

## WHITHER KIBBUTZ? - A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE : First in a Series

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## WHITHER KIBBUTZ? - A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE : First in a Series

*Last June, at the World Zionist Congress, I met with AMEINU activists Ken Bob and Hiam Simon in order to update them on the developments within the Cooperative Stream (Zerem Shitufi) of the Kibbutz movement. I also arranged a meeting between Mario Taub, the coordinator of the Zerem Shitufi and Ken as chairperson of AMEINU. I agreed to update JEWISH FRONTIER readers on developments within the Kibbutz movement from my point of view. The year 2010 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Degania's founding. I realize, willy-nilly, that I have personally been a participant-observer of kibbutz history for almost half that time. Actually, I have to add a decade of (sometimes stormy) Habonim activism prior to my Aliya.*

*Currently, the two kibbutzim with which I have been intimately involved, Gesher Haziv and Lotan, have followed diametrically opposite paths. Gesher Haziv, has privatized. Kibbutz Lotan of which I have been a member for twenty years, is a collective kibbutz. I serve on the outer executive (Mazkirut Murchevet) of the Zerem Shitufi.*

Degania was founded 100 years ago. If we undertake a Zionist “*cheshbon nefesh*” (“spiritual appraisal”) , what has the Zionist enterprise produced that is unique? Yes, the Zionist movement gave us a state “like all the nations.” Yes, Israel's calendar is a Jewish calendar. Yes, we revived and speak Hebrew. Yes, Israel has achieved the unbelievable in fields such as agriculture, the military and hi-tech in comparison to other nations. But there has been one accomplishment, one social phenomenon which has not been paralleled elsewhere in the world. The kibbutz has been unique feature in our national movement. Failures and foibles – aplenty. We will discuss them in this series. But yes, I am proud and have no regrets that for almost 50 years my story is also a kibbutz story.

In order to share my personal perspective on what is happening in the Kibbutz movement with readers of the FRONTIER, I revisited the last article that I wrote for this journal. “The Merger of the Kibbutz Movements,” appeared in the FRONTIER November 1979 issue. The article focused on the then impending merger between *Ichud Hakvutzot VeHakibbutzim* and the *Kibbutz Hameuchad*. (Outside of Israel, that merger was to lead to the merger of Habonim with Dror as

Habonim-Dror in 1982) The merger was catalyzed by cataclysmic events – the Yom Kippur War, the end of Labor hegemony in Israeli politics in 1977 as well as the Camp David agreement. Those events impacted sufficiently on the consciousness of the kibbutz public to overcome establishment reservations – especially in the *Meuchad*. The drive and determination of Musa Charif, the General Secretary of the *Ichud* at the time to achieve the merger was also a decisive factor.

In my FRONTIER article I quoted Berl Katzenelson’s eulogy of Chaim Nachman Bialik delivered a month after the latter’s death in 1934.

“We are now in a period wherein we are engaged only in constructing the frame of the building. Our thoughts have not yet turned to furnishing the house, to its interior decoration... We do not yet have the leisure for profound spiritual life, but the day will come... Some day there will be many Jews in the country and they will give us no rest... in time to come they will struggle with questions of our cultural fate.”

At that time I wrote:

“(Berl) surely had the kibbutz movement in mind... In fact, Berl made out a promissory note—to be redeemed some day by the Zionist labor movement, including the kibbutzim. Berl implied that without providing some meaningful content for the edifice that was being built, the Zionist labor movement would bankrupt itself. This is indeed what has happened in the past few years...

The kibbutz movement seems to be stagnating ideologically... rank and file kibbutz members are involved mainly with the day to day problems of their particular kibbutzim. Will the merger create a new dynamic of purpose? ... Can the kibbutz movement redeem the promissory note that Berl Katzenelson drew up 45 years ago?”

More than thirty years have passed. Using the end of the 1970’s as a baseline, the articles in this series will detail my personal view of what has happened in the kibbutz movement and why.

## **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: Second in a Series**

**Michael Livni**

## **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: Second in a Series**

*In his introductory article, Michael Livni (Max Langer) set a baseline of the 1970’s for examining his personal understanding of developments in the kibbutz movement during the past generation. The event which prompted his article in the November 1979 issue of the JEWISH FRONTIER was the merger of Ichud Hakvutzot Vehakibbutzim and Hakibbutz Hameuchad into Hatnuah Hakibbutzit Hameuchedet (“Hatakam”) – the United Kibbutz Movement (UKM). In that 1979 article he had ventured the opinion that, in fact, the kibbutz movement was stagnating. Would the merger create a new dynamic?*

At the time, I was not alone in my general perspective. Among others, the late Stanley Maron of Kibbutz Maayan Tzvi bemoaned the “ideological anemia” of the kibbutz. However, those sounding the alarm were in a very small minority. The political turnabout of 1977 which brought the Likud to power was seen by many as a temporary aberration. In the very same issue of the FRONTIER in which my article appeared, the late David Twersky wrote from Israel: “To Likud: Enough! Be Gone!” But there was no magic wand to wave the Likud away. The inability to internalize the significance of the socio-political sea changes in Israeli society characterized (still characterize!) the Israeli Left.

Behind Stanley Maron’s term, “ideological anemia”, loomed a somber implication. After all, ideology is but a map of ideas and ideals with an action program for their realization. Ideology expresses purpose. In origin, the kibbutz had seen itself as embodying “in micro” the “in macro” values of the future Jewish state. Determining the “cultural fate” (Berl) of that embryonic state was its original mission. That was the challenge with which the kibbutz was meant to contend.

True. The kibbutz took on functions of settlement and defense for the Zionist enterprise as a whole. It did so gladly – but that was not the central purpose of the kibbutz. **“Ideological anemia” really meant the loss of Zionist ideological purpose in the individual kibbutz and in the kibbutz movement as a whole.** In 1979 the kibbutzim were still COLLECTIVE communities. However, in retrospect they had largely ceased to be INTENTIONAL communities.

The term “intentional community” did not exist in 1979 – it was coined by the Federation of Intentional Communities of North America in the 1980’s. The late Geoff Kozeny, a leader in the North American Fellowship for Intentional Community defined intentional community as “a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values.”

The kibbutz loss of purpose, of “intention”, was, in fact, symptomatic of the demise of purposeful Labor Zionism in Israel as a whole.

## **SELF-FULFILLMENT and SELF-REALIZATION**

In retrospect, a corollary to the loss of intention, the loss of ideological purpose, was that the kibbutz could no longer serve as a venue for self-realization (*hagshama atzmit*). The simplistic association of the term, self-realization, as *aliya* to the kibbutz is superficial and inadequate. Self-realization as a core value-concept of the *chalutz* (pioneering) ethos has to be reexamined. This necessitates differentiating the concept of **self-realization** from that of **self-fulfillment** (*mimush atzmi*).

**It was A. D. Gordon who set down the conceptual basis for the differentiation between Life of the Hour, *Chayei Sha’ah*, self fulfillment and Life Eternal, *Chayei Olam*, self-realization. Life of the Hour is essential – but secondary. Life Eternal, a life of meaning and purpose is primary.**

**Self-fulfillment** can be understood in terms of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs (status). All these lead to what Maslow called self-actualization, synonymous with self-fulfillment. A parallel perspective would be the preamble to the U.S. Declaration of Independence - "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

**Self-realization** means adding a **dimension of meaning** to the concept of self-fulfillment. Gordon insisted that the *chalutzim* (the pioneers) must find finite self-fulfillment in their daily lives – in their life of the hour (*chayei sh'ah*). He negated the idea that the *chalutzim* should sacrifice their present lives on the altar of the future redemption of the people. His demand was the **integration of Life of the Hour with infinite purpose of Life Eternal (*chayei olam*)**. Only thus could there be a **life of meaning** in Eretz Yisrael. Practically, this meant a lifetime of commitment to the Labor Zionist vision – Hebrew land, Hebrew labor, Hebrew language, social justice. This was the *chalutz* expression of Jewish-Zionist identity.

We will return to this question in later articles where we track and explain changes in the outlooks, in the attitude to life, of the generations who grew up on the kibbutz. However, in our next article we must necessarily focus on the immediate causes of the economic crisis in Israel and its immediate impact on the kibbutz movement.

## **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: Third in a Series**

**Michael Livni**

### **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: Third in a Series**

*In the previous two articles in this series Michael Livni pointed out that by the end of the 1970's all was not well in the kibbutz movement. This was so in spite of the fact that the kibbutz appeared to be flourishing. In the early 1980's the moment of truth arrived.*

The newly elected Likud's policies of economic deregulation led to the financial crisis that hit Israel in the early 1980's. There was a conscious intention to emulate the neo-liberal economic policies of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. In the atmosphere of economic expansion, bank promos exhorted the public, day and night, to take out loans and "grow with the bank." Inflation reached 400%. In 1983 Israel's whole banking system went through a meltdown as a result of financial speculation – not dissimilar to what happened in the U.S.A. in 2008. In effect, the government had to take over the banks.

The Labor party policy of "dispersing the population" was discontinued. It had meant a protectionist economic policy for agricultural products. This benefitted both kibbutzim and moshavim who constituted a major element in Israel's geographic periphery.

## **FINANCIAL CRISIS AND THE KIBBUTZ**

Many kibbutzim took part in the financial speculation catalyzed by inflation. Many speculated in supposedly gilt-edged bank stocks. The banks had lent billions of shekalim to the kibbutzim for

industrial expansion in non-indexed loans. Kibbutzim also utilized such loans for infrastructure such as enlarging members' houses for the transition to *lina mishpachtit*.

As kibbutz historian Henry Near pointed out in his **History of the Kibbutz Movement** (1995): "During the period of galloping inflation it was virtually impossible to make any realistic estimate of the profitability of an investment or in many cases of the simplest day-to-day transaction." There was the expectation that the loans would have negative interest as a result of inflation. Kibbutz debts to the banks were a significant component in the banks' liquidity crisis.

In 1985 the government acted. Non-indexed loans liberally granted by the banks became indexed. Under those circumstances, many kibbutzim, including central financial institutions of the Kibbutz movement and the network of mutual guarantees no longer had the assets to cover their liabilities. The Moshavim were hit just as badly. Each individual moshav member had to contend. Many simply abandoned their holdings on the moshav and walked away from their debts. This was not an option for the kibbutzim.

The agricultural sector in general and much of the kibbutz movement in particular were badly affected by cutbacks in agricultural subsidies and development funds. In partial compensation, the government instructed the Israel Lands Authority make kibbutz land available for real estate development. (For example: Gesher Haziv tripled its population in a decade). This enabled some kibbutzim to partially repay their loans to the banks.

### **CAUSE OR EFFECT?**

Was the financial crisis in and of itself the CAUSE of the kibbutz movements' ideological implosion? Maybe – but the alternative proposition is that the vulnerability of the kibbutz in the financial crisis was a RESULT of an ideological vacuum which had developed. The latter is my firm belief.

Stanley Meron's metaphor of "ideological anemia" was particularly apt. A normal person has six liters of blood. Suppose that such a person has an accident and suffers a sudden loss of a liter of blood. He/she will have to rest for a day or so to recover. A person suffering from anemia because of a chronic disease can, over a period of time, lose a liter of blood or even more. He/she will not be a well person but will continue to function. However if that person then suffers an additional sudden loss of an additional liter, his/her life is in immediate danger. That was the impact of the financial regulations promulgated in 1985 on many of the kibbutzim and the central economic institutions of the movement.

But the above conclusion leaves a number of questions unanswered. Were all kibbutzim affected by the crisis and if not, why not? What were the causes of the assimilation of the kibbutz (and by extension, of Labor Zionism as a whole in Israel) to neo-liberal values with its attendant pitfalls? What were the underlying factors behind the loss of purpose, of intention, of mission (*shlichut*)? The kibbutz had been both a home and an ideological path. What happened to the ideological path?

Down the line the questions are: What is happening now? Can the movement make a comeback? Can it regain mission? Can it regain Zionist purpose? Under what conditions? These questions will be the subject of later articles in this series.

## **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: Fourth in a Series.**

**Michael Livni**

### **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: Fourth in a Series.**

*In the previous article Livni detailed some of the parameters of the financial crisis that hit the kibbutzim. In fact, most (but not all) the kibbutzim were extremely vulnerable because they no longer had the ideological strength to withstand the temptations of speculation.*

Not all kibbutzim allowed themselves to be lured into the world of financial speculation. If they did, it was with only a percentage of their profits. Those kibbutzim weathered the financial storm. The problem was that the central financial and economic institutions of the movements, one of whose purposes was mutual help, had become involved in speculation. They were no longer there to help weaker kibbutzim. The movement structure of mutual aid between kibbutzim collapsed.

Only the *Kibbutz Hadati* movement of Orthodox kibbutzim made a movement decision (albeit by a narrow vote) based on ideology, not to involve themselves in speculation. In the main, the financial crisis did not affect the *Kibbutz Hadati*. The example of the *Kibbutz Hadati* shows that a firm ideological decision based on their vision and principles of religious socialism enabled their movement to weather the storm.

**The conclusion is clear. Finance and economy were only proximate causes of the crisis. It was the “cultural-ideological assimilation” of the kibbutz to surrounding neo-liberal values that created the “ideological anemia” which made the kibbutz movement so vulnerable. The kibbutzim were no longer guided by principles of their original vision.**

## **THE CAUSES OF IDEOLOGICAL ANEMIA.**

The causes of the ideological anemia, already apparent at the end of the 1970's, lay in developments resulting from the establishment of the state as well as processes within the kibbutz movement itself.

In order to discuss the impact of the establishment of the state we have to revisit the historical perspective. The kibbutz was born as a Zionist enterprise. We often forget that there were always two aspects to the term “Zionism”. The one aspect, political Zionism, was a response to the physical need of Jews for a secure homeland in an ever more hostile world. Herzl's recipe for the travails of his people was a state for the Jews “like all the nations”. The other aspect, cultural

Zionism, associated with the name of Achad Ha'am (1856 – 1927), sought to contend with the threat of modernity to the continued creative survival of Judaism.

Achad Ha'am claimed that the only way to stem physical and cultural assimilation inherent in the impact of modernity would be the re-establishment of a Jewish National Home in the historic homeland of the Jewish people. In particular, he believed that renewed Jewish creativity depended on reviving the creative Biblical tension between WHAT IS (the priestly tradition) and WHAT OUGHT TO BE (the prophetic tradition of *tikkun*). This would be possible only in a Jewish National Home where a Jewish polity would have to contend with all political, socio-economic and cultural challenges of modernity. In that context, the kibbutzim saw themselves as constituting an example of realizing values "that ought to be" in the here and now of the emerging Jewish state.

### **WHAT HAPPENED TO THE "MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE"?**

Degania and other *kvutzot* that followed were the result of a "marriage of convenience" between the needs of the (political) Zionist establishment and Labor Zionist pioneers who sought to realize a particular (prophetic) socio-cultural vision of what a Jewish state should be.

The Zionist establishment needed an economic way to settle the land and to provide the agricultural infrastructure for urban settlement. Later, in the 1930's, the social structure of the kibbutz made it an ideal framework for settling isolated areas in order to ensure the future borders of the Jewish state.

In the wake of the establishment of the State, that marriage of convenience came into question. The government was confronted by unprecedented challenges with which the kibbutzim were unable/unwilling to cope. The outstanding example was the absorption of the mass immigration immediately after the establishment of the State. New moshavim partially replaced the kibbutzim in agriculture. In addition, after a large number of kibbutzim (e.g. Gesher Haziv, Urim) were founded immediately after the establishment of the state, the kibbutz was no longer as necessary for securing borders and unsettled areas.

Within the kibbutzim, the realization of political Zionism, i.e. - the establishment of the state, constituted a rationale for many to leave the kibbutz. Many took positions in government or in the army. Many felt it was now time to make their own individual way.

Nevertheless, until 1977 the Government was a Labor government. It would be an exaggeration to say that the government was socialist but Israel was a mixed economy welfare state. In matters such as agricultural development, its policies were very favorable to the kibbutzim. There was always a significant group of kibbutz members in the Knesset and a number of ministers in the government.

The political reversal of 1977 brought a government to power that represented immigrants of the previous generation who had felt patronized and exploited by the Labor "aristocracy". They demonized the kibbutzim as the ultimate symbol of that Israel from which they felt socially and ideologically alienated. End of marriage. The kibbutzim were now on their own!

In summary, in the first three decades of statehood the kibbutzim achieved a degree of economic consolidation but then their Zionist purpose came into question in the eyes of Israel society in general and in their own eyes as well.

In our next article we will turn to the changes **within** the kibbutz movement which predisposed it to forego its principles and which made it so vulnerable in the economic crisis. A key to understanding that vulnerability lies in the changing outlook of the generations of the kibbutz.

## **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE : Fifth in a Series**

**Michael Livni**

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*Negative internal dynamics within the kibbutz contributed significantly to their loss of ideology and purpose. A key to understanding those dynamics and the resulting vulnerability of the kibbutz to the economic and social changes taking place in Israel, lies in changes and changes of outlook of the generations that followed the founding generation of the kibbutzim.*

### **THE GENERATIONS OF THE KIBBUTZ**

The paradigm of our mythic patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – provides a useful description of kibbutz generations. It is a paradigm that illustrates the dynamics by which “ideological anemia” developed in the kibbutzim as well as the Labor Zionist movement in general.

The founding generation, the generation of Abraham, *Dor Avraham*, (think: David Ben Gurion, Berl Katzenelson, A. D. Gordon) made a deliberate and radical break from its surroundings in order to start anew.

“The Divine said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you’.” Gen. 12: 1. Abraham was the first emissary, the first *shaliach*. He was aware that his path would deviate from the norms of his surrounding society. He was able to contend with ideological confrontation. He was prepared to dispute with the Divine itself as shown in his argument with It regarding the destruction of Sodom.

For *Dor Avraham*, self-realization meant linking personal self-fulfillment in life with a Labor Zionist social vision of what the Jewish state in embryo should become. It embodied the idea of self-realization discussed in the second article in this series .

Maurice Samuel (1895 – 1972), Anglo-American Zionist publicist and intimate of Chaim Weitzman, was a major formative influence on the Jewish-Zionist outlook I developed as a young man in the 1950’s. In his book, **Level Sunlight** (1953), Samuel recounted his encounters with the *chalutzim* in Eastern Europe preparing to make *Aliya* in the early 1920’s – the future Third *Aliya*.

“They were caught up in the fever of a great mission; they were going forth to show that a Jewish life could be built in Palestine cleansed of the particular curse of Jewish homelessness and of the general all-human curse of an exploitative economy...It was altogether extraordinary to encounter in them an equal passion for the Bible and Karl Marx... They conceived of the land they were going to build as the expression of the Jewish and world future.”

In the words of Avraham Shlonsky (1900 – 1970), poet of the Third Aliya :

“At the crossroads of the generations between night and dawn

We dared to create a new beginning ,for we came here to continue the way”.

(*Eileh veEileh*, 1930).

### **THE ISAAC GENERATION – *DOR YITZCHAK***

The Isaac generation, *Dor Yitzchak* – think: Moshe Dayan, Yigal Alon, Yitzchak Rabin - did not have to contend with ideological challenges stemming from major alternatives within its immediate environment. It came to maturity before and during the War of Independence. Abraham was prepared to sacrifice Isaac to ensure his covenant with the Divine. Similarly, the founding generation had to sacrifice much of the cream of *Dor Itzchak* on the altar of statehood in the War of Independence. (More recently, for many of us, the assassination of Yitzchak Rabin resonated as the ultimate tragic consummation of the fate of *Dor Yitzchak*.)

*Dor Yitzchak* matured in the shadow of the founders. The latter supplied the inspiration, the ideology and the framework. *Dor Yitzchak* carried out the practical work. They were critical of excessive ideological discussions. They were there to act. Nor was the Biblical Isaac an ideological pioneer. Ideologically, he acted within the parameters inherited from his father. Isaac was the one who settled and built in the land. He never left. He was enjoined by the Divine: “...Do not go down to Egypt...Reside in this land and I will be with you and bless you” (Gen.26: 2-3).

Like Isaac, *Dor Yitzchak* was rooted in the land. An important part of its culture was *Yidiat Ha'aretz* – knowledge of the Land. This was not only a matter of academic knowledge. The Hebrew term *ladaat*, to know, implies a physical-emotional relationship as in the Biblical *ladaat Isha*, to know a woman.

The self-realization of *Dor Yitzchak* lay primarily in integrating (and often sacrificing) their personal life history with the practical Zionist tasks of the state in embryo – settlement, defense, illegal immigration. It did not have to deal with the ideological challenges faced by their parents nor with the challenges that were to face their children. Ultimately, the educators of the Isaac generation were not equipped to inculcate a comprehensive, cognitive world view of values to the next generation – the generation of Jacob, *Dor Yaakov*.

The dilemma of the Jacob generation on the kibbutz (and in Israel) will be the subject of my next article.

## **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE : Sixth in a Series**

**Michael Livni**

### **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE : Sixth in a Series**

*The previous article in this series began to examine ultimate causes rather than proximate causes of the crisis faced by the kibbutz movement in the 1980's. Utilizing the paradigm of our mythic forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Michael Livni discussed the fundamental differences between the founders and their sons and daughters, Dor Yitzchak. This article focuses on the effect of these changes on the third generation, the generation of Jacob, Dor Yaakov.*

### **THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN SELF-FULFILLMENT AND SELF-REALIZATION**

The emergence of the Jacob generation on the kibbutz marks the disconnect between personal self-fulfillment and self-realization which had, in the past, been an identifying feature of kibbutz society as previously outlined in the second article in this series.

The disconnect of the Jacob generation was already apparent in the 1970's. In her essay, "The Youth Movements in the Current Social Reality in Israel," which appeared in the 1979 Annual of the Seminar Hakibbutzim (teachers seminary) in Tel Aviv, Zippora Efrat wrote:

"Strangely, our learned sociologists (discuss) the 'crisis in the youth movements' in isolation from social developments in Israel... Shmuel Eisenstadt, in his book, **Education and Youth** (1965), pointed out that in the past 'the revolt of youth aimed at full integration between personal future with the future of society' ... The youth movement member who cared perceived the problems of the collective as an integral part of his/her personal life.... What happened to the collective identity in the 1960's and the 1970's – actually since the establishment of the state? Simply put, that (collective) identity consciously detached itself from the values and social aims of Zionism in a general process of erosion of values."

Already in 1979, Zippora Efrat was correctly describing the early effects of the ideological vacuum on the youth movements. However, more specifically, that crisis reflected the "ideological anemia" of the youth movements' mentors in the kibbutz movement. The latter were now the Jacob generation of youth leaders and kibbutz members.

### **THE DILEMMA OF THE JACOB GENERATION**

In the Biblical narrative and in the contemporary context, the generation of Jacob faced a crisis of identity. After attaining Esau's birthright (his older brother) by trickery, Jacob was forced to flee to his kinsman, Laban, in Haran to escape Esau's wrath. Twenty years of fortune and misfortune transformed him. The final pivotal event symbolizing his new identity occurred on his way back to Canaan from Haran at the ford of the River Yabbok.

“Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn... Then (the man) said: ‘Let me go for dawn is breaking’. But (Jacob) answered, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’ Said the other... ‘Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings Divine and human, and have prevailed’.” (Gen. 32: 25 – 28).

The generation of Jacob in the kibbutzim matured against the backdrop of sea changes taking place in the society around them at the end of the 1960’s and the 1970’s. The Six Day War. Economic Development (in part because of the occupied territories). Television (introduced in 1968). Young volunteers from the West inundating the kibbutzim. The Yom Kippur War. The rise of the Right and the “Second Israel” – the end of Labor hegemony. The generation of Abraham had passed from the scene. As noted above, the generation of Isaac (*Dor Yitzchak*) did not have the ability to transmit a cognitive ideological map to *Dor Yaakov*.

The Jacob generation was set adrift without a map, without the ability to synthesize an ideological transformation in order to contend with the far-reaching changes in its surroundings. Worse. The generation of Jacob (as distinct from the Biblical Jacob) was scarcely motivated to grapple with either the Divine or the surrounding human (social) environment in order to crystallize a new outlook/identity – let alone an action program. (Think: Ehud Barak). As Zippora Efrat had pointed out, they already reflected the changes in Israeli society.

It was precisely the Jacob generation, graduates of the youth movements and kibbutz born young adults in their thirties and forties who were to contend with the economic crisis that struck the kibbutz in the 1980’s.

What was less apparent to all of us a generation ago was the fact that we had also become an inseparable part of a global change – the emergence of post-modernity. *Dor Yaakov* on the kibbutz (and in the Labor movement) had to contend not only with economic crisis. It was faced by the challenge of post-modernity.

The impact and implications of post-modernity on Israel and the kibbutzim will be the subject of the next article in this series.

## **WHITHER KIBBUTZ> A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: Seventh in a Series**

WHITHER KIBBUTZ    Number Seven

Michael Livni

*In his previous articles, Michael Livni showed that the roots of the crisis in the kibbutz movement lay in loss of purpose reflected in the waning of ideology. He surveyed the factors in Israel and within the kibbutz movement that caused “ideological anemia.” The third kibbutz generation, the generation that came to maturity before and after the Six Day War, the Jacob generation, was/is no longer capable (or motivated) to confront these questions This article focuses on the negative impact of developments in the Western world on Israel. Central to these developments is the influence of post-modernity on Israel in general and the kibbutz in particular.*

## **THE IMPLICATIONS OF POST-MODERNITY for ZIONISM and the KIBBUTZ**

In discussing the impact of post-modernity on Israel and the kibbutz we have to limit ourselves to the political and social aspects of this phenomenon. In general, post-modernity in Israel expresses itself as the process of “Americanization.” This really means that Israel has become “like all the Nations” In so doing, Israel has negated the cultural Zionist rationale for the establishment of a Jewish state. As we have seen, the essence of that rationale was the Achad Ha’amist view that a Jewish National Home in the historic homeland of the Jewish people was necessary to ensure the continued creative survival of Jewish civilization in the modern age. But what do we mean by “post-modernity” – in particular as it relates to Zionism and the kibbutz?

In two books, *Zionism in a Post-Modernistic Era* (1997) and *New Gordonian Essays* (2005), the Israeli philosopher, Eliezer Schweid summarized the meaning of post-modernity for Israeli society. (The books are in Hebrew))

Modernity is a product of the enlightenment. Modernity assumes that humans, as rational beings, have the capability of determining what is desirable and can formulate an action program to further wanted ends. Movements are a phenomenon of modernity. The strategic aims of a movement are determined by its ideological vision. Tactics, not vision, are dictated by an analysis of reality.

Zionism was (is) is a modern movement – whether in its political or cultural manifestation. The political Zionist movement strove to achieve a state for the Jews. Different streams of cultural Zionism, the kibbutz among them, sought to realize different visions of what the social and cultural character of the state should be. The kibbutz was an integral part of the modern Zionist movement both in its political and cultural manifestation.

The post-modern rejects ideology. It utilizes social sciences and public opinion surveys to ascertain what is realistic and this determines both its aims and its tactics. Schweid pointed out that the post-modern consumer society is based on the assumption that individual needs are to be nurtured and satisfied. The ultimate aim is a homogeneous global mass of individuals served by trans-national corporations. The United States, where the trans-nationals were spawned became the source and arbiter of this global consumer culture by virtue of being the only real victor in World War Two.

Perforce, Zionism can never be post-modern. Herzl’s “If you will it – it is no fairy tale” is absolutely modern and not post-modern. The struggle of Eliezer Ben Yehuda to revive the Hebrew language – was absolutely modern; not post-modern. The goal of the Zionist Labor movement to build communities based on the equal worth of all (the kibbutzim) as a focal value for an ideal society was modern and not post-modern.

In his book, *This People Israel* (1955), Leo Baeck , “ the Rabbi of Theresienstadt” paid tribute to Moses Hess, the harbinger of Socialist-Zionism :

“He viewed the present from the future...he did not want to determine the future from the present.”

There can be no more succinct juxtaposition of modernity with post-modernity.

#### POST-MODERNISM ASCENDANT

The latter part of the 1970's witnessed the triumph of post-modernism in Western society as embodied in the socio-economic philosophy of neo-liberalism. It was the age of Reagan and Thatcher. Neo-liberalism was ultimately based on the assumption that there are no limits to growth, no limits to Gross National Product. The ever-expanding GNP would be the surest guarantee of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” for the maximum number in society.

The tide of neo-liberalism engulfed Israel. The Likud also understood that dismantling the welfare state and its (in many cases atrophied) institutions would also definitively remove the power base of Labor.

This happened at the very time when the kibbutz movement, suffering from “ ideological anemia” described in our previous articles, had lost its ability to contend ideologically with new realities. An additional factor in the inability of the kibbutz to relate to new reality was its leadership – the subject of the next article in this series.

#### **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE – Eighth in a Series**

**Michael Livni**

#### **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE – Eighth in a Series**

*In this series, Michael Livni has been dealing with the underlying causes, in Israel and in the kibbutz movement, that resulted in the “ideological anemia” responsible for the kibbutz movements vulnerability to financial crisis. In this article, Livni discusses the dilemma of leadership within the movement as a further exacerbating factor.*

The nature of the leadership in the kibbutz movement was an additional contributory factor to its inability in relating to the unfolding reality – including the internal reality that had developed in the kibbutzim as a result of the paradigm of the generations and the ascendancy of post-modernity described previously. A summary discussion of kibbutz leadership is complex and problematic as it involves historical sensitivities.

#### **HISTORIC LEADERSHIP**

In two of the three major historic kibbutz movements, the *Kibbutz Hameuchad* and in particular in the *Kibbutz Haartzi -Hashomer Hartzi*, leadership was based on a “historic leadership”. The authority of this leadership was akin to that of the Hassidic Masters in Eastern Europe.

This historic leadership had an emasculating effect on the internal development of alternative leadership in those movements

### **LEADERSHIP in the ICHUD**

As distinct from *Hakibbutz Hameuchad* and *Hakibbutz Ha'artzi* the third movement, *Ichud Hakvutzot Vehakibbutzim* had no historic leadership. In general, it was associated with *Mapai*. The *Ichud* played a significant role in *Mapai* but in no way dominated it. The pragmatism of the *Ichud* (as distinct from dogmatism of the other movements) reflected the pragmatism of *Mapai*. It was no coincidence that innovations such as *Lina Mishpachtit* (children sleeping in their parents' home) began in the *Ichud* where it first received (grudging) recognition in 1967. It was no coincidence that in addition to sending *shlichim* to *Habonim*, it was the *Ichud* which sent *shlichim* to Young Judaea and eventually to the Reform movement.

It was the *Ichud* which gave institutional support to *Chug Shdemot*, the Shdemot (= fields) circle, composed of young kibbutz intellectuals from all the movements. The circle emerged in the early 1960's. They founded the quarterly, *Shdemot* which continued publication for 30 years. In the 1970's an English version of *Shdemot* appeared – a partial replicate of the Hebrew – edited by David Twersky, z"l.

Great hopes were pinned on *Chug Shdemot* but they remained unfulfilled at that time. The members were mostly educators – not suited for political leadership in a time of crisis. Muki Tzur, Shdemot activist did become Secretary of the *Takam* in the late 1980's. Some members of this group did have an important influence on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century renaissance of communal groups – a story which will be dealt with later in this series.

### **MOSHE (MUSA) CHARIF**

It was no coincidence that it was in the *Ichud* that a young charismatic personality emerged that might have had a decisive effect on the kibbutz movement - Musa Charif of Kibbutz Tzora, graphic artist and architect.

In the 1950's he served as secretary of the *Hanoar Halomed* youth movement and united it with *Hanoar Haoved* to form *Hanoar Haoved Velomed* youth movement, the “sister movement” of *Habonim* in Israel.

In 1976 Charif became General Secretary of the *Ichud*. Charif was a rising star in the Labor party. There is no doubt that his interfacing with Diaspora youth and Habonim graduates on Kibbutz Tzora (South African and Australian Habonim) had an influence on him. In the wake of the Labor reversal in 1977, he realized immediately that the Labor movement in general and the kibbutz movement in particular would have to develop a proactive policy in the development towns in their regions. He understood that the Labor debacle of 1977 made it imperative to seek

new allies not only in Israel but also in the Diaspora. In 1978, on the initiative of then *shaliach* of the *Ichud* to the Reform movement, Gidon Elad of Chatzerim, Charif visited America. His visit was focused mainly on the Reform movement. It was Musa Charif who was the moving force behind the merger of the *Kibbutz Hameuchad* and the *Ichud* which prompted my essay in the November 1979 issue of the JEWISH FRONTIER referred to at the outset of this series.

Musa Charif was killed in a traffic accident in January 1982. Could he have made a difference? We will never know. It is similar to the question of what might have been if Yitzchak Rabin had not been assassinated. What is certain is that no leadership emerged to contend with the economic crisis that unfolded shortly after Charif's death.

The landmark events of the crisis in the kibbutz movement during the past twenty years, the process of redefining the term kibbutz in the Cooperative Societies Regulations and the emergence of the city kibbutzim and communes will be the subject of the next articles in this series

### **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE – Ninth in a Series**

*The first eight articles in this series outlined the background to the many factors – internal, national and global – which made the kibbutz movement so vulnerable to the economic and financial crisis which developed in Israel during the early nineteen eighties. The crisis exposed the “ideological anemia” of the kibbutz movement described in previous articles. The next three articles chronicle the central events of the last three decades. This summary of “main events” is a retrospective – at the time the significance of some of these events was not understood by most.*

The momentous years (for the kibbutz movement) between 1985 and the present (2012) are very recent history. The span of almost three decades is divided into three periods. The first period, just over a decade, ended in 1997. Landmark events during that period set the stage for the major transformation which took place during the next period whose end was marked in 2010 by the kibbutz movements' centenary convention in Degania. That convention also serves as a convenient point for the onset of the third period, currently in its opening phase.

These landmark events were taking place against the backdrop of the financial insolvency of the kibbutz movement and its institutions as well as of many individual kibbutzim. (See third article) The 1985 emergency clamp down on credit and rocketing interest rates of 25% to 85%, created a freeze in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors of the economy. A business could go bankrupt or fire its employees. This was not an option for kibbutzim. The kibbutz leadership was forced to negotiate with the government and the banks to find a way to deal with the collective debt of the kibbutzim and their institutions. That debt spiraled to 6 billion shekalim (about \$ 4 billion USD at the time). This debt and the debt of the moshav movement threatened the liquidity of the banks. In 1992, politics and leadership enabled the moshav movement to have 75% of its debts revoked. In any case, moshav members, could simply abandon their

holdings – literally walk away from their debts. Kibbutzim remained saddled with debt and in many cases with an aging population. Eventually 25% of their debts were written off. In addition, the government relaxed zoning restrictions within the kibbutzim, especially those near the border, thus allowing the conversion of agricultural land to residential land. Selling land for real estate saved a number of kibbutzim – both financially and demographically. The last decade has witnessed stabilization of the kibbutz’s economic situation. Taken as a whole, there has been significant economic growth. The introduction of residential areas for non-members (often including many kibbutz sons and daughters returning after many years) has expanded the nominal kibbutz population to 141,000 and reduced the average age. However, the expanding population does not necessarily express ideological commitment.

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### **Chronology**

1985 - Abolition of the unlimited guarantee of mutual aid of the movement for its individual kibbutzim. This process begins in the United Kibbutz Movement (UKM) in 1985 and is followed by the Kibbutz Artzi - Hashomer Hatzair somewhat later. Only the small orthodox (today 19 kibbutzim) HaKibbutz Hadati movement retains its classic structure because it has avoided the financial market and reined in investments.

1986 – First debt settlement arrangement. It soon becomes apparent that it is inadequate.

1987 - Kibbutz Beit Oren, UKM, (guttled by the Carmel forest fire in 2011), announces that it is revoking the principle of comprehensive mutual responsibility – the members are now on their own.

1987 – First city kibbutzim established: Tamuz in Beit Shemesh -UKM. Migvan in Sderot – Hakibbutz Haartzi. (They had been preceded by the orthodox Reshit located in Jerusalem in 1979).

1992 - Kibbutz Ein Zivan on the Golan Heights becomes the first kibbutz to officially implement privatization, i.e. differential salaries for members based on their individual "market value".

1993 - The Registrar of Cooperative Societies rules that Ein Zivan is no longer a kibbutz but his ruling has no immediate practical implications.

1993 - Arik Reichman (Glil-Yam) replaces Muki Tzur (Ein Gev) as General Secretary of the UKM. The vigorous opposition to change in the UKM secretariat gives way to Reichman’s stand. Reichman states that Ein Zivan is only a symptom of what might be necessary to “bring

the kibbutz into line with the changes in surrounding society – there is no way to guarantee the continuity of the collective kibbutz”.

1994 - First educational kibbutz established by the Hanoar Haoved Vehalomed youth movement at Ravid overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The youth movement no longer sees the kibbutz, in particular the privatizing kibbutz, as a relevant educational goal. Members' income is derived from educational work in the surrounding area. The other “blue-shirt” movements, follow suit: Hamachanot Haolim in 1998 and Hashomer Hatzair in 2003.

1994 - Kibbutz Snir, just over the Green Line, near the sources of the Jordan River, becomes the first kibbutz in Hakibbutz Haartzi - Hashomer Hatzair to privatize.

1994 - Thirty kibbutzim who are fully committed to the idea of the collective kibbutz form an informal group, Kibbutz Tamid (Kibbutz Always). Significantly, the meeting was hosted by Kibbutz Yavneh – the flagship of Hakibbutz Hadati. The small number of the Kibbutz Tamid circle reflects the growing ambivalence to the cooperative ideal in the majority of the kibbutzim even if they officially still remained collective. As a contra, a group of privatizing kibbutzim form also form a circle - Kibbutz Atid (the Future Kibbutz).

1996 – Second and final debt settlement arrangement between government, banks and kibbutzim.

1997 – The UKM convention in Ein Harod grants legitimacy both to collective kibbutzim as well as privatizing kibbutzim by establishing the Collective Circle (Maagal Shitufi) and the Privatizing “Renewing” Circle (Maagal Mitchadesh). Two General Secretaries are elected, Dubi Helman ( Yotvata) represents the collective kibbutzim while Zvili Ben Moshe (Neve Ur) reflects the privatizing trend.

1997-1998 - In a series of two conventions, Hakibbutz Haartzi attempts to define parameters for collective kibbutzim. The official decisions prove to be non-viable. Abu Vilan (Negba) elected General Secretary in 1996, favors tolerating deviation from collective norms.

The stage is set for the landslide of change which marks the next period: 1998 to 2010.

### **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE: Tenth in a Series**

*The previous article in this series chronicled the salient events that took place in the kibbutz movement in the years 1985 to 1997. The events set the stage for the major transformation which was to occur in the years 1998 – 2010.*

Two central events and one non-event highlighted the period between 1997 and 2010.

First and foremost, the new (privatized) kibbutz emerged as the preferred kibbutz framework. By 2010 the *kibbutz mitchadesh*<sup>1</sup>, the “new kibbutz”, constituted the majority of the movement. In 1998 there were 14 privatized (“new”) kibbutzim. By 2011 there were 202 privatized or partially privatized kibbutzim and 54 collective kibbutzim.

The above figure does not include the 19 kibbutzim of Hakibbutz Hadati five of which are collective. This number is somewhat misleading for two reasons. Firstly, the collective kibbutzim are the leadership of Hakibbutz Hadati. Secondly, Hakibbutz Hadati continues to function as did the other movements before the crisis in matters of mutual help and responsibility.

Consequent to the rezoning of agricultural land, many privatizing kibbutzim developed neighborhoods for non-kibbutz members adjacent to existing residential areas. In many cases a significant number of the non-kibbutz members are the grown up children of the kibbutz.

The emergence of different types of kibbutz was officially recognized by the government (2005). Could the kibbutz movement still be called “movement” or had it become a federative organization – this was (and is) an open question.

The second event was a formal parting of the ways between the “blue shirt” youth movements and the kibbutz movement. The Dror-Israel movement for graduates was established in 2006 as the preferred framework for self-realization (*hagshama atzmit*) . Cooperation continues, in particular with the minority Collective Council (Mate Shitufi) of the kibbutzim - see below. Ironically, the kibbutz movement as a whole continues to finance much of the youth movements’ activity without any real control.

The significant non-event during this period was that that the minority collective stream did not split off from the kibbutz movement dominated by the new kibbutzim. The reasons for this “non-event” that at the grass roots level, collective stream kibbutz members were indifferent to the whole issue and not prepared to invest energy and money in order to establish a new movement.

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<sup>1</sup> The literal translation of *kibbutz mitchadesh* is “renewing kibbutz”. In my opinion, this term is misleading and I have followed the precedent of Aryeh Greenfield (A.G. Publications – Haifa) who translated the Cooperative Societies Regulations into English and used the term “New Kibbutz.”

In most cases the community foregoes direct responsibility for the economy and transfers economic authority to a Board of Directors. There is a minimum guaranteed income for everyone but basically everyone is employed (or self-employed) and is paid according to the value of their work on the open market.

## Chronology

1999 – Twenty-eight kibbutzim within the Collective Circle formally organize as the Collective Stream. In general, they are the kibbutzim that formed the informal “Kibbutz Tamid” group in 1994. The Collective Stream also includes leading kibbutzim of the Hakibbutz Hadati movement most of whose veteran kibbutzim remains traditional. Another 40 kibbutzim remain collective but are loathe to formally affiliate and prefer passive membership in the Collective Circle.

2000 – Formal unification of the United Kibbutz Movement and Hakibbutz Haartzi – Hashomer Hatzair Into The Kibbutz Movement (henceforth capitalized) – Hatnua Hakibbutzit. Two General Secretaries elected – Natan Tal (Shefayim) UKM and Gavri Bargil (Ramot Menashe) Hakibbutz Haartzi. Natan Tal militantly furthers privatization. Gavri Bargil remains officially neutral.

2002 –The government appoints a Public Committee for Classification of Kibbutzim (the Ben-Rafael committee) in order to review the definition of “kibbutz” within the framework of the Cooperative Societies Regulations. After 15 months the committee concludes that there are now three different categories of kibbutz:

- a. Collective kibbutz (kibbutz shitufi) – a settlement society, which is a separate village, organized on the basis of **communal ownership** of property, of self-labor and of equality and cooperation in production, consumption and education.
- b. New kibbutz (kibbutz mitchadesh) – a settlement society , which is a separate village, organized on the basis of **communal participation** in the ownership of property, of self-labor, equality and cooperation in production, consumption and education which maintains mutual responsibility for its members in accordance ...with the **regulations for Mutual Responsibility in the New Kibbutz** – including provisions on one or more of the following matters:
  1. Allocations to its members **in accordance with their contribution, position** or seniority in the kibbutz.
  2. **Attribution of dwellings...**
  3. **Attribution of means of production** other than land, water and production quotas to its members on condition that control of the means of production not be transferred to its members.
- c. Urban kibbutz (kibbutz ironi) – a cooperative society that functions **for social contribution to and participation in Israeli society**, organized on principles of self-labor and of cooperation in income, consumption, and education on the basis of its members' equality.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These definitions are excerpted from the English translation by A.G. Publications, Haifa, 2007. **Bold** emphases are mine ( M.L.) The definitions of the cooperative (collective) kibbutz and the urban kibbutz are given in full. The

2005 - The recommendations of the Ben Rafael committee are passed into law. However, the interpretation of “mutual responsibility” on the new kibbutz remains open. Pension rights of veteran members constitute a source of great tension. “Attribution of dwellings” (private ownership of up to 500 square meters of residential land) has run into difficulty with the Israel Lands Authority. “Attribution of means of production” means that if the economic holdings (mainly agricultural) of the kibbutz make a profit the members receive dividends. Only the urban kibbutzim are recognized as intentional communities seeking to impact on the surrounding society.

2005 – Elections for one General Secretary of the Kibbutz Movement. Natan Tal is challenged by Zeev (Velvele) Shor of Kibbutz Ein Gev. Shor promises “benevolent neutrality” between the collective stream and the new kibbutzim. Voter turnout in the new kibbutzim is relatively low. However, Natan Tal has become anathema to the collective kibbutzim. and Shor is narrowly elected because of their massive turnout. The possibility of a split in the kibbutz movement recedes.

2006 – The Collective Stream and the Collective Circle integrate activity and morph into the Collective Council (*Mate Shitufi*)

2006 – Dror-Israel is established as an adult movement of educational communes with which organized groups (*garinim*) of youth movement graduates of the Hanoar Haoved and HaMachanot Haolim affiliate (Dror Israel is to play a central role in the social protest movement which erupts in the summer of 2011)<sup>3</sup>.

The 2010 Kibbutz Centenary marks the end of this period and the opening phase of the current period. Our next and final article will deal with the dramatic dynamics which are beginning to unfold within the Kibbutz Movement as it enters the second decade of this century.

## **WHITHER KIBBUTZ? A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE**

### **Eleventh and final article in a series.**

*As we have noted in previous articles, understanding developments within the kibbutz movement perforce necessitates insight into internal dynamics and their interface with Israeli Society as a whole. The last two articles sought to impart an overview of developments during the last generation. As the kibbutz movement moves into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we see new dynamics*

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definition of the new kibbutz has been abbreviated – the details are beyond the scope of this brief review and were at the core of heated discussions in the Ben Rafael committee

<sup>3</sup> For an English video clip on Dror-Israel see: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ6RzEEL1HM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ6RzEEL1HM)

*emerging – both within the kibbutz movement and within Israeli society. Apparently the interplay between them will have a major role in shaping events within the kibbutzim during the coming years.*

The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the founding of Degania, the “mother of the kvutzot” was a national event which generated many perspectives.<sup>4</sup> The celebration also constituted the first session of a Kibbutz Movement convention.

A central question emerged. Is this a farewell – will the kibbutz now “fade away” and become part of the Israel’s historical heritage? Significantly, in tandem with the event, the government announced funding for a number of historical sites on the kibbutzim. Alternatively, does the kibbutz have a relevant role in the future of the Zionist project – a Jewish and democratic state? The second session of the convention, held in January 2012 was to deal with this latter question. The intervening fifteen months between the sessions were fraught with unexpected developments which are still in the process of playing themselves out.

### **Social Protest 2011 – A Summer of Discontent.**

Unquestionably, the social protest of Israel’s middle class which erupted in the summer of 2011 had a major impact on the kibbutz as well. This protest was a reaction to the neo-liberal capitalist policies of the government – high prices, high indirect taxes, lack of affordable housing, economic windfalls for the top 0.1% (the “oligarchs”). The protest was also influenced by the “Arab spring” and similar economic protest movements in Europe – this factor is beyond the scope of the current discussion.

The Collective Council of the movement identified with the protest immediately. Similarly, the “Special Tasks” Department (Agaf Hamesimot) of the Kibbutz Movement under the leadership of Joel Marshak, was unequivocally supportive. The movement establishment followed only somewhat later. However, within the context of this article there were two aspects of the protest which had a bearing on all the kibbutzim.

First and foremost, the Kibbutz Movement was caught by surprise at the magnitude of the protest no less than the government. “Where were we? “ After all, most of the kibbutzim today are part of that very middle class which instigated the demonstrations. The question of kibbutz involvement in the surrounding society became a central question. The result was that the discussion on kibbutz

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<sup>4</sup> For a very short summary see by this author: “100 Years of Kibbutz – Now What and fFor What?”, **CALL**, International Communes Desk, No. 33, Winter 2010/2011. [www.michael-livni.org](http://www.michael-livni.org) (English Articles.) For further discussion of subjects raised in these articles see: Michal Palgi and Shulamit Reinharz, ed., **ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF KIBBUTZ LIFE**, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick (U.S.A.) and London (UK), 2011.

Note: The word “kvutza” denotes a small intimate group numbering tens. The term’ “Kibbutz” denotes a larger group of hundreds and eventually replaced the term “kvutza”.

involvement in surrounding society became a major focus of the second session of the Kibbutz Movement convention held in January 2012.

However, there was a second, indirect influence on the Kibbutz Movement. A central organizing force of the protest, behind the scenes, was the Dror-Israel movement of youth movement graduates as well as the youth movements themselves. That involvement highlighted the growing gap between the youth movements and the kibbutzim. The Dror-Israel movement was instrumental in melding variant chords of protest into a general demand for social justice and a return to some welfare state policies. The activism of Dror-Israel contrasted sharply with the tepid response in the kibbutzim. For Dror-Israel and the youth movements, this dissonance confirmed the image of the kibbutzim as being irrelevant in confronting current issues in Israeli society.

### **Within the Kibbutzim**

It is possible to identify a number of processes within the kibbutz movement itself - processes which will impact in the coming years in ways which are not yet clear.

1. On taking office in September 2011, as the new coordinator of the Collective Council (Mate Shitufi), Maia Shafir (Yotvata), announced that her aim was to have the Council morph into a movement within the overall federation of the Kibbutz Movement. In parallel, Uri Margolit (Ramat Hakovesh) is leading a Forum of New Kibbutzim (Hakibbutz Hamitchadesh) which seeks to define their role within the overall kibbutz organization and in Israeli society.
2. A strong lobby has emerged demanding social justice within the kibbutz movement. The roots of this are in the disparities created in the "New Kibbutzim", especially between retired members and the new managerial elite. There is a demand "First of all, adequate pensions for the veteran members." The question has even been raised in the Knesset – Israel's parliament. There are kibbutzim whose financial resources were adequate to guarantee adequate pensions. In other "new kibbutzim" there is competition for limited resources between veteran and younger members. The total economic situation of the kibbutzim is improving but some kibbutzim have been left behind. The amount of money deposited in pension funds is also an issue on some collective kibbutzim.
3. The impact of non-kibbutz members living on kibbutz, in particular those in the newly built residential areas, constitutes an on-going dynamic especially on the "new" kibbutzim. This dynamic takes place within a legal framework within which two entities exist and overlap. On the one hand there is the original cooperative society, now redefined as "New Kibbutz." On the other hand, there is the municipality which includes all residents. The latter can outnumber the kibbutz members. Significantly, returning kibbutz children – now adults – are often residents but not necessarily members of the cooperative society. Disputes arising between the cooperative society and the municipality have already reached the courts.

4. The return of kibbutz children in increasing numbers – sometimes after many years of absence – is an unexpected phenomenon of the last decade. In a large part this is a return to home – not to ideology. If the very survival of the kibbutz as a demographic entity was uncertain fifteen years ago, it is now becoming clear that the kibbutz will survive demographically and it will survive in terms of the continuity of generations.
5. A fascinating dynamic seems to be emerging among the younger generation of the kibbutz children returning to the kibbutz. In many cases, their older brothers and sisters led the move to far-reaching privatization. However, in some cases, the younger generation of kibbutz children on the new kibbutzim wants a partial return to some aspects of community abrogated in the initial privatization. There is a desire for more social security – the kibbutz not as a socialist society but rather as a mini-welfare state. Another focus is the concern for quality of the environment as a component in quality of life. A rejection of urban life and a return to the landscape of one's birth is another factor in the return to kibbutz. It reflects an emotional commitment which translates into environmental concern.
6. Statistics are important for perspective – even if their ultimate significance remains in doubt. Between 1983 and 2006 the total kibbutz population remained static between 115,000 and 120,000. The average kibbutz has 500 inhabitants. From 2006 to the end of 2010 the kibbutz population grew to 141,000 – mainly because of the non-kibbutz member neighborhoods. Currently, 50% of the population are members or candidates, 20% are kibbutz children and soldiers. Residents, the fastest growing element, number 20%. The final 10% includes volunteers and others. (These figures are taken from the Kibbutz Movement Statistical Annual which summarizes the year 2010 and was published in April 2012. The figures do not include the 19 kibbutzim of Hakibbutz Hadati).

Against the backdrop of all the foregoing, the major open questions remain: Can the federation of kibbutzim, formally organized as The Kibbutz Movement, reinvent itself as a real **movement**? What will be the relationship of youth movement graduates and their movement (Dror-Israel) to the Kibbutz Movement? Will it be able to project itself as an alternative way of life in Israel as a socially just, Jewish and democratic state?

Such an alternative vision probably involves social democracy as an alternative to neo-liberalism as well as a Jewish-Zionist identity and way of life free of Orthodox rabbinical constraints. Will the Kibbutz Movement be able to formulate and implement an action program to further its vision of an alternative Israel? Can it develop an operative partnership with other sectors in Israeli society?

Stay tuned. The jury is still out!