcriber familiar with Yiddish, her speech has been reduced to no more than a brief notation in the official record. No discussion followed her report that might have shed light on what precisely she said. Despite this official silencing, her presentation did have an impact at the time as the convention unanimously passed a resolution committing itself to enrolling more Yiddish-speakers. The resolution also urged the national board and local
chapters to include the Yiddish press consistently in all publicity campaigns. At least in terms of its own Newsletter, Hadassah failed to achieve the goal of producing more Yiddish propaganda. In the years between 1914-1929 only one Yiddish piece appeared in Hadassah’s monthly publication — a 1922 call to women not to abandon their duty to Palestine and to continue supporting the Medical Unit. As a Zionist organization, it is not surprising that Hadassah should show so little interest in promoting Yiddish; the group’s primary focus relative to language was to encourage American women to learn Hebrew. Still, the leaders’ limited interest in producing Yiddish propaganda is nonetheless striking given the large number of potential recruits to be found among that community in the United States. As a basically middle-class organization, tied to such elite men as Louis Brandeis, Hadassah constructed through language an image of itself as a distinctly American, acculturated and English-speaking, Zionist organization.

Council’s Yiddish problem had a different cast to it than Hadassah’s. Not ideologically opposed to the use of Yiddish the way some prominent Zionists could be, Council leaders nevertheless had little direct knowledge of Yiddish themselves. Yiddish was the language of Council’s clientele; very rarely was it the language of members, who, coming from wealthier backgrounds, had greater familiarity with the non-Jewish languages of Western Europe. Revealing the depth of ignorance within the NCJW regarding Yiddish, one notice in The Jewish Woman printed as late as 1929 suggested that it might be helpful if new

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7 Mrs. Reis-Zuckerman in “Proceedings of the Eleventh Convention,” July 1925, pp. 120, 249, Record Group 3, Box 4, Folder 1, HA. See also description of convention resolution in Newsletter 5 (August 1925): 11.

section presidents ensured “at least one of the active members” on their Immigrant Aid and Education committees could speak Yiddish. Given that Council had long prided itself on working with immigrant women, this suggestion starkly reveals the distance separating Council members from the recipients of their care. Members of the Yiddish press, not surprisingly, viewing Council through the lens of class, recognized the chasm separating Council members from the working-class or poor. The Yiddish daily Forverts, for instance, mocked the way Council women dispensed funds to the poor “with their bediamoned hands more to show their delicate alabaster fingers with well-manicured nails than really to save the unfortunates.” Council leaders were not unaware that such ideas circulated among less Americanized Jews. A brief note in The Jewish Woman observed that many journalists writing for the Yiddish press had misunderstood Council and its projects in the past; indeed, many even challenged Council’s very “Jewishness.” But such expressions of concern regarding Council’s image in the Yiddish community were rare. Other than the few instances mentioned above, Yiddish and Yiddish-speakers rarely entered into the public consciousness of the organization. The conflict over Yiddish in Hadassah and the NCJW would be solved more by the Americanization of immigrants than by any significant effort of the two groups to appeal to non-English speakers.

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10 Quoted in Rogow, 150-1. The works of Anzia Yezierska also show the working-class distrust of benevolent ladies. See in particular, Salome of the Tenements (1923; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); and, Arrogant Begger (1927; reprint, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

11 “From All Corners,” The Jewish Woman 4 (December, 1924): 37.
The organizations shared even more serious problems related to interactions between the national office and certain regional sections. This was a particular problem for Hadassah, since the national office was located in New York City and most leaders hailed from areas surrounding that city. At the 1921 convention a delegate from Ohio argued that the Central Committee should include more women from states other than New York. She worried that the rest of the country was neglected and that the national leadership did not reflect the full regional scope of Hadassah’s membership. Some delegates proposed raising the total number of women on the Committee in order to incorporate more women from across the country. But others feared that this would boost expenses as Hadassah might be obliged to cover the travel costs for those who lived a great distance from New York City. \[12\]

During the debate one leader held up the NCJW as a model for an effective, large national organization. She did not detail the methods by which Council avoided the conflicts that plagued Hadassah; indeed, she would have had difficulty had she tried given that Council faced similar problems in its own ranks. At the 1923 Triennial rural and western sections expressed great dissatisfaction with their eastern, and more powerful, cohorts. Upon leaving her office as Second Vice-President Seraphine Pisko of Denver commented that “any woman who is big enough to be a vice-president of the Council is big enough to be taken into the inner courts of the temple and not be left hanging on the ragged edge outside, wondering what may be going on and why she is so much an outsider.” \[13\] Pisko felt as if her tenure as

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12 “Proceedings of the Eighth Convention,” Fifth Session, 25 November 1921, pp. 15-31, Record Group 3, Box 2, Folder 2, HA.

a national leader had not afforded her, a Westerner, the same opportunities enjoyed by her Eastern colleagues. Her comments reveal that she felt slighted by the way she had been treated, uninvolved and unnoticed.

This was not the first time that Council leaders from areas other than the major Northern cities with substantial Jewish populations complained that their concerns went unheeded at national gatherings. As early as the World War I years Southern members had raised these issues in the relatively more private arena of the national board meeting. These women’s complaints show, even more so than Pisko’s brief comments, how regional differences could significantly influence women’s political outlook. As Council sought to re-define itself in the postwar period, moving further afield of its non-partisan origins as a religious and philanthropic organization, the issues raised by the conflict between Northern and Southern women earlier in the century grew more pronounced.

In 1915 a member from Savannah, Georgia, protested about the small number of Southerners on national committees, arguing that the Southern sections were inadequately represented and that the Southern viewpoint on certain issues was ignored. Evelyn Aronson Margolis disagreed with this woman’s perception and, in Council’s defense, remembered an instance where a particular Southern leader’s grievance had been settled by Northern acquiescence to her position. The dispute centered around the fact that Council had been giving money to an organization “for the uplift of the colored race.” Southern members of the board felt the NAACP was a political organization and that, as such, Council should halt its donations. Painting a rather bucolic picture of board deliberations, Margolis recalled that
since the NAACP was a group "of which the Southern people disapproved, [...] we immediately withdrew our subscription when that was explained to us.""14

In reality, the incident proved to be quite a bit more contentious than Margolis' recollection. At the 1914 Board of Managers meeting a woman from Mobile, Alabama, asked her colleagues why Council contributed to the NAACP, which she considered a political, not philanthropic, organization. Executive Secretary Sadie American brushed aside her concerns by stating that the board had been through this discussion once before when a majority had voted in favor of sending donations to the NAACP. Unable to let the issue go at that, she told the board member that the group had too many important issues to discuss to get sidetracked into sectional issues, yet she nevertheless challenged the woman to prove that the NAACP truly was a political organization. President Janet Harris tried to restore calm by suggesting that the best time to raise this particular concern would be at the meeting devoted to formulating the next national budget. The Southern member, fearing she would no longer be on the board at that time, requested permission to read a letter she had from Booker T. Washington, which, she believed, established the NAACP as a political organization. Inez Lopez Cohen of Charleston, South Carolina, came to her Southern sister's defense, urging the board to let the woman have her say. After reading from Washington's letter, which stated that the NAACP's "main business, so far as I understand it, is to agitate in favor of equal rights for colored people," the board member proceeded to outline the

14 "Special Committee: Reconciliation of the NCJW and the Representatives of the Disaffected Sects [sic], Informal Meeting between Committee on Reconciliation of Council of Jewish Women and Representatives of Disaffected Sections," 21 January 1915, pp. 12-3, Part I, Box 103, NCJW collection, LC.
dangers that would befall her "little town" should blacks be granted equal rights. Since African Americans outnumbered whites by three to one in the South, in her (incorrect) estimation their being given the same rights as blacks had in New York would guarantee "every official in town would be a nigger." She concluded that "if we are helping to give them political rights, we are doing an infamous thing." Harris called for order and asked the women to be quiet. She then moved that a recommendation be sent to the incoming board to stop the donation to the NAACP. One member, rejecting this proposal, stated firmly that "it would be a backward step in our history, in the history of our times, history of the decade, if we did not hold out a helping hand to everybody." Despite her opposition, President Harris closed the discussion and the women convened to lunch. The group withdrew financial support for the NAACP but individual sections continued to work for civil rights.15

This interchange reveals not only the contentiousness that existed between a minority of Southern Jews and their more liberal Northern counterparts but, more importantly, it is an early example of what would become a frequent debate over what constituted philanthropic work and what shaded off into the realm of the political. In using such terms, the women generally meant to distinguish neutral issues from the controversial. Where Northern women

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15 "Proceedings of the Executive Board of the Council of Jewish Women," November-December 1914, pp. 553-60, Box 1, Folder 1, NCJW collection, LC. Inez Lopez Cohen was the new wife of soon-to-be writer Octavus Cohen. In 1915 Cohen embarked on a career as a short-story and mystery writer. He is best known for his "Negro dialect fiction," which appeared regularly in the Saturday Evening Post. As a writer of detective stories two of his creations were quite well-known, the black detective Florian Slappey and the white private eye Jim Hanvey, the latter the subject of a 1937 film and the former of a 1920 stage production. Cohen also wrote for the radio program "Amos 'n' Andy" from 1945 to 1946. See Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976) 92-3; and Contemporary Authors, vol. 112 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1985), 106. During the 1920s the Chicago NCJW cooperated with Ida B. Wells in the wake of race riots occurring in that city. In 1955 the NCJW board passed a resolution in favor of integration and it supported the major Civil Rights legislation of the 1950s and 1960s. See Rogow, 186-7.
considered contributions to the NAACP to be in concert with the NCJW’s commitment to furthering social justice, and as such not out of line with their “philanthropic” goals. Southern members felt that the group had overstepped its boundaries by supporting an organization committed to achieving black political equality. Although the issue of race did not reassert itself so prominently in future Council deliberations, similar altercations occurred regarding what constituted a “political,” therefore controversial, issue.

As the two organizations asserted themselves in the 1920s they faced not only new opportunities but also potentially serious weaknesses. No longer a small coterie of women with similar ideals, by the 1920s Hadassah and the NCJW included women from every region of the United States, both rural and urban, young and old. Appealing to these members and holding them in the organization when so many other opportunities existed for voluntary activism presented substantial challenges. As Hadassah and the NCJW struggled to attract and keep members, their leaders engaged in an ever growing number of new projects while at the same time refining a distinctive organizational identity. Accordingly, both organizations also began to (re)establish contacts with existing organizations in their respective activist realms.

NCJW Involvement in American Politics

The NCJW had long considered itself the representative of Jewish women to the rest of America. Especially during World War I, Council, unlike Hadassah, had established many contacts with other American women’s organizations. Moreover, leading figures in the NCJW held membership in non-Jewish women’s groups and counted prominent activists, such as Jane Addams, among their friends. The group’s postwar involvement in European
Jewish affairs did not diminish its involvement in American reform efforts. In the 1920s Council affiliated itself ever more closely with American women’s social reform organizations. For instance, in 1920 the NCJW helped found the Women’s Joint Congressional Committee (WJCC), a lobbying organization composed of the major women’s associations, and well into mid-century it remained the sole Jewish organization on that committee.  

In the inter-war era, Council continued to help immigrants while at the same time it increasingly sought to effect change through legislative action. Many of its initial forays into politics not surprisingly centered on immigration issues. In 1921 the NCJW campaigned against restrictive measures and upon failure in this endeavor created a Bureau of International Service located in the Department of Immigrant Aid (DIA). The Bureau aided women and children separated from male family members who were in the United States by reuniting families where possible or at least ensuring that women receive their husbands’ workers’ compensation and veterans’ benefits. From 1923 to 1926 the Bureau distributed

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nearly $50,000 from U.S. citizens to their relatives abroad and by 1928 the Bureau
commanded one-third of the entire DIA budget.\textsuperscript{17}

When the U.S. Congress moved to restrict immigration even further, the NCJW
stepped up its lobbying effort, arguing that such measures had particularly deleterious
repercussions for Jews. In 1924 Fiorina Lasker, chair of the DIA, testified before Congress
about the effect of the quota system on European Jews. Some 6,000 European Jews, she
contended, held visas issued to them by American consuls in the years immediately
following the war, yet only a few of this number would be eligible to immigrate to the United
States under the new quota system. Most would have to return to their devastated homelands
or eke out an existence as refugees in West European cities. Many of these, fearing
antisemitic violence, absolutely refused to go back to their nations of origin, while many
others literally had no home to which to return. Lasker told Congress it “would be an act of
human mercy to end their distress and anxiety” by allowing entry into the United
States. Arguing that many of these refugees had relatives in the U.S. who would ensure that they did
not become public charges, she urged Congress to make the necessary legal changes to
facilitate the re-unification of families. Building on this concern for Jewish family, Council
also advocated a number of proposals that would ameliorate the harshest effects of the new
immigration law.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} On immigrant aid, see “Bureau of International Service,” \textit{The Jewish Woman} 8 (January-March
1928): 15; “Immigrant Aid and Immigrant Education: International Service,” \textit{The Jewish Woman} 9
(October-December 1929): 21.

\textsuperscript{18} “Council Appeals for Immigration Law Changes,” \textit{American Hebrew} 116 (December 12, 1924): 180;
see also “International Problems Increase with Immigration Exclusion,” \textit{American Hebrew} 116 (March 20,
1925): 584.
Their activism on behalf of immigrants led Council women to strengthen ties with other organizations similarly concerned with the plight of refugees, such as European Jewish women’s groups like the Jüdischer Frauenbund. Many of these groups also dedicated themselves to promoting international peace, and Council joined them in pursuit of this goal as well.19 Like activism on behalf of Jewish immigrants, Council’s position on peace reflected a longstanding commitment that grew during the postwar era. As early as 1898 the group had urged President McKinley to avoid entering the war against Spain, and in 1908 it had established a Peace and Arbitration Committee. Prior to the U.S. declaration of war in 1917, Council had worked with other organizations for Belgium relief and the peaceful conclusion to hostilities. When World War I ended in November 1918, Council joined with its “sisters of other faiths” in calling for disarmament. The NCJW, through its Peace and Arbitration Committee, became the only Jewish organization affiliated formally with such groups as the National Council for Limitation of Armament, the Women’s Committee for World Disarmament, and the American Union Against Militarism.20 The 1923 Triennial guest speaker, Carrie Chapman Catt, told the assembled delegates that she had always


believed Jews had a great role to play in bringing peace to the world. A year later Council helped Catt to plan the Conference on the Causes and Cures of War. President Rose Brenner, Executive Secretary Estelle M. Sternberger, and one hundred delegates from the NCJW joined those of eight other organizations, including the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, the National Women’s Trade Union League, and the League of Women Voters, in the Conference held in January 1925.21

Like other peace activists, some Council leaders explicitly linked women’s involvement in this issue to their new responsibility as voters. In a speech on Armistice Day in 1924, Fanny Brin, founder and chair of the Peace and Arbitration committee, argued that since women could now participate directly in political life they must shoulder an even greater burden for ensuring the safety of the world. Sounding much like her contemporaries in other women’s peace groups, Brin claimed that “the recently gained rights of women in the educational, industrial, professional and political world have prepared them for the new role which they must assume. There is no field in which women can be of greater assistance than in the development of the new international order. We must help replace fear and distrust with international understanding.” Council maintained its interest in peace throughout the decade, lobbying for American inclusion in the World Court, urging U.S.

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support of the Kellogg-Briand pact, and attending sessions of the League of Nations and other international gatherings.\textsuperscript{22}

While Council leaders moved forward vigorously on agenda items shared by other American women's groups, they maintained a determined silence regarding Zionism. A Jewish journalist covering the 1923 Triennial noted with displeasure that women debated religious and peace issues but "in spite of this the cradle of religion and peace was not even mentioned." Zionism and Palestine were topics kept off the table even if some members thought they should be on the agenda. Phoebe Ruslander, a Council member and Hadassah leader, attempted to put forward a resolution supporting Palestine and its Jewish inhabitants. The chair of the resolution committee assured her that her resolution would be presented if time allowed. When no resolution on Palestine emerged from the triennial, the disgruntled journalist concluded that "apparently there was no time...." [ellipses in original]\textsuperscript{23} As Council affiliated more closely with other American women's groups, it seemed, to some Zionist observers, to have abandoned its commitment to the Jewish people.

Council leaders did not agree that Zionism constituted the most authentic means by which to express one's Jewish identity. Although pledged to aid Jews around the world, these leaders, like many other Reform Jews, continued to disavow any notions of a Jewish


\textsuperscript{23} Ezekiel Rabinowitz, "Jubilee Convention," pp. 5, ?, in Part II, Box 34, NCJW Collection, LC.
national identity. Because they embraced the cause of internationalism and attempted to speak for Jewish women globally, the majority of Council leaders rejected Jewish nationalism, particularly as espoused by Zionists. Moreover, they believed they had a better method for promoting Jewish and women's interests, one that simultaneously advanced the American identity of their membership. Women in the upper echelons of the NCJW prided themselves on being American Jews working in concert with Americans of other faiths. Peace initiatives or changes to immigration law did not set Council apart from the other groups with which it was allied; indeed, work on such issues brought Council into ever closer contact with prominent activists. As it studiously avoided open debate on Zionism or other controversial topics, the NCJW proceeded to forge bonds with mainstream women's activists through engagement in political work pursued by other female social reformers.

In line with Council's alliance with these other reform groups, it opposed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) as advocated by the National Woman's Party (NWP). After the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment feminists split into two broadly-defined camps. As the National American Woman's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) transformed itself into the non-partisan League of Women Voters (LWV), the more radical women in the NWP determined to continue their battle for women's rights by supporting the ERA. Social reformers, Council included, feared that the success of such an amendment would lead to the demise of protective labor legislation for women. The ERA divided the movement between
those women focusing primarily on achieving equality for women and those whose activism encompassed a broader agenda of reform initiatives. 24

Council's participation in this debate has been overlooked by scholars of American women's history as well by recent chroniclers of the NCJW itself. This has contributed to the impression that the NCJW was a more conservative and less feminist organization than its own leaders considered it to be. Council women had a definite interest in the question of equal rights versus the necessity of protective labor legislation, and *The Jewish Woman* printed several articles on the topic. Summing up the debate in December 1922, Estelle M. Sternberger referred to the National Consumers' League and the NWP as "the outstanding and opposing forces" regarding female equality. She urged members to consider the positions of both organizations, pointing out that the NWP favored a "blanket-equality" while the NCL sought to work to remedy each "specific evil" as it arose. In conclusion she told members they would have to "determine whether the proposed 'freedom' and 'rights' would be to the hurt rather than to the benefit of women." 25

Council's anti-ERA stance also sheds light on the manner in which the leadership struggled to maintain a position on women's rights that recognized gender difference while still affirming women's equality to men. In 1924 Therese M. Loeb wrote a lengthy article


25 Estelle M. Sternberger, "Editorial: Womanhood's Liberators at the Cross-Roads," *The Jewish Woman* 2 (December, 1922): 16. Faith Rogow notes that Council opposed the ERA but fails to put their opposition in sufficient context or to elaborate on the other female reformers who also opposed the measure, conveying the impression that Council women valued motherhood over all other concerns and thereby muting their feminism. Like other feminists, the NCJW came to support the ERA by the early 1970s. It also supported *Roe v. Wade*, legalizing abortion. See Rogow, 83-5, 243.
for *The Jewish Woman* explaining the position Council took on the ERA at its 1923 triennial. Although the version of the NCJW resolution discussed in her article proved not to be the final version approved by the triennial, Loeb’s version clearly shows the organization embracing both women’s equality and the notion of inherent gender difference. Stating that women “now have freedom and power to strive effectively for life more ideal in every aspect, social, legal, industrial, political and educational,” the resolution nevertheless concluded that “women are by nature essentially different from men.” Council, Loeb argued, opposed the amendment because it sought to establish “compulsory equality,” overlooking the physical differences between the sexes and the “divergence of powers and duties which inevitably arise therefrom.” Still, Loeb stated that Council hoped there would be a way to avoid passage of the amendment and yet “gain for us all of its unchallenged benefits.”

Like some other feminists of the era who opposed the NWP stance, Council leaders struggled to find a way both to recognize women’s individuality and equal capacity to men while not ignoring gender difference.

Yet Council’s opposition to the ERA did not entirely mimic that of other women’s groups. The NCJW also opposed the amendment because it feared the negative consequences for immigrant women, a point not strenuously raised by others. In 1925 a

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26 Therese M. Loeb, “The Lucretia Mott Amendment: Pro and Con,” *The Jewish Woman* 4 (February 1924): 3-4, 27. The version of the resolution adopted by the Triennial toned down its essentialist language while more firmly maintaining Council’s official position on women’s equality. It read, in part, “Whereas, We believe that its enactment would imperil the rights and privileges secured by women in industry and would render insecure the legal and economic basis of marriage and the family, be it Resolved, That the National Council of Jewish Women opposes blanket legislation on these subjects and endorses the method of securing separate, specific legislation to remedy the existing inequalities involving injustices to women in the laws of most of the states of the nation.” See, “A Correction,” *The Jewish Woman* 4 (April 1924): 35.
Council representative appeared before the House Judiciary Committee in order to present the group’s stand on the proposed amendment. Her testimony focused on the potential harm the ERA could bring to immigrant women especially through changes to those laws affecting parental guardianship and support payments to women. Believing that the ERA would only bring more confusion to the lives of people who already faced great turmoil and dislocation, Council’s representative argued that “we feel that the passage of an amendment so revolutionary as the one under consideration would make for insecurity and chaotic conditions, not only in the home and family, but also in the courts of justice.” Council’s caution arose both from their ideological stance regarding the nature of gender difference but also from their longstanding concern for the plight of immigrant women.

Council commitment to protecting the interests of immigrant women and their children was one of the primary ways that it expressed its devotion to Jews and promoted its own version of an American Jewish identity. Involved in aiding immigrants for some thirty years, Council stepped up its programs for these women in the wake of the dramatic changes affecting American women in the postwar period. Revisions to citizenship legislation, the granting of female suffrage, and restrictive immigration laws aimed, in part, at keeping Eastern Jews from entering the United States, intensified Council’s interest in Americanization efforts. Americanization had long been an implicit element of Council’s program, but, during World War I and in the era of “100% Americanism” the group like similar gentile organizations became even more dedicated to this work. As the NCJW

integrated itself into the mainstream of American women’s organizational life, its immigrant program increasingly aimed at promoting the NCJW vision of American Jewish female identity. Because they still dealt with immigrant, Yiddish speaking women as a separate entity from their own membership, Council leaders endeavored to turn such women into American Jews through English language classes, citizenship courses and more. Following the 1922 passage of the Cable Act, which made a woman’s citizenship status independent of her husband’s and thereby required naturalization for the wives of immigrants, Council instituted citizenship courses for this population. Unlike gentile Americanizers, Council diligently persuaded naturalized women that their duty to their new nation extended beyond the mere attainment of citizenship to active participation in public life through voting and club activity.  

Council believed that its cooperation with non-Jewish women’s organizations helped in its efforts to integrate immigrants into American life. Rose Brenner, national president from 1920-1926, had a great interest in this integrative function of her organization, and she was not coincidentally one of the leaders most firmly opposed to the NCJW embracing Zionism. During the 1920s she wrote several articles outlining Council’s crucial mission not only to Americanize Jewish immigrants but also to provide Christian women with a more realistic image of Jews and Judaism. Brenner strongly advocated organizational work as a

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28 Winifred Lancashire Rich, “The National Council of Jewish Women,” The Woman Citizen 10 (1925): 13. See also Seth Korelitz, “‘A Magnificent Piece of Work’: The Americanization Work of the National Council of Jewish Women,” American Jewish History 83 (June 1995): 192-7. The Workmen’s Circle printed an editorial in February 1918 urging women to take their new suffrage seriously and also to engage in “naturalization” work. “Capitalist” women, the editors argued, were already citizens and would use the new vote to advance their class interests. The Workmen’s Circle branches needed to ensure that working-class women became citizens and utilized their vote to further the workers’ interests. “Undzere naye birger” (Our new citizens), Der fraynd 9 (February 1918): 4.

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means to accomplishing both goals. Even such seemingly mundane tasks as writing memos or arranging a small meeting, she argued, taught women the skills necessary for them to join other, even non-Jewish, groups. In doing so, Brenner believed that Council facilitated the acceptance of Jews, especially the foreign-born, into American life more broadly: “For the responsibility resting on the Council is not only the training of its own members, but the preparation for American life of the great body of foreign-born women, of the town and the farm, whose psychology is best understood and whose hearts are most tenderly sounded by their sister Jewesses.”

Brenner later elaborated on these concepts in an article entitled, “The Great Interpreter.” Here she asserted that Council had long considered immigrant aid its “chief obligation” and that this work allowed the NCJW to become the “interpreter of America to the foreign-born Jewess.” But Brenner feared that the majority of Americans still thought of Jews as foreigners who had a weak grasp of the English language and American culture. In recent years, she believed, Jews had been depicted in popular and literary writing in such a way that “the Jew as we know him, and Judaism as we love and follow it, seem altogether unfamiliar to the mass of American people.” Recalling an incident where a New York City public school teacher complimented her for speaking English “without an accent,” Brenner refused to blame the woman because “she might very well have received [her impression] from a perusal of stories and sketches of our own Montague Glasses and Fannie Hursts.”

Council, she proudly noted, made sure that the “Potashes and Perlmutters have not usurped


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all the interpretive functions." Brenner and other leaders in the 1920s strove to ensure that they presented an acculturated and, to their minds, fully American image to the non-Jewish world with which they interacted. In her opinion, along with Americanization work, Council’s other critical mission was to “interpret” Jews accurately to mainstream America.

Not all leaders shared Brenner’s discomfort with Jews who did not fit this acculturated, middle-class model. Jennie Franklin Purvin, writing on a similar topic as Brenner, highlighted the positive attributes Jewish women brought to American society. Purvin felt that the Jewish tradition, geared as it was toward ameliorating social conditions, had enabled Jewish women to prepare themselves better for civic work. Since the synagogue, in her opinion, was so clearly a male stronghold, civic work gave women the opportunity to express their commitment to social justice. This brought women together from across religious lines, ultimately serving as “self-defense” for the Jewish people. As more non-Jews began to cooperate with Jewish women in social welfare and political work, prejudice against Jews, Purvin believed, would inevitably decline.31

30 Rose Brenner, “The Great Interpreter,” The Jewish Woman 2 (April 1922): 3-4. Montague Glass was a Jewish writer of British origin who popularized the Jewish immigrant figures Morris (“Mawruss”) Perlmutter and Abraham Potash, partners in the garment business. Described by one literary critic as “lovable but one-dimensional ethnic stereotypes,” some Jews at the time took offense at the characterizations. Nevertheless the stories, and later stage productions, had a wide appeal particularly in Great Britain. See entry on Glass by Gregory S. Sojka in Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 11, American Humorists, 1800-1950 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1982). On Hurst, see Antler, 151-4, 158-75. Interestingly, Antler points out that Hurst was born in a small town in Ohio to German-Jewish parents who were very class conscious. She looked down on East European Jews to such a degree that for awhile she even kept her own marriage to an immigrant musician a secret. This disdain was reflected in her fictional works.

Similarly, if more negatively expressed, a Columbus, Ohio, member noted that Jewish women’s political activism benefitted all American Jews. Although few women she knew had expressed interest in suffrage prior to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, she still believed that having the vote helped Jews by bringing them into greater contact with other women. “We are intensely clannish, excessively race conscious,” she asserted. “Civil and political work mean a forgetfulness of all such clannishness, and a consciousness only of a larger community life and purpose. The necessity for concentrated and organized effort during the war, the consequent necessity for following leadership, and again our club activities too, prepared us in a measure for political activities.” She went on to state that although Jewish women were very fashionable when it came to their clothing, they tended to lag behind in intellectual pursuits. Urging them to make use of their mental capabilities now that they had the right to vote, she credited the NCJW with having done much to lead women forward on this path.  

During the 1920s, Council leadership moved their organization into the mainstream of American women’s political activism. While some members and Jewish observers feared that the NCJW had begun to drift from its Jewish roots, most Council leaders disagreed, arguing that the organization’s involvement in political work helped “interpret” Jewish culture to the non-Jewish majority while at the same time aiding Jewish women in the United States and overseas. The NCJW leadership did not see a contradiction in advancing Jewish, American, and women’s causes but rather promoted all three simultaneously. Hadassah

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leaders took a different path in the 1920s. Where the NCJW fostered connections to other American women’s organizations, Hadassah turned its attention to Zionist women at home and abroad as it had begun to do during the war years. Fully committed to their American identity, Hadassah leaders opted to turn their attention overseas, exploring how American Jewish women could advance the cause of their counterparts in Palestine and the Zionist movement more broadly.

**Hadassah and Zionist Women’s Issues**

Unlike the NCJW, Hadassah infrequently mentioned U.S. politics following the conclusion of World War I. In one of the rare cases, its *Newsletter* drew attention to the proposed immigration restrictions of 1924, but other than that the paper scarcely noted the world outside Palestine and Zionism. More frequently, published accounts focused readers’ attention on life in Palestine and Hadassah’s growing list of accomplishments in that land. Yet at the same time they highlighted success, leaders underscored the need for continued efforts. Despite Hadassah’s and other Zionists’ work, Szold told her members in 1923, life in Palestine remained “primitive.” Many homes had no modern appliances, and Jewish women remained legally unequal to men. Szold laid the greatest blame for women’s legal status on the rabbinical establishment, whose ideas, she believed, lagged behind even “Mohammedan law.”

Hadassah’s determination to ameliorate women’s condition in Palestine led to heightened interaction with other women’s Zionist organizations.

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33 See exhortation for members to contact Congressmen in opposition to the proposed changes in *Newsletter* 4 (January 1924): 1; Henrietta Szold, “Women’s Work in Palestine,” Ninth Convention Proceedings, 1923, pp. 1-9, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 1, HA.
By the mid-1920s one of the major issues facing Jewish women in Palestine was whether or not they would be allowed to vote and hold office in the Mandate government established by the British authorities. Under the British Mandate the religious communities in Palestine were organized into administrative, elected bodies. Immigrant Jews, who had tended to retain their native citizenship under Ottoman rule, instantly grew more involved in Palestine politics. With this newly awakened engagement came growing division as Orthodox elements vociferously spoke out against allowing women to vote and hold office. From 1917 to 1920 the various secular and religious factions deliberated over the question of women's suffrage. In 1919 Rose Welt Straus, mother of Hadassah’s Nellie Straus Mochenson, joined other women in forming the Palestine Jewish Women’s Equal Rights Association (PJWERA). Women in the Association battled against anti-suffrage forces and eventually secured the right to vote and hold office in the national assembly elected in April 1920.34


“The Jewish community in Palestine was organized in a legal body known as Knesset Israel (Community of Israel), with which every Jew was automatically affiliated unless he elected not to be. The members of the Knesset Israel elected a parliamentary body known as the Assefat ha-Nivharim (Elected Assembly), from which in turn, the Va'ad Leumi (National Council) was elected.” Defined in Anita Shapira, Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), 421.
But women's rights were far from assured. Conservative elements in Palestine continued to agitate for women's disenfranchisement even after the 1920 election, going so far as to walk out of the very first session after others denied their request to hold a second election without women. Late in 1923 the moderate Orthodox faction Mizrahi began to lobby for a male-only referendum on whether or not women should be allowed to vote. Women in the PJWERA were incensed that such a referendum was even considered. Rosa Welt Straus contacted Hadassah and other women's organizations in 1924 urging them to publicize their opposition to such measures. Hadassah immediately joined the battle, sending telegrams opposing the measure to influential people and printing their position in Palestine newspapers. The organization also worked at home to aid the PJWERA. At its July 1925 convention, Hadassah unanimously adopted a resolution urging the Fourteenth Zionist Congress to uphold women's suffrage in the National Assembly. In August of that year the Newsletter reported that the PJWERA had called on the women of the world to contact the Jewish government to oppose continued Orthodox attempts to revoke women's suffrage.

As negative publicity surrounding the referendum mounted, those groups supporting the measure began to disagree on technicalities -- whether women should be allowed to participate in the referendum, for instance. Some Orthodox men started to back away from the issue, stating that they would support only a referendum in which all rabbis took part.

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Yet many Orthodox rabbis asserted that holding a referendum on women’s suffrage would be meaningless because Jewish law clearly stood opposed to women’s equal rights with men, and therefore no secular referendum could comment further on the issue. Eventually the Mizrachi and others agreed to hold a referendum in which the women could take part, although the ultra-Orthodox Haredi party remained firmly opposed. Regardless of the partial compromise worked out by Mizrachi, the referendum was never held. After the Haredi party fell apart due to internal disputes women increased their representation in the government and secured their legal equality. In April 1926 Hadassah announced triumphantly, "Jewish National Assembly Proclaims Equal Rights," citing the government’s declaration from January that women had secured civil, political and economic equality. The policy was ratified a year later by the Mandate authorities in the constitution of “Knesset Israel” (community of Israel).

The activism on behalf of women’s suffrage amounted to only a fraction of Hadassah’s involvement with a growing network of women’s clubs in Palestine. Shortly after World War I many of these organizations joined together in the Histadrut Nashim Ivriot or Jewish Women’s Organization (JWO). The group formalized in 1924 as a federation of

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38 Newsletter 6 (April 1926): 3; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 270-72. Fogiel-Bijaoui presents a much more detailed version of the events than that depicted in the Newsletter. Unlike the Hadassah account, which discusses only “Orthodox” opposition, Fogiel-Bijaoui maintains that the ultra-Orthodox were those seeking to end women’s suffrage while the Mizrachi tried to work out compromises on the issue. Abrams concurs with this interpretation, arguing that Mizrachi eventually concluded that it would be impossible to bring the far-right, non-Zionist Orthodox elements into agreement with secular Jews on the matter women’s suffrage. See Abrams, “Jewish Women,” 232-68. The PJWERA continued to exist but never formally affiliated with any Zionist party. After the establishment of the state of Israel the Association became part of WIZO. See Hanna Herzog, “The Fringes of the Margin: Women’s Organizations in the Civic Sector of the Yishuv,” in Pioneers and Homemakers, 289.

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various women's associations that worked in a variety of areas, including social welfare, maternal and infant health, and job training. From the outset it had difficulty raising funds and so turned to the major Diaspora women's groups, Hadassah and the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO), for assistance. Hadassah, unsurprisingly, paid particular attention to the JWO's healthcare projects and assisted the JWO in this arena.\(^\text{39}\)

Yet in a short time confusion arose over funding and jurisdictional issues. As the JWO requested ever greater financial input from Hadassah, the American women demanded that their organization's contribution to the JWO infant centers be more explicitly acknowledged, particularly since Hadassah considered this work that they had originated.\(^\text{40}\) As it was in the very midst of its battles with the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), Hadassah guarded its organizational autonomy closely, insisting on public recognition for work it developed and underwrote. Despite growing frustration, Hadassah leaders nevertheless resisted overwhelming the JWO with an American presence. While not entirely opposed to Diaspora women assisting initially with the new organization's work, some Hadassah leaders


\(^{40}\) In 1925 Henrietta Szold wrote Nellie Strauss Mochenson that she had seen the JWO claim responsibility for founding the infant welfare centers in Jerusalem. This was a false presentation, Szold complained, because the Hadassah Medical Organization had already started such a program. Henrietta Szold to Nellie Strauss Mochenson, 23 March 1925, Record Group 2, Box 62, Folder 1, HA. Herzog credits the JWO with devising the infant and mother welfare services. Sources produced by or about Hadassah attribute it with helping to create the JWO while sources relying on WIZO documents or perspective downplay Hadassah's interest in that group. Compare, for instance, Herzog, 290-1 with Joan Dash, Summoned to Jerusalem: The Life of Henrietta Szold (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), 181.
maintained that the JWO should be an “organic product of the land,” not a Palestine chapter of Hadassah, entirely financed and led by American women.41 Other leaders, however, urged affiliation between the two groups, particularly after it became apparent that WIZO sought precisely this goal for itself.

Founded in Great Britain in 1920, WIZO was composed of many smaller women’s Zionist groups throughout Europe. From the outset WIZO was not as strongly or effectively organized as the American women’s group despite its close connection to the World Zionist Organization (WZO) and its leader Chaim Weizmann whose wife Vera headed the women’s group. Although initially it seemed that WIZO and Hadassah might unite, most Hadassah leaders had little desire to attach their organization to the weaker European association. Underlying this sentiment was Hadassah leaders’ determination to avoid subordination to the ZOA, Keren Hayesod, or the WZO. These leaders felt WIZO was already too closely aligned with the latter two. Finally, some Hadassah leaders felt that WIZO did not allow women in Palestine sufficient autonomy to run their own projects. In 1923 Henrietta Szold stated that WIZO had not been very successful because the most productive women operated out of Palestine but had to send their plans to London for initial approval. Her implication was that the London office maintained too much control over the Palestine programs, ironically a charge often leveled against Hadassah itself. Still, noting WIZO’s intention to formalize its connection to the JWO, Szold warned that “we cannot afford not to establish some sort of relation with the W.I.Z.O.” Szold did not want Hadassah to be marginalized in Palestine, nor

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41 “Report of the National Board” in Seventeenth Convention Proceedings, 1931, pp. 12-3, Record Group 3, Box 6, Folder 5, HA.
did she want her group to be ousted from the inner circles of Zionist politics, recognizing as she did WIZO’s closer ties to the international male leadership. Her political acumen led her to advocate separation and cooperation between the rival organizations.

Aside from personal connections to the male leadership of the World Zionist Organization, WIZO also gained leverage in the international movement by engaging in work that was more in line with the movement’s conception of appropriate Zionist activities. Unlike Hadassah, WIZO promoted agricultural education programs for women. Programs like these supported the pioneers and underscored the idea that WIZO was helping to create a New Jewish Woman who would take her place alongside the New Jewish Man, both strong farmers who turned their wills to building the nation. Hadassah’s work in the urban areas and with the poor appeared bourgeois and philanthropic alongside these physical and nominally more Zionist initiatives.

Hadassah leaders in Palestine bridled at suggestions that their group was insufficiently Zionist compared to WIZO. Nellie Straus Mochenson related to a friend a visit from a man who declared himself to be the organizer of “our friends in Yanishek,” that Lithuanian town where local women had opted to affiliate, at least initially, with Hadassah.

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42 "Proceedings and Resolutions of the Ninth Convention," 1923, pp. 11-2, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 2, HA. Szold commented at this convention that when WIZO was founded the ZOA did not think it advisable for Hadassah to affiliate with it. She added that she could not remember why the ZOA took that position. See also Grove-Pollak, The Saga of a Movement, 11-4, 76-7. On WIZO connections to the WZO see Michael Berkowitz, Western Jewry and the Zionist Project, 1914-1933 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 182. Rose Jacobs felt that WIZO was composed of women who were the wives of men supporting the Keren Hayesod. See Antler, 368, note 14. On Hadassah as too controlling, see Abrams, 242; Berkowitz, Western Jewry, 188-9.

This organizer had confidently informed her that WIZO had Zionist credibility while Hadassah most decidedly did not. Although Mochenson strenuously disagreed with him “he smiled the [...] omniscient smile of a Yiddish speaking propagandist and said that for the purposes of propaganda Hadassah was not a Zionist Organization.” Mochenson, in defending Hadassah, openly challenged the European perspective on what constituted legitimate Zionist work.  

This conversation also brought to light another problem between the two groups – namely, organizational territory. Mochenson’s visitor had wanted her to help him in moving the Yanishek women away from their attachment to Hadassah. Although Hadassah itself had urged these women to support their own Palestine work directly and requested that they no longer forward money to the New York offices, Mochenson hesitated to turn the fledgling group over to WIZO. She wrote her friend that she was reluctant to help this man establish contacts with any other women’s groups in Lithuania until Hadassah’s relationship with WIZO was clearly defined, stating that “I consider it extremely bad policy to give them a handle of this sort.” Mochenson did not want to forsake entirely the idea that Hadassah might recruit chapters in Europe, at least until Hadassah and WIZO had officially clarified the exact nature of the “cooperation” advocated by Szold. Indeed, Nellie Straus Mochenson strongly disagreed with Szold that Hadassah should cooperate with WIZO at all. Even before her exchange with the Yiddish “propagandist” she told Alice Seligsberg that she had already written to Szold twice to convey her objections: “She surely thinks I have an obsession on

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44 Nellie Straus Mochenson to Alice L. Seligsberg, 2 June 1924, Record Group 7, Reel 1, HA.

45 Nellie Straus Mochenson to Alice L. Seligsberg, 2 June 1924, Record Group 7, Reel 1, HA.
the subject — to tell her how much I disapprove of Hadassah’s allying itself in any way with the W.I.Z.O.” Mochenson believed that Hadassah, as the more effective of the two organizations, could forge productive bonds with non-American women and that it should resist succumbing to the Zionist movement’s valuation of its work or place in the world movement.46

Other Hadassah members, in opposition to Mochenson’s position, advocated establishing closer relations than even Szold herself proposed. A delegate at the 1923 convention argued that Szold, far from being too welcoming of WIZO, was needlessly worrying about its potential to affect Hadassah. WIZO, this delegate believed, had done little of import and she felt that its leadership would welcome any assistance Hadassah offered with “open arms.” “We are the rich ‘Mrs. Hadassah,’” she said, implying that WIZO would find Hadassah’s financial backing useful and that would give Hadassah a degree of clout in the group. Szold disagreed with her, and her proposal was not carried forward. But the issue did not die. Two years later delegates raised it again, introducing a resolution favoring affiliation with WIZO that surely ignited the worst fears of women like Nellie Straus Mochenson. Although she supported cooperation, Henrietta Szold opposed this measure, or any other that threatened to submerge Hadassah in another Zionist organization. Having just achieved a modicum of autonomy from the ZOA, the major Hadassah leaders were unlikely to relinquish their independence willingly, even to another women’s organization.47

46 “Nellie Straus Mochenson to Alice L. Seligsberg, November 1923, Record Group 7, Reel 1, HA

47 “Proceedings and Resolutions of the Ninth Convention, 1923, p. 14, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 2, HA; Proceedings of the Eleventh Convention,” 1925, pp. 181-93, Record Group 3, Box 4, Folder 1, HA.

When the issue arose in 1925 Szold reminded members that the interactions between the two
In the end the two women’s groups agreed that Hadassah would maintain responsibility for Zionist work among American women, while leaving Zionist organizing in the rest of the world to WIZO. Ever one to cut to the chase, Rose Jacobs sarcastically described this arrangement as a “Monroe Doctrine.”

Other issues beyond alliances with the male movement, perceptions of appropriate Zionist work, and recruitment of new members complicated interactions between Hadassah and WIZO. The American women’s very success in Palestine further contributed to their tense relations. Hadassah’s effectiveness in Palestine could not help but draw the attention of European women interested in supporting practical Zionist work. In 1923 Nellie Straus Mochenson reported from the World Congress of Jewish Women in Vienna that she was startled how “women from all over complained about the W.I.Z.O.” These women told her that, to their minds, all WIZO did was to meddle in their work and interfere with their

women’s groups had always been tense, ever since WIZO’s founding. As early as January 1921, Szold recalled, WIZO had expressed interest in opening an Infant Welfare Station. Hadassah, seeing itself as the major organization providing medical services in Palestine, offered to help with this project but never heard back from WIZO. Eventually Hadassah forged ahead by itself and opened its own infant station in June of that year. Early in 1922 WIZO opened a service center in Jaffa, funded by money received from Australia; and this led to conflict with Hadassah and the Hadassah Medical Organization (HMO). Both groups disapproved of the administration in the WIZO center where a nurse was authorized to make decisions independently of a physician. While the medical aspect may have been a major issue for HMO doctors, Hadassah’s chief concern centered on its belief that all social welfare should fall under the auspices of the HMO. The HMO, Szold believed, should have control over its own affairs and if women disagreed with the way that the HMO was run they could opt to withdraw their support. Although Szold personally supported cooperation between the two women’s groups, she concluded from this incident that the most important relationship to foster was that between the HMO and WIZO. See “Proceedings of the Eleventh Convention, pp. 181-93, Record Group 3, Box 4, Folder 1, HA.

Rose Jacobs to “Hal,” n.d., Record Group 7, Reel 2, HA. The Canadian situation was unique. In 1917 Szold oversaw the founding of the Hadassah Organization of Canada, which held its first national convention in 1921. Chaim Weizmann, head of the World Zionist Organization, and his wife Vera, head of WIZO, attended this convention after which time the group became a part of WIZO. In later years the group was known as the Hadassah-WIZO Organization of Canada. See Grove-Pollack, Saga of a Movement, 115-6.

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establishing direct contact with Palestine. Some women pleaded with her to send them a monthly newsletter to let them know “what was really going on” in Palestine and how they might be of use. While she wanted to help them she could not envision a way to do it without being insubordinate to WIZO—“(a thing I should dearly love to do, but am withheld from by thoughts of Miss Szold’s organisation principle.)” Szold’s desire to maintain cordial relations, along with the group’s later assent to the Zionist “Monroe Doctrine,” prevented women like Mochenson from moving Hadassah onto the international plane of organizing.

Without a clear articulation of its connection to the WIZO or even consensus among the leadership regarding what precisely Hadassah’s relationship to it should be, the two groups were destined to run into trouble in Palestine. Confusion regarding the two groups’ connections to the JWO only inflamed the problems and with the three groups’ decision to produce a journal for women, *Ha-Ishah* (The Woman) all these troubles came out into the open. *Ha-Ishah* was envisioned as a monthly publication to acquaint women around the world with female activism in Palestine. The articles were to be primarily in Hebrew with occasional material written in English or German. Initially WIZO vetoed the plan for Diaspora women to finance the journal but finally agreed in August 1925 to fund the project partially. By November of that year, however, the WIZO leadership reneged on its support and withheld the promised funding for six more months. Possibly in light of this frustrating

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Nellie Straus Mochenson to Alice L. Seligsberg, 27 May 1923, Record Group 7, Reel 1, HA. She wrote that those who complained the most came from Amsterdam, Zurich and Vienna.

Henrietta Szold to Ruth Cohen, 2 June 1926, Record Group 2, Box 62, Folder 1, HA; Henrietta Szold to Hadassah National Board, 27 April 1926, Record Group 2, Box 62, Folder 1, HA.
turn of events Szold, in her capacity as Hadassah president, requested that the JWO list Hadassah as an equal publisher since the very idea for the journal had originated, in her words, “with us.”\footnote{Szold to Buchstab, 15 January 1926, RG 2, Box 62, Folder 1, HA.} Regardless of billing apportionment, after much delay the journal eventually appeared as a joint venture. Relations between the three sets of women, however, only grew more strained.

Given WIZO’s lukewarm support the journal quickly encountered serious financial difficulties. The Palestine women could not garner enough advertising or subscribers to keep Ha-Ishah solvent, and neither WIZO nor Hadassah allowed the JWO to raise funds on their own outside Palestine. The Palestine women soon began to complain that even Hadassah was growing disinterested in subsidizing the journal. Szold told a colleague that the JWO believed Hadassah expected one-half the credit even though it failed to perform one-half of the work, and she had to admit that there might be some truth to these complaints. Despite her earlier advocacy of a strong Hadassah presence in the journal, Szold hesitated when the Palestine women wanted to find new subscribers in the United States. “Why they do not look to Poland and Galicia, which we have always been told are countries so much more Jewishly intelligent than we are in America, I do not know,” she queried, referring to the general movement’s perception that Hadassah was less than sufficiently Zionist.\footnote{Szold to Cohen, 2 June 1926, RG 2, Box 62, Folder 1, HA. On WIZO and Hadassah not allowing JWO to fundraise, see Herzog, 290.} Moreover, she surely tired of WIZO attempts to coopt the JWO even as it left one of the group’s major new endeavors in such financial straits. By 1929, Hadassah women, aggravated by the
complex and problematic negotiations with both the JWO and WIZO, voted to terminate their portion of Ha-Ishah’s funding.\(^\text{53}\)

At about the same time that Hadassah dropped out of Ha-Ishah, the JWO and WIZO moved forward with serious negotiations aimed at unifying the two groups. Some Hadassah women, jealous of WIZO and fearing that it would succeed in becoming the primary, and perhaps eventually the sole, women’s Zionist organization in Palestine, felt that Hadassah should compete with WIZO for the JWO affiliation. Henrietta Szold and others rejected these suggestions stating that they did not want to interfere with talks that had already begun.\(^\text{54}\) Always blunter than her more circumspect colleagues, Rose Jacobs later commented that she thought Hadassah should have pursued a union more aggressively in order to curtail the WIZO ambition to be the “spokesman [for female Zionists] in the total international picture.” In the end, Hadassah watched as the JWO formally joined the WIZO as its Palestine branch in the early 1930s.\(^\text{55}\) Hadassah maintained its presence as an American organization responsible for medical work in Palestine but forfeited the chance to build an international membership.

Due to turf battles, internal disputes within the international Zionist community, and Hadassah’s fear of losing its autonomy, the American Zionist group’s attempts to reach out to other Zionist women did not prove as fruitful or as seamless as did Council’s interactions

\(^{53}\) Mrs. E. (Rose) Jacobs to Histadrut Nashim Ivriot, 20 December 1929, Record Group 2, Box 62, Folder 1, HA.

\(^{54}\) Zip Szold to Irma Lindheim, 30 July 1929, Record Group 7, Box 16, Folder 163, HA.

with non-Jewish Americans. In light of their failure to reach a workable compromise with the JWO and WIZO, Hadassah leaders focused their energies on fortifying their own organization. In order to prove itself a strong Zionist organization and to be able to withstand the encroachment of both the male-led ZOA and female-led WIZO, Hadassah needed to sustain its own programs and maintain a large membership. For all of these reasons, throughout the 1920s Hadassah vigorously pursued recruitment efforts among the non-Zionist American population, especially members of that rival American Jewish women's organization, the NCJW.

**Recruiting American Women to Zionism**

Both Council and Hadassah sought large membership in order to keep revenue streams constant and to enhance their own power in Jewish organizational life. Throughout the 1920s the two groups sponsored membership campaigns that ultimately strained leadership relations as each set of leaders vied to promote most effectively their own vision of American Jewish women's public role. These two visions necessarily conflicted, given the NCJW leadership's stance regarding Zionism and that ideology's centrality to the lives of Hadassah women.

Conflict also resulted because both groups bluntly asserted their intention to enroll every single American Jewish woman in their own organization. In 1921, for instance, the NCJW proudly announced in the inaugural edition of its journal, *The Jewish Woman*, that it would "endeavor to introduce every Jewish woman in our communities to affiliate with
Such exhortations seem not to have done the trick as later the Extension Committee blatantly linked Council’s very survival to its members’ capacity to recruit others. An advertisement in 1924 warned members that “The Need of the National is Urgent! Can your Section afford to jeopardize our broad program by failing to meet your quota?” These campaigns continued throughout the decade as Council sought to maintain its preeminence among American Jewish women.

Hadassah used similar methods to increase its membership during the 1920s. Like NCJW, Hadassah leaders pledged to make “every woman a Hadassah woman.” As did Council, Henrietta Szold candidly linked the need for new members to the organization’s demands for greater sums of money. At one point, responding to sustained criticism that Hadassah was not serious or Zionist enough and focused too much attention on bourgeois women, Szold wrote a friend that “if we did not penetrate into non-Zionist circles, it would be impossible to raise the huge sums we do raise.” She further concluded that “it might be advantageous for some of the ladies [in Palestine] to come over here and take a hand in the ‘black work’ of collecting funds.”

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56 Mrs. William Loeb, Chair of the Extension Committee, *The Jewish Woman* 1 (October 1921): 11. See also Mrs. William Loeb, Chair of the Extension Committee, “Vigorous Extension Campaign,” *The Jewish Woman* 2 (April 1922): 2. The NCJW goal was to reach 300 sections and 100,000 members in 1923. In the same issue Rose Brenner stated that the organization currently had 45,000 members. Rose Brenner, “The Great Interpreter,” *The Jewish Woman* 2 (April 1922): 4.


58 Henrietta Szold to Nellie Straus Mochenson, 23 March 1925, Record Group 2 Box 6 Folder 2, HA.
Despite Szold’s bold statement, Hadassah saw its membership drives as aimed at more than merely augmenting its own coffers. Fundraising and membership growth played a part in the group’s primary goals to sustain Jewish life in Palestine while building the Zionist movement at home. Announcing a drive to increase membership late in 1926, Hadassah’s Newsletter reported that there were thousands of women in America who “must be changed from passive, if amiable, spectators into collaborators in the upbuilding of Palestine.”\(^{59}\) This desire to build its membership was inextricably linked to its commitment to promoting Zionism. Just as fundraising laid the foundation for life in Palestine, so did new membership augment the strength of Zionism in the United States. Indeed, one led to the other. Henrietta Szold believed that fundraising helped the Zionist mission because “where money goes the heart follows.”\(^{60}\) Women might start out apolitically, uncommitted to Zionism per se, but through their interest in helping Jews overseas, Hadassah leaders believed they could be brought around to supporting Zionism. Cooperation would encourage the transition to full-fledged commitment. This strategy, however successful it proved, necessarily brought them into conflict with NCJW leaders who resented Hadassah’s attempts to lure away their own members.

Shrewdly understanding that middle-class American women, like those in Council, might be easier to reach through methods that downplayed any overt attachment to controversial political ideologies, Hadassah leaders focused recruitment efforts around


\(^{60}\) “Report of Proceedings of the Fifth Convention,” June 1918, pp. 35, 111, Record Group 3, Box 1, Folder 5 HA.
ventures that united women in both groups, such as immigrant aid, health care and social work. Despite Hadassah’s adherence to Zionism, its membership campaigns most frequently presented the group’s work in non-political terms, linking it explicitly to that pursued by other women’s and relief organizations. Hadassah’s Chicago chapter’s plan to solicit donations from a variety of sources, even non-Jews, illuminates the organization’s attempt to place its work within the broader context of international relief. A Chicago delegate reported to the convention that her local group had grown weary of ceaseless fundraising drives and the expense they entailed. Looking at the methods of non-sectarian relief organizations, these women concluded that “if people all over the world, and so many Jewish people, contribute to the Red Cross for health work, we have a perfect right to appeal to Jews to contribute to health work in Palestine.” Women set out across the city asking numerous individuals and organizations for donations, presenting Hadassah’s Palestine work in this non-sectarian manner. By the end of the first drive they raised $6,500 with an expense of only $200. In 1923 the campaign raised $12,000 with an outlay of only $300. The Chicago success led the national convention to approve a motion urging Hadassah’s board to “aid the Chapters in securing annual contributors to Hadassah, Zionist or non-Zionist, Jewish and non-Jewish, as the case may be.” The advancement of Hadassah’s work as non-partisan at heart, embracing health and welfare initiatives but not political ideology, proved an expeditious means to raise money.

61 “Proceedings and Resolutions of the Ninth Convention,” 1923, pp. 19-23, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 2, HA.
Well before this national commitment to raising funds among non-Zionists and even non-Jews, the leaders had already realized the utility of stressing common cause with other middle-class Jewish women's organizations. Informal meetings, they averred, were among the best means by which to bring non-Zionist women slowly into the movement. Criticizing the large-scale efforts of the male-led Zionist movement, Hadassah leaders argued that most people did not join Zionism because of "much-lauded mass meetings" but rather through routine participation in small groups. Particularly during the war years, Hadassah leaders urged members to reach out to others through a shared interest in relief activities. Large numbers of women, they argued, might be persuaded to assist Hadassah with relief work despite their reluctance to embrace Zionism forthrightly. With time, leaders believed such sympathetic women would "perceive that there is a greater task before them than that of providing raiment for the children of Palestine - that of providing a home for the Children of Israel."62 By using such gendered strategies, talking to women one on one and asking them to participate in relief work for Jews in Europe and Palestine, Zionist women could indirectly change the minds of newcomers.

The most effective means of promoting non-Zionist active involvement in Hadassah's work was through the sewing circles, groups that provided clothing for those in Palestine. Pittsburgh and Chicago claimed the two largest and most organized of these circles and both included Council members. Realizing the utility of these circles for recruitment, Hadassah leaders urged all chapters throughout the nation to start their own circles in order to spread further Hadassah's message among non-Zionists. In 1926 Ruth Cohen, reporting on the


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success of the sewing circles, asserted that these small groups had proved indispensable in attracting women to the movement. "In many Jewish women’s organizations not under the auspices of Hadassah," she noted, "the sewing circle is the only link with Palestine. It is often the entering wedge for Hadassah in a city and the kernel about which the whole chapter is built." Cohen frankly admitted that the sewing circles served a larger purpose than mere relief provision; these circles allowed Zionist women a forum to talk to others about the movement and its mission in Palestine. By attracting women with such seemingly apolitical and un-ideological work as preparing infants’ clothes to send overseas, Hadassah activists could introduce non-Zionist Jewish women to their ideals in a relaxed and non-threatening atmosphere. The group realized great success with such efforts. In 1924 Hadassah reported 547 sewing circles acting in cooperation with the Palestine Supplies Department. Among these circles numbered 25 sections of the NCJW, even though the national leadership still refused to take an official position on Zionism. By 1927 more than 700 sewing circles existed throughout the United States, and over the course of ten years they had contributed some $500,000 in goods and donations to Palestine. The sewing circles proved invaluable in terms of monetary and material sustenance, but also, and more importantly, by introducing potential members to Hadassah’s work. Commenting on the

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63 Ruth Cohen, “Report of Miss Ruth Cohen, Executive Secretary of Hadassah,” 1926 Convention, p. 2, Record Group 3, Box 5, Folder 2, HA.

64 Ruth Cohen’s 1926 report notes that “naturally the Council has not yet taken action regarding Palestinian work.” See her report to the 1926 convention, pp. 17, Record Group 3, Box 5, Folder 2, HA. For sewing circle figures see “Palestine Supplies Bureau Report,” 1924 Convention Proceedings, p. 1, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 4, HA.

success of the sewing circle as a recruitment tool, the Hadassah leaders proudly proclaimed in January 1927 that “there is a ‘Hadassah-spirit,’ a spirit of harmony and unification which has attracted women from all ranks, even anti-Zionist women, and has made of them first, Hadassahites, and then convinced Zionists, to whom nothing Jewish in Palestine or outside Palestine is strange.”

Along with recruiting through fundraising campaigns and the sewing circles, Hadassah pursued more frequent, and formal, interaction with other national Jewish women’s organizations in the attempt to facilitate the growth of its own membership. Drawing on the success of the sewing circle model, in 1923 a Hadassah committee began to devise plans aimed at encouraging collaboration on Palestine work with other national Jewish women’s organizations. The next year Henrietta Szold asked her members, “how can we interpenetrate the other Jewish women’s organizations?” Aware that sections of the NCJW and other groups had been cooperating with Hadassah on the local level for years, she proposed that the national office keep a table listing the major Jewish women’s organizations and noting the extent of collaboration taking place between Hadassah and local sections. Armed with incontrovertible evidence of rank and file support for Zionist projects, Hadassah’s national leadership could then approach the leaders of these groups to request that they take an official position on Zionism. The national leadership would have to recognize the Zionist character of many of their own constituents or be forced to act in

66 Hadassah Newsletter 7 (January 1927): 3.

67 “Proceedings and Resolutions of the Ninth Convention,” 1923, p. 28, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 2, HA. A similar resolution passed the following year directing each chapter to “form a committee to enlist the interest and cooperation of other organized groups of Jewish women in their respective communities.” “Proceedings of the Tenth Convention,” 1924, p. 189, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 3, HA.
opposition to trends occurring on the grassroots level. Stressing the common theme inherent in all Hadassah’s recruitment campaigns, Szold asserted that “we must work from below upwards.” Singling out the NCJW in describing her proposal, Szold argued that if 90 of the 120 Council sections could be shown to support Zionism then the NCJW national leadership would be hard pressed to continue its reticence on the subject. Other Hadassah members agreed that a visible representation of Council support for Zionism at the grassroots level could be extremely useful in pushing the leadership to alter its resolutely non-Zionist stance.68

Szold and others at Hadassah’s 1924 convention realized that they had a difficult task before them if they wished to influence the NCJW’s official position on Zionism. A Boston delegate alerted members to the fact that Council had recently passed a resolution to limit the sums it dispensed to outside groups. She reported that she had appealed to Council for a donation in light of the fact that Hadassah’s work of non-political and non-sectarian relief was not dissimilar from Council’s own program. Her efforts, however, did not result in success.69 Her account touched off a round of grumbling in which some delegates referred to Council women as having “stone hearts,” prompting a delegate with ties to both organizations to take the floor in response to these charges. Stating that such opinions forced her, a Council member for 24 years, to “analyze my heart,” she concluded that “it was beating and I was certain it wasn’t stone.” She further asserted that some 95 percent of the delegates to this very Hadassah convention also held membership in the NCJW. Although

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68 “Proceedings of the Tenth Convention,” 1924, pp. 232-7, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 3, HA.

69 Ibid., 241-3.
this was surely an inflated figure, her perception nevertheless reflected the high level of cooperation taking place between the two groups. The delegate reminded the convention that while Council as an organization failed to support Zionism, its members joined in Zionist work on an individual basis. Hadassah leaders urged the membership to take this delegate’s message to heart, pointing out that significant cooperation occurred on the local and state levels between the two organizations regardless of the NCJW national office’s coolness.

Evidence suggests that one by one Council women did make notable contributions to Hadassah’s work. Throughout the 1920s Hadassah’s Newsletter reveals an observable growth in local chapters reporting cooperation with Council sections, testifying to the success of Hadassah’s efforts to “interpenetrate” other Jewish women’s groups, especially the “stone-hearted” NCJW.

One city where cooperation between the groups proceeded apace was Pittsburgh; indeed support for Zionism was strong throughout Western Pennsylvania. In 1924 NCJW sections from this region went so far as to pass a resolution at their regional conference urging their national office to meet with Hadassah national leaders and underscoring the great similarity between the actual projects of both groups. This resolution led to a meeting between Henrietta Szold, Rose Jacobs, Council President Rose Brenner and Executive Secretary Estelle Sternberger in Brooklyn early the next year. Although the Hadassah board reported to its convention that the meeting had been “amicable,” they concluded that “no

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70 Ibid., 241-3.

71 Ibid., 245-6.
hope of immediate participation in Palestine work was held out.” Their official spin on the event, later presented in the Newsletter, nevertheless assured readers that “such occurrences herald a time when it will be recognized that Palestine, the center of Jewish life, is the concern of all Jews.”

Rose Brenner presented a much cooler version of the meeting to her own board in November 1925. Indeed, the text of her presentation made it quite clear that she felt the meeting should never have taken place at all. She privately noted that the meeting had occurred only because the Pennsylvania sections had “most unwisely” passed a resolution requesting it. “A long and amicable conversation was held,” she concluded publicly, “and clearly demonstrated that Hadassah’s work has no place in the program of the National Council.” She further insisted that these organizations could maintain friendly relations only when each confined itself to its own sphere of activity. Surely aiming to remind the upstart sections of Council’s purview, Brenner asked the board to endorse a policy reiterating the group’s dedication to “the Jewish woman, in America, AND ON HER WAY TO AMERICA;....” [capital letters appear in the original], underscoring the fact that Council was an organization concerned with American Jews. While the war had heightened the group’s

72 “Report of the National Board of Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America,” 1924-1925, p. 8, Record Group 3, Box 4, Folder 2, HA. The resolution read as follows: “Whereas Palestine is assuming importance in the solution of the world problems of the Jewish people, particularly in relation to the tasks which the National Council of Jewish Women has adopted as its province, viz: immigration, women on farms, and the welfare of unprotected girls, therefore, Be it resolved that the Pennsylvania State Conference recommend that the Board of the NCJW invite to its meeting an accredited representative of Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America” Ibid., 8.


74 Typescript report to Board of Managers by Rose Brenner, November 1925, pp. 2-3, 9 Box 100, Klau Library, Hebrew Union College. The handwritten words “most unwisely” were added to the typed speech but were also crossed out.
interest in international affairs, the official program was to remain limited to those projects connected to the United States, not Palestine.

Breimer condoned political work that formed a part of the social reform agenda of similar American women's groups, but abjured all appeals for Council to consider involvement in Zionist work. Her position suffered when Hadassah did its best to present its own work as "philanthropic," or non-controversial, rather than solely "political," a distinction long maintained, although uneasily, among Council leaders. Brenner could not simply ignore the Pennsylvania sections, which in 1925 claimed the largest number of sections per state in the nation. By 1925 the Council leadership could no longer simply ignore Hadassah or Zionism either. 75

Throughout the 1920s, Hadassah continued recruiting locally, bringing Council women into cooperative projects and thereby encouraging them to join the organization directly. To reduce conflict with the NCJW national office, Hadassah leaders employed language, patterned after Rose Brenner's, that advanced the notion of a non-competitive partnership between the two groups. In 1926 Hadassah President Irma Lindheim sent greetings to Council's Triennial, claiming that Council and Hadassah pursued similar work but in distinct arenas: where Council helped immigrants on their way to the United States, Hadassah brought aid to immigrants settling in Palestine. "May a strong bond unite these two great sisters organizations," she proclaimed. "In the purposes which they share in

75 Ibid., 3-4; "Membership and Extension Campaign," The Jewish Woman 5 (March 1925): 28-9. Membership campaign information reports that the organization included 229 sections, 43 of which were in Pennsylvania. The next in line were New York with 22 and New Jersey with 21. On Council's post-war political work, see Rogow, 167-75.
common let them cooperate, in the purposes which are specifically their own, let them complement each other.” Borrowing Brenner’s message to undercut her ultimate intent, Lindheim argued that Council and Hadassah did not have to compete. Together they could aid Jewish women throughout the globe.

In a symposium on “Cooperation Among National Women’s Organizations” published in The Jewish Woman in 1928 Hadassah board member Rachel Natelson presented her group’s position. Following Lindheim’s model, Natelson argued that a variety of organizations sought to meet the diverse needs of Jews around the world. In Palestine ideological differences further escalated the potential for duplication of services. She believed that American Jewish women grew confused when they received numerous appeals from a variety of groups proposing to aid development in Palestine. Natelson urged Council women to consider Hadassah the safest “medium, if not the object, of material interest in Palestine” and assured them that Hadassah was taking steps to coordinate women’s groups in that land. Her objective was surely, at least in part, to establish Hadassah’s primacy among American Jewish women interested in Zionism. Alluding to tensions between Hadassah and WIZO, Natelson informed Council readers that these two Zionist groups had agreed not to propagandize in each other’s territory. Yet she declined to comment on the relations between Hadassah and Council because she felt such a topic “deserves a chapter in itself.” She concluded that the future demanded that all Jewish women’s organizations “as time goes on, work in ever closer harmony,” even holding up the General Federation of

Women’s Club as a model for them to follow. In her view, women should seek to streamline provision of services. But while Hadassah and WIZO might compete, she assured Council women that they need not fear the encroachment of Hadassah on their own work.

Council’s submission to the symposium propounded a similar ideal of mutual, if more aloof, cooperation. President Ida W. Friend also focused her attention on the speedy and efficient dispensation of aid. She argued that Jewish women’s organizations needed to develop mechanisms to avoid duplication and to cooperate in fulfilling their general goals. Yet the example she set forth in support of her ideas exuded not a little disdain for life in Palestine. Presenting a tale of one woman to illustrate how Jewish organizations could work together, she described how a girl in Palestine had received Hadassah’s assistance but wanted to go to the United States to find her fiancé. Council provided the young woman with advice on immigration, helped her to locate her fiancé and eventually settled the two in the United States. After introducing the young woman to the local section of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, Friend stated that “we thus have the completed circle of co-operation in which each organization within its sphere has contributed to the happiness of a deserving sister who without such aid might still be languishing in a distant village of Palestine.”

While the overall goal was to reduce overlap, it seems another implicit aspiration of the NCJW was to help young women leave Palestine, not emigrate there.

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President Friend’s anecdote along with Brenner’s earlier coolness to Hadassah in general reflected a sense of distrust for Hadassah and its work common among a certain core of the NCJW leadership. While many of their rank and file were moving closer to Hadassah’s ideals, the leadership maintained a chilly distance, fearing not only the loss of their ability to set the organization’s agenda with regard to political issues but also of losing members to the Zionist group. Distrust arose particularly among those Council leaders who did not accept Hadassah’s commitment to mutual cooperation as entirely sincere, believing that Hadassah wanted to augment its own membership rolls at any cost. At a 1927 board meeting Florina Lasker stated that “we may just as well be perfectly candid about the fact that Hadassah wants a good deal more than just moral support.” Another member concurred. Lillian Burkhart Goldsmith told the board that for three years the Southern California Council women had tried to involve Hadassah members in their work, but during that time only one Hadassah woman had offered her help. Most Hadassah members, Goldsmith maintained, refused to assist Council in any meaningful way.79 Hadassah’s recruitment tactics called for cooperation, but a cooperation with a definite end in mind: bringing more women to the Zionist movement. While they might pay lip service to helping the NCJW, in reality Hadassah women focused their considerable energies on building Palestine and bolstering the American Zionist movement, not in helping Council.

By 1929 the Zionist women’s group had achieved major success in bringing new members to the movement. At the start of the 1930s Hadassah rivaled the NCJW in size,

79 “Proceedings of the Meeting of the Board of Managers of the National Council of Jewish Women,” January 1927, pp. A29-30, Box 3, Folder 2, NCJW collection, LC.
claiming 44,000 members, an increase of 42,000 in only 14 years. Hadassah proudly discussed instances of collaboration between the two groups in its “Chapter Notes” column. The comparable column in Council’s publication, The Jewish Woman, maintained a stony silence about Zionist activism in its local sections. By the late 1920s, however, Council could no longer ignore Zionism as an issue of importance to American Jewish women. Even if it avoided advertising for Hadassah in its own pages, Council did begin to present more frequent stories on Zionist topics. Finally, late in 1929, several Council leaders themselves attended Hadassah’s convention, including Council president, Ida W. Friend, and Rebekah Kohut. At this convention, Kohut was elected to Hadassah’s national board. Not surprisingly, the following year a Hadassah representative was invited to attend a Council Triennial for the first time ever.80

Events on the international stage stepped up the success of Hadassah’s gendered recruitment strategies. In 1929 Arab riots in Palestine left 125 Jews dead and many American Jews began to take a greater interest in preserving the safety of that community. Rebekah Kohut declared that the riots “broke down this great big fence that divided the Zionists from the anti- or non-Zionists. We rushed right in with our money to help them. It was the kind of picture that we have known, of one Father, and that we are all brothers and

80 Newsletter 10 (December 1929): 5, located in Record Group 3, Box 6, Folder 3, HA; Rose Jacobs handwritten notes, Record Group 7, Reel 4, HA.
sisters.... The philanthropic activism of the war years kicked into action as American Jews saw their co-religionists threatened once more.

Where women like Brenner and her colleagues might question the political ramifications of Zionism, other women in their organization had begun to see Zionist work as but a continuation of their European agenda - aid to the Jewish people throughout the globe. Their thoughts were influenced not only by Hadassah’s shrewd and successful recruitment strategies and the terrible events in Palestine, but also by increasing contact their organization had with leading Jewish activists in Europe, many of whom were themselves Zionists. As the NCJW laid plans to revive an International Council of Jewish Women their leaders found the issue of Zionism nearly impossible to keep off the table. Despite their best efforts to mold an international organization in the image of its American originator, Council leaders could not arrest the growing international interest in Zionism.

**World Congress of Jewish Women**

The impetus for a World Congress of Jewish Women built on groundwork laid before the war when women from Europe and the United States had met in conjunction with the International Council of Women (ICW). In 1912 during the ICW meeting in Rome, an International Council of Jewish Women was founded; however, this group did not survive the war years. Council’s continued involvement in the ICW, along with Rebekah Kohut’s dedicated efforts with the Reconstruction Unit reinvigorated ties between European and

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American Jewish women and reawakened the call for an international organization. In November 1922, when the Unit finished its mission in Europe, Elinor Sachs-Barr remained behind to finalize plans for a World Congress of Jewish Women to be held in Vienna in May 1923.82

Congress organizers, like their American counterparts in 1893, recognized the need for an organization that addressed both women’s and Jewish identities. Proudly committed to serving their people, Congress organizers also spoke in highly positive, and gendered, tones about women’s ability. In preparing for the Congress Viennese social worker and Zionist Anitta Müller-Cohen argued that the conference would benefit both Americans and Europeans by advancing the ideas of women, so often overlooked by men. “We women have a better programme than all politicians,” she contended, “we come with pure hearts and with warm sympathies. We are not fighting for power; we wish to promote the welfare and stability of our people.”83

82 Rebekah Kohut, “Report: Committee on Reconstruction,” Official Report of the Tenth Triennial Convention, 1923, pp. 210-1, Box 5, Folder 2, Solomon collection, LC. For the precursor organization, the ICJW, see Nelly Las, Jewish Women in a Changing World: A History of the International Council of Jewish Women (ICJW), 1899-1995 (Jerusalem: A. Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, 1996). 29-31. See also Janet Harris in Official Report of the Ninth Triennial Convention, 1920, p. 30, 46, 427, Box 5, Folder 1, Solomon collection, LC. After attending the 1920 Quinquennial of the International Council of Women (ICW) in Norway, Janet Harris reported that she had used the meeting to begin arranging an international congress of Jewish women. While European women favored the idea, they could not initially agree on where to hold the congress. Great Britain’s Union of Jewish Women insisted it play host to the international gathering but, according to Harris, German and Austrian women rejected that idea stating that their delegates would be unable to obtain the necessary travel documents. Although no permanent decisions were made at the Quinquennial, the NCJW committed itself to pursuing the organizational effort.

In a pre-Congress editorial in *The Jewish Woman*, NCJW Executive Secretary Estelle M. Sternberger also affirmed the belief that the Congress would strengthen the bonds between Jewish women around the world. In language starkly reminiscent of that used by Hadassah leaders as well as her own colleagues, Sternberger expressed the Congress’ goals in language that emphasized women’s natural propensity for nurturing:

It is the wearied and broken heart of Israel’s unfortunate mothers and daughters that the women at Vienna will hold in their hands. Theirs will be the tender task of healing it with the balm of counsel and united service. The Jewess of Europe and the Jewess of America are to give expression, not only to the spiritual kinship that binds them together, but also to their mutual responsibility of caring for those who turn their pleading eyes to us for a blessed release from their perplexing agonies.

Sternberger saw in the Congress the potential for Jewish women to use their skills in the service of their people. Valorizing what she saw as women’s natural aptitudes, she stated that the Congress would “contribute [a] new chapter to the revelation of womanhood’s power.” While affirming women’s capacity for public work, Sternberger never lost sight of the fact that the primary function of the Congress was to help fellow Jews. Despite allegations in the American Jewish community that the NCJW had become assimilated, Sternberger insisted that “this conference testifies that our women, wherever they may be, will never hide themselves from their own flesh and kindred – that they will ever dedicate themselves to the task of delivering our distressed sister from the vale of tears through the door of new hopes.”

Although seemingly united by gender, the Congress’s goals ignored the issue of class. Just as the NCJW had developed as an organization of the upper-class aiding the poor, so

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now did well-off American and European women devise ways to aid less fortunate Jews throughout the world. The recipients of this aid, however, were never considered as equals or even potential delegates to the Congress themselves. From the start the Congress constructed boundaries in defining what type of woman belonged in an international organization of Jewish women.

The Congress convened in Vienna on May 6, 1923 amidst antisemitic protests. Some 20 nations were represented by 90 delegates, including such distinguished Europeans as Müller-Cohen, Bertha Pappenheim of the Jüdischer Frauenbund and Rosa Pomeranz Melzer, a member of the Polish Parliament. Despite the antisemitic protests outside the hall, Dr. Michael Hainisch, President of the Austrian Republic, and his mother, Maria, an early advocate for equal rights, both addressed the assembled women. Like the organizations after which it modeled itself -- the ICW and NCJW -- the Congress endeavored to avoid divisive topics, including all sensitive political and religious matters. Rebekah Kohut, serving as chair, asserted that the primary reason for the gathering was to focus on the needs of Jewish women through practical work in the field of social welfare. Yet, obviously, presenters could not possibly avoid all references to politics or religion at such a gathering. Papers discussed Jewish immigration, involvement in prostitution and the "Ostjudenfrage" (East European Jewish question). Others looked at the development of social services, Jewish education for the young and women’s position in the Jewish community. Many of these presentations, while touching upon political and religious subject matter, did not raise

much controversy as they limited themselves to topics long associated with middle-class Jewish women’s organizations.\textsuperscript{86}

Some delegates did manage to work in discussions of Zionist topics even as they avoided mentioning Zionism explicitly. Rebekah Sieff of WIZO presented a paper on the halutzot (female pioneers), and Nellie Straus Mochenson discussed Jewish immigration to Palestine.\textsuperscript{87} Neither addressed Zionism directly but each presenter clearly identified herself as an advocate of that movement. Mochenson, who attended the Congress as a representative of Palestine, not Hadassah (even though it funded her trip), privately expressed ambivalence about the Congress. She felt that it had been moderately successful for Zionists in that she and others had been allowed to present their views to the largely non-Zionist delegates. Nevertheless she questioned the ultimate outcome of the Congress, noting that although she found the proceedings interesting she did not see what concrete purpose they served. “If it was merely a spiritual Turkish bath, like so many other assemblages of the kind, why then it seems a great extravagance,” she concluded.\textsuperscript{88}

Despite Mochenson’s fears that the Congress did not produce tangible results, it did resolve to support Jewish settlement in Palestine, stopping short of decisively endorsing Zionism itself. Mochenson played an important role in drafting and lobbying for the resolution, making a “deep impression on all delegates present,” according to Rebekah


\textsuperscript{87} Rebekah Sieff and Nellie Straus Mochenson in World Congress of Jewish Women, 63-5, 92-6.

\textsuperscript{88} Nellie Straus Mochenson to Alice L. Seligsberg, 27 May 1923, Record Group 7, Reel 1, HA.
Kohut. Janet Harris later remarked that a Council member and "ardent Zionist," most likely Rebekah Kohut, "to whom [the resolution] had been submitted said it would be acceptable if adopted without debate. This was done."\(^9\) Kohut, more amenable to Zionism than other Council leaders but unwilling to allow the Congress to devolve into feuding over the issue, probably used her position as Congress chair to ensure that, if considered at all, the resolution would pass without acrimonious in-fighting. Although the resolution studiously avoided mentioning the word "Zionism," it did endorse Jewish settlement in Palestine and recognized the importance that settlement had for Jews around the world. Moreover, it urged all Jewish women to help with establishing the necessities of life in that country. It aimed to build support for Zionism's projects while tabling the discussion of Zionism itself for the time being. In this way, the Congress action resembled Hadassah's own recruitment strategies with non-Zionist women in the United States.\(^9\) Happy though she was about the passage of the resolution, Mochenson described it as "luke warm, but nevertheless, [...] the first to be passed unanimously."\(^9\)

Expressing great satisfaction with Mochenson's work, Henrietta Szold reminded Hadassah that she had only indirectly represented them in Vienna. Szold strongly


\(^9\) World Congress of Jewish Women, 129. The unanimously adopted resolution declared that: "Whereas with the Balfour Declaration, and its incorporation into the Public Law of Europe by the San Remo Decision and the acceptance by Great Britain of the Mandate for Palestine, Palestine has been made available as a home for the Jews. Be it resolved that the Conference deems it to be the duty of all Jews to contribute to the physical reconstruction of Palestine, to aid in its social and economic rehabilitation and to promote the settlement in that country of such Jews as wish to go there."

\(^9\) Mochenson as reported by Henrietta Szold in "Women's Work in Palestine," Ninth Convention Proceedings, pp. 14-6, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 1, HA.
recommended that as an organization Hadassah play a more direct role at any future international gatherings. With the American NCJW virtually running the Congress, WIZO’s official presence and Hadassah’s absence formally marginalized the American Zionist group, a situation leaders did not want to see repeated. Szold’s comments reveal a heightened interest in the international women’s community as Hadassah embarked on its struggles with WIZO and endeavored to recruit Council women to Zionism.92

At the second World Congress of Jewish Women, convened in June 1929 in Hamburg, Germany, Hadassah President Irma Lindheim attended on behalf of her organization. As in 1923, the delegates represented the most active and influential Jewish women from the United States and Europe. While much remained constant from one Congress to the next, a noticeable difference occurred in the treatment of the Zionist question, reflecting the growing interest in the movement throughout the decade despite the continued official silence from such groups as the NCJW and the Jüdischer Frauenbund.93 The second Congress saw a significant rise in the discussion of topics relating to Jewish settlement and life in Palestine. Austrian Zionist Anitta Müller-Cohen addressed the Congress on “The Influence of Cultural Work in Palestine on Women,” drawing responses from Lindheim and the Zionist and Palestine resident Helene Hannah Thon. Another distinguished speaker from Palestine, Rosa Welt-Strauss, discussed women’s suffrage in that

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92 Henrietta Szold, “Women’s Work in Palestine,” Ninth Convention Proceedings, pp. 14-6, Record Group 3, Box 3, Folder 1, HA.

93 The Jüdischer Frauenbund went through similar changes regarding Zionism as did the NCJW in the 1920s. Shortly after the war pro-Zionist members attempted to win a resolution supporting the movement despite leader Bertha Pappenheim’s desire to avoid the issue. While the organization never embraced Zionism officially it did support Palestine’s “importance and great interest as a Jewish women’s and a cultural question.” Quoted in Kaplan, 87.
country. Colorfully noting that upon achieving the vote it was “wonderful to see, how the
women in Jerusalem with child in arm and a cigarette in their mouths came to the ballot
box,” she reminded delegates that women’s vote was still not secure. Although women had
won equal rights back in 1926, she feared that various forces opposed to women’s suffrage
would not rest until they had repealed the measure. The breadth of topics covered relating
to Palestine as well as the prominence of Zionist women in the discussions and proceedings
speaks to the changing status of Zionism within the international Jewish women’s
community. No longer a topic to be avoided or supported only obliquely with vague phrases,
Zionist women took their place alongside others at an international gathering debating Jewish
women’s status, problems and possible solutions.

The presence of Zionist women made other women’s absences all the more striking.
As in 1923, there is little evidence to suggest that many, if any, working-class Jewish
attended the event. Those women whose names are recorded in the official record tended
to come from the U.S. or Western Europe and all delegates were able to speak German,
French or English. Indeed, in concluding the Congress, Rebekah Kohut thanked Müller-
Cohen and Paula Ollendorff of Germany for translating, even though, she remarked, most
women at the Congress could already speak German. When the Congress voted to form a
permanent international organization the only non-European elected to serve on the new
Executive Committee was Helene Hannah Thon of Palestine. While attempting to forge

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94 Rosa Welt-Strauss, Protokoll der Gründungsversammlung des Weltbundes jüdischer Frauen vom 4.-
6. Juni 1929 (Record of the founding meeting of the ‘World Congress of Jewish Women’ from 4-6 June,
1929) (Berlin: B. Levy, 1929), 96. (Original in German: “Die Wahl kam zustande, and es war wunderbar
zu sehen, wie die Frauen in Jerusalem mit dem Kind auf dem Arm und der Zigarette im Mund zur
Wahlurne kamen.”) For Anitta Müller-Cohen and others see same program, pp. 127-41.
alliances with Jewish women throughout the world, Congress organizers maintained the distinctions that many of the constituent groups had long held themselves. Like the NCJW, the Congress viewed working-class and poor, Yiddish or Ladino speaking Jews along with Middle Eastern Jews as people in need of service, not as potential colleagues.95

In line with the notion of service expressed through organizational aid and philanthropy, the Congress passed another resolution favorable to settlement in Palestine. This resolution, like the previous version, recognized the importance of upbuilding Palestine and charged Jewish women’s organizations with taking part in that project. Attesting to the heightened power of Zionist delegates, Rebekah Kohut told the NCJW board that “the majority of the [Congress] members were very, very anxious that the Conference go on record as supporting Palestine and Zionism, and there was a threatened bolt from the Conference on the part of a large number of women.” Despite this groundswell in favor of a pro-Zionist resolution, those opposed managed to pass a more watered-down version not dissimilar to the 1923 version.96 Kohut later assured NCJW triennial delegates that although the Zionist issue was brought up “forcibly” at the Congress, the new international organization would still endeavor to avoid embroiling itself in controversial issues: “we have started out, not only with peace all over the world, but we are going to try to have peace within our own ranks. With peace in our own ranks we believe we can work for the peace

95 Protokoll der Gründungsversammlung, 147-8, 152, 160. For similar dynamics in other international women’s organizations, see Rupp, 51-81.

96 Meeting of the Board of Managers, National Council of Jewish Women, October 1929, pp. 292-3, Part 1, Box 6, Folder 2, NCJW collection, LC. The Palestine resolution read: “In Anerkennung, dass das in Palästina unternommene Aufbauwerk für die Juden der ganzen Welt von Bedeutung ist, spricht die Weltkonferenz die Forderung aus, dass der zu gründende Weltbund seine angeschlossenen Verbände zur Mitarbeit an diesem Aufbauwerk auffordert.”

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of the world, too." By linking support for Zionist projects to Council's work in the realm of immigrant aid, social welfare and education, Kohut and others continued to lobby for change in Council's official position on Zionism. While it may not have been possible for all Jews to agree on the Zionist issue, proponents were able to build tremendous support by emphasizing how Palestine work resembled that of other women's organizations. Using the same rhetorical strategies as Hadassah employed to increase membership in the United States, women involved in the international movement similarly managed to bring Zionist issues to the floor by the end of the 1920s. Yet in seeking to break down barriers, the new organization succeeded in upholding many others that had long existed, including barriers based on class, language and national or regional origin. The make-up of the international movement mirrored that of the national groups, leading to the continued invisibility of certain types of women, such as those in the Arbeter Ring, in this international organization theoretically open to all Jewish women.

Moving into the Mainstream

By 1930 middle-class Jewish women from around the world had come to support the practical goals of the Zionist movement even if they still hesitated to identify themselves or their organizations openly as Zionist. Hadassah women in the United States and Zionist women at the world congresses met their non-Zionist counterparts half-way, realizing that it was easier to recruit new adherents in a more piecemeal, non-ideological fashion than to overwhelm the reluctant with political tracts, lectures and exhortations to support the

97 Rebekah Kohut, “Proceedings of the Twelfth Triennial Convention of the National Council of Jewish Women,” January 1930, p. 400, Part 1, Box 37, NCJW collection, LC.
nationalist cause. Their methods, and more importantly the methods' effectiveness, reveal the important ways that seemingly non-political acts can have profound political consequences. The 1920s were a decade when the Zionist Organization of America lost large numbers of members while Hadassah absolutely flourished. This achievement, frequently overlooked by historians, had significant results not only for the women's organization but for building the American Zionist movement in a period that was otherwise one of decline.

Hadassah's recruitment strategy centered on articulating its gendered Zionism, one that valorized women's talents and interests. Rather than discuss Zionist ideology or the political ramifications of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine, Hadassah attracted non-Zionists by engaging their interests as women. Hadassah publications stressed its services to women and children, its devotion to medical work, and its ability to heal the breach between Arabs and Jews. These projects, though clearly aimed at promoting Jewish life in Palestine, resembled work pursued by a wide variety of contemporary women's organizations. In the post-war era when many women's groups, both Jewish and non-Jewish, turned their attention overseas, Hadassah promoted its own involvement in international and peace issues all the more strongly. By appealing to women in ways that highlighted those topics and undertakings common to so many middle-class women, Hadassah was able to attract a large number of new recruits to the Zionist movement during the inter-war period.

Hadassah leaders particularly recruited members of the National Council of Jewish Women, an organization resolutely non-Zionist until after World War II. Both these groups participated in similar work and used analogous rhetoric and imagery to describe their
projects. These commonalities worked to Hadassah’s benefit. Just as the NCJW had long before established close ties to the National and International Councils of Women and many other women’s groups, so too in the 1920s could many of its members volunteer to assist the Zionist organization, Hadassah, without feeling any particular conflict of interest. By moving Hadassah into the mainstream of female organizational activity its leaders ultimately succeeded in making Zionism as an ideology more acceptable to middle-class American Jews. Hadassah’s work, although often perceived as being apolitical, philanthropic and feminine, in the end played no small role in helping Zionism begin its move from the fringes to the center of American Jewish life.

Council women, especially those opposed to Zionist affiliation, formulated another means by which to promote their American and Jewish identities. Unlike Hadassah, they turned their attention to the American sphere, forging bonds with non-Jewish women’s organizations and striving to be the “interpreter” of Jewish culture to their middle-class, non-Jewish counterparts. Like these women, Council supported a broad political agenda that sought to preserve protective labor legislation, opposed the Equal Rights Amendment and promoted world peace. Yet although they focused their energies on the American context, Council women did not abandon or ignore their Jewish identities. Council broadened its overseas agenda after the war not only by working for peace but also by expanding its involvement with immigrant aid, reconstruction work and collaboration with European Jewish women similarly concerned with the plight of the refugees. Like Hadassah, women in the NCJW sought to create an international Jewish women’s community; however, most Council leaders stressed their American nationality and strove to avoid discussion of Jewish
nationalism. Nevertheless their commitment to Jews from around the world, in concert with their devotion to the United States, led Council women to develop an identity that was grounded in more than religion alone, despite the protestations of such leaders as Rose Brenner.

These two groups experimented with ways to be both American and Jewish while at the same time championing women's issues and talents. While their leadership found much to disagree on politically, the rank-and-file of the two groups grew closer together over their common interest in social welfare, education, the status of women and children, and the condition of Jews worldwide. While these shared concerns brought middle-class, English speaking American Jewish women closer during the 1920s, they also raised barriers between these groups and women from poorer and/or more radical backgrounds, such as those in the Workmen's Circle. As Council and Hadassah moved ever further into the broad mainstream of American social reform-oriented feminism, they did so without significant involvement or input from working-class, Yiddish speaking women. Although such women certainly joined Hadassah and Council, they could hope to achieve prominence only by embracing these groups' visions of what it meant to be an American Jew. Women with different understandings of their American, Jewish and gender identities had to travel alternative paths to full involvement in public life.
CHAPTER 6

THE FEMINIZATION OF THE ARBETER RING, 1920-1930

Like women in the NCJW and Hadassah, those in Arbeter Ring worked vigorously to raise relief funds during the war, putting aside their earlier attempts to achieve equality through the separate ladies’ branches. After the war some women returned to their interests in gender issues and attempted once again to construct a coherent way to reconcile their often conflicting positions as socialists, workers and mothers. In the 1920s many women formed voluntary ladies’ auxiliaries and women’s clubs. These groups provided women with greater flexibility than did formal branch membership and pursued work of immediate concern to many women, including social welfare and education projects. The women who launched these groups sought ways to combine their interests in both class and gender issues, to be active publicly while continuing to care for home and children.

Creating their own groups enabled women to address their problems by offering an alternative to the regular branch and membership modeled on men’s work lives. The women’s groups provided female companionship, sociability and an agenda attuned to women’s needs. Constrained by the socialist movement’s reluctance to deal with gender difference, Circle women used their own groups to create a distinct space for themselves.
within the organization itself. Their actions resembled those of middle-class women's organizations where separate female organizing also persisted even after the attainment of suffrage. Yet while these women willfully separated themselves, they were far from marginalized. The women's groups in the Circle ultimately resulted in the formulation of a new type of involvement— one that recognized gender difference while still firmly supporting the broader socialist agenda. By engaging in work traditionally associated with women, and which was receiving greater attention nationally due to the efforts of middle-class women's social reform initiatives, these socialists not only delineated a space for themselves within the Circle but ultimately succeeded in expanding the order's overall mission.

Arbeter Ring in The Postwar World

Following the war the Workmen's Circle, like other Jewish organizations, continued its interest in overseas relief. Members sent support to Jews in Poland and Russia through the People's Relief Committee. The landsmanshaft branches gave financial aid to family members and relatives still residing in Eastern Europe. In addition to providing short-term financial and material assistance, the Circle also built children's schools and helped adults

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gain the skills necessary to learn a trade. Just as they had during the war, the Circle’s female members remained in the trenches, raising funds and preparing clothing for shipment overseas, but rarely appearing in prominent leadership positions. While the relief agenda remained substantially the same, other issues also began to attract members’ interests.

Zionist topics crept into the pages of the Circle’s monthly paper Der fraynd with greater regularity after the war, particularly in the late 1920s, although the organization continued to adhere to its anti-Zionist posture. At the same time it affirmed the development of the labor movement in Palestine, the Circle continued to abjure any direct support for the nationalist and political goals of the Zionist movement as a whole. In October, 1927 Der fraynd reported on the Fifteenth Zionist Congress as an example of the “abnormal” modern Jewish condition. The next month European Bundist Gina Medem included a favorable description of Palestine’s female pioneers in an article on the “new woman,” which also described Russia’s female doctors and Viennese women who had turned a Catholic holiday into a socialist street parade. The most straightforward renunciation of the Zionist cause appeared following the Arab riots in 1929 when Der fraynd published Bundist Yakov Pat’s negative assessment of the events taking place in Palestine. Pat harshly criticized Zionist interpretations of the riots, arguing that the Zionists had helped inflame tensions by ignoring

the Arab nationalist element inherent in the Palestine conflict. Sharply denouncing the attacks on Jewish settlers, Pat nevertheless insisted that although these Jews were innocent victims, the Zionists most definitely were not. He asserted that the only way to solve the current stand-off was for Zionists to abandon their desire for a Jewish homeland and to make peace with Arabs in Palestine. Continuing in this vein, early in 1930 the Workmen's Circle urged members to support the workers' movement in Palestine, arguing that the movement provided the only practical solutions to the variegated problems in that land. Leaders maintained that political Zionism had long ago proven its futility and that the time had come for workers in Palestine to reach a compromise with their Arab neighbors and the British authorities.  

But events in Palestine interested Circle members only marginally in the 1920s. Of far more immediate concern was the internal dispute that threatened to tear the organization in two. With the founding of the Communist party and the Third International, or Comintern, intense conflict entered the ranks of the Arbeter Ring. In 1917 the Circle had thrown its support behind the Russian Revolution, and through the early 1920s it pursued projects aimed at relieving the plight of Jews in Ukraine and elsewhere in the Soviet Union. But over time the division between socialists and Communists widened, mirroring the larger strain enveloping the entire Socialist Party in the United States. Leftists in both the Party and

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4 M. Ivenski, "Tsvey kongressen" (Two congresses), Der fraynd 17 (October 1927): 7-9; Gina Medem, "Di naye froy" (The new woman), Der fraynd 17 (November-December 1927): 7-9; Yakov Pat, "Di geshehenishen in palestina un der 'bund' in poylen" (The events in Palestine and the 'Bund' in Poland), Der fraynd 20 (November-December 1929): 10-2; and, "Palestine," Der fraynd 21 (November-December 1930): 2-3. See also M. Ivenski, "'Ahad Ha'am' un zeyn literarishe badaytung" ('Ahad Ha'am' and his literary meaning), Der fraynd 16 (September 1926): 17-9; and, Harold Berman, "The Youth Movement in Palestine," The Friend 21 (November-December 1930): 5-6.
the Circle wanted to affiliate with the Comintern, an action opposed by more mainstream members. The socialist movement voted down the leftist program in 1919, at which point the leftists formed an underground campaign that eventually took over the Jewish Socialist Federation. When that group seceded from the Socialist Party, loyal members, including many Workmen's Circle leaders, formed a new group, the Jewish Socialist *Farband* (union, association). Both the Federation and the Farband included people affiliated with the Circle. In 192 the Communists founded the Workers' Party, and the Jewish Socialist Federation became the Yiddish section of that organization. The next year the Workers' Party started a Yiddish newspaper, *Frayhayt* (Freedom), to counter the more moderate *Forverts*.

The discord that wracked the socialist movement also affected the Circle. Throughout the 1920s local branches and district organizations were riven by conflict between leftist and "rightist" members. The Circle initially attempted to retain members in the branches despite the growing ideological divide, but as the 1920s progressed this became an increasingly difficult task. The vitriol in the attacks from both sides intensified, and rare was the branch that remained immune from the internal strife of these years. In 1930 some 8,000 leftists finally organized their own "proletarian" fraternal organization, the International Workers Order (IWO), and formally withdrew from the Workmen's Circle.

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Women participated in these struggles along with male members. One woman attributed the late appearance of a separate women's group in her branch to the intensity of the battles with the Communists. No one in her branch had time to think about organizing women, she recalled, while the branch fought for its very existence. Another woman noted that the internal strife of the 1920s had led to the temporary demise of her women's club in Atlanta, although it was later revived in 1925.⁷

The conflict took a toll on the organization not only in terms of personal relationships but also in overall membership rates. The Circle reached its peak membership of 85,000 in 1925 but consistently lost members thereafter. In 1926 the National Executive Committee (NEC) reported that the number of new members inducted that year amounted to 2,000 less than the year before.⁸ As branch relations deteriorated some members opted to leave the organization entirely. Yet factors aside from ideological conflict also contributed to the post-war membership decline. Immediately after the war, for instance, immigration restriction significantly curtailed growth. With fewer immigrants arriving in the United States from abroad, the Circle lost one of its major sources of new recruits. During the 1920s still other considerations influenced the decrease in Circle membership.

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⁷ No author, “Di grindung fun froyen klub in brentsh 392” (The founding of the women's club in branch 392), in 50th Anniversary Jubilee Lubliner Ehrlich Branch 392 W.C., 1909-1959. New York, pp. 22-3, Box 31, Folder 172, YIVO. No author, “Anshit a bagrisung” (Instead of a greeting). In dorem-land (In the southern land) (Branch 207, Atlanta), 1928, p. 43, Box 19, Folder 119, YIVO.

⁸ 1. Sh. Herts, 50 vohr arbeter ring in vidishn lebn (Fifty years of Workmen's Circle in Jewish life) (New York: National Executive Committee, Arbeter Ring, 1950), 184; National Executive Committee meeting minutes, in English, 9 January 1927, unprocessed material at YIVO. General Secretary Joseph Baskin reported that in 1926 the Circle lost 3,070 members.
The relative prosperity of the 1920s enabled some Circle members to move into the middle-class. When this happened, many of them did not renew their affiliation with the socialist fraternal order. This situation occurred most frequently in small cities and towns with a modest overall Jewish population. Along with this movement out of the working-class, 1920s-style welfare capitalism also contributed to rising numbers of people leaving the organization. As some businesses and unions began to meet workers' needs that once had been covered only by the mutual aid societies, members started to withdraw from fraternal organizations. Finally, the post-war conservatism did little to encourage growth in an organization affiliated with socialism, even if it were considered "rightist" by its more radical members.9

The political context of the period, most notably the postwar Red Scare, did much to ensure a meager turnout of new members. Particularly in small cities, the Arbeter Ring's operations were nearly paralyzed, and few people wished to join a group targeted by the government as being potentially subversive. The NEC protested such local government action against the branches as arresting leaders or meddling in Circle affairs. In some cases the NEC provided trial funds for those leaders facing prison sentences, and throughout the country it struggled to maintain its right to provide insurance to its members. In this trying atmosphere the NEC endeavored to hold on to these old members at the same time recruiting

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9 Herts, 170-1, 184-5. He maintains that by 1922 11% of Arbeter Ring members were businessmen, generally small, who had retained their ideals.
new members. To this end it sent speakers to the branches, distributed recruitment materials, and initiated a variety of membership campaigns.\(^\text{10}\)

Given these circumstances, the Circle leadership struggled to find ways to augment membership rolls that did not rely on recruiting new faces to the movement. Young people and women became the foci of recruitment campaigns. Both these groups contained large numbers of people already related to current members and so were, theoretically at least, familiar with the organization and its ideals. For the first time in the Circle’s history, then, women became a population energetically courted by male leaders. As early as the autumn of 1918, when immigration restriction first began to threaten recruitment, the Organizing Committee initiated a campaign to raise membership to 70,000. Campaign activity during October and November focused exclusively on women, specifically the wives of current members.\(^\text{11}\) Such campaigns continued throughout the next decade. In 1926 an article in the English-language section of Der fraynd praised women for their work on behalf of the Circle, but pointed out that they accounted for a mere 9,000 of the total 84,000 enrolled members.\(^\text{12}\)

While this figure reveals the low level of female membership in the Circle, it hides the fact that significant numbers of women remained active in their organization even if they were not dues-paying members. Despite the organization’s concerted efforts to attract female


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members, many women in these years opted instead to work on behalf of the Circle without formally joining the group itself.

During the 1920s women began to form new ladies’ auxiliaries, volunteer groups the form of which had existed since the Circle’s earliest years and which consisted of members’ female relatives. The auxiliaries did not require that a woman actually enroll in the Arbeter Ring herself although some women in the auxiliaries did pay dues. Ladies’ branches from the pre-war era also still functioned but by the 1920s they were few in number as most women chose to join the auxiliaries, or later, the froyen klubn (women’s clubs) instead.13 The women’s clubs, as we shall see, were groups affiliated with a particular branch that closely resembled ladies’ auxiliaries; indeed, at first only the names represented any real difference between these volunteer groups. By 1927, recognizing the potential for membership growth, Circle leaders began devising ways to bring these two types of volunteer groups formally into the organization. The 1927 convention resolved that the NEC should begin to work through city and district committees to increase the numbers of class 3 members (a rate instituted for members’ wives). Acknowledging that the informal auxiliaries and clubs were attracting many women, the convention also resolved that all branches attempt to create such groups in their areas. This was not the first time that the leaders had noticed women’s critical role in recruiting other women.14 By the end of the decade the

13 Hurwitz, 212-4. At the time he wrote the book, 1936, six ladies’ branches still existed: two in Newark and one each in New York City, Syracuse, Pittsburgh, and Richmond, VA.

14 Konvenshon buletin (Convention bulletin) 9 (5 May 1927), p. 28, Box 4, Folder 22, YIVO. In December, 1924 plans had been laid for a joint conference between members of the 3rd class (members’ wives) and the Organizing Committee. This conference established a campaign to enroll more wives into the 3rd class. See Report of the Office Committee, NEC minutes, 7 December 1924, p. 206, in English, unprocessed material located at YIVO.
Circle leadership, seeing a new means by which to increase enrollment, moved to institutionalize these informal groups and tried to integrate their members into the organization as dues-payers. Yet unlike the pre-war ladies’ branches, which could include members at any class level, the formal women’s clubs and branches contained only the 3rd and 5th classes, both limited solely to women.\textsuperscript{15}

Although the Circle leadership endorsed the informal women’s groups over time and continued its membership campaigns among women, this did not mean that women no longer encountered difficulty when trying to support the organization. Indeed, continued male ambivalence about women’s presence at organizational meetings played no small role in the development of separate women’s groups. Just as they had in the Circle’s first days, women in the 1920s continued to feel uncomfortable when they tried to participate in the male-led meetings and conventions. Regardless of the organizational commitment to recruit more women, many men seemed to prefer that their wives and other women abstain from involvement in the business of the regular branches. In 1925, for instance, the Convention Bulletin reported humourously about the recent “picture” presented by female delegates accompanying their husbands to the annual meeting:

This ‘picture’ is simply scandalous. Is it not enough that these delegates suffer from their wives at home that they should also suffer from them at the convention? No, this ‘picture’ should be abolished. Conventions were not created for women. True, women do indeed have the same rights as men but women should be prohibited from receiving such rights as to make men’s lives bitter during convention time. The convention must once and for all speak out against such women’s rights.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Hurwitz, 212-4.

\textsuperscript{16} Konvenshon bulletin (Convention bulletin) 7 (5 May 1925), p. 6, Box 4, Folder 21, YIVO.
Even if reported in a lighthearted tone, this piece indicates that many men felt threatened by women’s formal participation in the Circle. Although committed to the ideal of gender equality, they preferred that equality not extend to those arenas they considered their own, including Circle meetings and conventions.

Such sarcasm did not abate even as the organization forthrightly worked to support the women’s clubs by decade’s end. In 1929 a humor publication teased General Secretary Joseph Baskin about trying to take all the credit for bringing women’s clubs into the organization. A cartoon showed him bounding across a crowd of women, grasping the hands of two women in his own large hands and pulling the quite reluctant new members along with him. The headline above the cartoon names him the “General of the Feminine Multitudes,” while underneath a caption states that “our general secretary wants to take the whole credit for the plan to incorporate the froyen klubn into the Arbeter Ring. Give him credit, give it to him!” The cartoon appears to be poking fun not only at Baskin’s willingness to take sole credit for a membership boost but also at the women themselves who are portrayed as unwilling, dismayed or indifferent to his attentions. Physically the women are depicted either as heavyset, wearing plain clothing and something akin to hardhats, or as slender young women decked out in modish attire. Although women were becoming a greater presence in the order clearly there persisted a certain sense of unease about how their participation might alter the organization. A brief, satirical article beneath the cartoon noted that from the moment that women’s clubs began to meet, the National Organization Committee “started to break its head” over the question of what premiums to give these women in order to draw them into the Circle. The response was that in order for the
membership drive to be a success one should offer women perfume, roses, powder and silk
stockings as rewards for joining the Arbeter Ring. Such humor reveals that at least some
men feared the effect of heightened female participation on their socialist workers’
orGANIZATION.

Women’s reminiscences underscore the fact that these national documents were not
merely the product of humorists but reflected views held at the local level as well. Female
members in Rochester, New York, recalled that when they initially planned to form a special
women’s group, some men opposed the idea. The men feared that this new group would
draw their wives out of their quiet homes and into an independent women’s forum. The
proponents found themselves having to go door to door in the hope of explaining their plans
both to potential members and to their husbands.18

Other women described more bluntly how alienated they had felt from their
husbands’ organization and how this had led directly to their forming their separate groups.
A Borough Park woman recalled attending branch meetings with her husband in 1917.
Although she listened attentively to the discussions and longed to take part in the
proceedings, she felt that she could not because, as she did not pay dues herself, she
technically did not belong to the group. Beyond that, she simply did not feel comfortable.
When other women in the branch announced the formation of a separate women’s group, she
reacted with joy, particularly embracing the notion that women might have a space of their

17 Konvenshon bulletin (Convention bulletin) 10 (7 May 1929), p. 5, Box 4, Folder 23, YIVO.

18 “Leydies okzileri fun brentsh 27 a.r.” (Ladies’ auxiliary of branch 27 a.r.), in Branch 27
Workmen’s Circle, 25th Jubilee, 1903-1928/Ladies Auxiliary of Branch 27, 20th Jubilee, 1908-1928
(Rochester NY, 1928), pp. 14-6, Box 16, Folder 94 YIVO.
own where they could play a more active role. Another woman forthrightly recalled that when women tried to attend Circle meetings in the 1920s, after their children had grown, men told them not to participate because the women were not full members at class level 1 or 2. This sentiment made her feel unwelcome and increased her alienation from the group; she wrote that she felt like a stranger at the men’s meetings. Upon formation of a women’s group she eagerly joined, appreciating having a forum where she felt at home and where she might be able to get over her nervousness about speaking in public. Throughout the nation, similar groups arose, bringing women together with others who understood their lives, their reluctance to speak in front of groups, and who shared their desire for public activism.

Creating an Activist Arena for Women

The life of the Circle’s major female columnist during World War I, Adele Kean Zametkin, exemplifies the struggles faced by radical women in combining motherhood and political work, revealing the tensions faced by other women who wanted to raise their children and be involved outside the home. Although her wartime columns in Der fraynd enthusiastically supported gender equality and were imbued with class consciousness, in her private life Zametkin behaved not unlike the more conventional women of her era. Her daughter, the author Laura Hobson, wrote movingly of Zametkin in her memoirs, presenting a woman somewhat at odds with the political positions expressed in her “Iber der froyen velt” columns. Hobson described her mother as a Jewish immigrant socialist who refused

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19 Sere Eybishoz, “Mayn troyen farvirklkh” (My dream realized). Boro park froyen brentsh 315-b acht-voriker yubiley suvenir zhurnal (Borough Park women’s branch 315-b eight year jubilee journal), n.p., 1937, Box 22, Folder 137, YIVO; and, Rokhl Vol, “Di froy - frier un yitsf” (The woman - earlier and now), Tsen-vorigey yubiley zhurnal pinsker froyen brentsh 210-b arbeter ring, 1929-1939, (Ten year jubilee journal of pinsker women’s branch 210-b Workmen’s Circle, 1929-1939), n.p., Box 20, Folder 121, YIVO;
to teach her daughters either Yiddish or Russian, a supporter of gender equality who succumbed to pressures to conform to tradition. When Zametkin moved in with her husband, the socialist Michael Zametkin (they were not officially married until 1929), he already had a young son. Following the birth of her own son, Adele Zametkin entered dental school, but she felt distressed leaving her young boys with a friend while she was away at classes. After looking into other day care alternatives she found unsatisfactory, Zametkin quit school in order to stay at home with the two boys and later her twin daughters. Zametkin wrote to Hobson years later that she “finally had to give up the dreaming. I dropped college and became the housewife, but not the typical one.” Indeed, she was far from typical in some respects. When Hobson graduated from Cornell, Zametkin arrived at the ceremony in the sidecar of her son’s Harley-Davidson. Like many other women of her generation, Zametkin was forced to choose between pursuing a career or raising her children. She never explicitly blamed her husband or the socialist movement for not enabling her to do both, and by all accounts she embraced her role as stay-at-home mother. While at home she maintained involvement with the movement through her writing and by helping immigrant women learn English. When Zametkin died in 1931, Hobson recalled that there were many long obituaries printed in the Jewish and socialist press. Reflecting on the New

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20 Laura Z. Hobson, Laura Z.: A Life (New York: Arbor House, 1983), 23. She writes: “To think that I might have been a linguist! But the whole purpose of their moving away from New York in my earliest childhood, first to Brooklyn, and then to a small town on Long Island, away from their colleagues and friends, away from their co-workers on newspapers and in labor unions—the whole point was to bring up their children as total Americans, with no trace of foreign accent, no smallest inflection or gesture that was not native to this their beloved country.”

21 Ibid., 27-8, 63-4. She also wrote to Hobson that “I was the mother who dreamed dreams, and the cradle by my side pulled me away, and I had to give up, until the dreams for my own rosy future turned into dreams...for my little ones.”
York Times obituary Hobson stated that it showed "a lot about the kind of woman she was, way back there, long before the phrase, women's liberation, had ever been heard."^{22}

Zametkin's life shows the trouble that women, particularly working-class women, had in trying to reconcile their professional aspirations with their desire to stay at home with young children. Zametkin opted to drop out of college, raise her children, and pick up work writing columns for Der fraynd and other Yiddish newspapers at home. After the war, Zametkin stopped writing for Der fraynd. Her new column, titled "Fun a froy tsu froyen," (From a woman/wife to women/wives), turned toward more traditionally female concerns. These pieces, which were published in the Yiddish paper Der tog (The Day), along with a second column "In der froyen velt" (In the women's world), focused on such topics as food preparation, childcare, housework techniques, sex education, and hygiene. A year before her death she published these pieces in a 600-page volume entitled Der froy' s handbukh (The wife's handbook), which she gave to her daughter despite the fact that Hobson knew no Yiddish.^{23}

Other women, less prominent than Zametkin, faced the same problems when they attempted to participate in the Arbeter Ring. Like Zametkin, they sought means by which to pursue both public activism and maintain responsibility for the home. Attempting to deal with these conflicting ambitions, women created a more flexible and supportive atmosphere than that provided by the regular branches. These new groups enabled women to join in

^{22} Ibid., 100.

Circle work without paying an actual membership fee. Because many families continued to feel unable, or unwilling, to pay for two memberships despite the relative prosperity of the 1920s, these groups proved popular with a growing number of women.  

Khane Klein's experience demonstrates how important it was for some women to have a way to remain affiliated with the Circle but free from dues. Klein, who ultimately became a member of women's branch 210-b, had been quite active in radical politics in Russia. Upon her arrival in the United States she had eagerly joined the Arbeter Ring -- in fact, she was a charter member of her branch. In time, however, she and her male "life partner" found that they could not afford to make the two dues payments. Her partner stayed in the group while Klein, who had hoped not to fall out of the Circle, found herself drifting away. She maintained that, regardless of monetary attachment, she considered the Circle her organization, insisting that it embodied her own goals and interests and played a central role in her life. As the couple's economic status improved, Klein later re-joined the organization as a class 3 member. Yet she felt constrained as such a member because she did not have the right to vote on all branch business, only the management of those funds to which her dues contributed. In the end she joined the women's branch as a class 5 member, an even lower level of dues payment. Unlike her experience in the regular branch, she now no longer felt unequal, even if she had fewer actual membership responsibilities than she had before. Klein

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considered branch 210-b, the women’s branch, her “spiritual home” and indicated that she had finally found a satisfactory way to be active in the group. Her experience, like that of other women, demonstrates that women felt their inequality more keenly when they attempted to participate side-by-side with men. In a separate forum, despite their even greater formal “class” inequality, women felt less disadvantaged because everyone in the group belonged to the same lower class levels.\(^25\)

Creating such groups was by no means a simple process. Organizers found that they had other hurdles to cross in addition to economic constraints and male reluctance to let their wives leave home at night. The dynamics that had plagued women before the war continued to hamper women’s involvement in public activism into the 1920s. Without a commitment from their husbands to help with the household duties, many were still simply too busy with childcare and other household concerns to attend meetings. Women in Atlanta made a direct connection between women’s domestic duties and a declining interest in Circle activities. Like women elsewhere in the United States and Canada, Atlanta Circle women began to toy with the idea of bringing women together in separate, voluntary groups to pursue their own interests in concert with the larger Circle mission. While they insisted that they themselves had never been “wives of the ezrat nashim” (women’s section of a synagogue), they nevertheless founded a club separate from the men.\(^26\) Such women believed that making

\(^{25}\) Khane Klein, “Yorn loyfn” (Years run), in Tsen voriger yubilev zshurnal pinsker froven brentsh 210-B arbeter ring (Tenth year anniversary journal of the Pinsker women’s branch 210-b of the Workmen’s Circle), 1929-1939, n.p., Box 20, Folder 121, YIVO

\(^{26}\) “Froven”(Women), in Di geshikhte fun 60 vor arbeter ring brentsh 207/40 vor arbeter ring brentsh 207-b yubilev feyering (The history of 60 years, Workmen’s Circle branch 207/40 years Workmen’s Circle branch 207-b jubilee celebration) (Atlanta: n.p., 1968), p. 6-7, Box 19, Folder 119, YIVO; Beki Kohen, “...ikh dermon zikh...” (I reminisce), in Tsen voriger yubilev zshurnal pinsker froven brentsh 210-B arbeter ring (Ten
groups more flexible and relevant to women’s lives would attract greater numbers of women to the Circle cause.

Women in branch 210-b similarly reflected on how women’s reproductive lives had influenced their ability to engage in public work. Although many of them had been active back in their native Pinsk, upon arrival in the United States they found their lives restricted to the domestic sphere. They became disconnected from other Pinsk transplants, absorbed in their household duties and children’s lives. By the 1920s, when their children had grown older, these women had more free time. Some of them, remembering their radical pasts, awakened to the fact that, although they had traveled to “another world,” many of the same problems against which they had once protested still held sway. Twelve such women decided to form a women’s club and moved quickly to attract more members.27

Such dedication to form the new women’s groups was sometimes not sufficient to overcome future members’ personal reluctance to leave their homes even once the primary years of childcare had passed. Anna Kronstadt of New York branch 244 recalled how in her community women were reluctant to form their own group after years of attention to domestic concerns and separation from the socialist movement. A small coterie of activists, led by the “wonderful, idealistic” Esther Neumark, called a meeting in 1920 to organize a

[EndNote: Jeni Goldberg, “Tsvelf zeynen mir geven” (We were twelve), in Tsenvorigervubileyzhurnalpinskerfrovenbrentsh210-Barbeterring(Tenyearanniversaryjournalpinskerwomen’sbranch210-bWorkmen’sCircle),1929-1939,n.p.,Box20,Folder121,YIVO.
women’s club but found it difficult to attract others at first. Kronstadt felt that the women had grown unaccustomed to being outside their “narrow homes,” to interact with others on an independent basis. 

Women’s clubs and auxiliaries sought to help women overcome their reluctance to enter the public sphere and their timidity at participating in meetings and other organizational activities. After years out of the Circle, if they had ever been in it to begin with, many women expressed hesitation about participating in the regular branch business whether due to economic issues, shyness or a feeling of inequality given their lower “class” membership status. Rokhl Vol argued that the women’s clubs, and later the women’s branches, provided women with a space of their own, where they could work on developing public speaking skills, learn how to run a meeting, and create their own agenda. She maintained that with the appearance of these female groups, women in the Workmen’s Circle felt they had a “worth,” that they were useful members of the society.

Women frequently relied on one another to get these new groups started. Generally a very small core of dedicated women formed the nucleus which took on the task of bringing women into the auxiliaries and clubs. In 1923, for example, women in New Brunswick’s branch 208 who had been active in supporting their branch’s school met in one woman’s house in order to form a club. Unlike the case in some other areas, these women recalled that

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28 Anna Kronstadt, “Vos ikh gedenk fun undzer froyen brentsh: erinerungen” (What I think of our women’s branch: memoirs), in 40 vehriger vubilev zshurnal fun pruzhener brentsh 244 arbeter ring (40 year jubilee journal of Pruzhen branch 244 Workmen’s Circle) (New York: 1948), n.p., Box 21, Folder 127, YIVO.

29 Rokhl Vol, “Di froy - frier un yiṭsṭ” (The woman – earlier and now), Tson-yoriger vubilev zhurnal pinsker froyen brentsh 210-b arbeter ring, 1929-1939. (Ten year jubilee journal of pinsker women’s branch 210-b Workmen’s Circle, 1929-1939), n.p., Box 20, Folder 121, YIVO;
it had been relatively easy to form a group in their branch; they merely called upon old female revolutionaries of various stripes. These women then recruited other leftists who had been involved in social welfare but were dissatisfied with the middle-class groups that usually directed such work. Workmen’s Circle women’s clubs, on the other hand, offered the opportunity to pursue social welfare, education and cultural projects within a decidedly socialist context.

While women sought to help one another and frequently originated the idea to start a voluntary club, they nevertheless had to rely at times on the branch male leaders to help them get the message out to members’ wives and other women. Although women in Branch 392 helped men with their work, they began to feel that men were indifferent to their assistance. Just as other Circle women had, they felt the need for more experience, and they believed that the only way to attain this would be to form their own separate group, which they did in the mid-1930s. In their case the male-dominated branch executive played a central role in the formation by aiding with the distribution of a letter to all branch members outlining the goals of the group. While women might spark the impetus for a separate group, the regular branch often still had the material resources needed to spread the word to members’ wives.

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30 Anna H. Yafe “Tsen yor froyen klub geshikhte” (Ten year women’s club history), in Arbeter Ring jubilevum shtime: 25 voriker jubilevum fun brentsh 208, a.r. (Workmen’s Circle jubilee voice: 25 year jubilee of branch 208, W.C.) (New Brunswick: 1933), pp. 11-3, Box 19, Folder 120, YIVO.

31 “Di grindung fun froyen klub in brentsh 392” (The founding of the women’s club in branch 392), in 50th Anniversary Jubilee Lubliner Ehrlich Branch 392 W.C. 1909-1959, New York, pp. 22-3, Box 31, Folder 172, YIVO.
At the same time women were organizing these clubs and auxiliaries, the Arbeter Ring’s national leadership, as we have seen, pursued numerous campaigns to increase female membership in the organization. As it became apparent that the volunteer groups were attracting more women than the formal membership drives, the national leadership began to take an even greater interest in the work these women were pursuing. While Circle men had long provided social insurance and attempted to enhance the education of fellow members, when women promoted similar activities, unhampered by male guidance, the leadership and its supporters began to fear that their organization was moving too far afield of its socialist origins. Women’s club proponents, on the other hand, believed that their work was indeed political and that it did much to further the socialist agenda of the Workmen’s Circle. As more women joined the volunteer groups, expressing a commitment to the Circle but a coolness toward actual, formal membership, Der fraynd began publishing a series of articles that attempted to explain to women the necessity for work on behalf of the Workmen’s Circle and the means by which to keep that work focused on socialist goals.

Perspectives on Women’s Work

During the 1920s the women who replaced Zametkin in writing on women’s issues for Der fraynd attempted to keep up her wartime political outlook while at the same time drawing new women into the movement, many of whose interests leaned more toward Der fraynd’s handbuch than Das Kapital. The postwar columnists for Der fraynd sought to increase women’s participation in the Workmen’s Circle while at the same time ensuring that these new recruits remained true to the group’s socialist principles. Recognizing the new groups’
interest in traditionally female concerns, the columnists urged Arbeter Ring women to resist modeling their groups on those of the middle-class.

In an article written early in 1920, Esther Lurie asked how the Circle might make itself more appealing to workers’ wives. Lurie argued that although Der fraynd needed to attract female readers, as a workers’ organization it could not follow the example of other magazines by printing fashion features. Since women bore great responsibility for rearing the next generation, Lurie felt that the group could attract female readers by focusing on topics related to the home; for instance, printing more articles on child development and Yiddish schools. Lurie also urged the Circle to instruct women on political issues, to teach them that these too were “women’s issues.” Perhaps acknowledging that many socialist women followed in Zametkin’s footsteps rather than trying to balance paid labor with domestic responsibilities, Lurie counseled the organization to bring politics and labor issues directly into their homes, through their organizational newspaper. Jewish women, who usually left the workforce upon marriage, could still be active and useful members of the socialist struggle through their participation in the Arbeter Ring.32

Der fraynd made a concerted effort in the next several years to acquaint its female readership with a host of political topics, especially labor issues affecting women. The major author during this period was Rokhl Holtman. Unlike the wartime columns, Holtman’s

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32 Esther Lurie, “Der ‘Fraynd’ un di froy” (“The friend” and the woman), Der Fraynd 11 (November-December 1920): 21. Maxine Seller points out that in similar articles for Forverts in 1919 Esther Lurie fails to mention the Workmen’s Circle Yiddish school movement. This could indicate a change in Lurie’s interest or position on the movement. It is also a reminder of the importance of the newspapers’ editors in determining the content of articles printed in their papers. While much can be gleaned of the women’s positions from their printed articles, editorial influence and input cannot be ignored. Maxine S. Sellers, “Defining Socialist Womanhood: The Women’s Page of the Jewish Daily Forward in 1919,” American Jewish History 76 (June 1987): 432.
articles dropped the comparative instruction on suffrage battles and focused almost exclusively on the American political scene. Her writings continued to stress class and economic issues as the most salient factors in working-class women’s lives whether or not women worked for pay themselves. Holtman expressed particular antipathy for those pro-suffrage organizations that had promised great change once women won the right to vote.

In January 1923 she went so far as to argue that women’s suffrage had done little to alter the American political economy, presenting as evidence rising poverty rates and increasing numbers of women in the Ku Klux Klan. In another article, Holtman faulted the Women’s Bureau of the Labor Department for not having done enough to improve women’s working conditions. In her mind, women’s suffrage alone could little affect the working-class struggle, demonstrated by the fact that middle-class women’s involvement in government bureaucracy had failed to ameliorate the plight of their working sisters. Her articles aimed

33 Rokhl Holtman, “Di oyftuungen fun der amerikaner froy in 1922” (The achievements of the American woman in 1922), Der fraynd 14 (January 1923): 20-2. See also “Di antshteyung fun der modermer froyen bavegung,” (The rise of the modern women’s movement) Der fraynd 14 (August 1923): 20-1. In this article Holtman provided a history of the U.S. women’s suffrage movement and queried whether women’s suffrage has substantially changed life for the better. She concluded that most working-class women were not freed by attaining the right to vote because they were suffered from oppression due to their class. The fate of working-class women, she argued, was closely tied to the general fate of the working class itself.

Like Zametkin and Lurie, Holtman led quite an extraordinary life. Born in Memel, near the Baltic Sea in 1882, Holtman struggled for years to achieve an education. As a youth she opened a night school for working girls and read widely in Russian. At a young age she expressed an interest in women’s rights and read such authors as George Elliot, Emma Lazarus, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lucretia Mott, Frances Wright and Mother Jones. She later studied in Vilna, Warsaw and Berlin before emigrating to the United States with her husband in 1913. After living in Minneapolis and Pittsburgh, they eventually landed in New York City where her husband became the editor of Der kampf. He was also an editor of the Communist Frayhayt, whose Sunday women’s page Holtman edited. Holtman was a member of the Workmen’s Circle and wrote for Der fraynd as well as other Yiddish papers. After divorcing Holtman, she traveled to Moscow, where she met Nadezhda Krupskaya, and to South Africa where all of her brothers had emigrated. See Rokhl Holtman, Mayn lebns-veg (My life-path) (New York: Rokhl Holtman bukh-komitet, 1948); and, Fain Pratt, 142-3.

34 Rokhl Holtman, “Di froy un der industrie” (The woman and industry), Der fraynd 14 (March 1923): 17-8.
at enlivening in Arbeter Ring women a keen appreciation for class-based politics and keeping them focused on the necessity for class, not gender, solidarity.

Holtman often wrote about non-socialist women’s clubs in the United States in quite disparaging tones and continually urged Circle women to remain true to their socialist ideals and worker origins. One early column berated middle-class women’s clubs particularly harshly. In providing a brief, and biased, history of the American women’s club movement, Holtman repeatedly criticized the non-political nature of such groups. One would think, she remarked, that given the great size of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) it would stand as a major player in the nation’s political life. Yet the group was heard from so rarely that Holtman felt one would not be amiss to question its very existence. Holtman maintained that groups such as GFWC, which participated in traditional women’s work, refused to deal in any serious way with theoretical or ideological issues, eschewing these topics in favor of “practical work.” Such practical work, Holtman joked, amounted to little more then discerning which streets in the “shtetl” lacked beauty and then strenuously endeavoring to decorate them. Working-class women must stop mimicking these “ladies,” she argued, encouraging them to form their own clubs affiliated with the Arbeter Ring. Holtman clearly wanted women to participate in public work but she also desired to find a means by which socialist and/or working-class women would not have to adhere completely to the middle-class model. Seemingly, radical women, the editors of Der fraynd, and the leaders of the Workmen’s Circle were beginning to relent in their opposition to separate

women's groups so long as they could be convinced that such groups benefitted the
movement at large.

Prominent member Rose Asch, who belonged to a regular branch, also weighed in
on the discussion regarding the nature of women's participation. Like others writing on
gender issues, Asch began by giving her readers a bit of historical background and a crash
course in socialist theory as it applied to gender relations. Capitalism, she believed, had
driven women into the workforce without providing adequate support in the home.
Therefore, women lacked the opportunities afforded to men, both young and old, to develop
their intellects. Inequality between the sexes, she argued, was not inherent but rather had
developed over the course of centuries due to women's sole responsibility for the monotony
of housework. Asch claimed that the same inequality ruling over gender relations throughout
the centuries also held sway in the Arbeter Ring. Only in its very first years, she pointed out,
did any women serve on the National Executive Committee. Recently a woman had attained
a national post, but this, Asch argued, had more to do with the fact that the woman's husband
was a renowned member of the group than with the woman's own accomplishments. In
looking for the cause of women's plight, at least in the Arbeter Ring, Asch concluded that
the guilt lay entirely with the women themselves. In order to attain national positions, she
argued, women needed first to be active on the local level and to join the organization
independently of their husbands. She did not mention who would look after the home.\footnote{Rose Asch-Simpson, "Vorum members froyen darf en zikh onshlisen in dem arbeyter ring" (Why members' wives should join the Workmen's Circle), in Grodner brentsh 74 20 veriger yubileyum (Grodner branch 74 20th anniversary), 1926, Box 17, Folder 100, YIVO.}
Recognizing the heightened activity of women in the public sphere brought on by war relief efforts, the attainment of suffrage, and the popularity of women's clubs, including other women's organizations, the columnists urged Workmen's Circle members not to abandon their socialist principles. Assuring women that they could continue to do the work that they enjoyed, the columnists nevertheless underscored the necessity for such endeavors to resist mimicking the un-political, leisurely pursuits of middle-class clubs.

Circle women heeded these messages, at least in part. During the 1920s, while the Arbeter Ring tried to hold on to its socialist politics as more of its membership inched out of the working-class, female members became an ever more vibrant presence in organizational life. Like Der fraynd's female columnists, many Circle women believed that in the past Jewish women in the United States had lacked an organizational life outside the realm of charity provision. Women in New Brunswick's branch 208 argued that while charity groups had managed to help the poor they also limited women's public activism to a narrow sphere. Yet these women felt that their own club could expand the horizons of other Circle women, bring them "out of their kitchens," instruct them in current social problems, and put them on a level equal to men. Many women similarly began to look for a way to engage in public work. In the end they opted not to engage in paid labor, as many die-hard socialists urged, but, like middle-class women before them and their sisters in other socialist women's clubs, they took their traditional duties and interests out of the private sphere and brought them into the public realm. In the process these women broadened the very notion of what was considered appropriate work for a Jewish socialist.
Women’s groups engaged in a variety of activities to benefit the Circle and its causes. Much of their work centered around holding fundraisers for the various cultural and educational initiatives they hoped to institute in their branches. Just as the war had expanded the scope of Council’s and Hadassah’s work, so too did many Circle women’s groups initially concentrate on providing for Jews overseas. Anna Kronstadt remembered that the first project of her women’s group had been to collect relief money for Pruzhene, the home site of her landsmanshaft branch. The women collected food for the European town and hoped one day to raise enough money to set up a Jewish school there. Similarly, the first project for women in branch 392 had been to try to open a school in Lublin, the native city of many branch members. Other women’s groups raised money to aid the Jews throughout Poland and the rest of Europe.  

Fundraising for domestic endeavors was also a priority for these groups, which raised money for hospitals and sanatoriums in the United States and provided assistance to unions and striking workers. Rochester women’s first activity as a group had been a fundraiser to sell “bricks” (penny stamps) for the branch to build its meeting house. Later they held herring and potato dinners to raise money to build a “Lyceum.” The women recalled that members would give their last bit of money to attend these dinners, even if it meant going

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37 Anna Kronshtadt, “Vos ikh gedenk fun undzer froyen brentsh: erinerungen” (What I think of our women’s branch: memoirs), in 40 vehriger yubilev zhurnal fun pruzhener brentsh 244 arbeter ring (40 year jubilee journal of Pruzhen branch 244 Workmen’s Circle) (New York: 1948), n.p., Box 21, Folder 127, YIVO; See also Roze Selnik, “Tsen yor” (Ten years), in Tsen vorieer vubilev zhumai oinsker froven brentsh 210-b arbeter ring (Ten year jubilee journal of pinsk women’s branch 210-b Workmen’s Circle), 1939, n.p. Box 20, Folder 121, YIVO; and, Philip Grosman, “Geshikhlakhe erinerungen fun lubliner yong mans brentsh 392 arbeter ring” (Historical reminiscences of the Lublin Young Men’s branch 392 Workmen’s Circle), Lubliner yong manis brentsh 392 voriger jubilevum. 1909-1934 (Lublin Young Men’s branch 392 yearly jubilee, 1909-1934), pp. 12-3, Box 31, Folder 172, YIVO.

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hungry the next day. Others women’s groups held lectures, formed drama clubs and choruses, gave dance lessons, and created a whole host of cultural programs aimed at raising women’s awareness about political, economic and social issues, at the same time providing a sociable outlet for group members.  

Women took pride in their work and only rarely expressed frustration with the manner in which their work was received by the regular branches. One woman bluntly commented that she felt the regular branch had “exploited” her women’s group over the years by giving them the biggest projects to do. It seemed to her that the men turned to the women’s club when they did not know who else could finish the job. Yet even in this case the women’s club felt they had a close working relationship with the regular branch. Women enjoyed having their own sphere and control over their own projects, even if they maintained an unequal administrative position compared to regular branch members.

With greater frequency throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, women discussed the Circle as a family, arguing that women contributed to it just as they cared for the own families at home. And the leadership came to agree with them. In 1929, as the Workmen’s Circle prepared to draw the women’s groups into regular membership, the English portion of Der fraynd underscored the new familial image of the Circle:

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The significance of this declaration [to form women’s clubs] is obvious. In a society where women are taking an equal part with men in world’s work [sic], it is an inestimable boom to our organization to be thus assured of the full support and co-operation of our womenfolk. It means that The [sic] Workmen’s Circle family will hereafter be a replica, on a larger scale, of the modern family, in which husband and wife participate fully and equally in promoting the welfare of the family.39

By the end of the decade even the male leadership had grown more accustomed to viewing their group as a cooperative partnership between men and women. While both might contribute to the organization in different ways, they all remained dedicated to the organization and its socialist program.

Mini Shneyder of branch 200 felt that women were the best guardians of the growing “tree” that was the Workmen’s Circle. She argued that it had taken women so long to get involved in the organization because back in Eastern Europe they had been responsible for maintaining the family while their husbands aspired to full-time study. Upon emigrating to the United States, these men found their industrial jobs made it impossible for them to continue with any sort of cultural work, and therefore they left it to the women. Shneyder argued that as men began to engage in activities associated with work, women bore greater responsibility for cultural, educational and domestic concerns. She urged women not to downplay their contributions to the Circle; even cooking for a banquet or washing dishes, she argued, was critical work because it constituted the “clay and bricks” forming the foundation of those institutions that enabled Jewish survival. Writing in 1939, she asserted that the vast majority of Circle funds came through lectures, theater, concerts and school organizations --

all women’s projects. These funds helped sustain the organization but also assured the survival of Yiddish language and culture.40

While men did not always give women credit for the work they did on behalf of the Circle, one area of life where women’s contributions were acknowledged as critical was the Yiddish school movement, of which women were considered the “financial mainstay.”41 A prominent male leader, struck by the high level of female activity associated with the schools, commented that in areas where the national administration’s contribution to the school budget was small, women raised the bulk of the funds. Especially in the small towns of the South, where men tended to be only marginally interested in the schools, women shouldered the burden of financing them.42

Many women attributed to the schools a prominent place among those causes leading to their groups’ formation; indeed, many women’s clubs first developed in order to raise funds to open a school or to keep an existing one in operation. Some of the women’s groups

40 Mini Shneyder, “Di role fun der froy in dem arbeter ring” (The role of the woman in the Workmen’s Circle), 30 voriker vubilev khotiner beserabier brentsh 200, 1909-1939 (30 year jubilee of khotin besarabia branch 200, 1909-1939), New York, Box 19, Folder 117, YIVO.

41 Hurwitz, 213-214. The Workmen’s Circle schools began as “socialist Sunday schools” in 1906. Many of the early teachers were women. The Sunday schools were not ultimately successful and ceased to exist in 1914. The following year proponents of Yiddish education began to work in the Circle to open Yiddish school programs. The proponents met opposition from more orthodox socialists. These opponents were overcome by a promise that the schools would stress both radical politics and Yiddish education. In 1918 the first part-time elementary schools opened in the New York area, followed in later years by programs for older children, summer camps and teacher education classes. By 1928 there were 105 schools with 6,500 total students. See Epstein, 275-9. See also Zaks, Geshichte, 508-27.

42 N. Khanin, “Di froyen arum der arbeter ring shul bavegung” (The women around the Workmen’s Circle school movement), Shul Almanakh: di vidishe moderne shul ovf der vel (School almanac: the Jewish modern school in the world) (April, 1935): 196-198. Mini Shneyder asserted that it was due to women that the schools and cultural work existed in the Circle. See Mini Shneyder, “Di role fun der froy in dem arbeter ring” (The role of the woman in the Workmen’s Circle), 30 voriker vubilev khotiner beserabier brentsh 200, 1909-1939 (30 year jubilee of khotin besarabia branch 200, 1909-1939), New York, Box 19, Folder 117, YIVO.
developed from mothers' clubs, earlier organizations that had arisen in the first years of the school movement to promote and support the institutions. Rochester women recalled how the Circle had opened a school with other local, progressive organizations, but too many "landlords" ultimately led to its demise. The Rochester Circle women believed that their group should open a school on their own. By 1926 they achieved success. Mothers' club members in this city later became among the most active in the ladies' auxiliary. Women in New Brunswick's branch 208 also wanted a school, believing that it would do much to keep younger people involved in the Arbeter Ring. Realizing that children were growing up divorced from the movement and that some were embarrassed that their parents even belonged to the Circle, women organized a youth club in 1924 that succeeded in attracting young people to the group. Soon thereafter the branch began to debate whether or not to open a formal school.43

Along with the rise in family language and images, increasing numbers of women seemed content to join clubs that valorized volunteer efforts and formalized their unequal status in the organization at large. Montreal women prided themselves and others on the fact that they had all engaged in work long neglected by the Circle. These women stated forthrightly that they felt they could do more for the Arbeter Ring in their capacity as an auxiliary, even going so far as to reject branch attempts to restructure their group as a

43 "Leydies okzileri fun brentsh 27 a.r." (Ladies' auxiliary of branch 27 a.r.), in Branch 27 Workmen's Circle, 25th Jubilee, 1903-1928/Ladies Auxiliary of Branch 27, 20th Jubilee, 1908-1928 (Rochester NY, 1928), pp. 14-6, Box 16, Folder 94 YIVO. J. Flekser, "Froyen organizatsies beym arbeiter ring in montreal" (Women's organizations in Workmen's Circle in Montreal), Suvenir bukh aroysgegeben fun mayer london brentsh 151 (Souvenir book published by Meyer London branch 151) (Montreal: 1932), 23-5, Box 18, Folder 111, YIVO; Anna H. Yafe, "Tsen yor froyen klub geshikhte" (Ten year women's club history), in Arbeter Ring vubilevum shtime: 25 voriker vubilevum fun brentsh 208, a.r. (Workmen's Circle jubilee voice: 25 year jubilee of branch 208, W.C.) (New Brunswick: 1933), pp. 11-3, Box 19, Folder 120, YIVO.
women’s branch. The Montreal women felt that an informal, separate structure better enabled them to pursue their independent agenda, and they were hesitant to relinquish that control. By the late 1920s, the Circle’s national leadership, observing the widespread growth of the women’s groups and the influential projects these groups pursued, resolved to incorporate the auxiliaries and the clubs directly into the Circle. This action would serve a dual purpose: to increase membership in a period of decline and to ensure a certain level of direct, official control over the development of this burgeoning socialist women’s movement.

Formal Establishment of the Froyen Klubn

In February 1929 Der fraynd announced that a convention of the ladies’ auxiliaries would be held in New York City on March 1st. The article stated that in recent years women had begun to question whether their groups should be more than an “appendix” to the regular branches. Placing the organizational leadership in the center of this shifting posture on women’s place in the organization, the article, while conceding that women’s groups had existed in the past, asserted that these earlier groups had only assisted the general branches and had never exhibited aspirations for any sort of independence. The leaders contended that they agreed with women who felt a change was needed but did not mention that this newfound desire for “independence,” fueled by the recent NEC organizing drive, would bring their organization a sizeable number of dues-paying members. Long ignored or confounded by the masculine leadership, the separate women’s groups now found themselves the object of intense interest.

Where the Yiddish portion of Der fraynd focused on formalizing women’s participation in Circle activities, equating “independence” with a greater dedication to the
Circle itself, an article in the English section stressed American women’s general importance
to the philanthropic and cultural life of the nation. The article affirmed the leaders’ hope that
women’s groups would grow until “our women members play the same, vital, civilizing part
in the life of the Workmen’s Circle that the American woman does in the cultural and
philanthropic life of the country.” This open embrace of purely “cultural and
philanthropic” work represents quite a shift from the Circle’s stance in the early 1920s, when
Rokhl Holtman chided women for being insufficiently political in their activism. The change
reflects the Circle’s continued need for greater enrollment as well as a growing realization
of the importance of the work performed by the separate women’s groups to the organization
as a whole. Moreover, it reveals the different tone of the Yiddish, and more traditionally
socialist, side of Der fraynd and the more acculturated, English portion.

When they convened in March, 1929, convention participants debated at great length
the final organization of the women’s clubs and their official ties, duties and responsibilities
to the Workmen’s Circle. The convention addressed other issues, providing a rare glimpse
into the world of Circle women’s political interests, so often obscured by women’s absence
in the leadership ranks. The convention passed resolutions favoring providing tools for
Russian Jews to learn a trade. Delegates instructed their leaders to find ways for Circle
women to join the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and establish
formal connections with the Women’s Trade Union League. They encouraged Circle leaders
to reach out to housewives with propaganda regarding the labor movement in order to raise

44 “Di konvenshon fun di leydis okzileris” (The convention of the ladies’ auxiliaries), Der fraynd 20
(February 1929): 5; and in the same issue’s English section, “The Ladies Auxiliaries Conference.”

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the level of non-working women's involvement. Moreover, they resolved that the women's clubs should each have a representative on local school administrations.45

The leadership proposed, and the convention approved, new means by which women could join the organization, in part through creating the special class 5 for them and by allowing Class 3 members to join the women's groups. This latter modification was recommended so that those women in the 3rd class, instituted for members' wives (some 10,000 in 1929), would no longer have to follow the stipulation that they belong to the same branch as their husbands. By creating a new class, cheaper yet independent from male membership, and by allowing Class 3 women to join the auxiliaries, the leadership endeavored to provide ways for women to belong to both the Circle and the separate women's groups.46

Anticipating a certain amount of resistance to the proposed changes in membership status and organization for the women's clubs on the part of the general membership, Der fraynd published a glowing endorsement of the women's convention, one which, at the same time, managed to downplay women's own organizing efforts of the early 1920s. The author acknowledged that there were Circle men who would doggedly resist the women's club movement, but nevertheless maintained that such reactionary elements were a small minority of the overall membership. The editorial praised the women's demeanor and actions at the


46 "Klas 3 froyen members in leydis ukzileris" (Class 3 female members in ladies' auxiliaries), Der fraynd 20 (March-April 1929): 2-3.
conference, expressing pride that despite their inexperience the women ably ran a large convention, handled tough questions, and chose effective leaders. Although it praised women’s work, the article decried the fact that the women’s groups had operated so long without any systematic plan. The author failed to note that many women had learned the very skills he praised so highly in the volunteer and unsystematically organized women’s clubs created both before and after the war.47

At the Circle’s general convention in May the NEC sponsored several resolutions to formalize the actions taken at the women’s conference. It also proposed that the women’s clubs be inducted into the Circle as independent branches with the same responsibilities as the regular branches. Such branches would be indicated by a “b” following the branch number or could apply to have their own branch number entirely separate from the regular branch in their area. The women in the clubs, unlike those in the earlier ladies’ branches, could only enroll in the organization in Class 3 or 5 membership rate. Women club members could send delegates to Circle conventions and could vote on all matters except those relating to benefits for which they did not pay. In essence, these changes did little to alter women’s status in the organization other than to ensure that women’s clubs members were also dues-paying members. Nevertheless several male delegates expressed concern about creating a new membership class. A female delegate from Chicago took the floor to assure the detractors that they “should not be afraid of the women.” She insisted that women had as much to offer the Circle as men; they were willing to carry equal burdens and wanted

47 “Der ershter tsuzamenfohr fun unzere froyen kluben” (The first convention of our women’s clubs), Der fraynd 20 (March-April 1929): 4.

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to have equal rights. Yet unlike the earlier ladies’ branches, these new women’s clubs did not have equal rights in membership dues or voting privileges. Not all of the women’s groups embraced this new status, but rather than battle for equality as had the pre-war ladies’ branches, many post-war women chose to retain their separate and unequal status by not applying to become women’s branches at all.

In October, 1929, at the start of the clubs’ official, administrative existence, there were some 113 clubs and auxiliaries representing about 5,000 women. By April, 1930 only 57 of these had completed the process of becoming full-fledged women’s club branches, while the others kept their status as auxiliaries to regular branches. By 1936 the figures increased to 76 women’s club branches with 3,038 members, yet this was still a far cry from the convention’s initial goals. One woman, writing about why her club rejected the branch option, suspiciously commented on the fact that for years the leadership had prohibited female delegates from voting on assorted matters, but now vigorously encouraged women to enter the group as dues-paying members. Her group refused the call to become a women’s branch, arguing that they already formed an “organic part” of the regular branch and saw no

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48 Mrs. Levin in Konvenshon buletin (Convention bulletin) 10 (7 May 1929): 13, 26; Herts, 189; Hurwitz, 212-3. For explanation of class 3 status see “Vikhtige informatsiyes vegen klas 3 members” (Important information about class 3 members), Der fraynd 19 (September 1928): 3. Class 3 membership was for wives of Circle members and who belonged to the same branch as their husbands. If a member whose wife is in Class 3 died, resigned, was expelled or disappeared, the wife was able to remain in Class 3 paying for her own fees. The same situation held if the members divorced. Explication of Class 5 rights and duties can be found in “Membership kampeyn notitsehn” (Membership campaign notes), Der fraynd 20 (September 1929): 2. All classes of women could join a women’s club but those outside Class 3 and 5 could only do so on the local level.

49 Herts, 190; for 1936 figures, see Hurwitz, 214.
need to separate themselves further into a distinct women’s branch. As dues-paying members such women perceived their inequality keenly. By devising alternative means to aid the Circle, the women felt more involved, independent yet more integrated.

By accepting a certain amount of inequality in exchange for greater autonomy the women’s club structure opened the doors to a greater level of female public activity than had been the case prior to the war. While some of the rise in female participation can be attributed to women’s greater amount of free time as their children grew up, this cannot entirely explain the shift in women’s priorities, especially for those younger women who first entered the group during the 1920s. Circle women found that they could exert influence even outside the traditional avenues of power by subtly shifting the focus of the organization into areas of their expertise and interest. Aside from volunteer work in the women’s clubs, women also led and supported one of the most significant developments in the Circle’s transformation -- the creation of a Social Service Department. This Department was the brainchild of one of the few Circle women to gain national prominence, Rose Asch-Simpson (more commonly known simply as Rose Asch). The department served to institutionalize women’s concerns, exemplifying the fact that women’s work did not remain solely in the realm of the voluntary, on the periphery of the organization’s central agenda. While both men and women played crucial roles in founding the new Department, the primary instigator for the move into this area was Rose Asch. Yet, as with the women’s clubs, within less than

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50 Anna H. Yafe, “Tsen yor froyen klub geshikhhte” (Ten year women’s club history), in Arbeter Ring yubilevum shtime: 25 vorikervubilevum fun brentsh 208, a.r. (Workmen’s Circle jubilee voice: 25 year jubilee of branch 208, W.C.) (New Brunswick: 1933), pp. 11-3, Box 19, Folder 120, YIVO.
two decades of its founding, male leaders had begun to claim a preeminent role in its creation, in the process downplaying Asch’s own centrality.51

Social Service and the Workmen’s Circle

Rose Asch was never associated with the ladies’ branches or women’s clubs, having been a lifelong member of regular branch 367. Before coming to the United States she was an active revolutionary in her native city of Vilna. Her sister, Esther, recalled that the two girls had been raised in a household that, while patriarchal and traditional in many ways, had also instilled in them a fervent desire to help others. Esther believed she had grown up to pursue these goals in idealistic ways whereas Rose proved to be the more practical of the two.52 Rose Asch’s career shows her commitment to practical endeavors. After emigrating to the United States at the turn of the century she attended a normal school in Pennsylvania. A year following her 1907 marriage to Herman Simpson, an editor for the socialist paper The Call, Asch began to work for the Arbeter Ring, helping the main office handle the dramatic rise in paperwork. Within a year she had taken over the management of the group’s Cemetery Department and a short time thereafter had convinced the National Executive Committee to let her Department handle funerals as well as burials.53

51 Joseph Baskin, In dinst fun der vidisher gezelshaft (In service of Jewish society) (New York: National Executive Committee of the Workmen’s Circle, 1945), 20-1. In this passage, Baskin discusses the formation of the Social Service Department, using Asch’s arguments, but without once mentioning her centrality to its creation.


In her capacity as head of the Cemetery Department, Asch soon realized that workers' mutual aid needs often extended beyond sickness or funeral benefits. She was particularly concerned about the family members of a spouse who was ill or died. She discovered, through her work with the Cemetery and Sanatorium Departments, that the Circle was not doing all it could to meet the members' many concerns. For instance, what became of a member's family when he lay bedridden in the Circle's Sanatorium for a year or more? Despite the benefits provided to the ill spouse, his family was forced to turn to non-socialist providers of charity. Unfortunately, Asch contended, these people, most often women and children, discovered only red tape and unsympathetic bureaucracies. Asch believed the Circle could do more to help in such circumstances, lending a hand to a member's widow as she struggled to maneuver through the system to obtain her pension check, or aiding immigrant workers who lacked the necessary knowledge and language skills to find the services they needed. She highly praised existing Circle services, especially the Sanatorium, Cemetery Department, schools and cultural initiatives, but she asserted that even when the branches did their best to help the needy among them, the absence of a central, organizing body meant that too many people fell through the cracks.54

In 1925 she wrote an article for the English section of Der fraynd outlining her thoughts regarding the need for the Circle to move into social service provision. She argued against the contention that social work necessarily equated with more traditional forms of

54 Rose Asch-Simpson, “The Origins of Social Service in the Workmen's Circle,” Social Service Review of Workmen's Circle, pp. 2-3, Box 9, Folder 56, YIVO; and, Rose Asch-Simpson, “Di soshel soyrvis byuro' in arbeter ring” (The ‘social service bureau’ in workmen's circle), in Yubileum ovfgabe tsu dem 25 vorigen fest fun dem minsker progresiv brentsh 99 arbeter ring (Anniversary task of the 25 year festival of the minsk progressive branch of the workmen's circle), pp. 28-30, Box 16, Folder 105, YIVO;
charity, urging those radicals opposed to charity to acknowledge the fact that they could not simply ignore the numbers of workers relying on such provisions:

We generally speak of social work with...disdain, for no other reason than the fact that it smacks of charity. And this is just the point I want to attack. We are ashamed of charity and yet thousands of our members, the poor and the sick, are recipients of alms from charity organizations. Why not control this social work for our members by our organization? Why not organize a department that should function in a manner conducive to the benefit of our needy members and at the same time save them from degradation and shame?^55

Asch firmly believed that workers had a great variety of needs, needs that could be met ably by the socialists affiliated with the Arbeter Ring. Arguing that sometimes even socialists required social welfare services, she maintained that socialist provision of this assistance could offset that middle-class charity so despised by the leadership: “We knew that as a department supported by the members, it becomes actually a paid socialized service which may be expected and which is easy to request.” Or, as she put it in Yiddish, a member might “fihlt zikh...heymish” (feel at home).^56

Her own branch supported her proposal as did allies in other branches in the New York area. In December 1926 these branches held a conference to discuss the proposed department. Some 154 delegates from 84 branches attended the event, to which Rose Asch invited a number of social work professionals. A Committee of Twenty along with an advisory board composed of six prominent members, including two representatives from the National Executive Committee, was established to study the question further. A second

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^56 Rose Asch-Simpson, Der sosheh sovrvis department fun arbeter ring (The social service department of the workmen’s circle), 1943-4, n.p., Box 9, Folder 56, YIVO. (One-half in Yiddish, one-half in English).
conference in January 1927 attracted even more branch support, with some 146 branches in attendance. This conference approved the Committee of Twenty’s proposal that the New York branches tax themselves 5 cents a quarter per member to fund a new department devoted to social work. At the same time Rose Asch and Boris Fingerhut began to lobby the NEC for its support.57

As successful as the proposal might have been among the New York branches, it met with considerable resistance from much of the national leadership, who believed that the new department would broaden the activities of Workmen’s Circle and thus raise taxation. In February 1927, the NEC postponed action when department proponents requested endorsement for a letter explaining the plan to fund the new department with the 5 cent tax. In March the NEC went further in its obstructionism. After hearing a favorable report by Nathan Chanin on the social service conference’s actions, the NEC became embroiled in a heated debate that led ultimately to its resolving to “inform the committee of the Social Service Department that they take no further measures until they hold a joint meeting with the National Executive Committee previously.”58 The national leadership sought to restrain the New York branches from moving forward on their proposals without first attaining NEC consent. Moreover, some NEC leaders most likely wanted to find a way to halt the development of this new department entirely.

57 Hurwitz, 199-200; Herts, 193. The Committee of Six included Rose Asch, Nathan Chanin of the NEC, Boris Fingerhut, Henry Fruchter, Philip Geliebter and Samuel Koner. The other NEC representative attending the conference was Louis Zinderman. See also National Executive Committee meeting minutes, in English, 7 November 1926, p. 95, unprocessed material located at YIVO.

58 NEC minutes, 1 February 1927, pp. 15-6, in English; NEC minutes, 21 March 1927, p. 36, in English.
The joint meeting was held in April 1927. Since the detractors tended to voice their opposition to the department on the grounds of added cost, proponents attempted to explain how the new department could actually save the Circle money in the long run. This argument did not appease the opponents. Naphtali Feinerman took offense at the New York conference’s sponsorship of a referendum to raise taxation without first obtaining NEC approval. He believed the NEC should declare the referendum void and at the very least assume no responsibility for collecting the new tax. Eventually, after much lobbying on the part of Asch and her allies, the NEC resolved to endorse a Social Service Department “in principle” and set up a joint committee of NEC and department supporters to work on building further NEC support for the plan. Yet by June of that year the NEC already began to move away from its tentative support for the new department. General Secretary Joseph Baskin, reporting to the NEC, stated that the number of expelled “leftist” members had reached nearly 8,000 and the new membership increase amounted to only 5,000. The losses, he maintained, were most keenly felt in Canada and “country-towns,” not New York City. Baskin attributed the inability to attract a sufficient number of new members to excessive local taxation and urged the NEC to put some curbs on these new taxes. Baskin’s report followed a presentation by Rose Asch on the proposed Social Service Department.

59 “Joint Meeting with Committee of Social Service Conference,” 11 April 1927, pp. 46-7, in English, and continuation of meeting on 18 April 1927, p. 50, in English. The joint committee included Dinerstein, J. Rothman (recording secretary of NEC), Bruskin, Haskell and Padnick. In June the committee was composed of Davidoff, Padnick, Fischman, Berman and Cohen. NEC minutes, 5 June 1927, p. 60, in English. All in unprocessed materials, YIVO.

60 NEC minutes from 5 June 1927, in English, pp. 60-1, unprocessed material, YIVO.
While the predominant issue in the NEC debate about the department was the additional expense it would entail, this was not all that troubled the opponents. Like Asch, Circle historian Maximilian Hurwitz believed that the radicals hatred of “anything that savored of charity” along with “Coolidge prosperity” contributed significantly to the fierce opposition. Jurisdictional and turf battles also figured into the picture. In 1926 Nathan Rothman, chief clerk of Sanatorium Department, wrote an article for the English portion of Der fraynd asking “Is a Social Service Department Necessary?” The article opened by sarcastically stating, in a mixed metaphor, “at last the mountain has given birth to a mouse.” After having waited two full months for “Miss Rose Asch Simpson” to present her plans for the Social Service Department, Rothman finally “discovered that the whole system of Social Work consisted in extending help to our tubercular patients.” Although Asch’s vision of the new department included much more than this, Rothman dismissed her plans, asserting that the General Office had been handling, and could continue to take care of, the needs of the membership without the institution of a new department. Again, in contrast to Asch’s proposal, Rothman expressed concern that the proposed department would take power away from the General Office, scattering centralized administration by diverting functions to the new department. Rejecting the idea that a social service department could provide services not currently handled by the Circle, he maintained that “the G[eneral]O[ffice].....should also be a clearing house for all ideas of human helpfulness, advice, counsel, assistance, and

everything else that goes with fraternity. The Workmen's Circle is strong enough, powerful enough, financially, and morally sound enough to undertake real human enterprises which will place it in the foremost ranks of the advanced fraternal organizations.\textsuperscript{62} Rothman was loath to see changes in administration, particularly changes that might decrease his own department's authority.

The joint meeting between department advocates and the NEC did not mollify the opposition, who continued to worry that the 5 cent tax would not be sufficient to cover costs incurred by the department. The compromise reached by these groups provided for official NEC participation in the new department's work but also stipulated that the Social Service Department could not begin operations for another year.\textsuperscript{62} Early in 1928 the NEC authorized the department to begin collecting tax funds from the branches, and in April Rose Asch and Henry Fruchter alerted the Committee for a Social Service Department that they had collected 2 quarters' tax from about 100 branches, a total of over $1,000. They ran into problems, however, as many branches continued to withhold their payments until after they were assured that the Social Service Department would be efficiently run and of use to members. Asch and Fruchter asked the NEC for a temporary office and also requested that a sub-committee be formed to help the Social Service Committee get the Department up and

\textsuperscript{62} Nathan Rothman, "Is a Social Service Department Necessary?" \textit{Der fraynd} 16 (February 1926): 3-4.

\textsuperscript{63} NEC minutes, 7 September 1927, pp. 175-6, in Yiddish. At the August 2, 1927 meeting, a Social Service supporter recommended that the department begin to function in September. 2 August 1927, pp. 168-9, in Yiddish. Both in unprocessed material, YIVO.
running. The intransigence of the NEC held firm when leaders decided not to allow the SSD to begin functioning until they had first collected a full four quarters taxes in advance.  

Dealing with the conundrum of an NEC that required the bulk of the money to be collected prior to opening operations and a membership that wanted to see the operations before providing the funding called for a strong-willed leader. Rose Asch proved to be just such a person and refused to be dissuaded from her project. A cartoon published in 1927 reveals her forceful determination in the pursuit of her dream. The cartoon depicts her with a baby, labeled "social service," to which she is singing a lullaby. The words of this lullaby indicate her intention to drive away the baby's enemies and banish them to the cemetery.  

Led by such single-minded dedication, the social service proponents eventually prevailed in July 1929 when the department officially opened its doors. Rose Asch served as supervisor and worked together with a social worker and secretary. The department quickly became a highlighted feature of the order, offering a wide range of services, such as employment referrals, psychological services, legal aid, advice on childcare and domestic problems, and more. During the Great Depression the department handled approximately 2,000 cases a year; in the period from 1934 to 1935 alone the department interviewed some 6,837 people and provided assistance to 2,369 of them.  

64 NEC minutes, 1 April 1928, pp. 264-5, in Yiddish, unprocessed material, YIVO.  
65 Konvension buletin (Convention bulletin) 9 (5 May 1927), p. 8, Box 4, Folder 22, YIVO.  
66 Hurwitz, 201-6; For the services offered by Social Service Department see Y. Kaminski, Fertsik yor arbeter-ring: a geshikhte in bilder (Forty years of the Workmen's Circle: A history in pictures) (New York: National Executive Committee of Workmen's Circle, 1940), 50-51. At the center of the two-page spread on the Department is a large heart from which the services are listed as if emanating from the heart.
Asch, having tried to make her way up the traditional ladder of power, found herself intrigued by issues the many in the male-dominated leadership deemed unimportant. Her espousal of working-class social service provision implicitly critiqued her colleagues' lack of attention to the variegated problems of the private sphere. By advocating a socialist Social Service Department Asch not only aided a great number of needy individuals and families, but also expanded her own power within the organization and brought attention to what had previously been considered “women's issues,” those not directly related to paid labor and men's public life. Where many women had tried to redefine membership to give themselves more autonomy, Asch successfully brought these new concerns into the central structure of the organization itself.

Arbeter Ring women found work for themselves in those areas of life commonly associated with women: social welfare, education, and cultural work. Even such radical women as Rose Asch, who had never been involved in the ladies’ branch or women’s club and was one of the few women to claim a major role in the leadership, found that by focusing on certain types of work they could facilitate their movement, and other women's, into the public sphere. By the late 1920s women were well on their way to forging a prominent space for themselves in the Workmen's Circle — they were recognized as the primary supporters of the Yiddish school movement, as founders of such cultural ventures as the Workmen's Circle's choruses, and as the leaders of the Social Service Department. Still, despite women's success in increasing female activism and in changing the tenor of the organization, their actual work at home remained solely their responsibility and an underappreciated one at that. In 1935 a youth group, praising the contributions of women to their branch, commented that,
“Five years ago you realized the great importance of women, finding some interest outside of their everlasting duties to their homes and families. Upon your removal of the chains of your everyday life, you have enriched your lives and those of your families.” While housework and childcare remained uncelebrated, many male members had come to consider women’s educational, cultural and social contributions as vital to the Circle’s continued existence.

**Feminizing the Socialist Brotherhood**

After World War I, socialist women in the Arbeter Ring joined other American women in creating cultural groups, raising money for children’s education, and pioneering in social welfare provision. By the start of the Great Depression the Workmen’s Circle no longer resembled, and no longer depicted itself as, a socialist brotherhood. Rather, members of the group considered themselves individuals in a larger family. Gone were the images of strong men, standing alone or with other men against capitalist oppression. Replacing such pictures were drawings of entire families: fathers and mothers surrounded by their children.

Women and their ideas about gender equality played a central role in this transformation. Over the years they had created spaces for themselves in an organization that had originally given them quite a cold reception. The unwillingness of the Circle or the socialist movement in general to re-envision gender relations in any substantive way initially limited the ability of married women to engage in Circle activities. Rather than forego

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67 Greetings [in English] sent from The Matrix Young Circle Branch 1022 Workmen's Circle, in *Suvenir zshurnal lozsher froyen brentsh 342-b arbeter ring* (Souvenir journal of the lodzer women's branch 342-B Workmen's Circle), 1935, Box 22, Folder 144, YIVO. Such language is not unique for this period; in discussing women in the order, Kaminski states that “when she finally freed herself from the greyness of kitchen walls, when she sought recreation and social intercourse, she came to the Workmen's Circle.” See Kaminski, 42.
membership in an organization they admired, women devised a new means by which to be a socialist and a mother, to be active in public while maintaining responsibility for the private sphere. Women did not turn away from political activity; indeed, they embraced wholeheartedly the Circle’s stance that they be active outside the home. In the end, they expanded the parameters of what “political” action meant. Like women in the NCJW and Hadassah, Arbeter Ring women created a way to engage in public action on behalf of Jews while simultaneously furthering the interests of women. Refusing to adhere to the implicit notion that only men belonged in “politics,” women in all three groups created their own activist spaces and, in the process, shaped the contours of modern American Jewish life.

The strategies employed by Circle women illuminate the struggles faced by all activist women, especially radicals, early in the twentieth century. While on the surface it might appear that separatist organizing meant women’s surrender to the constraints placed upon them by men, closer examination demonstrates the profound impact these strategies had on Jewish American organizations. Denied traditional political power but wishing to remain within the socialist movement, Circle women, like those in Hadassah and the NCJW, devised alternative ways to engage in public work. By organizing on their own and promoting women’s issues and interests, Circle women managed to achieve prominence in the organization. Although they ultimately conceded the battle regarding equality in membership benefits and national leadership posts, these women succeeded in broadening the organization’s purview and sustaining it during a period of great change and challenges to its very existence. By 1930 the Workmen’s Circle was a major player not only in the realms of Jewish politics and relief work but also in the fields of Yiddish education and culture.
Gender politics, as witnessed in the Circle women’s struggle to define a female place in a socialist brotherhood, played a crucial role in this transformation.
CONCLUSION

Whether we will or no, the consciousness of our Jewishness is forced
upon on us. We may glory in it, we may try to evade it, but it is
inescapable. We are forced to consider ourselves as one tribe...even
when [some Jews] have renounced Judaism and have become
Christianized or turned atheists, they are still recognized as Jews.
They remain members of the family.¹

Rebekah Kohut, like countless other American Jews in 1929, envisioned the world’s
Jews as one large family. Just as in a personal family, where relationships might not always
be easy, Kohut argued that all members, no matter how troublesome, remained part of the
whole. For centuries American Jews had cared for one another, aiding the poor and others
in need. American antisemitism, while not as virulent as the European, especially Russian,
variant, nevertheless required that Jews not abandon their co-religionists. American Jewish
women had joined in these endeavors, maintaining a strong adherence to group identity. As
large numbers of East European immigrants arrived on the shores of the United States in the
late nineteenth century, American Jews found their duty to their “family” increased. Jewish
women, such as those in the National Council of Jewish Women, organized to provide relief,
aid, and other services to this poorer population.

¹ Rebekah Kohut, As I Know Them: Some Jews and a Few Gentiles (New York: Doubleday,
Doran and Company, Inc., 1929), 40
With the arrival of the new immigrants came more numerous ways to identify as a Jew. While the older immigrants, the German Jews, tended to abjure identifications that did not rest on a religious foundation, many newer immigrants expressed their Jewishness in ways more closely resembling an ethnicity rather than a religious confession. This was particularly the case for those people, such as Workmen's Circle members, who adhered to socialism and Bundism, denouncing religion outright. In these years the American Jewish community experienced widening fissures based on class, ideological conviction, religious observance, and language usage. While still committed to promoting Jewish life in the United States and protecting Jews abroad, American Jews found themselves with an increasing variety of ways to identify as a Jew.

Despite these growing differences, the outbreak of World War I in Europe led to a new-found unity within the diverse American community. The war deepened profoundly the connection American Jews felt for those overseas, bringing them together to aid refugees fleeing war and pogroms. During the war various relief groups exhorted American Jews to care for their "family" abroad, to look out for their unfortunate "brothers and sisters." Yet while the war initially brought great solidarity to the American Jewish community it ultimately could not conceal the substantial rifts dividing them. These rifts became all the more obvious as the war drew to a close and various sub-groups advanced their own solutions to the postwar Jewish "problem."

Along with class and political division, tensions that had existed between men and women before the war re-surfaced with greater intensity after it. Women's participation in war relief work brought them actively into the public sphere and, in the case of NCJW and
Hadassah, led to the expansion of their pre-war programs, even if for the duration of the war these projects were put to the service of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and larger Zionist movement. Greater interaction, particularly in the case of the NCJW, with gentile women’s organizations further raised women’s feeling of competence. By the end of the war growing numbers of women, most notably the female leadership of the NCJW and Hadassah, resented their unequal partnerships with men. Having suppressed a great deal of their own autonomy during the war, women quickly grew disenchanted with the silencing that seemed to accompany collaboration with men’s groups. As war-time unity gave way to heightened division in the Jewish community, so too did war-time cooperation between men’s and women’s organizations lead to a renewal of separatist strategies by women at war’s end.

Women in the NCJW, Hadassah, and Workmen’s Circle had all employed separatism to a greater or lesser degree before the war, finding that it allowed female members an area away from men to hone the skills needed to assume leadership positions -- posts they failed to attain in the integrated groups. The women who began the NCJW and Hadassah long acknowledged the importance of maintaining these distinct spaces for women. In 1893 Hannah Solomon, angered by the dismissive attitude she received from male leaders, had concluded that women should organize on their own. A decade later Henrietta Szold and her cohorts recognized that the Zionist movement was not attracting female adherents and went on to form a separate organization at the same time formulating a distinct “woman’s interpretation of Zionism,” one they felt better spoke to women’s needs, interests, and capabilities. Workmen’s Circle women initially took a different path from those in the
female-only groups by struggling to attain total equality with men. In the matter of a few years some of their number began to argue that absolute equality with men, premised on a male model, neglected areas of life unique to women. Soon they too endeavored to find a means by which women could organize on their own even as they continued to advance the cause of gender equality. Hadassah and the NCJW felt that men's groups overlooked certain constituencies, notably women and children, and believed that women were better suited to work with these populations. Circle women in the ladies' branches found men inattentive to women's needs and struggled to show reluctant fellow members that an insurance benefit and membership model based on the male breadwinner did not adequately address their concerns. The women in these three organizations, each in their own way, perceived the importance of gender difference and denied the principle that difference resulted in inequality.

During the 1920s women in all three organizations, following different paths, returned to structures based on separatist organizing. The Circle women remained the most closely attached to male-run entities but nevertheless proceeded to form voluntary ladies' auxiliaries and women's clubs that provided them with an organizational space free of male ambivalence or obstructionism. The NCJW continued to aid the JDC but also inaugurated an overseas program of its own, in the process establishing ever closer ties with middle-class European Jewish women. Back home Council leaders built on war-time alliances forged with gentile women's groups and during the 1920s became integrally involved in the female reform movement associated with such women as Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, and Lillian Wald. Hadassah fought bitter battles with the male-led Zionist Organization of America
(ZOA) to regain its independence. Like their counterparts in the NCJW, Hadassah leaders also reached out to Jewish women overseas, in Europe and Palestine. Regardless of their ultimate goals, women in each of these three organizations expressed a firm commitment to separatism, arguing that women needed some degree of autonomy from men, even as, together in concert with men, they worked to ameliorate the conditions of Jews at home and abroad.

This renewed commitment to women did not result solely from tense interactions with Jewish men. Advances in women’s rights and the proliferation of gentile women’s organizations also served as powerful catalysts for Jewish women’s activism. Far from eliminating a sense of gender difference in the Jewish community, suffrage encouraged women’s desire for groups of their own devising. Participating in war relief and entering electoral politics moved all American women, Jewish and gentile, into the public sphere. This movement into the public arena, however, failed to dampen Jewish women’s preference for separatism. Conversely, even some socialist women persisted in advancing an ideal of complementarity, holding that Jewish men and women could work together on behalf of fellow Jews from around world, each within their own activist sphere.

Joining other American women, Jewish women stepped up their public activism and explored ways to promote women’s issues. At the same time they did not abandon their involvement in Jewish politics. Working in different areas, women in all three groups made significant contributions to American Jewish life. The NCJW increased its involvement with women’s issues both in the United States and in Europe. It helped to form the Women’s Joint Congressional Committee (WJCC), the World Congress of Jewish Women, and
numerous national Councils of Jewish Women overseas. In concert with its work in the WJCC, Council became active in a range of legislative issues, joining social reformers in opposing the Equal Rights Amendment and promoting peace and disarmament. During the same years Hadassah established itself as a central presence in the daily life of Jewish Palestine by inaugurating countless medical and social services. It supported women’s right to vote in Palestine and vigorously recruited American women to Zionism. Circle women, through their ladies’ branches, auxiliaries and women’s clubs, initiated a host of new projects. Through their dedicated efforts, the organization sponsored Yiddish education and other cultural endeavors, such as summer camps and choruses.

In all these efforts women argued that they were bringing uniquely female characteristics to the public sphere, acting differently than men and initiating work long neglected by them. Jewish women, like their gentile predecessors in the Progressive era, argued that they were taking their special interests and capabilities out of the home and putting them to the service of the wider community. This Jewish “social housekeeping” led to the introduction new community-provided services and, more importantly, to a re-definition among Jews of what constituted “women’s work” and “politics” more broadly. Lillian Wald had once commented that “when I went to New York, and was stirred to participate in community work...I believed that politics concerned itself with matters outside [women’s] realm and experience. It was an awakening to me to realize that when I was working in the interests of those babies...I was really in politics.” Like Wald, it took more

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Jewishly-identified women some time to realize the full import of their actions. Perhaps less active than non-Jewish American women in the days before World War I, Jewish women blossomed in the 1920s. As other American women experimented with public life in the first days of their full participation in electoral politics, so too did Jewish women engage in activities that questioned the dividing line between the male and female spheres, between self-interested political concerns and selfless communal work. Far from being disinterested outsiders looking in, Jewish women were in the center of the fray, initiating a variety of social welfare, educational, and cultural projects, bringing issues previously considered domestic or feminine directly into the political realm.

Women found, however, that using gendered and maternalist justifications for their participation in the public sphere was not without complication; they found that such line of reasoning could be used against them. While gendered arguments and separatist strategies provided women with the confidence and organizational base from which to work effectively alongside men, they also could be utilized by opponents, both male and female, to curtail women's bid for gender equality. Men in the Zionist movement argued that Hadassah leaders' attempts to take a more active role in the administration of the movement at large amounted to little more than the women "playing politics," participating in a self-interested gambit for power. While men involved in the Zionist wrangling of the 1920s clearly sought power for themselves, the notion that women might engage in the same battle for administrative control proved deeply disturbing. Even some Hadassah members believed that, as women, their leaders should leave the supposedly more complicated, ideological aspects of movement administration to the men. Women, they argued, had their own activist
sphere and were quite capable within it but were unqualified for central roles in the national leadership.

Proponents of women’s equality sought to re-value their work as meaningful, as “political,” and to make the case that they were as qualified as men, even if they believed men and women had different leadership styles. They encountered opposition from those men and women who disagreed with the premise that women’s work was equal to men’s, that women, though different, were as capable as men of leading the national movements. This is clearly seen in the case of the Workmen’s Circle where men had long engaged in activities that in other contexts were designated part of the female sphere, namely, social service provision. Yet men in the group valued their work as “political” whereas they deemed women’s involvement in similar activities as less serious, more bourgeois. Both socialist and Zionist men expressed anxiety over women’s increased participation in those movements. As women in the 1920s claimed a more prominent place in the two movements, they changed the general climate, transforming these once predominantly male bastions of activism into groups involved with a wide array of issues. Not only did they make the groups more amenable to women, they changed the very format and structure of movement organizations.

Women in all three groups had a profound impact on American Jewish life. They initiated new services to the Jewish community, provided Jewish women with a rich activist life, and promoted Jewish concerns both nationally and internationally. Although during this period women failed to attain prominent leadership posts in the major organs of American Jewish politics such as the JDC, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish
Congress or the Zionist and socialist movements, this does not mean that their influence was minimal. Gender issues stimulated crucial changes in the Workmen’s Circle while commonly held ideas about gender enabled NCJW women to find affinity with gentile women from similar backgrounds in the WJCC. Most significantly, Hadassah promulgation of a gendered Zionism enabled it to recruit large numbers of non-Zionist women to the cause by 1930. By employing maternalism and other gendered perspectives Hadassah was able to fit its own political work into a paradigm familiar to many American women. By 1930, not only Jane Addams praised Hadassah projects, so too did numerous non-Zionist Jewish women. In time women concerned about preserving Jewish life in the modern world, but less comfortable with the geo-political implications of Zionism, loosely allied themselves with the movement through cooperation with Hadassah. Following World War II most American Jews, including Workmen’s Circle members, supported the idea of Palestine as a haven for persecuted Jews, even as many continued to hesitate endorsing the establishment of a Jewish nation-state. The Holocaust did much to change the minds of the most recalcitrant anti-Zionists, but, as this dissertation has shown, American Jewish women were already on their way to supporting the idea of Palestine as a refuge ten years before the start of the Second World War.

During the 1930s all three organizations once again mobilized to provide relief to the Jews of Europe and pursued work similar to that rendered in the earlier conflagration. The NCJW helped refugees and would-be immigrants while assisting with the founding of the National Coordinating Committee, a centralized organization of groups working with these populations. Hadassah was recruited by Berliner Recha Freier to guide the Youth Aliyah, a
large-scale project to transport German Jewish children to Palestine. From 1933 to 1950 some 50,000 children arrived in Palestine, later Israel, from Germany. Workmen’s Circle members, horrified by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, denounced Stalin’s sacrifice of Poland and its Jews. The group pledged to support the Polish resistance and determined to keep Jewish culture alive in the United States. In 1941 the Workmen’s Circle, abandoned its earlier pacifism and supported the U.S. bolstering of the Allied war effort. The organization declared that “the Workmen’s Circle is opposed to war and to the shedding of blood...The present critical times force us to regard the present war as different from all previous wars. This war is a struggle by free countries against tyranny.” Once the United States entered the war, Workmen’s Circle members struggled assiduously to advance the war effort, buying war bonds, volunteering with the Red Cross, and providing aid to the armed forces. Hadassah and NCJW members pursued similar work during the 1940s.3

After the war all three organizations, horrified by revelations of the Holocaust, resolved to aid the survivors in any way they could. Each group raised money for the central fundraising entity, the United Jewish Appeal, and for the Joint Distribution Committee. The Holocaust finally brought Council and the Workmen’s Circle closer to supporting the Zionist cause officially; in 1946 the NCJW declared its support for the proposed State of Israel as a refuge for Jews from around the world, and two years later, upon the formation of that state, the Workmen’s Circle joined the NCJW in accepting Israel as a haven for persecuted

Jews and a center of Jewish culture. In the ensuing years Council took a more active role in
supporting the developing state by instituting educational and children’s projects, including
the Center for Research in the Education of the Disadvantaged in 1968. Although some
Workmen’s Circle members refused to support Israel at all and many others expressed regret
that Hebrew, not Yiddish, was to be the language of the new Jewish state, over time the
majority of Circle members involved themselves with Israeli issues and projects. Hadassah
continued its work in Israel and became a powerful presence in the medical life of that land
as well as in the organizational life of the United States. Current membership statistics
reveal the extent of Hadassah’s success: at the end of the twentieth century the Zionist
Organization of America claimed only 50,000 members while Hadassah, the largest
American Jewish women’s organization, counted 300,000 members. In addition to
Hadassah’s regular membership some 25,000 men joined the group as “associate” members.
Having resisted so strenuously becoming a women’s auxiliary to the ZOA earlier in the
century, Hadassah has ultimately created its own men’s auxiliary, even if it resists naming
it as such.

The horrors of World War II and the Holocaust prompted the turn toward Zionism
by many American Jews, and Hadassah undoubtedly reaped the benefits of this change in
attitude. Yet, by emphasizing the centrality of gender, of the ways in which Hadassah long

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4 Rogow, 176-8; Shapiro, 195-207.

5 Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, “Hadassah Associates,” and “Our
Timeline,” <http://www.hadassah.org> (20 January 2000); Zionist Organization of America, “About the
ZOA,” <http://www.zoa.org> (20 January 2000). The Hadassah Associates were formed in 1966 to give
men a way to support the Hadassah Medical Organization directly. More recently, these groups have
developed their own national structure and leadership.
conceptualized its work and recruited new members, we better understand how fundamental
gender was to Hadassah's program and ultimate success. Moreover, highlighting gender
politics underscores Hadassah's substantial accomplishments at home, in Palestine/Israel,
and in the world Zionist movement. Gender also played an essential role in the development
of the NCJW and the Workmen's Circle, although with less far-reaching political
consequences. By the late twentieth century the NCJW maintained its position as the voice
of American Jewish women in mainstream organizational feminism, lobbying the United
States' government on such issues as gun control, domestic violence, and reproductive
choice while continuing its Israeli and Jewish communal work. Women in Workmen's
Circle, no longer separated into their own groups, managed to enter the ranks of the national
leadership in large numbers. Today twenty-one of the forty National Executive Board
members are women, and women hold five of the twelve national administrative posts.
Separatism, far from stifling women's voices, facilitated American Jewish women's
entrance into the public realm in a manner that did not necessitate their sacrificing
commitment to either Jewish or women's issues. Gendered and separatist strategies,
although dividing women from men for a time, ultimately enabled women to bring their
concerns into the public sphere, to affect the course of American Jewish history, and to shape
the contours of modern American Jewish identity.

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