

Architectural Preservation

The Legacy of Andrei Leitersdorf and Ilya Belsitzman for the Petach Tiqva¹ General Workers Union (Histadrut)

by Architect Prof. Amnon Bar Or

At the center of the city of Petach Tiqva, on HaHistadrut street (previously Wolfson street), not far from where the old Workers House stood until 1947 [Image 1], there stands the Workers Union's cinema **Heichal (Hall)**. Now abandoned, it no longer shows any films and seems to have withdrawn from the street. It is shaded by two adjacent buildings: **The Workers Union (Histadrut) House** (1946) [Image 2] and **The Tax Bureau House** (1957) [Image 3]. Those two buildings were planned by architects Andrei Leitersdorf and Ilya Belsitzman, and commissioned by the Workers of Petach Tiqva Union.

Although they were built dozens of years ago, they have retained their original façades almost unchanged.. This despite the pressures of development and competing priorities in the heart of the city. Both structures are still used by the Workers Council and other Histadrut bodies and have retained their original façades almost unchanged.

The signature style of Leitersdorf and Belsitzman is also apparent in the cinema, which was planned in 1935 by architect Arie Sharon; later upgraded by the pair while they were building the Histadrut House and Tax Bureau House, keeping it well-hidden [Image 4]. The entire historical compound therefore carries the imprint of Leitersdorf and Belsitzman, demonstrating the power and influence wielded by the city's Workers Council since the end of Ottoman rule, and retained throughout the time of the British Mandate, all the way to the first days of the State of Israel.

¹ The writing of this article would not have been possible without the help of Andrei Leitersdorf's two sons, architect Tommy Leitersdorf, his two brothers – Eran & Gioyra as well as Amos Belsitzman, son of Ilya Belsitzman. To this we must also add the immense contribution of Gili Leitersdorf-Fierstenfeld, wife of Tommy Leitersdorf, as well as the priceless contribution of young architects Gilad and Yishai Lehavi, who toiled in various archives during their studies, visited many structures and documented them, and conducted many interviews.

The three structures, and the open spaces between them, bear witness to a heroic period in the time of Jewish settlement in Israel, from the beginning of the Zionist days and the settlement at Em HaMoshavot (“the Mother of Settlements”) until this very day. The designation of the compound as a” preserved” **historical Landmark** allows for urban renewal that retains the location’s past on display, as well as its changing cultural meaning and its importance as part of the Zionist legacy in the Land of Israel [Image 5].



Image 1: The old Workers House



Image 2: Histadrut House since 1946



Image 3: The Tax Bureau House since 1957



Image 4: Heichal Cinema

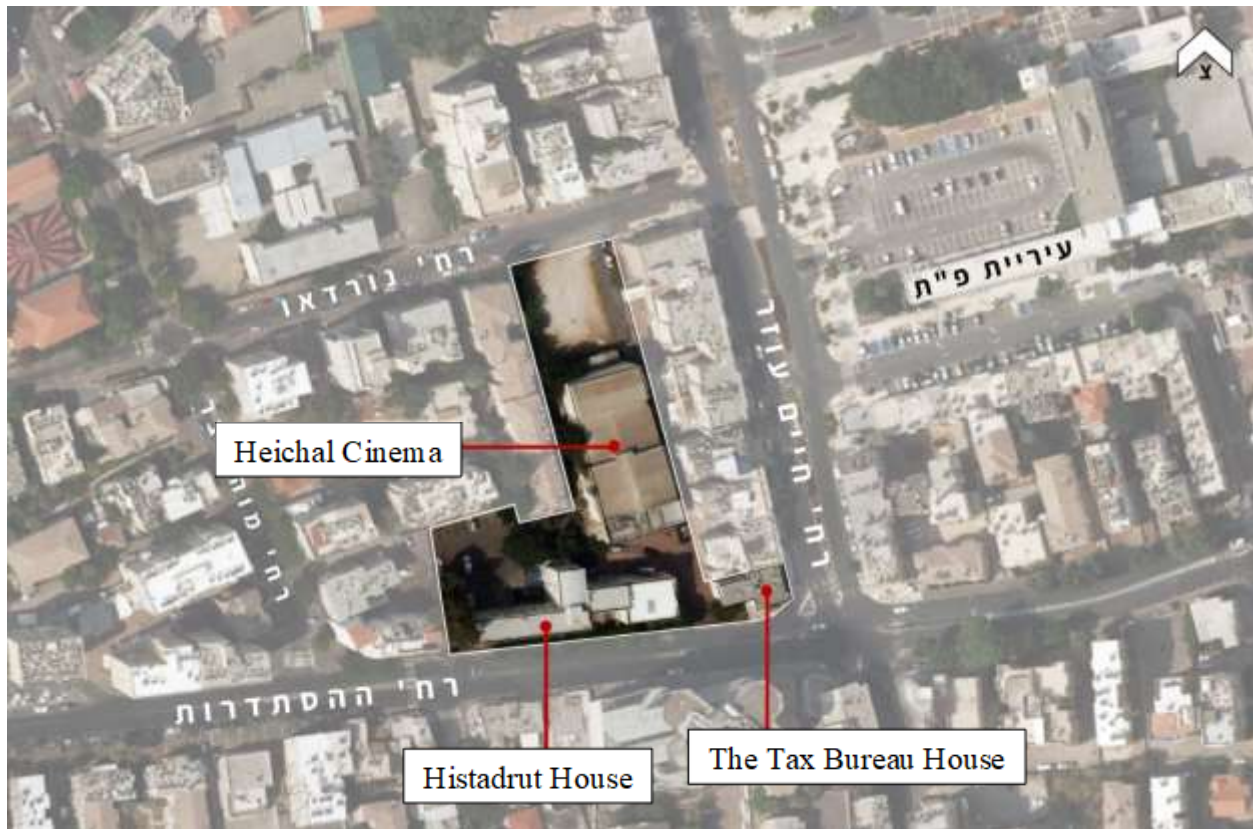


Image 5: An aerial shot of the Histadrut Compound, Petach Tiqva.

Introduction: What is Preservation and Why Do It?

The Burra Charter for Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance² states that, “Places of cultural significance enrich people’s lives [...] often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape, to the past and to lived experiences.”

If that is the case, what is this “cultural significance”? This meaning embodies various values, aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations.

It manifests in the buildings and their environment; in the way we use them and their ever-changing contexts. If so, places with cultural significance tell us who we are, both as individuals

² The Australian ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance was put together by the Australian branch of the ICOMOS Organization and adopted by the entire organization. Its content also refers to the Venice Charter of 1964 (International Conservation Charter). The quotes of the charter in this article were taken from the Getti Conservation Institute (GCI) and were translated by the Israeli Committee to UNESCO.

and as a community. They teach us about the present and carry us into the future by telling us about our past, retaining the local irreplaceable landscape. Preservation itself is obviously not meant only for us; in preserving, we acknowledge our responsibilities towards future generations.

The reader could rightly ask how we can measure abstract things such as cultural significance and importance. The simple answer is: with humility and professionalism. By cherishing the past, acknowledging the present and having concern for the future. Practically, this means that before we make any decisions that might affect the future of a place and its meaning for future generations, we must meticulously gather information, among other things, as well as document the site as scientifically and objectively as possible. Only thus can we thoroughly understand the significance of a site, and accordingly establish development and conservation policies which will preserve it. We must also take into consideration the resources at our disposal, relevant physical restrictions, the needs of the landowners and residents, the municipal outline and local development policy.

Taking all the aforementioned factors into consideration, when we examine the Histadrut Compound in Petach Tiqva, we find that it is in fact an historical compound with extraordinary values and meaning, not only for the local community, but also for the city and the country. Not only is conserving the compound (with all its buildings, and surroundings) worthy by virtue of our historical responsibility, it will also allow us to recreate a central and active urban area in the very heart of the city [Image 6].

Part of the compound's historical importance lies in the values of the General Union of the Hebrew Workers of Israel – a body that had struggled for the rights of Hebrew workers since the Second Aliyah period, and for many years after the establishment of the State of Israel and its official institutions; an organization which served a key role in welcoming the large waves of immigrants who came to Petach Tiqva , making sure they had work and roves over their heads while promoting the farmers' colony that became a large industrialized city and one of the focal points of the organized struggle for Hebrew labor.

The article will lay out the history and characteristics of the Histadrut Compound, focusing on conservation. I will also talk about the bond between the works of Leitersdorf and Belsitzman in Petach Tiqva and the work of Arie Sharon, who was the Histadrut's architect about

a decade prior; I will look into the architectural creation of Leitersdorf and Belsitzman for the Petach Tiqva Histadrut beyond the lens of the Histadrut Compound's conservation and briefly discuss the activity and development of the Histadrut itself, which took upon itself many of the roles that later became governmental functions.



Image 6: Petach Tiqva City Center. Intersection of Haim Ozer and HaHistadrut streets

The General Union and Organized Labor in Israel

The General Union of Workers in the Land of Israel (Histadrut) was officially established in 1920. It was preceded by workers' organizations such as the Workers of the Land Union, which was established in 1892 at the young colony of Ness Ziyona and operated in the Petach Tiqva, Rishon LeZiyon, Ness Ziyona, Rehovot, Ekron, Zichron Ya'akov, Rosh Pina and Ein-Zeytim colonies; and the Hapoel HaTzair Workers Union, established in 1905, founding among other things the loan fund, workers kitchens, cooperative shops and settlement ranches, seeking to realize the Socialist ideology of A.D. Gordon who believed that "a necessary condition to the realization of Zionism is conquering all the working positions in Israel by Jewish people."³ This struggle to conquer labor was the initial formative process for the General Union, which sought

³ Yosef Groni, Yitzhak Greenberg, *Israeli Labor Movements: Idealistic Foundations, Social Trends and the Financial System*, Vol.1, Open University Publishing, 1997.

to serve as a framework for all Jewish workers and laborers in Israel from its very beginning. A mere five years after it was established, it already had half the Jewish workers in the Land of Israel as members, and in the next five years they had reached three-quarters of all Jewish workers. A rate that was maintained in the years to come.

Another example demonstrating the immense importance of the Histadrut is that its first General Counselor, David Ben Gurion, became Israel's first Prime Minister. "We weren't just another trade union," he later wrote to the organization's newspaper, 'Davar'. "We were also not a regular cooperative organization; we were more than that. Those who built and shaped the Histadrut and its path, saw it as more than just a trading, cooperative, cultural settlement union, but rather something deeper; a pact of country founders and homeland rejuvenators."⁴ In the first few decades of the new country, as stated in the Histadrut's vocabulary, the Histadrut was "simultaneously a professional super-union protecting the rights of its members and a super-employer, the largest in the country, dabbling in all branches, of the economy : manufacturing, construction, trade, import, export, banking and services. [...] the Histadrut was also a convoluted social mechanism which provided residential, health, welfare, educational and cultural services to its members."⁵ With immigrants pouring in after the establishment of the State of Israel, the Histadrut opened employment bureaus, built housing, initiated cultural industries and helped the new immigrants acquire the Hebrew language.

However, as the years went by, the importance of the Histadrut's role in the economy, security, welfare, education and construction areas, eroded, since these all became state functions. Governmental institutions grew stronger while the Histadrut grew weaker. The outcome was, among other things, great crises, stagnation and privatization processes.

The Architectural Mark of the General Union

In 1935, the Histadrut established the "Public Buildings Inc." company, which they used to construct its public buildings and the Workers Council Houses, planned by the best Israeli

⁴ David Ben Gurion, *Davar*, July 2nd, 1953.

⁵ Ben Meir, Dov, *The Histadrut Vocabulary*, Tel Aviv, Am Oved – Culture and Education, 1980.

architects. “Just as it had an effect on all economic, social and cultural aspects,” Zvi Efrat writes in his book *The Israeli Project*, “so did the Histadrut spread throughout the country with an elaborate web of functional and public buildings: **workers councils** and **tax bureaux, concerns** and **cooperatives, wholesale markets, co-op stores** and **grocery stores, health care clinics** and **hospitals, culture houses, people houses, youth houses, colleges, theaters, halls, libraries** and **museums**. This mass construction created a spatial and cognitive matrix which is just as comprehensive (if not even more) than that of official government institutions.”⁶

The Histadrut saw itself as the enlightened patron of architecture, dictating public fashion: “It consciously elected not to have a conservative style of architecture, but rather consistently encouraged a trend or embraced current architectural trends,” Efrat writes. There were no less than 68 Workers Council buildings built in the 1950s and ‘60s in Israel, many of them planned by Leitersdorf and Belsitzman. Efrat states that the Histadrut developed its own architectural language which brought about its organizational efficiency and amplified its presence in various settlements in the country. “Much like the (literary) persona of the worker, marking them socially before identifying them geographically, ethnically or nationally, so does the (architectural) persona of the Workers Council building or the Health Care Clinic place it first as part of the ‘Histadrut Series’ and only then as a specific site, if at all.”⁷ .

And indeed, the Histadrut’s construction projects clearly show both its power and its processes as well as changes regarding national public construction. Despite the common characteristics, each construction period created a different and distinct architectural series: the program was the same, but the architectural planning was different.

With that said, as massive as the size and might of the original Histadrut’s architectural projects were, its imprint on our current space is no longer the same as it used to be. Following the political upset of 1977, the various institutes of the Histadrut deteriorated even further. Many of the buildings they had owned were sold to private entrepreneurs as real estate, who mostly sought to destroy the old and build new high-rises in the city centers.

⁶ Efrat, Zvi, *The Israeli Project – Construction and Architecture 1948-1973*, Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2004, p.398.

⁷ Ibid.

Petach Tiqva: The Cradle of the Workers Movement in the Land of Israel

The founders of Petach Tiqva came from the Ashkenazi community of the old settlement in Jerusalem, most of whom had no prior experience in working the land or agriculture. The grounds on which the colony was built belonged to the Arab village of Umlabes. David Gutman and Yehoshua Shtampfer acquired it from Salim Kasser and Antoine Bishara Tian, who were two of the richest people in Jaffa at the time, and in 1878 Yehuda Rabb broke the first furrow in its ground.

A quarter of a century later, at the time of the Second Aliyah, the colony had become the largest Jewish workers' center of all the colonies. Elazar Trofa tells in his book *Foundations of the Story of Petach Tiqva* (1948) that the number of Hebrew workers in the colony reached 130 in the winter of 1905 (Trofa notes that most of them worked in the citrus orchards and suffered from a despairing lack of occupational certainty).

Most of the people from the Second Aliyah flocked to the colony in 1904. The Workers Union adopted them as equal-rights members and a few of them settled there and established the Ein-Ganim colony, with the help of the Hovevei Zion association. As mentioned, in 1905 they established the Hapoel HaTzair Workers Association there and four years later, in 1909, the first workers club opened, which served as “the spiritual center of the workers” as Trofa describes it [Image 7].

Ben Gurion, who writes in his memoirs about his days as a worker in the colony in 1906, said that Petach Tiqva was “the larger and (financially) healthier colony of all the Judea colonies, where there are a hundred and forty mansion owners and they are almost all doing well [...] besides, there is a lot of drilling done in the summertime. Therefore, only two types of workers could remain in the Land of Israel, those with great will or those with ability, meaning young people who were accustomed to hard work.”

The British authorities acknowledged the colony in 1921 and it was granted the status of regional council. A year later, new financial horizons opened up thanks to the new train lines. A decade later, in 1935, there were factories opening up in Kiryat Arie, which took in many workers, and there was a school established at the colony for the workers' children.

Not long after, in 1937, the colony became a city headed by Shlomo Shtampfer, son of the colony's founder (much to the satisfaction of the veteran oligarchy there), and after the War of 1948, the areas of the Arab village of Feje were annexed to the city. Following this move, Petach Tiqva grew, received many immigrants who found jobs in construction and industry, and became a large industrial city, quite a bit at the expense of its open areas. Most of the historical orchards, the colony's trademark, were uprooted. By 1951, there were already more than 1,500 worker families living in the city and its suburbs.

That is how Petach Tiqva, previously the citrus colony, became one of the most important industrial centers in the country. Step by step, it grew from a colonial farmers' colony with a traditional Jewish character to a workers' city. That process was the outcome of a fierce internal struggle, in which the majority – the laboring workers – came out on top.

The General Council naturally took a big part in that struggle. The impressive public structures it built in the city of Petach Tiqva, both before the establishment of the State of Israel and after, were a testament to its overcoming of feudal perceptions as well as the crucial contribution it made to the establishment of the sovereign Jewish country.



Images 7: The old Workers House

Andrei Leitersdorf and Ilya Belsitzman, Architects

Andrei Leitersdorf and Ilya Belsitzman met while they were working together at the architecture firm of Ze'ev Rechter. In 1946, the two established a joint architecture firm at Andrei's house on Ehad HaAm street, Tel Aviv. Later on, they transferred to an office on Ester HaMalka street and finally settled at Remez street, Tel Aviv, where they worked together until Leitersdorf's death.

The two started working in Petach Tiqva towards the late 1940s, continuing into the 1950s and '60s. Their architectural legacy in the city is nothing less than an important testimony of a crucial time in the country's history, and the body of public works they had planned for the General Council between 1946-1970 is an aggregation of institutional architectural work which is mature and current to its time. It is an architecture confident in itself and its path, which pragmatically responds to the demands of the main commissioning body, which is the Petach Tiqva Workers Council of the General Council of Workers in the Land of Israel.

Andrei (Andreas) Leitersdorf was born October 2nd, 1905, in Bratislava, Slovakia (then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) to Ada Levi and attorney Moritz Leitersdorf. In 1922 he graduated with honors from the Reali School of Prague and in 1926 he graduated, with distinct honors, with an Architecture and Engineering degree from the Deutsche Technische Hochschule.

Between 1927-1930, Leitersdorf was an engineer and architect at the Czech Firm for Entrepreneurship and Construction, where he managed dozens of residential, commercial and hospitality projects. Simultaneously, he was also working as an independent architect and after leaving the firm, he kept working in Bratislava and Komarno. In 1936 he married Adolfina (Fini) Haas and in 1937 their son Tommy (an architect in his own right) was born in Komarno. About two years later, due to political developments in Europe, the three immigrated to Palestine. Andrei's mother, Ada, and his brother Yugen remained in Bratislava and were sent to the extermination camps of Majdanek and Sobibor in 1942.

Andrei and Adolfina wished to continue their journey to New Zealand, but as World War II broke out, the ports were closed to civilian traffic and the family had to stay in Israel. Andrei, who could not find a job as an architect in Palestine, had a truck driving license issued and

worked in moving. About a year later, during wartime, the Mandate authorities invited him to take part in planning military camps.

In 1941, Andrei joined with the firm of architect Ze'ev Rechter, which was one of the top firms in the country. There he met Ilya Belsitzman, his future partner [image 8].

In 1948, after leaving Fini, Andrei married Gina Rappaport. In 1949, their son Giora was born, and in 1950, their youngest son Eran was born, who later said of his father: "Father immigrated to Israel with his young family and arrived in a completely different world than the one they knew back in Central Europe, a country which was yet to be established and another time of bloodshed, war and austerity. However, he still managed, with supreme powers which are now hard to grasp, to rehabilitate from terrible trauma and contribute his many skills to build up the country. He was a very special, talented man, yet humble."

Leitersdorf had a lot of influence on public and institutionalized architecture in Israel before its independence and in the first decades of its existence. As part of his partnership with Belsitzman, Leitersdorf planned dozens of projects, many of them for the General Council, via the local Workers Councils and the other Histadrut bodies. The European influences are very apparent in his education, in the perspectives and isometrics he sketched free-handed.

Leitersdorf never published articles or manifests, which is why it is hard to trace his thoughts regarding architecture, Zionism as a whole and the Labor movement specifically. Yet we can learn quite a bit from the projects he planned prior to his immigration to Israel. There was a recent connection made between his son Tommy and his team and architecture researchers in Slovakia. In their research, conducted for an exhibition in Bratislava, the researchers uncovered a few of the structures Leitersdorf had planned for private and rich clients. These works, including residential buildings and bourgeois villas in a restrained modern style, were well-preserved and maintained until this very day.

Alongside his ideology, it seems that Andrei's personal motives for immigrating to Israel were not about Zionist fulfillment; his body of work in fact shows that he had understood the social and political situation of his time well, and knew how to function under its limitations in a professional and talented way, without being influenced by the monumental socialist architecture common in Europe at that time.

Andrei Leitersdorf passed away at the age of 65 due to a sudden cardiac arrest at the entrance of his Ehad HaAm street house in Tel Aviv. He died in the arms of his son Eran who was a twenty-year-old student at the time [image 9].



Image 8: Architect Andrei (Bondi) Leitersdorf as a young man in Slovakia, 1926.



Image 9: Andrei (Bondi) Leitersdorf and his son Tommy on the roof of their Tel Aviv home (1939-1940).



Image 9: Andrei Leitsdorf with his wife Gina and their two sons, Giora and Eran (1956).

Ilya Belsitzman [Image 10] was born in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1917 and immigrated to Germany with his family while he was a child. In 1934, after the Nazis assumed power, his family immigrated to Israel and settled in Tel-Aviv, where he lived with his family until he passed away in August 2006, at the age of 86.

Like many members of his generation, Belsitzman never acquired any formal architectural education. He gained most of his professional experience through practical work and learning architectural sketching at a Tel-Aviv night school.

At the beginning of his professional career, Belsitzman worked at the firm of Modernist architect Yosef Neufeld, who he considered to be his mentor and greatest influence. Later on, in the mid-1940s, he worked at Ze'ev Rechter's leading firm for a few years. Working in those two important firms, each considered leaders of international architecture in Israel in their own right probably influenced his architectural style.

As mentioned, he met Leitersdorf at Ze'ev Rechter's firm and in 1946 they started their fruitful and long partnership, which lasted until Andrei passed away in 1970. From then on, Belsitzman worked at his private firm, in partnership with his son, architect Amos Belsitzman.

During his 60 years of architectural work, Belsitzman dealt mostly with public construction "in accordance with his belief in the values of socialism and a welfare society, and also since that is how things came to be," says his son Amos. The period in which he worked for the Histadrut was also the peak of the institution itself. The buildings he planned "were meant for general welfare but also reflected the might of the Histadrut back then and its presence in all walks of life – structures that are slowly disappearing from urban scenery as the process of privatizing the assets of this institution intensifies."⁸

"Father didn't plan grandiose architecture," says Amos. "It was important for him that a building stand and be functional, once he solved the functional aspect, his work was done as far as he was concerned."



Image 10: Ilya Belsitzman

⁸ Esther Zandberg, "Architect Ilya Belsitzman dies", Haaretz, August 2nd, 2006.

A Partnership

Belsitzman and Leitersdorf met at Ze'ev Rechter's firm, as previously mentioned. Their embarking on a joint independent journey seems to have been carried out due to them winning third place at the Tiberius Hot Springs planning in 1945, while at Rechter's firm. A year later, the two won the Petach Tiqva Histadrut House planning competition, thus opening many more opportunities to plan additional projects for the General Council. These opportunities were vigorously realized by the two from then until the end of their partnership when Andrei died in 1970.

Unfortunately, the partners did not publish their works and few materials remain from their firm.⁹ However, it is known that most of their planned projects were the outcome of winning competitions and bids. Their credibility and professionalism helped them acquire their clients' trust, rewarding them with more projects to plan for those clients.

Evidence shows that Leitersdorf was rather introverted and managed his meetings concretely and to the point; despite that, he managed to impress his clients and create a relationship of mutual respect with them. His son, architect Thomas Leitersdorf, remembers his father's meetings with the vibrant and influential then-Secretary General of the Workers Council of Petach Tiqva, Pinchas Rashish (who later became Mayor of Petach Tiqva and was re-elected to the position twice). "I guess the integrity of the Yekke (German-Jewish) education, his professionalism and modesty, captured Rashish," he tells. "They had great symbiosis."

"Each of the partners," architect Amos Belsitzman tells, "planned his 'own' projects and they consulted one another, with a rare harmony and mutual respect. They would speak in third-person German to each other."

Leitersdorf and Belsitzman were not "the quintessential court architectures of the Zionist labor project."¹⁰ They were not part of the political and social circles of the labor movement leaders at

⁹ In this regard, we should mention that due to a lack of proper documentation, it is hard to determine which of them was the main influence in each project. However, we can say that Belsitzman planned the hospitals and guest houses while Leitersdorf mostly planned the various Histadrut buildings as well as different commercial and industrial projects; his engineering-construction skills and experience vastly influenced the firm's planning. The initial sketches of the various projects were mostly the outcome of their practical cooperation.

¹⁰ Alona Nitzan Shifan, *Architecture as a Zionist Action – From a Conceptual Change to a Cultural Diplomacy*, from the book *Arie Sharon – Architect of the Country*.

the national level, but were mostly close with the local Histadrut leadership of the Petach Tiqva Workers Council.¹¹ The personal relationships they formed with the local Histadrut leadership in the various settlements – relationships which helped include them in restricted architectural competitions and receive commissions – were first and foremost possible due to the successful planning and impressive outcome of the Petach Tiqva Histadrut House.

Rashish relentlessly worked to grant the two additional projects for Histadrut institutions. Among other sources, we can learn this from his letter to Histadrut member Finkelstein, the Unemployed Foundation Secretary, from November 17th, 1948: “D.M [Dear Member],” Rashish wrote. “It is extremely unfortunate that you have yet to visit our new Histadrut House. There is no doubt you would have enjoyed the building’s format from its architectural aspect, etc. I recommend you incorporate these architects in your upcoming, low-scale competition for the Culture Center; I do so for the benefit of the matter. The architects are Leitersdorf-Belsitzman, 140 Ehad HaAm street. Maybe you should visit us nonetheless?”¹²

The architecture created by Leitersdorf and Belsitzman for the Histadrut, as Zvi Efrat wrote, could be located “on the style seam between the international-style architecture (of Arie Sharon) and the ‘Israeli Project’ architecture, without the need to use brutal and forceful architecture, but strict and pragmatic, as well as functional and modest architectural language, according to those who commissioned it, while knowingly moving away from unnecessary esthetics and design aspects.” [Image 11]

The duo’s architectural work for the Petach Tiqva Histadrut was a step ahead of the “Israeli Project” style of building, the architectural style typical of the sum total of construction work done in Israel during its first two decades, according to Efrat, who adds that this style is nothing more than “the representation of the Social-Realist hegemony which managed to dictate a tasteful regime and operate an efficient mechanism of planned culture, in order to create a new

¹¹ This calls for a comparison between them and architect Arie Sharon, who belonged to the social elite, worked for the government and represented the Social-Zionist project in the years leading up to the establishment of Israel and its first years. Belsitzman and Leitsdorf, who arrived in Israel 15 and 19 years later (respectively) were also not part of the **Architects Circle** (1932), which greatly influenced local modern planning discussions from the 1930s all the way through to the establishment of the State of Israel.

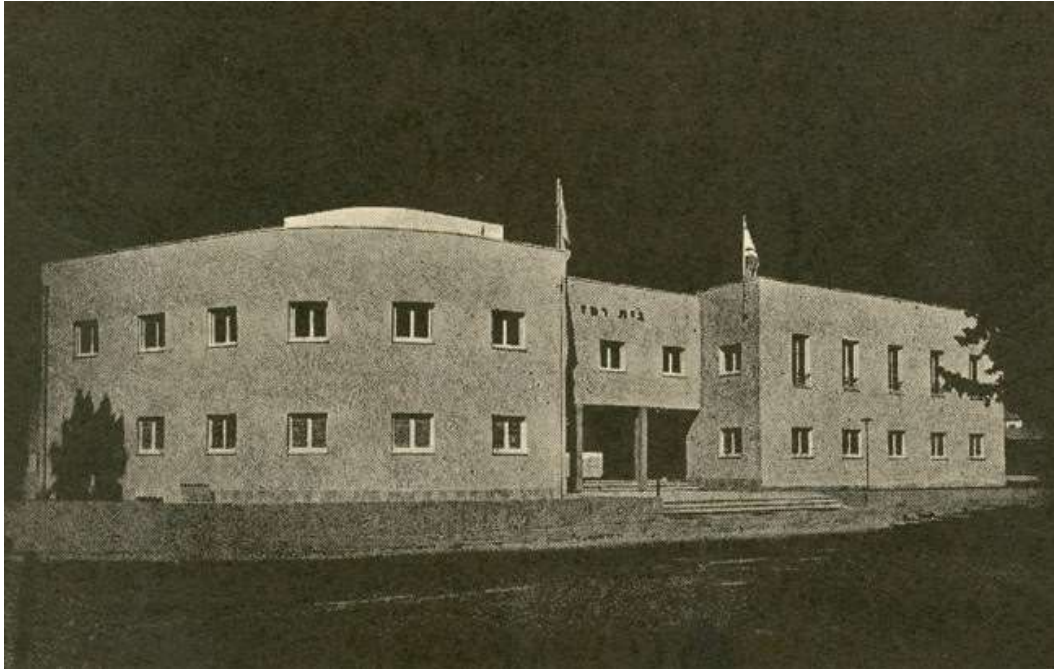
¹² File: General Council, division: Petach Tiqva Workers Council. File mark: 250-54-499-IV, The Pinhas Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research archives.

surface, a new countenance, a new type, an official Israeli one, completely different from that of the Israeli settlement during the British Mandate.”

In this regard, we should mention that even though this article is about the two Leitersdorf and Belsitzman structures at the Histadrut compound in Petach Tiqva, the two are signed on other successful projects, also worthy of detailed research; all in all, these consist of twenty projects that won various planning competitions, seven of them first place.

The two planned the following, for municipalities and various institutions, among others:

- The Petach Tiqva Histadrut House (1946, first place) [image 12].
- The Hadera Histadrut House (1949) [image 13].
- The Rishon LeZiyon Histadut House (1951) [image 14].
- The Ra'anana Histadrut House (1951) [image 15].
- The Ramat Gan Workers Council House (1951) [image 16].
- The Oranim Kibbutzim College (1947, first place).
- The Hadera Solel Bone House (1949).
- The Hadera Yad Lebanim House (1952).
- The Petach Tiqva Yad Lebanim House (1955).
- The Petach Tiqva Tax Bureau House (1956).
- Wings at the Tel HaShomer Hospital (1957-1968).
- Wings at the HaSharon Hospital, Petach Tiqva (1959).
- The Sugat Factory, Quiryat Gat (1961).
- The Petach Tiqva Human Anatomy Museum (1966).
- Tadmor School of Hospitality, Herzliya (1967).
- Sharett School of Education, Tel Aviv University (1969).



Images 11: Other projects by Andrei and Ilya:

Top, the Netanya Histadrut House (1953),

Bottom, the Petach Tiqva Employment Bureau



Image 12: The Petach Tiqva Histadrut House inauguration ceremony, 1948.



Image 13: The Hedera Histdrut House



Image 14: The Rishon LeZiyon Histadrut House



Image 15: The Ra'anana Histadrut House



Image 16: The Ramat Gan Workers Council House

The Histadrut Compound

The permanent structure of Israel's first "Workers Club" was inaugurated at the Petach Tiqva colony on Hanukkah 1912, funded by the Jewish National Fund. The club, which initially operated in a temporary apartment at the Tomshevsky House (Zerah Barnett street), played an important role in the workers' lives and its influence reached further than the colony itself.

The club's permanent structure included a spacious hall designated for the club, a library, a kitchen and eight bedrooms which could each house three bachelor workers. The club was also used as a meeting place for the workers to meet the young generation of the farmers' descendants.

The structure, dating back to the time Petach Tiqva was a colony, had matching architecture, highly influenced by the local Bezalel style. It was an elongated, single-floor stone structure with a clay shingled roof. The entrance was in the middle for the structure and the symmetrical façade was emphasized by an external and elevated lobby and an elevated central section.

In many ways, the Workers Club was the programmatic and architectural source of the People Houses and other public structures the Histadrut established across Israel in the following decades.

The structure was demolished in June 1947, after a long struggle. Pinchas Rashish suggested the structure be demolished; as mentioned, he was the General Secretary of the city's Workers Council and later on its mayor. He met with intense objections from the people of the Second Aliyah. "That is where we went hungry, where we rejoiced, where we sang and danced, we spent a great part of our lives at this Workers House," they said, and Israel Feinberg told of how a pioneer from Dgania came to him and said: "I arrived especially all the way from my farm to see the rooms and walls you are looking to tear down for the last time. Don't you know that those are not walls you are tearing down, but history?"¹³

However, Rashish was not deterred and even led the special collection started to fund the new building of the Histadrut House, whose members purchased a symbolic brick.

¹³ Zalman, Yoeli, *Everyday Pioneer: Pinchas Rashish – Life Moments and Period Events*, Tel Aviv, Federation of Local Authorities, 1981.

Demolishing the old club, as Trofa wrote in *Foundations of the Story of Petach Tiqva*, was “a new record [...] instead there was a huge and lavish three-floor house [...] housing all the Histadrut institutions within it.”

The old building, then, was sacrificed in favor of the new building, but this could actually mark the basis of the historical value of the location: even though the original structure was destroyed, its replacement was built on its ruins. We learned early on that continuity is important and that the existence of the Histadrut compound has cultural significance preserving a well-defined urban area at the historical center of Petach Tiqva, at the intersection of Haim Ozer and the Histadrut streets.

Everything that was built in that compound was initiated by the Histadrut and the Petach Tiqva Workers Council: **The Old Workers House** (there, as mentioned, until 1947), later on the three most important buildings which this article is about: **Heichal Cinema** building (1935), **The Histadrut House** (1946), and **The Tax Bureau House** (1957), which continued to serve the Workers Council and the rest of the Histadrut institutions despite the many years that had passed since their construction and despite the pressures of development and competing priorities in the city center [Image 18].

This historic Histadrut compound in Petach Tiqva therefore reflects the power and influence of the city’s Workers Council from its first days at the end of the Ottoman Empire, through its growth during the British Mandate, and eventually the changes it underwent during the first days of the State of Israel until its demise.

However, the importance of the compound does not relate only to the General Council and its history; its nature, content and history are a living testament to the wondrous process of transforming the first farmers’ colony into an industrial city and center for the Labor rights struggle in Israel.

The compound, which started out in a modest colony, now lies at the heart of a city with a quarter-million residents, containing the country’s largest industrial zones. The preservation of such a compound is significant to the history of the place and country and includes a dimension of both physical and spiritual urban renewal.



Image 17: A poster of the Histadrut, “The Construction Project Map”, 1950s.

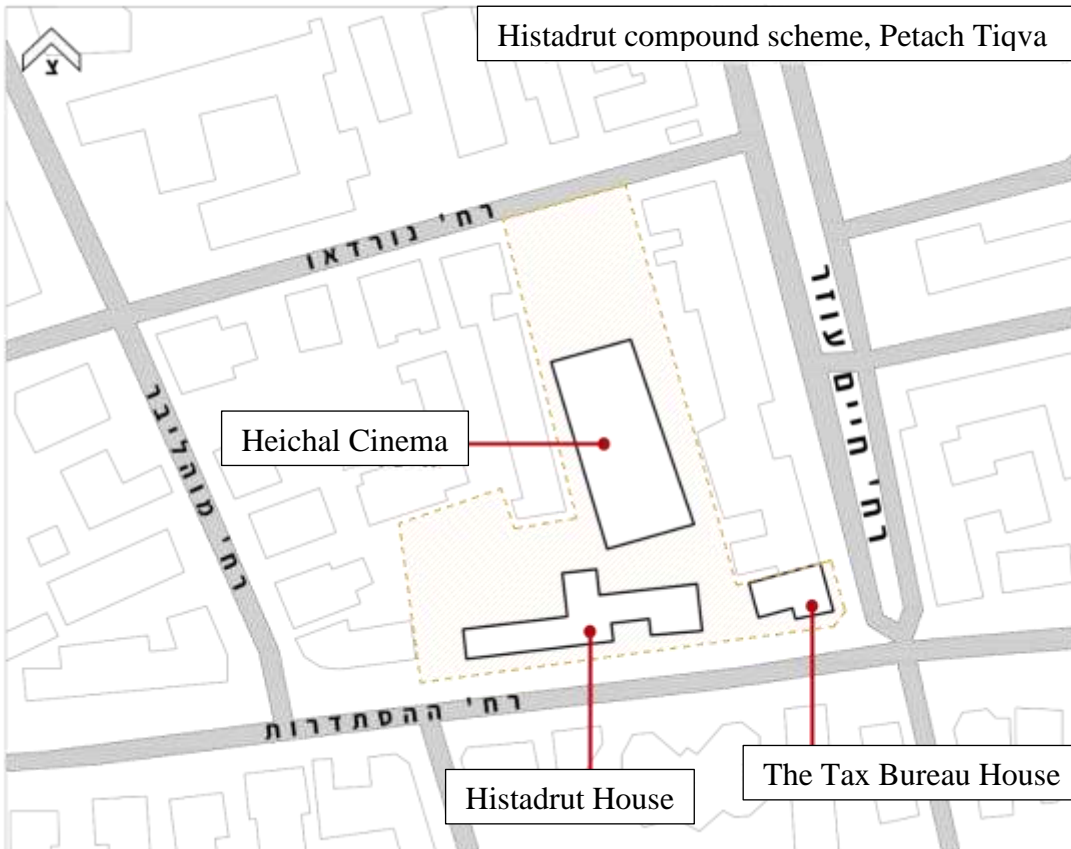


Image 18: The Histadrut compound scheme, Petach Tiqva

The Structures Up for Preservation at the New Histadrut Compound

The Histadrut House (1946)

Planned by architects Andrei Leitersdorf and Ilya Belsitzman.

19 HaHistarut street, Petach Tiqva.

In 1936, after architect Arie Sharon finished working on Heichal cinema – which was also built for the Petach Tiqva Workers Council – he was asked to plan the new workers' building that would be built instead of the old Workers Club, which was there for “thirty six years [...] and graciously served the workers population, which since grew massively and was too small to

contain all those coming there,” as was written in a Histadrut publication titled *50 years – Working Petach Tiqva*¹⁴

Sharon asked to locate the new structure in the empty lot in front of the cinema, meaning between it and the street to the south (since the old Workers House, which was up for demolition, was situated along the street and the cinema was built behind it – a fact that determined the limitations of the planning for the Histadrut structure to be built in the old club’s stead). He offered to build a four-story building, which would serve as a built-up façade to the street. The structure he offered had two horizontal segments, clearly designated: the two upper floors would be used for council offices while the bottom two floors would be for public use, to service the workers. In the eastern side of the building planned by Sharon, there was supposed to be an open and wide passage, leading from the main street to the cinema.

However, Sharon’s proposal was not carried out [image 19]. Due to that, the Petach Tiqva Workers Council and the Israeli Architects and Engineers Association held a competition.

The program for the competition, held at the end of 1945¹⁵, was written jointly by architects Arie Sharon, Ze’ev Rechter, Yaakov Pinkerfeld and Eliyahu Roda; these were some of the most well-known architects of that time. The size of the lot intended for construction was about 1,437 m² and the roles of the building were to “house within it the organizational, economic and cultural institutes of the Petach Tiqva Workers Council.” There were 6,000 Histadrut members by that year and it was determined that the new structure should be able to house up to 10,000 members. In accordance to the architectural image of the Histadrut, the program’s main demand was that the building would become “the city’s main value.”

As for the size of the building, the program stated that the maximum allocated space is “the entire area restricted by the building’s outline” (meaning 1,500 m² per floor) and that its maximal height would be 12.5 meters of three floors. At Sharon’s insistence, it was also determined that “the program should ensure the best possible ventilation of the workspaces. North-western winds during the day, at 22-2700 [sic] the wind breaks and starts blowing from

¹⁴ Reicher Mordechai, *50 Years Working Petach Tiqva: 1920-1970: events, deeds, people*, General Council of Workers in the Land of Israel. Petach Tiqva Workers Council Publishing, Petach Tiqva, Workers Council and Beit Neta, Center for History of Conquering Labor and Histadrut Knowledge, 1970.

¹⁵ From the program document published as part of the competition documents, in the Histadrut House building file 11/48; division name: Petach Tiqva Workers Council, Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research archives.

the southeast. We assume we should prefer the northern side for daytime workrooms and the southern side for evening time workrooms.”

All in all, there were 49 suggestions submitted to the competition, and that of partners Leitersdorf and Belsitzman won first place.¹⁶ The building plan they presented would later become a typological, physical and programmatic prototype that would repeat itself in many of the Histadrut buildings in small and medium urban settlements throughout Israel.

Even though their original proposal included three floors above the basement level, a fourth floor was added to the structure’s western and central wing during construction (additional expansion programs that the two planned for later were never executed). In accordance with the common Histadrut program of those days, the planning combined various Histadrut functions under one roof, a distinct expression of the bureaucratic, social and cultural centralization of the Histadrut’s management, which was evident in both the old Workers House as well as in many other Workers Council Houses.

The original proposal included:

A basement floor: a gymnasium and service rooms for the Hapoel organization, cafeteria, an apartment for the on-location guard, storage rooms and garages.

First floor: Petach Tiqva Workers Loans building, library and study room, Agricultural Construction Firm (ACF) offices, Solel Boneh offices and reserve offices.

Second floor: offices of the Workers Council and professional associations, Tax Bureau offices.

Third floor: a hall for conferences and meetings of the Workers council, a club for female workers and study rooms for the worker youth.

It should be noted that establishing a large hall in the structure was one of Leitersdorf and Belsitzman’s most important ideas, as they identified the need of

¹⁶ The judges’ panel at the competition included engineer Zion HaShimshoni of Petach Tiqva, architect Yaakov Yeroset of Tel Aviv, Eliyahu Roda of Petach Tiqva, member Pinchas Rashish (who was still the Petach Tiqva Workers Council Secretary) and Moshe Soroka, member of the General Council’s Medical Care Center.

the members of the Histadrut, who were holding pre-election conferences. At a later interview¹⁷ with Ilya Belsitzman in 2005, the architect said that “at that time, they did not build halls and we started in Petach Tiqva the trend that each Histadrut House would have a hall to gather the audience; and, as long as you have a hall, why not use it as a cinema and bring in a little money? This way, we solved several issues and the model also transferred to other Histadrut Houses in the country.”¹⁸

In order to fund the construction of the large and expensive building (55,000-70,000 Israeli Pounds) they had to conduct a collection from all Petach Tiqva workers who were members of the Histadrut. Many signed up for the task, but there were quite a few who refused. In the summer of 1946, the Petach Tiqva Workers Council issued a certain receipt stating that “the member contributed to the Histadrut building a sum of 2 Israeli Pounds” [image 20].

The structure’s cornerstone was set in the beginning of July 1947, at an impressive ceremony in the backyard of the old Workers House, which was about to be demolished. Among the attendees of the ceremony were the leaders of the local community as well as the Histadrut management. Construction itself was carried out, as was the custom, by the Histadrut’s company of Solel Boneh and lasted for over a year.

The project was undertaken during a tense period, as the British were leaving Israel and the War of 1948 was beginning, which meant a severe shortage of building materials. Despite it all, the outcome was a great and impressive building for its time, inaugurated at the height of the Independence War, in the summer of 1948 [image 21]. Before its inauguration, on June 24th, 1948, the Petach Tiqva Workers Council Secretariat approached all the Hebrew newspapers in the country and informed them of a press conference at Rashish’s new office. The conference was called a day before the inauguration in order to encourage positive reviews from the media, which this enormous undertaking justly deserved.

¹⁷ An interview from *Planning the Histadrut Houses of the Leitsdorf and Belsitzman firm* – a paper that was part of the Israeli Architecture course guided by architects Zvi Efrat and Zvi Elhayani, submitted by Hagit Kolev and Meital Zur, September 2005, Department of Architecture, Bezalel Academy for Arts and Design.

¹⁸ It must be noted that the Histadrut House in Jerusalem, planned by D. Kochinsky, was already built in the second half of the ‘30s with a restaurant, concert hall and HaPoel hall. This, in addition to offices of the Tel Aviv Workers Council in Beit Brenner, planned by Sharon, which contained a hall used by the cooperative restaurant.

At the ceremony itself, Rashish said that “the inauguration of this house shows how grand the vision of the pioneers was and how deep the recognition of the righteousness of their industry was; here, we have grown from 12 Hebrew workers 44 years ago to a grand camp of 8,000 workers – the pioneer before the camp...”

Dozens of congratulations were sent from all the Histadrut bodies to the Petach Tiqva Workers Council for the new Histadrut House, especially to Histadrut member Rashish himself. For instance, the Central Committee of the Histadrut Construction Workers wrote: “Let us wish that this house serves as a loyal nest for the thousands of organized labor workers and a gateway to the tens of thousands of new immigrants that seek shade under your roof, until you cannot contain them all. The State of Israel was established and became what it is right before our eyes, let us march together and lay a foundation for a Socialist Israeli State.” The congratulatory letter was sent on August 13th, 1948, shortly after the declaration of the State of Israel and the beginning of the Independence War, just before mass immigration to Israel began.¹⁹

The Dan Cooperative also sent Rashish a greeting that glorified the new building: “The heart expands at the sight of this glorious and grand building, now added to the heritage assets of the Petach Tiqva Histadrut; beyond it being an asset, we hope it will also bring in humanitarian assets that project from within to the streets of the working public in Petach Tiqva. It should be in the Histadrut’s favor and praise that there has yet to be a public house such as this one. We are lucky to have this housewarming on the 70th anniversary of the colony of Petach Tiqva and on this crucial year of the establishment of the State of Israel on this land.”²⁰

When we evaluate the preservation potential of the Histadrut building, various values are worth pointing out, some of which have gone through significant changes over the years. These could be divided into historical, social and architectural values.

Alongside the **historical values**, the structure represents the Histadrut’s victory at the time regarding the organized struggle for the rights and welfare of the Jewish farmers and industrial workers; all in a city which was one of the main focal points of employment in the

¹⁹ Secretariat file; division name: Petach Tiqva Workers Council, file mark 250-54-507-IV, Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research archives, *ibid*.

²⁰ Secretariat file; division name: Petach Tiqva Workers Council, file mark 250-54-507-IV, Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research archives

country. The building, constructed as a testament to the victory of the class struggle of the Petach Tiqva workers, became the largest Histadrut structure in the country upon completion, and was thereafter used as the General Council's headquarters for a decade, until it was transferred to Tel Aviv in 1956.

Alongside the **social values**, it should be mentioned that the Histadrut house provided many public services for the Histadrut members and served as a meeting point for versatile social activities for senior citizens, Holocaust survivors and others.

Among the activities in the structure were:

- Loans Bank, established in one of the Histadrut house's wings, which provided members with financial services, loans and credit. The Petach Tiqva workers, the Histadrut members, could receive loans for various purposes, from purchasing furniture for their homes to aid in getting family members to immigrate to Israel. The bank also helped reincorporate ex-servicemen returning from World War II.
- The Working Youth (HaNo'ar HaOved), the Histadrut's youth movement, was established to protect the rights of youths at work and acted, from the very beginning, to establish evening schools in which the working youth could acquire education.
- Solel Boneh, with offices located on the western side of the building, had a separate entrance. The company was established in 1942 as the executive branch of the Histadrut for construction and development works, and was the biggest and most influential construction company in Israel prior to the establishment of the new state and its first years. During World War II, the company worked for the British Army in constructing buildings and infrastructure.
- Various trade unions (print, work, post workers, etc.), with their offices in the main wing of the Histadrut house.

- The gymnasium, established for the Hapoel sports association, acting in the fields of athletics and gymnastics, mostly out of concern for the worker's health and mending physical damage that long and strenuous work brought on.

Alongside the **architectural values**, it is notable that it is a dignified and practical structure which has maintained its values over its seventy years of existence. The building seems to be rooted into the ground, without any mediation between it and the street; the basement floor is lit by hatches built into the main façade at set spaces, and do not diminish the monolithic impression of the building.

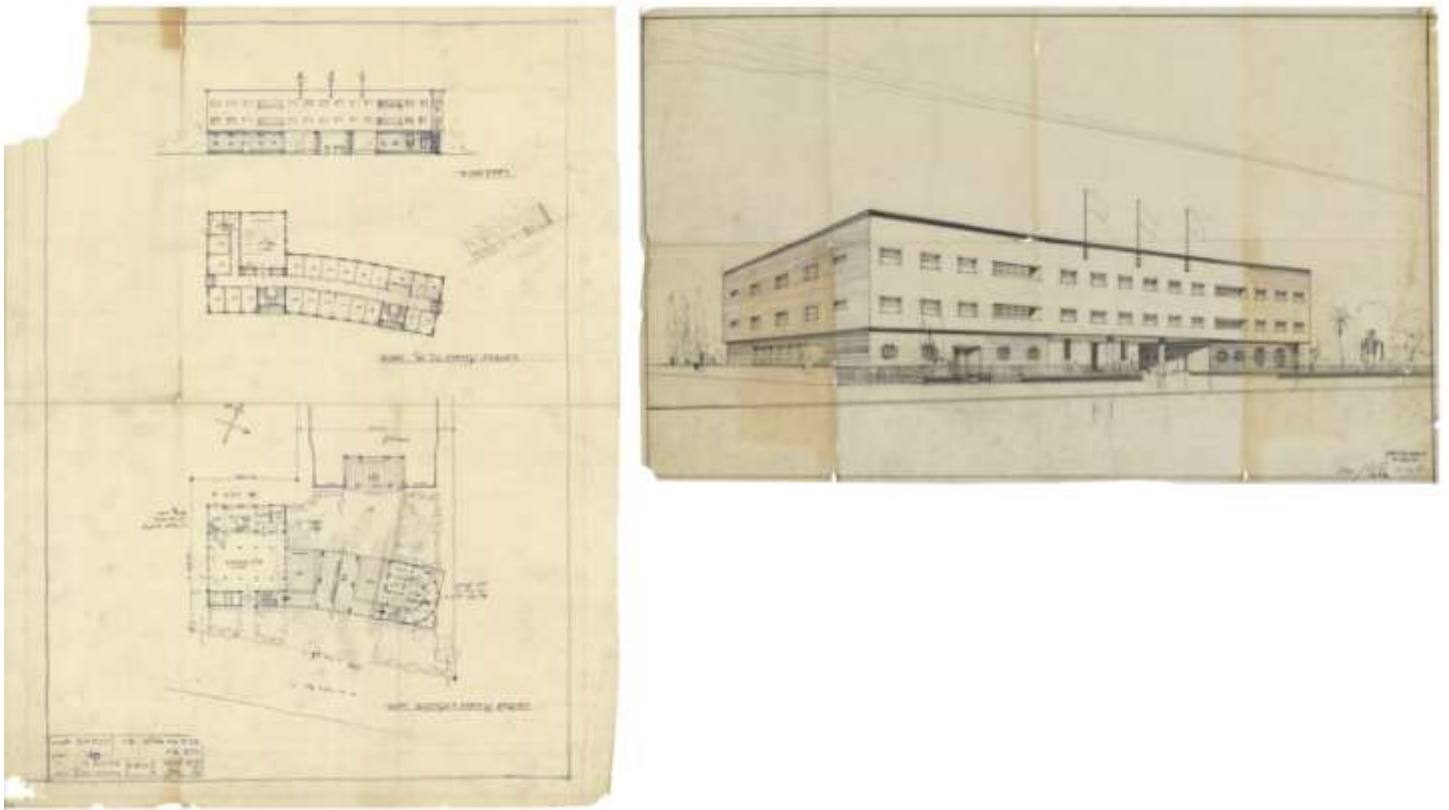
Despite the building's length, and its position along the street, the Histadrut House cannot be seen from afar; this practical modesty is a mark of Leitersdorf and Belsitzman's works for the Histadrut, since a workers' house is no place for monumentalism. The emphasis was on efficiency, pragmatism and frugality, and the outcome is a modest building, with no frills or other architectural elements that were common among those heavily influenced by the international style (such as cherubs and cement roof racks to accentuate the entrances, columns on the ground floor, special plaster, etc.) The building's long façade, merging with the street (but still allowing a gathering plaza thanks to the entrance's withdrawal at the central part) is free of the elements that were common in Sharon's and others' works, such as cornices, roof racks and columns [image 22].

In the past, when the street at the southern border of the historical colony wasn't entirely built yet, and the houses surrounding it to the north and east were small, shingle-roofed houses, the modern, flat-roofed public building was unusual and contributed to the development of the city and its expansion southwards.

Alongside the **cultural significance of the building**, we should mention, first and foremost, the authenticity that was preserved when it comes to its external appearance. The building's façade remained almost as originally planned, and the volume of the original building was preserved as well, in all three of its parts. Most of the original window openings remained, as did the flights of stairs and most of the internal division plans. The fourth floor, added to the

original building, was also planned by Leitersdorf and Belsitzman but does not damage the building's integrity and appears as if part of the original structure.

Before us, then, is a historical building with cultural, architectural and historic significance, not only for local communities but also for all organized workers around Israel.



Images 19: Arie Sharon's Petach Tiqva Histadrut House proposal (1936).

ההסתדרות הכללית של העובדים העברים בארץ ישראל
מועצת פועלי פתח תקוה

לבנה N° 000323

לבנין בית ההסתדרות בפתח תקוה

הח' 17.12.47

תרם לבנה לבנין ההסתדרות בסך שתי (2) לא"י

קד תש"ז - 1947

חומת ותיקים

מ.ר.ט.י. התכנית:

- (א) מרתף: אולם התכנסות וחורי שירות ליהודים, מנוף, דירת לשומר, מחסנים ונדרים.
- (ב) קומה א': בנין קיבוץ מלח של העובדים בפתח תקוה, ספרים וחורי עיון, משרדי חקלא, סוללנות ומשרדים דורכיים.
- (ג) קומה ב': משרדי מועצת הפועלים והאגודות המקצועיות, משרדי לשכת חשב.
- (ד) קומה ג': אולם לאומות וליסיבות מועצת הפועלים, קלוב למפעלות וחורי עיון לנוער העובד.

בסיס 1947 משרים מרובקים

תכנית בית ההסתדרות בפתח תקוה



קדומה קי הארייבלים: לויטרוסרוף - בלויטרוסרוף תל אביב

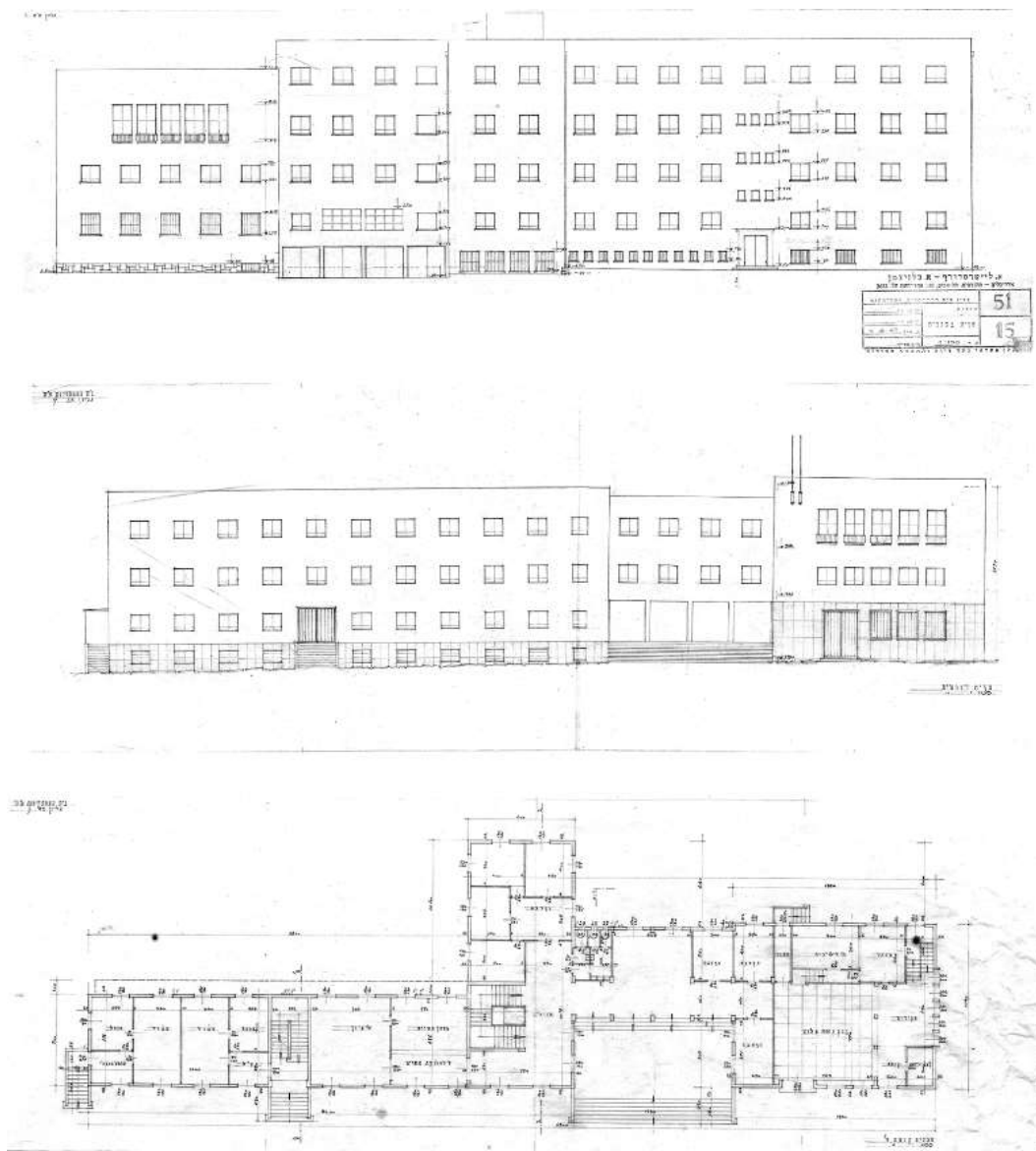
אשרה פת אחר עיי דעת השופטים: התנגדותם: הסמכות, ירושם, שאינן ומכיר מועצת הפועלים - מ. רשום וקבלת מרס ראשון בנין 49 תכנית שדוגמה לועדת השופטים.

בית הפועלים הראשון בארץ ישראל



נבנה בשנת 1911
נחרס יוני 1947 - תמוז תש"ז

Image 20: A receipt for contributing to the Histadrut building for 2 Israeli Pounds (1947).



Images 21: Leitersdorf and Belsitzman's plan for the Petach Tiqva Workers House (1947)



Images 22: A typical Arie Sharon building with cornices, roof racks and columns, Brenner House, Tel Aviv, 1930s.

Heichal Cinema (1935)

21 Histadrut street, Petach Tiqva

Planned by architect Arie Sharon, extension and renovation by Leitersdorf and Belsitzman.
[image 23].

“During World War I, an Arab man would occasionally arrive in Petach Tiqva with a donkey that had a dovecote-like box and a tripod. This man would declare a ‘Fruga’, a show, for a ‘Matlik’ (small coin). He would settle in the colony’s garden, place his ‘dovecote’ on the tripod and project a silent movie – a newsreel that showed the illustrious Turkish Sultan, a famous bellydancer from the east and images from the Russia-Japan War. The movie was not projected onto a screen but rather the inside of the box. The viewers had to put their eyes up against the

slot at the side of the box and the man would spin a crank so that the images would move around inside.”²¹

This “magic lantern” was the beginning of cinema in Petach Tiqva. Later on, there were a few places built which showed silent movies. The Heichal Cinema was built in 1935, at the initiative of the local Workers Council and with the support of the Histadrut, which sought to have not only shows and concerts, but also balls, lectures, gatherings and worker assemblies.

The Workers Council’s Heichal Cinema was built on a JNF-owned lot, behind the old Workers House. At the time the lot was at the southern edge of the growing colony, which would become a city only two years later and needed a theater that would also be used as a cinema.

Petach Tiqva, back then, was still very agriculture-oriented in its nature, with a few initial sparks of industry. The settlement developed around the houses of the farmers living there; at its edge, the further you got from the center, there were wide-open lots. The lot on which the Heichal Cinema was built on was then at the southern edge of the settlement and privately owned by the JNF. The adjacent lot, at the end of Wolfson street, already had the old Workers Club facing south, and the big lot to the north of the club had a vegetable garden planted during World War I that was meant to provide the workers with fresh vegetables.

In a map from the Mandate era, dated 1928, the lot on which the cinema was established had a impressive C-shaped²² agricultural structure on it, with its yard facing eastwards to the small houses on Haim Ozer street (then Yavne street). At the northern part of the lot was a clinic. The cinema was built on the majority of the lot, between the clinic to the north, and the Workers House to the south. Since the lot sloped northwards towards the valley line (later on HaTe’ala street and nowadays HaHagana street), they could only build two floors on its southern part and three floors on its northern part.

The cornerstone to the “Petach Tiqva Workers Council’s Amphitheater” was laid in March 1934, in the backyard of the old Workers Club. The lot’s natural northward slump inspired the idea to have an open amphitheater, but Sharon – who was then regarded as the “Histadrut’s architect” – offered to establish a closed rectangular theater instead with about one-thousand seats (800 on

²¹ Arie Hashbia, *Petach Tiqva 1878-1998, a City and Mother*, Milo Publishing, 1998

²² The undersigned did not know what the structure was used for, as it no longer appears on maps as of 1935.

the ground floor and 200 more in the balcony), a deep stage and open roof, which was a kind of compensation for rejecting the original plan and was meant to be open in the summer in order to ventilate the hall. Indeed, the vast budget the Histadrut allocated for this project allowed for the construction of the first-ever electrical roof installed in a cinema in Israel.

Despite its measurements, which were disproportionate to the houses in the colony, it blended in well with the scenery upon its completion and did not appear monumental. The main question in fitting the structure to the “scenery and surroundings” was discussed quite often in articles published by Sharon. “What is more important, that the building should blend in with nature and its surroundings without clashing, or should the building itself, be emphasized and impose itself on the environment since it bears public importance?” In his article, “Public Construction in Israel”²³, he replies “we should have a maximal degree of modesty and matching not only but especially when it comes to public construction, ...” And so he did – the modesty and functionality he bestowed on the original building were also preserved in the changes Leitersdorf and Belsitzman planned in 1950 [image 19].

Sharon did not give the Heichal Cinema characteristics of international style, like his other public buildings, but rather planned façades in the manner of industry buildings along with a slanted roof. The entrance was facing south, towards an open plaza, separating the cinema from the back of the old Workers Club building and the street.

The entrance façade was comprised of three levels: the front level was dark and low, from which the lobby entrance gaped, emphasized by a white cap-like roof supported by two round columns that went up to the top of the openings above the entrance; the second level, behind it, was a light and plastered wall; and the third level, the highest one, was roof gable, partially opened and made of wavy tin slabs. Despite its modesty, the façade attracted people from the lobby into the hall²⁴ [image 23], where there were murals of harvesting farmers on both sides of the stage.

²³ The article ‘*Public Construction in Israel*’ was published in the ‘*Twenty Years of Construction – Settlement, Housing and Workers Public Institutions*’ book, Engineers, Architectures and Surveyors Association Publishing, The General Council of the Hebrew Workers of the Land of Israel, Tel Aviv, 1940.

²⁴ We can learn of the importance City Hall also afforded the cinema and easy access to it from the unique permit it was given about ten years later, for the Histadrut House (no. 470620 of June 10th, 1947), in which it specifically

In 1950, as mentioned, Leitersdorf and Belsitzman were asked to plan changes to the structure and adjust it to the requirements of running a modern cinema²⁵. That is when the two planned the raising of the structure's front wing and also made changes to the entrance façade; the lobby was closed with doors and became part of the inside of the building. However, much of the original building remained, especially the pulled roof [image 24].

There is no doubt as to the local cultural significance of the Heichal Cinema. A testimony to its central role in city life and history can be seen, among other things, in the struggle that surrounded it for many decades – from its very first year of existence – between the city's liberal population, who sought to watch movies and go out on Friday nights and Saturdays, and its religious residents. The struggle reached its peak in the middle of the 1980s, with massive demonstrations by religious groups, lasting three years until 1987. It should be mentioned that the cinema remained open on Friday nights and Saturdays throughout that entire time.

However, the historical value of this structure supersedes even this matter.

The Heichal Cinema is the second public structure of the workers in that compound (after the old Workers Club, which was demolished), and it clearly signifies the growth of the Histadrut and its increasing power in the relevant years: a club intended for a small amount of workers became a giant urban hall with over a thousand seats.

Today, the structure is owned by a private entrepreneurship firm that intends to demolish it and build a high-rise in its stead. It now stands deserted and empty. However, even though the cinema had been inactive in recent years, its demolition would be considered a vicious erasure of one of the city's most historical and cultural focal points – a place with the ability to return and serve as a renewing and relevant cultural stronghold, which would better serve both young and old residents of the city today and in the future.

said that the Histadrut "would not hedge its lot at the border between the Histadrut House and the Heichal Cinema and no hole would be dug up in the plaza area."

²⁵ It is interesting to note that this is not the only Histadrut structure Leitsdorf and Belsitzman were asked to make changes to; it was the same for the Amal Cinema in Kfar Sava [image 25] and Brenner House in Tel Aviv (where they added a wing).

The preservation of the Histadrut Compound, and the Heichal Cinema in particular, would be a recognition of the city's and its residents' glorious past and a substantial contribution to their future.



Image 23: Heichal Cinema, Petach Tiqva, the historical one and after the additions made:

Top, the entrance façade designed by Sharon.

Bottom, the Heichal Cinema entrance façade after the Leitersdorf and Belsitzman addition, 1970s.

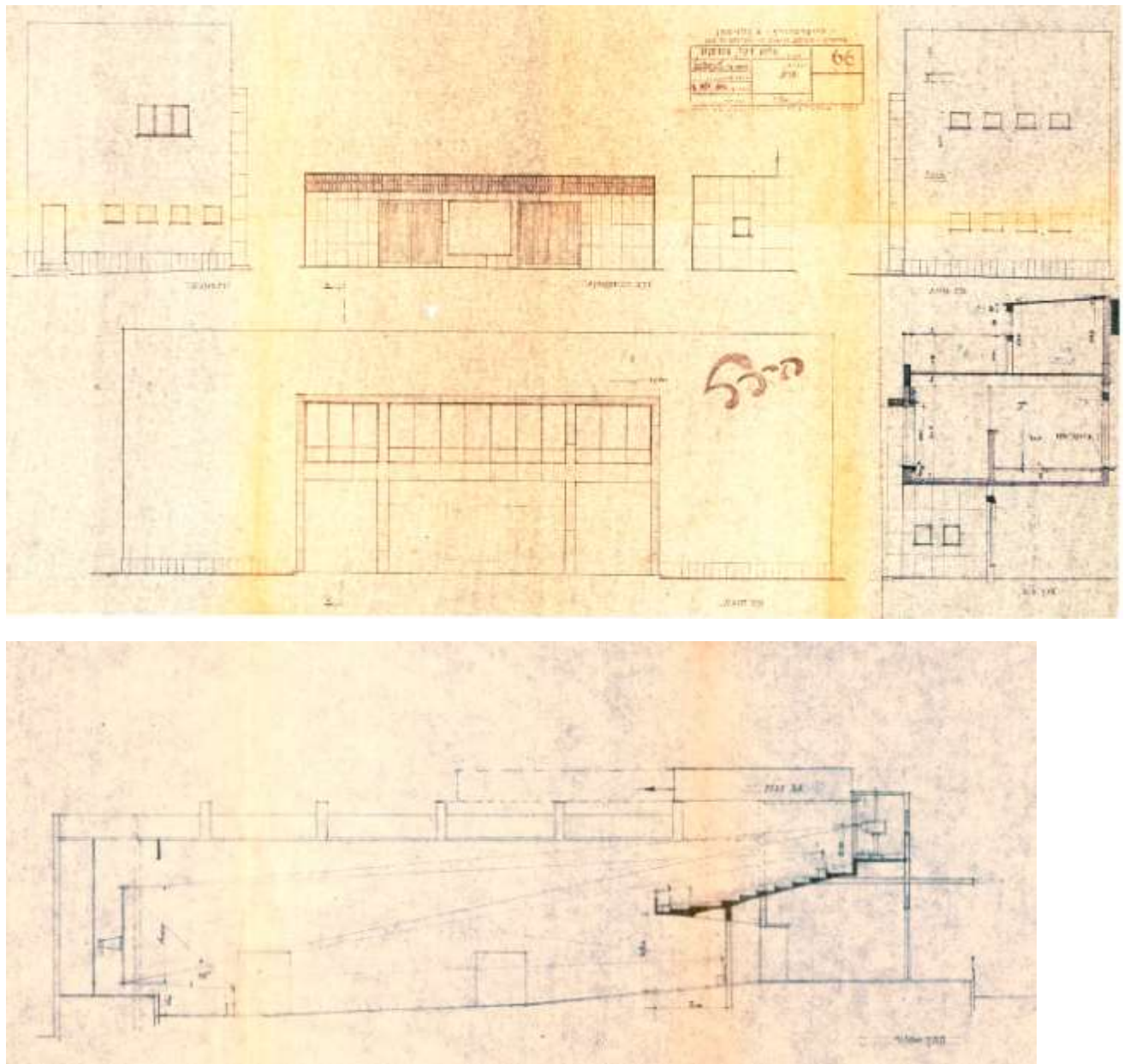


Image 24: Leitersdorf and Belsitzman's Heichal Cinema changes plan (1950).



Image 25: The People's House (Amal Cinema), Kfar Sava 1936:

Top, the historical structure.

Bottom, a recent photo with the changes made.

Tax Bureau House (1956-7)

23 Histadrut street, Petach Tiqva

Planned by Andrei Leitersdorf and Ilya Belsitzman [image 26]

Now used as a Clalit Health Care clinic

The Central Tax Bureau was established in 1937 to unify the taxes among Histadrut members instead of separate taxes (membership fees) that were the custom until then, and collect both the unified tax as well as the taxes of the branch organizations (meaning Hapoel HaMizrachi and Poal'ei Agudat Israel).

The bureau was entrusted with managing the Histadrut indexes, according to which it set the membership and rights of each member. It was also responsible for the election registry, determining which members were eligible to attend the elections, hence its immense importance to the organization as a whole and specifically to the local branches.

The Tax Bureau House itself was built about a decade after the nearby Histadrut House, in a corner lot on the northwestern corner of the intersection of Haim Ozer and the Histadrut (or Wolfson, as this part of the street was called then) streets. Its completion finalized the Histadrut Compound and it can be assumed that Leitersdorf and Belsitzman were awarded its planning both for their vast experience as well as their good and close relationship with Rashish, who had become the mayor of the city by then. Physical evidence of this can also be found in the fact that the main entrance and the building's main façade were planned in the south, on the Histadrut (then Wolfson) street, continuing the logic of the Histadrut House entrance array. It seems that this can also teach us about the power of the Histadrut and its thought process regarding urban planning at the local authority – as the person who initiated and built the Histadrut House is the same one who was mayor of the city while the decisions regarding the building of the Tax Bureau House were made

In this regard, we should mention that back when Leitersdorf and Belsitzman were entrusted with planning the new structure, there were over ten employees working in their firm, and it was considered one of the leading and most active firms in the country. Most of its work consisted of planning public structures around the country, mostly for the Workers Council and other Histadrut bodies at the local branches.

As for its physical structure, the original construction permit of October 8th, 1957 notes that the building was planned to be built on part of the big corner lot (plot 39), which exceeds 2,000 m². According to the lot's sketch, there were no other structures on that plot – even though a map dated from 1928 shows that prior to the establishment of the Tax Bureau House, there was a typical colony house which bordered the old Workers Club to the west and there is no record of when it was demolished.

Looking through the City Hall plans shows that until the 1960's, there were a few small colony houses north of the Tax Bureau House on Haim Ozer street, but those were demolished in

1958 due to the 1204 Petach Tiqva Urban Building Scheme to expand the street in front of the new City Hall building. Today, the building is adjacent to a row of multistory buildings for commercial and residential use along Haim Ozer street, which were gradually built according to a unified plan from the beginning of the 1970s onwards.

Being the first public-urban structure on that part of the street, which was still predominantly rural at the end of the 1950s, there were no entrances or commercial uses planned for the building's eastern façade (the one facing the street). Under said façade were closed balcony-like bumps, used as large windows (but not as actual balconies). It is possible that Leitersdorf and Blesitzmann had already predicted there would be residential houses built nearby, with balconies in them.

The Tax Bureau House is a two-story office building elevated from the ground which slopes northwards, and has a flat concrete roof. It is made of a reinforced concrete foundation and silicate brick walls. The functional planning of Leitersdorf and Blesitzmann divided the building's mass into two rectangular volumes, one wide and the other slimmer, up against each other to form a kind of T shape. That is how they created two open spaces, on both sides of the slim rectangle and the southern open space created by the withdrawal of the western wing, becoming part of the street.

The entrance to the building is from the south, into the wide rectangle, which was dedicated to traffic and receiving audiences, which included staircases, bathrooms and waiting rooms. There is a wide flight of stairs leading from the street to a roofed lobby, from which one would go up into a wide space to "wait". The ground floor had the "ticketing hall", used as the information center for all registered members and taxpayers. The hall was well-lit thanks to a line of identical set windows at the southern and northern facades. The rest of the offices on the ground floor were mostly for money collection.

On the first floor, in the narrow wing, were the accounting offices, archives and conference room, used by the manager, next to whose room was a special "tea kitchen".

The building meets the slanted ground with concrete columns, while the basement is partially set into the ground and supports the ground floor's concrete floor.

It is interesting to mention that when planning the Tax Bureau House, Leitersdorf and Blesitzmann did not forego the architectural gestures that were completely absent from their Histadrut House : the entrance wing they planned had a distinct diagonal portal which surrounded the entrance and the great first floor window above it, as if to cover those who enter the building. It is possible that those were all used by the planners to emphasize the intersection going towards the Histadrut street as you approach the branded Histadrut House.

Even though the building is positioned on the intersection of two main streets, it is not seen and is not conspicuous from afar, but completely blends into the street, with the modesty that characterized the two architects. Even though the houses around it grew over the years,

completely changing the urban scale, the old vegetation kept growing next to the historic buildings, preserving its intimate surroundings in the center of the city.

Those who visit the area today can find a row of residential structures along the Haim Ozer street, north of the Tax Bureau House, with a single commercial columned floor, combining with the pavement. The houses, closely knit together, present a unified and continuous front, with their rear side narrower than the one facing the street, which creates open gaps, allowing lighting and ventilation into the apartments. It is interesting to mention that the model of the houses strongly resembles the Tax Bureau House's model, built many years prior and that perhaps influenced their planning.

Anyone who seeks to examine the preservation potential of the Tax Bureau House will notice its distinct urban, architectural and cultural values.

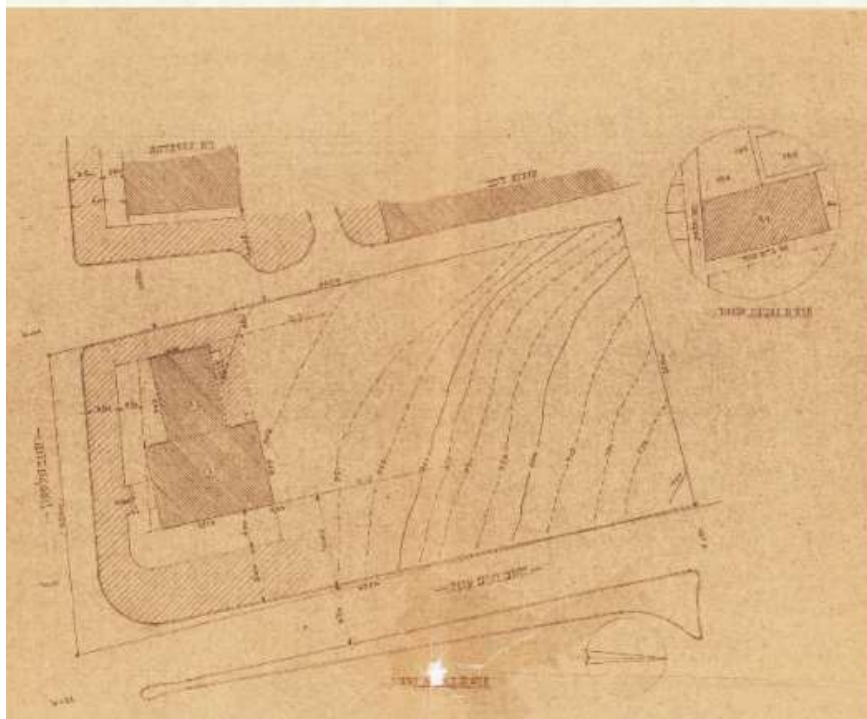
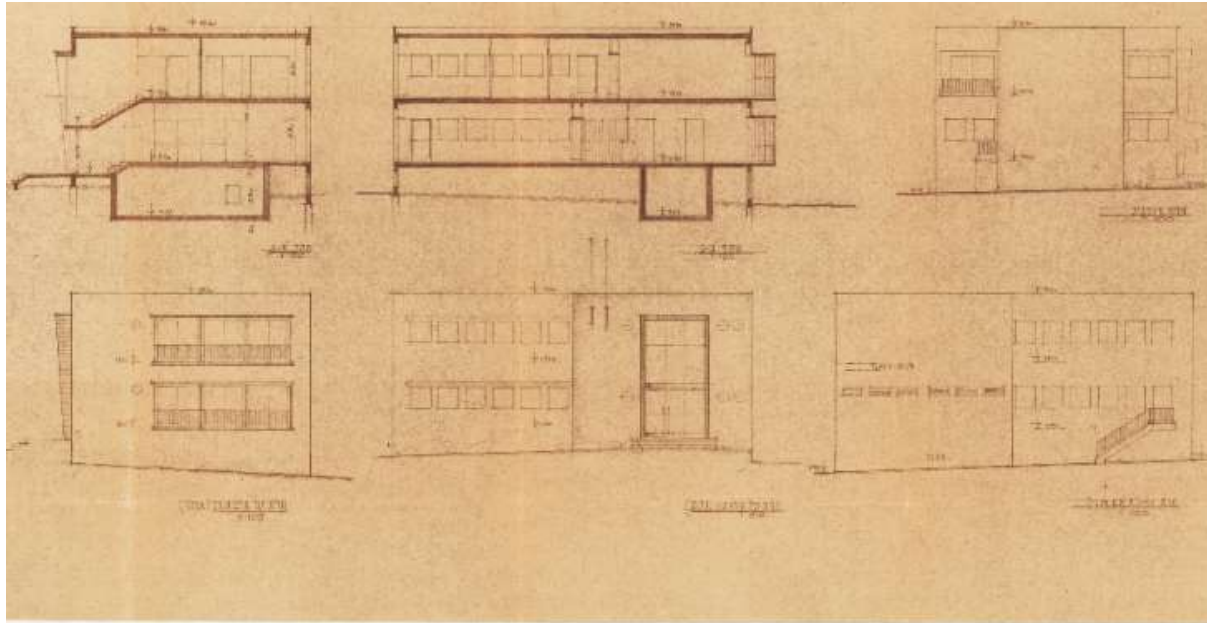
Alongside its **urban values**, the location of the structure should be mentioned first, at the corner of two main and bustling streets, which gives it a unique urban presence and importance, making it an inseparable part of the area's appearance and character – especially since the surrounding structures echo its own remarkably well-made architectural format, as mentioned.

Regarding the **architectural value**, the Tax Bureau House wonderfully displays its planners' power to raise a structure which is simultaneously functional yet also best serves the members and workers. It has a remarkable presence albeit modest a quality unfortunately missing from most of the structures of our time. In this context, we should also mention the pleasant architectural gestures which come across in the entrance portal and the front windows – all part of a restrained elegance, intimacy, stability as well as demonstrating quiet and calming security.

Regarding the **cultural and historical meaning**, we must inspect the structure as part of a series of Histadrut structures in the compound but also in light of the gradual, yet dramatic change in the balance of powers between the institutions of the Histadrut and those of the state. The quality and uniqueness of the Tax Bureau House are significant not only for the structure's contribution to the immediate urban environment, but compare favorably to fast, cheap and lackluster construction which characterized most of the structures the state built for its purposes at that time.



Image 26: Tax Bureau House front, 1960s.



Images 26: out of the sketch chart of the Tax Bureau House (1957).

The Histadrut Compound today

As the years passed, Petach Tiqva evolved and its values changed. The historical Workers House was demolished. The Heichal Cinema no longer played movies and there were no more rallies or ceremonies taking place there either. The plaza at its front was deserted. The Tax Bureau House became a health care clinic. The Histadrut House today still functions as it used to, but it might also be sold by the Histadrut, which is slowly losing its assets.

The story of these structures is the story of the city of Petach Tiqva, but also the story of the Histadrut itself, the most significant source of power in the years prior to the establishment of the State of Israel and in the first decades of its existence. The bricks and concrete tell the story of the organization, since it was at the height of its power and the peak of its influence over the daily routine of the workers and local politics – until its financial and ethical bankruptcy; to which the structures still standing testify even as they are in danger of being demolished any day, as they are overtaken by the temptation of speculative and saturated construction.

Furthermore, the story of the Histadrut Compound is also the story of architects Andrei Leitersdorf and Ilya Blesitzmann, who built most of the compound and were at the Histadrut's side in its heyday. Their architectural legacy, evident in the representative yet humble structures they established for the Petach Tiqva Workers Council, is a combination of quality realism and functional practicality, without any monumental gestures. It is certainly a modernist design, with a local inspiration clearly influenced by Arie Sharon.

The physical changes that occurred in the compound they planned and its surroundings mirror the changes in society and its values, as is the way of such processes. Unfortunately, these processes often include abandoning any value which isn't commercial or profitable, including values of preserving local heritage. We need to recognize that the values we hold today might not necessarily be those of future generations, for whom we are responsible and for whom we must preserve our legacy, as well as theirs.

Our role and duty are to think about the future of the compound while incorporating the memory of past values and the needs of tomorrow at the center of this historical city. To do so, both the municipality and the community need to prepare, including all stakeholders in order to form an educated and distinguished plan. There is a real option for urban revival in the city center – a revival which would incorporate both development and preservation.

It is the opinion of the undersigned, there is no work better suited than that of Leitersdorf and Blesitzmann to be at the center of such a revival. The future spirit of the renewed compound would benefit from the humble, yet confident qualities of their creation and its modernist spirit. The outcome would be a public compound, worthy of its name that incorporated historical and preserved structures coupled with new construction for residence and public needs.

Epilogue

The partnership of architects Andrei Leitersdorf and Ilya Blesitzmann produced a unique type of architecture, reflecting a crucial historical stage in the history of the country and Petach Tiqva. Their work belongs to the intermediate generation, between the modern and international architecture imported from Europe during the British Mandate, and the local Israeli architecture from the 1950s onwards. The architecture they created for the Histadrut was essentially modernist but lacked any fashionable characteristics or styled monumentalism; an architectural style that looked the residents of Petach Tiqva in the eyes, without any flattery or patronization.

Israeli architecture at the end of the British Mandate and the first days of the State of Israel is almost entirely represented by Arie Sharon and his fellow Tel Aviv architects' circle, but in Petach Tiqva and especially at the Histadrut Compound, the work of Andrei Leitersdorf is what gives the site its urban and architectural values, preserved to this day. The entire compound has a "casual practical architecture" feel to it, undoubtedly an essential part of the layered heritage of the city of Petach Tiqva. We should not give up on this heritage.

The call to preserve the compound and its buildings is a wake-up call, a call for the opportunity to renew the city center and not in a manner of 'evacuation for construction purposes', but by maximizing existing architectural values and developing them for the local community.

The preservation of the compound is a unique one time opportunity, to preserve the heritage as well as developing projects that will serve the public optimally.

With that said, preserving this historical site would also preserve the legacy and memory of Andrei Leitersdorf and Ilya Bensitzmann.

I do not know if Andrei Leitersdorf was a happy man. In one of the interviews he was described as a person who would not smile much, but his creativity attests that he found much satisfaction in his work and saw it as a public calling. This might also be the reason for the multiple works he performed for public institutions, preferring them over private clients, in complete contrast to the way he conducted himself before he immigrated to Israel.

His architectural heritage was important and is worth preserving. Leitersdorf's personality, tenacity, talent, professionalism and experience led him to create humble yet dignified public agriculture – two qualities that have all but disappeared from architects and their works.

Leitersdorf was a strict and uncompromising architect, who stuck to the smallest of details, but also served the clients who commissioned his work with loyalty and deserved professionalism. The practical modesty of his works best reflects the ethos that the Workers Movement and the systems of the country shared back then.

On a personal note, I will share that the story I have told in this article expanded further the more I worked on investigating and documenting it. I sought to evaluate the possibility of preserving

two structures in Petach Tiqva, but as I learned the historical background of their construction, I found much archival material about the buildings and what was there before them. Complex images started to slowly unravel before my eyes, starting from the Second Immigration and stretching on to the public construction of the Histadrut as a highly influential force on a national level. I discovered a compound that did wonderfully well to curate the spirit of the place – a time capsule from another era. A functional and esthetic place whose modesty fits the city of Petach Tiqva.

The author wishes to thank architect Tommy Leitersdorf, Gil Leitersdorf, Dr. Eran Leitersdorf, Giora Leitersdorf, architect Amos Blesitzmann, architect Adi Gilad, architect Yishay Lehavi, architect Zvi Elhayani, architect Hagit Koleb, architect Meital Tzur, Noa Chakim and architect Tamara Aharoni.

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Article Images Index

Number	Image name (title)	Year	Taken by	Source
1	Petach Tiqva old Workers House	Unknown	Unknown	Israeli Heritage Preservation Advancement Council website
2	Petach Tiqva Histadrut House (1946) today	2013	Yishay Lehavi and Adi Gilad	Irrelevant
3	Petach Tiqva Tax Bureau House (1957), Health Care clinic nowadays	August 2019	Omer Bar Oriyan	Amnon Bar-Or, Tal Gazit Architectures, LTD
4	Heichal Cinema nowadays	2013	Yishay Lehavi and Adi Gilad	Irrelevant
5	Current aerial photo of the compound as of today	2018	SoI	Survey of Israel
6	City center today – Haim Ozer and the Histadrut streets intersection	2011	Google Street View	Google Street View
7	Old Workers House another historical image	Unknown	Unknown	The Oded Yarkoni Petach Tiqva History Archive
		Unknown	1935	The old Workers House entrance gate; Petach Tiqva History Archive
8	Architect Andrei (Bondi) Leitersdorf as a young man in Slovakia, 1926.	1926	Unknown	Leitersdorf Family
9	Andrei Leitersdorf with his second wife Gina and their children, Giora and Eran	1956	Unknown	Leitersdorf Family
	Andrei (Bondi) and his son Tommy on the roof of their Tel Aviv home	1939-1940	Unknown	
10	Ilya Blesitzmann	Unknown	Unknown	Blesitzmann Family
11	Additional Leitersdorf and Blesitzmann projects (A – Petach Tiqva Employment Bureau, B – Netanya Histadrut House)	Unknown	Unknown	The Pinhas Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research Archive
		1953	Unknown	The Pinhas Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research Archive
12	Petach Tiqva Histadrut House (1946), historical picture	1948	Unknown	Israeli Architecture Archive, Zvi Elhayani
13	Hadera Histadrut House (1949)	Unknown	Unknown	Han Museum, Hadera
14	Rishon LeZion Histadrut House (1951)	1950s	Unknown	Rishon LeZion History Museum
15	Ra'anana Histadrut House (1951)	1950s	Unknown	Ra'anana Archive
16	Ramat Gan Workers Council House (1951)	Unknown	Unknown	Krinitzi House Archive
17	A Histadrut poster: "The Construction Project Map"	1950s	Illustration: Pesach Eir-Shay	Landmarks – posters from the Zionism 2000 collection (an exhibition for Israel's 60 th anniversary)
18	A schematic sketch of the compound	2019	Irrelevant	Amnon Bar-Or, Tal Gazit Architects Firm LTD
19	Arie Sharon's proposal for the Petach Tiqva Histadrut House	1936	Irrelevant	The David Azrieli Israeli Architecture Archive – Tel Aviv Museum of Art
20	A receipt for a contribution to building the Histadrut House for 2 Israeli Pounds	1947	Irrelevant	The Pinhas Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research Archive
21	Leitersdorf and Blesitzmann's plan of the Petach Tiqva Workers House; the planning was done on the lot of the previous Workers House (1912) which was demolished to construct the new structure. This fact gave the building its lengthy shape along the Histadrut	1947 Facades and plan	Irrelevant	Engineering Administration, Petach Tiqva Municipality
		1947 Perspective	Irrelevant	The Oded Yarkoni Petach Tiqva History Archive

	street. The architects' original offer included three floors above a basement floor, during construction they added a fourth floor at the western and central wing. The Leitersdorf and Blesitzmann's program became a typological, physical and programmatic prototype which repeated itself in many other Histadrut structures in small and medium settlements in Israel since. In the floor plan, you can see the various functions: a Petach Tiqva Workers Loans wing, a library and study rooms, the Agricultural Construction Company offices, the Solel Boneh company offices and reserve offices.			
22	A typical Arie Sharon public structure with cornices, roofs and columns: Brener House, Tel Aviv	1930s	Yitzhak Kelter	The David Azrieli Israeli Architecture Archive – Tel Aviv Museum of Art
		1930s	Yitzhak Kelter	The David Azrieli Israeli Architecture Archive – Tel Aviv Museum of Art