



‘Ideational power’ as a resource in union struggle

Jonathan Preminger 

ABSTRACT

Contributing to our understanding of ideas as power resources in union struggle, this article analyses a labour dispute in Israel’s shipping industry. The article follows the union’s foregrounding of a specific idea of the state contained within the collective understanding of Israel’s history, by which the union legitimised its position in the dispute and significantly influenced a government decision. The article therefore suggests that ideas can be an important power resource, particularly when other power resources are lacking but that this power resource is dependent on the specific ideational context: effective foregrounded ideas draw on a shared narrative that enables political actors to claim the moral high ground, while accusing their adversaries of failing to fulfil their moral obligations as understood via the frame of that shared narrative.

1 INTRODUCTION

There has been increasing acknowledgement or rediscovery of the role of ideas in shaping the ‘form, dynamics and products of the employment relationship’ (Hauptmeier and Heery, 2014: 2473), as well as recognition of the complexity in the ways ‘ideas matter’. Scholars have explored the role of ideologies and beliefs in shaping responses and as motivations for action (e.g. Cullinane and Dundon, 2014), and for framing (Goffman, 1986; Snow and Benford, 1988), to grant legitimacy to actors’ courses of action and to justify their claims (Ainsworth *et al.*, 2014). This article contributes to the ‘ideas matter’ literature by asking, under what conditions can ideas be a power resource for unions in industrial relations disputes?

On a theoretical level, it analyses the relationship between the ideas used as power resources in political struggle and the narratives from which these ideas are drawn. Scholars have long debated the power resources available to organised labour. In conceptualising the status of labour in capitalism, Wright (2000) distinguishes between structural power (or the power available to labour due to workers’ location within the economy) and associational power (which results from workers associating among themselves). Dörre (2011) elaborates on ideas of institutional power as the result of political conflict, where institutions ‘fix and to a certain degree legally codify basic social compromises’ (2011: 21). Much union revitalisation scholarship recognises the diminishing of such power resources, including the decline of collective

□ Jonathan Preminger, Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, Colum Drive, Cardiff CF10 3EU, UK. Correspondence should be addressed to Jonathan Preminger, Lecturer, Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, Colum Drive, Cardiff CF10 3EU, UK.
Email: premingerj@cardiff.ac.uk

labour's legitimacy as a political actor (e.g. Preminger, 2018: 105–117), and discusses ways in which unions can rebuild such power resources through various strategies, including efforts to 'frame' union struggle (e.g. Frege and Kelly, 2003). Thus, Budd and Bhave (2008: 92) assert that 'understanding the industrial relationship, ... labour union strategies, and work-related public policies requires understanding how values and assumptions form the ideologies and frames of reference used by scholars, practitioners, and policymakers'. In their view, values inform perspectives of unions and the employment relationship, which then impacts justifications for action (ideology), as well as enables the evaluation of that action's effectiveness. However, unions' use of ideas as a power resource has only rarely been studied (Ainsworth *et al.*, 2014). This article, then, also contributes to our understanding of the use of 'ideational power' in union revitalisation. Concurring that context is crucial 'for the production, change and maintenance of ideas and beliefs' (Hauptmeier and Heery, 2014: 2474), the article investigates the relationship between foregrounded ideas and background discourses. It shows how context provides rich material with which actors construct a persuasive discursive understanding of reality that supports their agenda, thus suggesting that ideas can be a powerful resource for political actors when other power resources are diminished.

On an empirical level, the article analyses a labour dispute in the Israeli shipping line Zim to explore the relationship between the idea of the Zionist nation-state rooted in a shared historical narrative, and the union's use of this idea in its struggle to protect seafaring jobs. Zim had a prominent position in Israel's history and, as argued below, was central to the development of the historical narrative of Israel's birth and survival. Details of the labour dispute were gathered from court documents, the media and secondary sources and from interviews with key industry figures: Avi Levi, chair of the Officers Union (26 July 2015); Shlomo Avitan, former chair of the Ratings Union (9 Aug. 2015); current and former directors of the Marine Education and Training Authority, Giora Dash (13 Apr. 2016) and Shay Meirson (16 Feb. 2015); Amir Basha and Moran Savurai, labour lawyers at Benny Cohen Law Offices (18 Feb. 2015); Natanel Haiman, director of energy and infrastructure at the Manufacturers' Association of Israel (6 April 2016); and Capt. Nimrod Keren, formerly of Zim (8 Dec. 2014). For understanding the historical context, the research drew on documents from the Knesset archives, Israel Corporation documents and some key personal correspondence provided by interviewees, as well as secondary sources.

The article first reviews current understandings of ideas and discourse in political struggle. It then gives historical information about Israel's national shipping company and its links with Israel's state ethos, crucial for understanding this case study. An account is then presented of restructuring negotiations and the union's struggle to compel the Israeli government to retain the state's 'Golden Share' in Zim, by foregrounding a specific idea of 'the state' and its obligations, drawing on Israel's national historical narrative. This is followed by a discussion on the significance of this 'idea' in the union's struggle. To conclude, the article suggests that ideas can be an important power resource, particularly when other power resources are lacking, but one which is greatly dependent on the specific ideational context: for maximum effect, foregrounded ideas should draw on a shared historical narrative, which enables actors to claim the moral high ground, while accusing their adversaries of failing to fulfil their moral obligations as understood via the frame of that shared narrative.

2 IDEAS AND DISCOURSE IN POLITICAL STRUGGLE

In a rapidly changing context in which the institutionalised certainties of the past can no longer be relied on, social science research increasingly focuses on the normative and cognitive 'meaning structures' actors use to make sense of the world (Hauptmeier and Heery, 2014). At the heart of this recent scholarship is the claim that 'ideas matter' (Parsons, 2016): both the background ideational landscape and foregrounded discourse impact on actors' perspectives of society, the decisions actors make and their normative vision; and this impacts policy and is ultimately reflected in institutions. For example, scholars have explored how new ideas impact policies, institutions and governance (Blyth, 2002) and how ideational processes can be 'discursive weapons that participate in the construction of reform imperatives' and bring about policy change (Béland, 2009: 702) or the ways ideas engender new perceptions of how the economy works (Hall, 1989).

After a long period of neglect, the role of such 'meaning structures' is coming under scrutiny in industrial relations too.¹ Thus, for example Frege (2005) aims to 'highlight the relevance of discourse and ideas in the field of comparative industrial relations' (2005: 152), suggesting that explanations for national variation in forms of industrial democracy have missed an important variable: 'the different ideational foundations or *discourses* of [industrial democracy] which are embedded in specific national political traditions' (2005: 151–152). Actors, she asserts, have very different perceptions on what industrial democracy is, 'embedded in the historical context of how nations discussed and defined the relationship between firm, state and society' (2005: 152). At a similarly high level of analysis, McLaughlin and Wright (2018) investigate the role of ideas to explain industrial relations policy liberalisation and differences between countries all categorised as liberal market economies. Importantly, they acknowledge ideational struggle and actors' agency, demonstrating that 'the agency of industrial relations actors seeking to marshal different ideas are important factors' explaining policy differences (2018: 570).

At a meso level, ideas have been linked to union identity. Scholars have looked at how the embeddedness of a union in society and the national context affects its ideologies (e.g. Hyman, 2001) and what is 'permitted' or condoned, and they have shown how these ideologies affect union strategies (e.g. Benassi and Vlandas, 2016; Hodder and Edwards, 2015). Piore and Safford (2006) suggest that social identities and cultures outside the workplace are gaining salience over class or occupational identity; in other words, our idea of 'who we are' is changing. This, they assert, is reflected in a shift of axes of mobilisation, which impacts regimes of workplace governance. Thus, the changing governance regime reflects a 'fundamental shift in our understanding of the nature of industrial society' (Piore and Safford, 2006: 300).

Similarly, at an organisational level, Greer and Hauptmeier (2012) investigate union identity but focus on agency. They show how in a context of transnational union action, in the absence of institutional imperatives to collective action, the union framed interests and problems to create shared norms and goals. This 'identity work' thus created a transnational collective identity over local or national identities. This identity motivated collective action and strengthened social ties, engendering solidarity even when material interests were not clearly aligned.

¹As reflected in the recent call (Feb. 2020) for a special issue of *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, 'Ideas in employment relations research'.

Hauptmeier (2012) also investigates changing actor ideologies as an explanation for changes in employment relations at a firm level even as national employment relations institutions remain unchanged. He notes (Hauptmeier, 2012: 738), 'institutions provide actors with rights and resources, and shape processes of employment relations, but this still provides actors with ample room to develop new employment relations practices'. But these practices also alter 'the functioning and meaning of institutions'; thus, 'to an important degree, institutions are what actors make of them ... actors with varying ideologies play an important role in the social construction of institutions' (Hauptmeier, 2012: 738).

Discursive institutionalism is an attempt to theorise the use of ideas (Schmidt, 2008, 2010). This 'new institutionalism' developed to fill a gap in institutionalism theory that was better at explaining continuity than change. Scholars in this 'new institutionalism' take discourse and ideas seriously as explanations for change (Schmidt, 2010: 2). This approach is 'also about the institutional context in which and through which ideas are communicated via discourse': these institutions are 'simultaneously constraining structures and enabling constructs of meaning' for sentient agents 'whose "background ideational capabilities" explain how they create and maintain institutions at the same time that their "foreground discursive abilities" enable them to communicate critically about those institutions' (Schmidt, 2010: 4). Hogan and O'Rourke (2015), for example, build on discursive institutionalism to show how ideational change is crucial for significant policy change, while Stringfellow (2018) uses discursive institutionalism to analyse how an idea (diversity management) has an impact at an institutional level (affecting national models of integration).

Such studies would suggest ideas are powerful. Carstensen and Schmidt (2016) develop this notion in their concept of 'ideational power', which aims to theorise how agents promote certain ideas at the expense of others. They define ideational power as 'the capacity of actors (whether individual or collective) to influence actors' normative and cognitive beliefs through the use of ideational elements' (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016: 320). Thus, they differentiate power from mere causality and from the general claim that 'ideas matter', while clearly linking it to agency. However, they also acknowledge that agents are 'dependent on existing ideational structures to develop, defend and communicate their ideas' (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016: 323). This is a concept of ideas as a resource, as something 'out there' that can be used to persuade other agents to understand an issue in a certain way and influence 'common knowledge' (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016: 325).

Accordingly, Foster *et al.* (2017) show how 'historical narratives are appropriated, mobilised and used, in the present, by managers and organisations' (2017: 1176) as a strategic resource as opposed to history being merely 'something that happened'. Similarly, Kinderman (2017) argues discourse is a power resource used by neoliberal think-tanks and employers to impact institutional arrangements. At the level of political struggle, Ainsworth *et al.* (2014) show how 'the mobilization of certain discourses can be used to frame issues and develop agendas' and 'thus contribute to the effectiveness of trade unions as political actors' (2014: 2511), while Dean (2012) shows the union's use of discourse to make its members appear 'worthy' of collective struggle.

In other words, the potential of ideas is not just how actors make sense of their environment, or how the 'ideational landscape' affects the development of institutions, but also how actors draw on collective understandings to make a case for their own agenda. Therefore, this article focuses on a union's use of these collective

understandings to explore the conditions under which 'ideational power' can be an effective power resource in industrial relations struggle. Specifically, it looks at the link between foregrounded ideas and background ideational capabilities or the shared discourses and narratives, and how political actors can use ideas when other power resources are diminished.

3 ZIM AND THE STATE: THE IDEATIONAL BACKGROUND

To understand the significance of ideas in this labour dispute, it is crucial to understand the historical status of Zim as Israel's national shipping company, whose history and identity are entwined with those of the country. The strong, centralised state was directly involved in developing a strong, centralised shipping industry, with Zim's 'national' character stemming from the way it was developed as a national priority for the newly established state, infused with the pride of collective ownership (Ra'anani, 2003). In fact, the need for a strong shipping industry was perceived even before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and Zim itself was founded using public funds in 1945 (Ra'anani, 2003: 112–113). Major Zionist settlement organisations were involved (Rosenstein and Sapir, 1980: 3–5), and the fledgling industry was lauded as crucial for the security and glory of the future Jewish homeland (Cohen-Hattab, 2015; Goldberg *et al.*, 1976: 83). After 1948, the government developed Zim using reparations from Germany (Ra'anani, 2003: 115). Thus, Zim grew rapidly, basking in the glory of being a state-owned company in a country where the idea of the 'Jewish state' was central to identity and culture.

However, from the 1970s, Israel began a process of decentralisation of power, liberalisation and privatisation (Katz and Zahori, 2002). The influence of a neoliberalising United States was notable, particularly since 1985 and the Emergency Economic Stabilisation Plan, as well as the increasing power of the economic elites in shaping Israel's economy in their own interests. At the same time, the socialist-inclined political camp was weakened, especially since the fall of the Soviet Union (e.g. Ram, 2008; Shafir and Peled, 2000; see Krampf, 2018, for an overview). These developments and the political leadership that emerged changed the relationship between the state and other areas of political and civil life: the state stepped back as economic entrepreneur and shed its responsibility for production and welfare (Ajzenstadt and Rosenhek, 2000), retreating from direct management of many areas of public service (Levi-Faur, 2000). The state also 'withdrew' in another sense, taking less direct care of citizens and shifting risk and responsibility to individuals (e.g. Peled, 2007). The idea of Israel as a collective enterprise was thus greatly undermined.

As the government transformed its modes of intervention in the economy, it also withdrew from direct management of Zim and gradually privatised it. The first sign of change came in 1969, when the Knesset established a holding company, part-owned by the State of Israel, which would attract foreign currency and 'unburden the state from having to invest huge capital' of its own, as the then-deputy finance minister said (Knesset, 1969). This was a ground-breaking idea for Israel at that time, the first crack in the government-directed closed economy funded by contributions, loans and reparations. In essence, this was a kind of foreign direct investment but with some differences. First, the company, known as the Israel Corporation, was intended to attract specifically Jewish investors in the belief that they would have a strong commitment to the idea of a new 'Jewish state'. Second, it offered particularly good terms to investors, to support this national idea with economic incentives. To ensure its

attractiveness, the company's portfolio of holdings included part ownership of prestigious Israeli public companies, including Zim (48.9 per cent).²

The 1970s, 1980s and 1990s saw Zim become one of the most prominent shipping companies in the world, joining the top 20 largest carriers by the late 1970s—a position it still retains.³ However, it also underwent changes similar to those in other shipping companies—particularly those connected with 'out-flagging', when a vessel is registered in another country in order to circumvent regulations of its home country (see Lillie, 2005). In most cases, one principal result has been the reduction of national crews and the increase in foreign crews. By 1973, 34 per cent of Zim-owned vessels carried foreign flags, up from 4 per cent in 1962 (Goldberg *et al.*, 1976: 83).⁴

The issue of the country's interests in a national shipping company remained. For example, in 1985, the Economic Affairs Committee chairperson declared, 'I have no doubt that we need a national [shipping] company and that we need to support it' (Knesset, 1985). However, the idea of the state as overarching director of affairs was changing, and the government believed Israeli crew numbers must be reduced to reduce costs (Meirson, Keren, Avitan, interviews).

In the mid-1990s, the government negotiated a 'Golden Share': a share held by the State of Israel, which specified that Zim would remain an Israeli-registered company with a certain minimum shipping capacity including a minimum number of Israeli-flagged vessels that the state can commandeer in emergencies. The finance and transport ministers hold the Golden Share in trust for the state (Finance Ministry, 1995).⁵ But according to the Officers Union, the Golden Share is not just about vessels; it also has a knock-on effect, providing jobs for Israeli officers and thus also experienced seafarers able to fill shore-based jobs such as pilots, harbour masters and tugboat operators (Dash, Levi, interviews; High Court, 2014: 8).

By the new millennium, things had changed completely, and ministers were considering the sale of Israel's remaining shares in Zim. In debates in the State Control Committee, the Accountant General noted approvingly that privatisation's main aim was to take control out of state hands (Knesset, 2000b); Economic Affairs Committee members noted that the state was not good at management (though in fact government representatives had no active management role in Zim) and that the government should be enabled to make the sale. The committee chair said, 'I think the Economic Affairs Committee's role is to enable the market to function as freely as possible in the economic field, and with as few fetters as possible'. The Government Companies Authority chief repeatedly noted that the state, as shareholder, was thwarting Zim's development (Knesset, 2004).

This is not to say the state's interests in a national carrier were completely forgotten: the Transport Minister said it was important to retain Israeli seafarers and vessels, and the 'security establishment' even quantified the state's needs, talking about some 11–18 vessels (Knesset, 2004). Indeed, a government decision from 1999 (No. 4797) determined that the industry would continue to be subsidised to retain Israeli professional knowledge and Israeli vessels, and the Sept. 11 events of 2001 brought home the need for Israeli vessels when many foreign-owned vessels were instructed

²See the Israel Corporation Law 1969.

³See www.alphaliner.com/top100/.

⁴It should also be noted that out-flagging has long been considered vital to Israeli shipping in order to enable Israeli-owned vessels to dock in countries hostile to Israel (see Rosenstein and Sapir, 1980: 89–90).

⁵Government Decision 5382.

to avoid Israeli ports.⁶ But as we see from Knesset Finance Committee discussions in 2000, some government members agreed with the CEO of Zim, who asserted that the Golden Share was archaic, old-fashioned and not suited to today's reality (Knesset, 2000a). Zim also claimed the Golden Share had scuppered various attempts to float the company to raise capital (Knesset, 2004). In 2004, the government sold Israel's remaining shares of Zim to the Israel Corporation (which already had half); nonetheless, the state retained the Golden Share, which was activated following the sale.

4 DEBT RESTRUCTURING AND THE UNION DISPUTE

In 2008, crisis hit the global shipping industry. Zim, affected like all shipping companies, had also embarked on an ambitious expansion programme (Rotem Strategy, 2014) and amassed enormous debt (Gabison, 2014e). A debt restructuring deal negotiated in 2009 proved insufficient, and by 2013, Zim had debts of some \$3.2 billion (Odell and Reed, 2014). Another deal took shape in which creditors would receive 68 per cent of shares while the holding company (which held 99.7 per cent; Gabison, 2014c) would inject \$200 million in exchange for retaining 32 per cent of shares (Israel Corporation, 2014c).

The shareholders and creditors agreed to the proposal, but only if the state relinquish the Golden Share or significantly alter its terms, which according to Zim would open the way for the public sale of shares (Gabison, 2014d). Zim argued that either some \$600 million of public funds would have to be injected into the company (which the government was unwilling to do) or the government would have to accept changes to the Golden Share, most crucially the reduction of the number of vessels required to fly the Israeli flag. Otherwise, Zim would go bust (High Court, 2014: 13).

The government indicated that it would accept this proposal, and the Shipping and Ports Authority, the industry regulator, accepted Zim's argument.⁷ However, the Officers Union saw this as a threat to its members, as it would lead to job loss and eventually the end of the Israeli merchant navy officer class. The union is a semi-autonomous body within the General Federation of Labour (the Histadrut), with the authority to sign collective agreements for its members. Following a split in the seafarers' union between ratings and officers, it represents only officers, and since the reduction in the number of Israeli ratings to almost zero, it is the only seafarers' union in Israel today and also represents the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) locally. It is run by an elected council of 16 members representing shore workers too (such as tugboat workers, pilots and vessel inspectors), who then elect a chair. Since 1995, the chair has been Avi Levi who had been a seafarer since 1969. During his long tenure as chair, Levi has amassed considerable power and contacts within the political establishment: union decisions, many interviewees noted, are basically Levi's decisions.

The union petitioned the High Court, claiming that the ministers holding the Golden Share in trust have no authority to relinquish it, and the union emphasised its national, sovereign importance. According to the lawyers involved, throughout the dispute, the union chair emphasised the public agenda, convinced it would benefit

⁶See letter from MK Nahum Langental to the transport minister, 15 Oct. 2001.

⁷See letter from Shipping and Ports Authority director Yigal Maor to Capt. Alex Gerson, dated 21 Jan. 2014.

union members and perceived the union's role in terms of a broader public benefit and solidarity (Basha, Savurai, interviews). In Finance Committee minutes, it is notable that the union chair repeatedly brings up the issue of the Golden Share and the 'state's interests', while government representatives talk mainly about debt and loss of investment (Knesset, 2014). In the High Court case, the union claimed that state efforts to retain an Israeli shipping industry and Israeli officers would be lost 'in the absence of a basis for a marine officer class through a shipping company with clear links to Israel', and this absence is what 'the sovereign tried to avoid by means of the Golden Share' (High Court, 2014: 9). At this time, Zim employed some 1000 Israelis directly (officers) and another 1200 indirectly, through various related activities. The union asserted that relinquishing or changing the Golden Share could void a raft of legislation intended to nurture sustainable Israeli shipping and feared that such change 'may be done for business reasons', which are irrelevant to the 'state's vital interests' (High Court, 2014: 7). Indeed, the union said that the Golden Share is a kind of 'insurance policy' for Israeli shipping, whose continuation is a 'national and public interest of the highest order' (High Court, 2014: 9); 'the debt restructuring ... does not justify harm to the public interest anchored in the Golden Share' (High Court, 2014: 11).

In its struggle to promote its own agenda, the union concentrated on security: as the union head put it, 'The need for Israeli officers is an existential, strategic need, it's not just to create jobs. Everyone knows that in times of emergency, foreigners [i.e. non-Israeli seafarers] won't come' (Levi, interview). As noted, the shadow of Israel's geopolitical isolation and reliance on shipping has accompanied Zim from the beginning. In the Goldberg *et al.* (1976: 31) report, the Defence Ministry notes the need for national carriers and Israeli seafarers. The need for Israeli seafarers was emphasised by the director of the Marine Education and Training Authority too: 'The seafarers' market is the most important market in times of emergency. You want it to function during emergencies. And for this you can rely only on Israelis' (Dash, interview). Today, some 98 per cent of imports and exports pass through Israel's seaports (High Court, 2014: 7). Towards the end of the 2006 conflict in Lebanon, by some accounts, Israel was running low on aircraft fuel because foreign-flagged tankers had kept away (Basha, Levi, Meirson, interviews). Two years later, Israel went to war in the Gaza Strip, and again shipping was seriously disrupted. But while there is agreement among state authorities over Israel's need for reliable shipping, there is no agreement over whether the Golden Share is necessary. For example, while an influential economist spoke out in favour (Barkat, 2014), the Manufacturers Association of Israel tends to prefer chartering (Haiman, interview). The head of the Training Authority agreed: 'Getting hold of a ship is relatively easy, it's just a question of money. Pay and they'll charter you a vessel, even if you pay 10 times the market price, but there'll be a vessel' (Dash, interview). Indeed, after the 2006 war, the government agreed there should be at least one tanker and two coal ships under Israeli flags, and hence with Israeli crew, but instead of including this within the framework of Zim's obligations to the state, a different shipping company won a tender to provide the vessels (Meirson, interview).

The union's approach succeeded in influencing the terms of the debate. While the High Court refused to rule on the dispute, saying it saw no reason why a union should be guardian of 'state interests', it nonetheless demanded that the state explain, as the union had demanded, why it appeared willing to accede to Zim's terms (Haifa District Court, 2014). The Israel Corporation took the case to Haifa District Court, sitting as a liquidation court, and asked the court to change the Golden Share's terms. Meanwhile, the debates became wider and louder, bringing in more parliament

members who framed the discussion in terms of the national need for the Golden Share (Bior, 2014; Zarhiya, 2014). It appeared that the government would change its position and demand that the Golden Share be retained. Only the Defence Ministry seemed uncertain of the need for the Golden Share, and this of course was a crucial voice (Haiman, interview). So the union recruited a well-respected military figure, former head of the National Security Council and former senior research associate at the Institute for National Security Studies, to persuade the Defence Ministry (Basha, Levi, interviews). The union also persuaded the head of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence committee of the importance of the issue, and he convened an urgent committee meeting to debate the issue (Levi, interview).

The result was a Finance Ministry declaration that the Golden Share is in the 'state's vital strategic, security and economic interests' and would be retained.⁸ The government submitted its response to Zim, noting, among other things, that the Golden Share has a 'sovereign character' and cannot be annulled as part of insolvency proceedings (Haifa District Court, 2014: 8). The Haifa court, recognising the risk of bankruptcy, made minor changes to the Golden Share agreement, which the union was able to accept (Haifa District Court, 2014: 11–14; Levi, interview). From the union's perspective, the dispute was settled.

However, the government feared a precedent enabling the lower courts to rule on issues of national importance, and took the case to the Supreme Court, claiming the Haifa Court had no authority to change the Golden Share terms (Dupin, 2014; Israel Corporation, 2014b). It insisted that the Golden Share is a regulatory tool with a sovereign character, not a corporate tool, and cannot be annulled by corporate means (Gabison, 2014a, 2014b). The Supreme Court agreed, and under its tutelage, the sides reached a compromise agreement (not significantly different from the lower court's ruling; Israel Corporation, 2014a).⁹

5 DISCUSSION: INVOKING THE ZIONIST SECURITY STATE

To summarise, the state built up the shipping industry and controlled it for its own perceived needs and then stepped back and relinquished its grip. This process marks the gradual disconnection between Zim and the state, and the increasing management of Zim outside the reference points of Zionist solidarity. The state aimed to create a perfectly competitive shipping industry untrammelled by the national responsibilities embodied in its earlier relation with Zim and anchored in the Golden Share.

The union, however, feared catastrophic job losses. Perceived as one of the 'privileged' organised worker groups whose legitimacy is questioned by the public and government (Preminger, 2018: 105–117), the union invoked an older idea of the Zionist state to alter government intentions and promote its own interests as part of a strategy of reduced conflict based on renewed partnership with the state. Once the union had achieved basic protection of Israeli seafaring jobs through the lower court's decision, it was satisfied; it was the government that took the case back to the High Court, acting contrary to its earlier willingness to relinquish the Golden Share. In

⁸Finance Ministry, press release, 19 June 2014.

⁹The importance of the agreement is that it brings authority to decide on sovereign matters back into the Supreme Court and the Government Companies Authority, annulling the precedent that the lower court could decide on such issues and clearly marking the dispute as a sovereign issue (Barkat, 2014; Wackett, 2014).

other words, the union invoked the idea of the historical Zionist state, to promote the interests of its members, and this provoked the government and upper court into reasserting the importance of the Golden Share as a sovereign tool. Thus, the older idea of the state re-emerged as something larger than merely government, larger than the interests and wishes of specific government ministers.

With this strategy, the union drew on an idea of a sovereign Jewish public, conceived as having interests in common. In linking its interests to the Jewish collective, embodied in the idea of the State of Israel, the (weakened) union tried to rehabilitate itself as somehow representing the public, recreating the idea of common interest round the Golden Share in order to anchor its agenda within the broader polity. Indeed, two lawyers involved in representing the union noted the union leader's perception of workers as gatekeepers, protecting the public interest (Basha, Savurai, interviews). But regardless of personal perspective, where unions' strength has been diminished and structural sources of organised labour's power have been undermined (see Preminger, 2018), asserting union interests in terms of wider public interests is crucial: in this case, efforts to invoke the Zionist state re-established the union's link with the collective common good. Given Israeli labour's singular history, this linkage is particularly effective: the union is part of the Histadrut labour federation, which was historically a national institution (not a labour federation in the regular sense), whose purpose was originally to assist in establishing the State of Israel, not merely representing workers (Shalev, 1992). This means the union can draw on a venerated history of organised labour struggling not merely for workers against 'capital', but for the entire Jewish collective in British Mandatory Palestine and later Israel—that is, the union can draw on 'existing ideational structures to develop, defend and communicate' its ideas (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016: 323). It was the union's embeddedness within a particular narrative that gave the union a particular identity that enabled it to draw on this ideational power (Foster *et al.*, 2017). Facing its own insignificance, the union protected its members' interests by reviving an older narrative of the seafarers' crucial role in the protection of the modern Jewish collective—a role framed by the state's need for security—thus tapping into shared discourses and collective understandings of history ('historically specific structures of meaning',¹⁰ Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016: 323), and using history as a strategic resource (Foster *et al.*, 2017).

This success has nothing to do with any 'objective need' for the Golden Share. In fact, this regulatory tool may not be fit for its stated purpose. As director of the Marine Education and Training Authority noted (Dash, interview), the Golden Share terms can be met without providing the state with substantive shipping capacity. This reflects the broader problem, which goes beyond the failure of government lawyers in writing up a loophole-free Golden Share agreement: the Golden Share depends on state authorities to enforce the substantive terms, and not just the letter, of the agreement. It also depends on a company committed to the state, as the Israel Corporation was intended to be. A company managed with the 'state's interests' in mind can fulfil the spirit of the Golden Share agreement, but a privatised company whose connection with Israel is weak will easily find ways not just to ignore the spirit but also to

¹⁰For more on the labour movement's crucial role in Israel's history, and the place of Palestinians and later Israeli Palestinian citizens in this movement, see Shalev (1992), Shafir and Peled (2002) and Preminger (2018).

circumvent the letter of the agreement. And after the debt restructuring agreement of 2014, Zim has an even weaker connection to Israel, because its shares are now divided among various creditors around the world.

Nonetheless, in geopolitical terms, Israel sees itself as vulnerable. On a political level, this view is very powerful, still able to unite (the vast majority of) its Jewish citizens. Moreover, security concerns have shaped the country's development from the beginning (Levi-Faur, 1999) and, as noted above, were instrumental in developing Zim. Given the dominance of military issues in Israeli society (Kimmerling, 1993), this appeal to security has enormous historical resonance.¹¹ This perspective is compelling also in neoliberal terms, when safeguarding 'national security' is the most important role the government still carries out through direct intervention—the neoliberal security state (see, e.g. Lea and Hallsworth, 2012). The union was able to make a strong case that in safeguarding the Golden Share, its members were fulfilling their duties to the security of the collective: it successfully carried out 'identity work' (Greer and Hauptmeier, 2012) in the sense of framing seafarers' identity within the broader state-security narrative. Importantly, this was not the development of an identity to foster internal solidarity or solidarity with allied groups, but in order to anchor the union within a value-laden narrative, to strengthen its position in promoting an agenda in the political sphere.

The appeal to security draws on a collective ethnonational discourse (Shafir and Peled, 2002), which prioritises the Jewish people, the Jewish state and the Zionist narrative of national resurgence, implicitly rejecting the discourse of economic liberalisation. Thus, the appeal to security, via this ethnonational discourse, also taps into popular protest against the new, managerial state perceived as failing in caring for its citizens (Peled, 2007), a perception that lay behind the wave of social protest in 2011 (Rosenhek and Shalev, 2013). Indeed, Zim's debt restructuring negotiations were often portrayed in the media as another instance of 'we' the public paying the debts of the 'tycoons' following a spate of such debt write-offs and the general loathing of such tycoons (e.g. Levy-Weinrib, 2011; Zarhiya, 2011). As seen in Israel's social protest movement of 2011, there is still faith that the government can do something and can wield state resources for the benefit of 'the people'. So the union's use of this discourse is an attempt to hold the government to account, to demand the state fulfil the promise of the idea of the Zionist state and accept once more its obligation of 'ensuring social cohesion and solidarity' (Soysal, 2012: 4). It is an appeal to the 'norms and principles of public life' to demonstrate the appropriateness of the union's perspective 'in terms of the values of a given community' (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016: 324).

This case shows the way 'foreground ideas' (Hauptmeier and Heery, 2014: 2475) are linked to, and heavily dependent on, the historical background (ideational landscape). In other words, it underlines the importance of wider narratives and collective understandings in 'empowering' specific ideational resources. It also shows how shared narratives infuse these ideas with moral significance. By reclaiming its place within the narrative, the union was able to claim the moral high ground, holding government authority to account. The union did not change overall policy trends of state retrenchment and liberalisation, but it did change the government's stance on a key

¹¹'National security' has been invoked in other cases too, as a way of influencing policy (see, e.g. Cohen and Naor, 2013).

issue that enabled the union to protect its members' perceived interests. The case thus shows how 'the mobilization of certain discourses can be used to frame issues and develop agendas' and 'thus contribute to the effectiveness of trade unions as political actors' (Ainsworth *et al.*, 2014: 2511), even when other power resources—specifically 'classic' sources of union strength (Dörre, 2011; Wright, 2000)—are lacking. While the importance of identity and legitimacy for unions and labour struggles has long been recognised, this is a more focused use of ideational power, as a particular weapon in the union's much-depleted arsenal.

6 CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted the importance of 'ideas' as explanations of, or at least significant contributors to, success in labour struggles. It has shown when 'ideas matter' (Hauptmeier and Heery, 2014: 2474) by investigating how unions can use ideas as a power resource, particularly when other power resources are lacking. Via a case analysis of a social group whose strength has been inexorably undermined, both specifically (seafarers in a globalised industry) and generally (organised labour), it suggests that ideational power was a crucial element in the union's success.

The normative aspect of the idea (holding the state/government to account) overshadowed other perspectives to gain traction in a way that promoted the interests of the group that was promoting the idea. The union also circumvented the issue of conflict with the employer by emphasising its work through political channels such as the Knesset committees and links with the military. This case, then, would suggest that this use of ideational power is effective for revitalisation strategies that focus on rebuilding wider union legitimacy, shifting the focus away from industrial relations dispute: by weaving itself into official state narratives, the union reduced public hostility to what is commonly perceived as 'privileged' organised labour (Preminger, 2018: 105–117). At the same time, it shifted policy in its favour by highlighting the mismatch between government action and popular understandings of the state's role. It must be noted that the state is not a monolith—certain military figures, some officials in the Transport Ministry and some in the State Advocacy Office were supportive of the union's approach (Basha, Savurai, interviews). The state also continues to support officer training. So the union tapped into a narrative already extant among state representatives but no longer dominant.

Historicity must be emphasised: context is crucial as a source of ideas and as constraining what can be done with them. In the Israeli context, security is the ultimate framing that 'structure[s] and delineate[s] the contours of public discourse' (Hauptmeier and Heery, 2014: 2478; Kimmerling, 1993). At the same time, the idea of the Zionist state, its purpose and obligations, is itself the result of, or shaped by, the ways it is invoked by political actors: background ideas are 'constantly evolving malleable structures subject to continual reconstructions' (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016: 329). In other words, the way an idea is used in day-to-day politics will also shape this idea, affecting the way it might be used by others in the future, as well as influencing which groups choose to use it.

To conclude, exploring the relationship between foregrounded discourse and power *through* ideas, and background ideational landscape, or power *in* ideas (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016: 329), the article showed how, in the absence of other power resources, ideas can be powerful tools when they link to a shared historical narrative: this enables actors to claim the moral high ground, while accusing their adversaries

of failing to fulfil their moral obligations as understood via the frame of that shared historical narrative.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Helen Sampson and Assaf Bondy for comments on previous drafts, Daniel Maman for access to his personal collection of historical documents, and the interviewees who were very generous in helping me understand a complex industry. I also thank the anonymous reviewers for suggestions that led to a much clearer framing. Any shortcomings, of course, are entirely my responsibility. The research for this article was supported by the British Academy (grant number NF150454), for which I am very grateful.

References

- Ainsworth, S., L. Cutcher and R. Thomas (2014), 'Ideas that Work: Mobilizing Australian Workers Using a Discourse of Rights', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, **25**, 18, 2510–2528.
- Ajzenstadt, M. and Z. Rosenhek (2000), 'Privatisation and New Modes of State Intervention: The Long-term Care Programme in Israel', *Journal of Social Policy*, **29**, 2, 247–262.
- Barkat, A. (2014) 'Settlement Reached on Zim Golden Share', *Globes*, 15 July, <http://www.globes.co.il/en/article-settlement-reached-on-zim-golden-share-1000954665> ()
- Béland, D. (2009), 'Ideas, Institutions and Policy Change', *Journal of European Public Policy*, **16**, 5, 701–718.
- Benassi, C. and T. Vlandas (2016), 'Union Inclusiveness and Temporary Agency Workers: The Role of Power Resources and Union Ideology', *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, **22**, 1, 5–22.
- Bior, H. (2014), 'Zim Strike Over: Offices Reopen and Zim Vessel Iberia Sets Sail', *The Marker*, 14 May [Hebrew]
- Blyth, M. (2002), *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, CUP).
- Budd, J. and D. Bhawe (2008), 'Values, Ideologies and Frames of Reference in Industrial Relations', in P. Blyton, N. Bacon, J. Fiorito and E. Heery (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations* (London, Sage) pp. 92–112.
- Carstensen, M. and V. Schmidt (2016), 'Power through, over and in Ideas: Conceptualizing Ideational Power in Discursive Institutionalism', *Journal of European Public Policy*, **23**, 3, 318–337.
- Cohen, N. and M. Naor (2013), 'Reducing Dependence on Oil? How Policy Entrepreneurs Utilize the National Security Agenda to Recruit Government Support', *Energy Policy*, **56**, 582–590.
- Cohen-Hattab, K. (2015), 'The Test of Maritime Sovereignty: The Establishment of the Zim National Shipping Company and the Purchase of the Kedmah, 1945–1952', *Israel Studies*, **20**, 2, 110–134.
- Cullinane, N. and T. Dundon (2014), 'Unitarism and Employer Resistance to Trade Unionism', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, **25**, 18, 2573–2590.
- Dean, D. (2012), 'The Relevance of Ideas in a Union's Organization of Contingent Workers: "Here Come the Fairy People!"', *Work, Employment and Society*, **26**, 6, 918–934.
- Dörre, K. (2011), 'Functional Changes in the Trade Unions: From Intermediary to Fractal Organisation?' *International Journal of Action Research*, **7**, 1, 8–48.
- Dupin, C. (2014), 'Israel Supreme Court to Consider Zim "Golden Share"', *American Shipper*, 8 July, http://www.americanshipper.com/Main/News/Israel_Supreme_Court_to_consider_Zim_golden_share_57716.aspx#hide ()

- Finance Ministry (1995), Special Share for the State in Zim (Government Companies Authority, Jerusalem, 21 April) [Hebrew].
- Foster, W., D. Coraiola, R. Suddaby, J. Kroezen and D. Chandler (2017), 'The Strategic Use of Historical Narratives: A Theoretical Framework', *Business History*, **59**, 8, 1176–1200.
- Frege, C. (2005), 'The Discourse of Industrial Democracy: Germany and the US Revisited', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, **26**, 1, 151–175.
- Frege, C. and J. Kelly (2003), 'Union Revitalisation Strategies in Comparative Perspective', *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, **9**, 1, 7–24.
- Gabison, Y. (2014a), 'State Opposes Zim Deal: Appeals Golden Share Decision', *The Marker*, 7 July [Hebrew].
- Gabison, Y. (2014b), 'Court: State Approval Required Only for Sale of More than 35% of Zim Shares', *The Marker*, 2 July [Hebrew].
- Gabison, Y. (2014c), 'Zim: Ready to Bring Back Hub from Piraeus in Return for Changes to Golden Share', *The Marker*, 22 May [Hebrew].
- Gabison, Y. (2014d), 'Zim CEO: Foreign Parties Expect the State to Annul the Golden Share', *The Marker*, 19 Feb, <http://www.themarker.com/markets/1.2247965> () [Hebrew].
- Gabison, Y. (2014e), 'Israel Corporation Losing Control of Zim', *Haaretz*, 16 Jan. <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/business/.premium-1.568877> .
- Goffman, E. (1986), *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience* (Boston, MA, Northeastern University Press).
- Goldberg, A., E. Dar-El and M. Bernstein (1976), *Institutional Effects on the Israeli Shipping Industry* (Haifa, Israel Shipping Research Institute).
- Greer, I. and M. Hauptmeier (2012), 'Identity Work: Sustaining Transnational Collective Action at General Motors Europe', *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, **51**, 2, 275–297.
- Haifa District Court (2014), *Zim v. State of Israel and others* (Haifa).
- Hall, P. (1989), *The Political Power of Economic Ideas: Keynesianism Across Nations* (Princeton, Princeton University Press).
- Hauptmeier, M. (2012), 'Institutions Are What Actors Make of Them—The Changing Construction of Firm-level Employment Relations in Spain', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, **50**, 4, 737–759.
- Hauptmeier, M. and E. Heery (2014), 'Ideas at Work', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, **25**, 18, 2473–2488.
- High Court (2014), *Seafarers Union and Others v. Yair Lapid and Others* (Jerusalem).
- Hodder, A. and P. Edwards (2015), 'The Essence of Trade Unions: Understanding Identity, Ideology and Purpose', *Work, Employment and Society*, **29**, 5, 843–854.
- Hogan, J. and B. O'Rourke (2015), 'The Critical Role of Ideas: Understanding Industrial Policy Changes in Ireland in the 1980s', in J. Hogan and M. Howlett (eds), *Policy Paradigms in Theory and Practice: Studies in the Political Economy of Public Policy* (London, Palgrave Macmillan) pp. 167–188.
- Hyman, R. (2001), *Understanding European Trade Unionism: Between Market, Class and Society* (London, Sage).
- Israel Corporation (2014a), Report to the Securities Authority and Tel Aviv Stock Exchange, 14 July.
- Israel Corporation (2014b), Report to the Securities Authority and Tel Aviv Stock Exchange, 8 July.
- Israel Corporation (2014c), Report to the Securities Authority and Tel Aviv Stock Exchange, 23 January.
- Katz, Y. and M. B. Zahori (2002), 'Privatization Policy: 50 Years of Low-intensity Conflict', in D. Korn (ed.), *Public Policy in Israel: Perspectives and Practices* (Oxford, Lexington Books) pp. 123–134.
- Kimmerling, B. (1993), 'Patterns of Militarism in Israel', *European Journal of Sociology*, **34**, 196–223.

- Kinderman, D. (2017), 'Challenging Varieties of Capitalism's Account of Business Interests: Neoliberal Think-tanks, Discourse as a Power Resource and Employers' Quest for Liberalization in Germany and Sweden', *Socio-Economic Review*, **15**, 3, 587–613.
- Knesset (1969), Minutes from First Knesset Reading of Israel Corporation Law 1969 (Jerusalem, Knesset archives).
- Knesset (1985), Minutes from Economic Affairs Committee, 8 Jan. (Jerusalem, Knesset archives).
- Knesset (2000a), Minutes from the Finance Committee, 4 Sept. (Jerusalem, Knesset archives).
- Knesset (2000b), Minutes from State Control Committee, 29 Aug. (Jerusalem, Knesset archives).
- Knesset (2004), Minutes from Economic Affairs Committee, 26 Jan. (Jerusalem, Knesset archives).
- Knesset (2014), Minutes from Finance Committee, 19 Feb. (Jerusalem, Knesset archives).
- Krampf, A. (2018), 'Israel's Neoliberal Turn and Its National Security Paradigm', *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, **47**, 2, 227–241.
- Lea, J. and S. Hallsworth (2012), 'Bringing the State Back In: Understanding Neoliberal Security', in P. Squires and J. Lea (eds), *Criminalisation and Advanced Marginality: A Critical Assessment of the Work of Loic Wacquant* (Bristol, Policy Press) pp. 19–40.
- Levi-Faur, D. (1999), 'Warfare, Polity-formation and the Israeli National Policy Patterns', in D. Levi-Faur, G. Sheffer and D. Vogel (eds), *Israel: the Dynamics of Change and Continuity* (Frank Cass, London and Portland OR) pp. 156–168.
- Levi-Faur, D. (2000), 'Change and Continuity in the Israeli Political Economy: Multi-level Analysis of the Telecommunications and Energy Sectors', in G. Shafir and Y. Peled (eds), *The New Israel* (Westview, Boulder) pp. 161–188.
- Levy-Weinrib, E. (2011), 'State Comptroller Launches Tycoons' Haircuts Probe', *Globes*, 27 Dec, <http://www.globes.co.il/en/article-1000710220> ().
- Lillie, N. (2005), 'Union Networks and Global Unionism in Maritime Shipping', *Relations Industrielles*, **60**, 1, 88–111.
- McLaughlin, C. and C. Wright (2018), 'The Role of Ideas in Understanding Industrial Relations Policy Change in Liberal Market Economies', *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, **57**, 4, 568–610.
- Odell, M. and J. Reed (2014), 'Zim Sets Course for Tie-ups after Debt Restructuring Deal', *Financial Times*, 24 Jan.
- Parsons, C. (2016), 'Ideas and Power: Four Intersections and How to Show Them', *Journal of European Public Policy*, **23**, 3, 446–463.
- Peled, Y. (2007), 'Towards a Post-citizenship Society? A Report from the Front', *Citizenship Studies*, **11**, 1, 95–104.
- Piore, M. and S. Safford (2006), 'Changing Regimes of Workplace Governance, Shifting Axes of Social Mobilisation, and the Challenge to Industrial Relations Theory', *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, **45**, 3, 299–325.
- Preminger, J. (2018), *Labour in Israel: Beyond Nationalism and Neoliberalism* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press).
- Ra'anana, Z. (2003), 'Israel—Bridge or Bridgehead? Some Regional Transportation Aspects and Trade Effects', *Israel Studies Forum*, **18**, 2, 107–126.
- Ram, U. (2008), *The Globalization of Israel* (London, Routledge).
- Rosenhek, Z. and M. Shalev (2013), 'The Political Economy of the 2011 Protest: Generational-class Analysis', *Te'oria ubikoret*, **41**, 45–68 [Hebrew].
- Rosenstein, E. and B.-A. Sapir (1980), *Industrial Relations in Israeli Shipping (1948–1975)* (Geneva, International Institute for Labour Studies).
- Rotem Strategy (2014), *Economic Position Paper on Zim's Golden Share* (Ramat Gan).
- Schmidt, V. (2008), 'Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse', *Annual Review of Political Science*, **11**, 303–326.

- Schmidt, V. (2010), 'Taking Ideas and Discourse Seriously: Explaining Change through Discursive Institutionalism as the Fourth 'New Institutionalism'', *European Political Science Review*, **2**, 1, 1–25.
- Shafir, G. and Y. Peled (eds) (2000), *The New Israel: Peacemaking and Liberalisation* (Boulder, Westview).
- Shafir, G. and Y. Peled (2002), *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Cambridge, CUP).
- Shalev, M. (1992), *Labour and the Political Economy in Israel* (Oxford, OUP).
- Snow, D. A. and R. D. Benford (1988), 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilisation', *International Social Movement Research*, **1**, 197–217.
- Soysal, Y. N. (2012), 'Citizenship, Immigration and the European Social Project: Rights and Obligations of Individuality', *British Journal of Sociology*, **63**, 1, 1–21.
- Stringfellow, E. (2018), 'Ideas at Work: A Discursive Institutional Analysis of Diversity Management and Social Dialogue in France, Germany and Sweden', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2018.1454489 (online first).
- Wackett, M. (2014), 'Embattled Zim Calls for State Exit as Loss Widens', *The Loadstar* 27 Mar, <http://theloadstar.co.uk/zims-loss-widens-vessel-cancellations/> ().
- Wright, E. O. (2000), 'Working-class Power, Capitalist-class Interests and Class Compromise', *American Journal of Sociology*, **105**, 4, 957–1002.
- Zarhiya, Z. (2011), 'Afraid of the Public Outcry: Netanyahu Averts Nay Vote on "Tycoon Haircut" Law', *Haaretz*, 25 Nov.
- Zarhiya, Z. (2014), '29 MKs to Finance, Defence and Transport Ministers: Don't Give Up Golden Share', *The Marker*, 25 June [Hebrew].