

# Jerusalem Letter

## Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

JERUSALEM INSTITUTE FOR FEDERAL STUDIES • CENTER FOR JEWISH COMMUNITY STUDIES

Daniel J. Elazar, Editor and Publisher • David Clayman, Executive Editor

ISSN: 0334-4096

JL: 73 22 Tammuz 5744 / 22 July 1984

### THE KIBBUTZ IN ISRAEL TODAY

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*The Facts / The Continuing Issues / The Impact of the 1977 Likud Victory / The Establishment of TAKAM (1979) / Responses to the 1982 War in Lebanon / Conclusion*

The kibbutz has been on the scene for almost three quarters of a century. It is known worldwide and the word appears in the dictionaries of many languages. Yet we on kibbutz are perpetually surprised by the misconceptions that linger. The kibbutz is not a profit-making corporation, although it operates on the profit system and strives for maximum yield with minimum expenditure. Nor is the kibbutz an autarchic village, supplying its own needs in a closed and sheltered environment. A true picture of the kibbutz is best provided by a factual account of kibbutz reality rather than by a theoretical discussion.

#### THE FACTS

At this writing, there are 280 settlements organized into different movements. The largest movement is HaTnua HaKibbutzit HaMeuchedet (The United Kibbutz Movement) or TAKAM for short. All the other movements come together under it, save for two: HaKibbutz HaArtzi (National Kibbutz movement), which represents eighty-five settlements; and one independent communist-affiliated kibbutz. A breakdown of the members and affiliates of TAKAM, and the number of settlements in each, is as follows:

Full Members	166 (2 are from the World Reform Movement)
Affiliated Religious Kibbutzim (Poalei Mizrahi)	16

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Associate Members ( <i>moshavim shitufim</i> <sup>1</sup> , now known as <i>meshakim shitufim</i> )	6
Affiliated Orthodox Kibbutzim (Poalei Agudat Yisrael)	2
Affiliated <i>Meshakim Shitufim</i> of Poalei Agudat Yisrael	4
Total in TAKAM	194

Poalei Mizrachi and Poalei Agudat Yisrael are affiliated with TAKAM for economic and personnel reasons only. They steer their own course ideologically. The Conservative Movement now has a *garin* (core group) in training for the settlement of an independent kibbutz at Kfar Hachosh. When this group is settled, it will complete the participation of all of the religious movements within Judaism in the kibbutz enterprise except for the most ultra-Orthodox anti-zionist groups.

The kibbutz population exceeds 120,000 souls or roughly 3-1/2 percent of Jewish Israel. Kibbutzim are 24 percent of the state's agricultural sector and account for over 40 percent of the state's agricultural production. They are responsible for 10 percent of Israel's gross national product — 5.6 percent of the industrial portion of the GNP (including 6 percent of the export) and 4.4 percent of the agricultural portion. In each case, the yield is about twice the numerical expectancy. How such a record is achieved without any direct personal remuneration has been amply discussed in the literature already extant and is outside the scope of this article.

In reviewing the current issues, problems, and dilemmas of the kibbutz, two aspects become pronounced: one, the continuing issues of recent decades, and two, the impact of events in 1977, 1979, and 1982.

### THE CONTINUING ISSUES

*Coping with a Multi-Generational Society.* The kibbutz has aged. Sixty year old swarthy men and robust women blend with the stereotypical concept of a kibbutznik. Frail octogenarians using walkers, wheelchairs and electric carts change the landscape. One third of the kibbutzim must deal with the results of aging and even the young members of kibbutzim in formation now know that they too will someday face this fact of life. The solutions range from establishing homes on the premises adapted to the special needs of the aged, to institutional care outside the kibbutz. The kibbutz movements have built two homes for the aged serving kibbutzim country-wide, but now the emphasis has shifted to home care.

Eighty percent of the kibbutzim are multi-generational societies. That, and the emphasis on the family unit, has produced the extended family, the *hamula* (an Arabic word and concept representing close kinship but less than a tribe). It is not unusual to see kibbutz family pictures with forty to sixty faces. The second and third generations are less ideological than the founders. They are pragmatic, practical, forthright. Many like kibbutz living because it is "home" and not because it is a purposive community. Roughly 50 percent of the youth prefer to attempt other forms of Israeli living. Three percent of that 50 percent (or 1-1/2 percent of the youth) leave the country. Eventually 10 percent of the departees return home.

*Coping with Outside Influences.* Pragmatism has encouraged kibbutzniks to pursue "self-actualization" (*mimush atzmi*), namely the search for self-expression and self-development as a goal equivalent to the

good of the community. Among the factors fortifying this trend is the large number of foreign volunteers. Since 1967, volunteers, eighteen to thirty years old, have come in large numbers, mainly from England, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Holland and the Americas. At first they came to help. Later they arrived with ulterior motives such as a vacation without out-of-pocket costs, escape from home, a search for soft drugs or because of unemployment in their own countries. Some came because of curiosity about communalism. Whatever the motives, their presence on the kibbutz was felt. The drug users and pushers were weeded out and the undesirable elements were not accepted, but the volunteers still opened a wide aperture to a different world. Had they not been a real asset to the labor force, their numbers would have been restricted severely. In practice, their presence is of mutual benefit.

The impact of the media on kibbutzim has been revolutionary. Once, long ago, the kibbutz was a haven for lengthy discussions, classical music, "serious" literature, the daily newspaper which reflected the members' consensus, violent arguments over plans and programs, etc. Then the media crept in. First came the radio; then the tabloid newspapers; the bewildering variety of magazines; the television and in its wake new arts and fads and styles. Thirty years ago, a discotheque was rank heresy. Today, the discotheque is a clubhouse among several: there is the clubroom for the old folks, the children's center, the cultural center, the synagogue. Every member has his outlet.

The influence of the media was not only direct as described above, but was far more potent via its influence on general Israeli life and culture. Commercial advertising, instant communications and satellites shrank the globe. Israel changed radically and the media brought those changes into the kibbutz.

*Industrialization.* On the economic level, the most significant change has been industrialization. Since land is restricted, water scarce, and economic demand ever-rising, there was only one answer — industry. There are 363 kibbutz factories, ranging from small to huge operations. The areas of production are as follows:

<i>Type of Factory</i>	<i>Number</i>
Metalworks	86
Electricity and Electronics	31
Rubber and Plastics	80
Woodwork and Furniture	15
Textiles and Leather	20
Glassware and Optics	15
Food Products	20
Quarries and Building Materials	10
Medical Supplies and Chemicals	15
Arts and Crafts	20
Paper, Cartons and Printing	10
Writing Supplies, Musical Instruments and Industrial Services	15

Guest Houses and Tourist Facilities	26
Total	363

The annual export figure for the kibbutzim is \$200 million or 23 percent of the total production of kibbutz industry.

My kibbutz, Kfar Blum, is a good example of the trend. Located in the northern Hula Valley, far removed from the industrial centers of the country, industry and services have nevertheless long since come to replace agriculture as the primary source of employment on the kibbutz, even though agriculture remains the major single source of income. The total income of Kibbutz Kfar Blum in 1982/1983 was \$7.5 million, of which agriculture accounted for 35 percent, equal to the total amount brought in by industry and services combined. The remaining 30 percent came from National Insurance, kibbutz members working outside of the kibbutz, and the kibbutz's financial transactions. The 7 percent of the kibbutz population engaged in agriculture compares favorably to the ratio in most Western countries where the agricultural sector has declined to a very small percentage of the population but still contributes a great deal to the gross product.

The annual production of a worker in kibbutz industry is \$63,000. (Workers in Israeli industry outside of kibbutz have an annual individual production rate of \$51,000.) Roughly fourteen thousand workers are engaged in kibbutz factories. Nine thousand of these are kibbutzniks and five thousand are people hired from outside the kibbutz.

Industrialization has perpetuated the practice of hired labor. Kibbutzim first departed from the ideological premise and practice of no wage workers as a temporary measure to alleviate unemployment after the founding of the state. Under the prodding of Ben-Gurion and the new government it was agreed to accept new immigrants until permanent jobs could be created for them. That transitional act remained permanent once factories were built and demanded hands. A multitude of theoretical and practical dilemmas ensued.

*Leadership.* Technological development and specialization yielded a predicament of leadership. An egalitarian society cannot tolerate permanent stratification into leaders and followers. Reality, however, is harsh and demands skilled and trained leaders. The accepted solution of rotating functionaries chosen by democratic elections has a high price tag in loss of efficiency. Nevertheless, kibbutzim willfully pay the price. (To everyone's surprise, studies indicate that the loss of efficiency is less than expected.)

*Serving the Kibbutz and the State.* With the establishment of the state, the concept of voluntarism was downgraded. Many individuals and leaders, Ben-Gurion among them, believed that the state would assume all essential functions for the commonweal. Were it not for the normal inertia of society, the very existence of the kibbutz would have been threatened. In fact, many a professor and journalist predicted its early demise. The fallibility of the state and its leaders and functionaries, especially since the rude awakening in 1973, altered the "dire premature conclusions" (as Mark Twain once said). There is a growing realization that democracy requires local initiative and voluntary activity. Kibbutz members are reacting positively to the challenge implied by voluntarism.

A growing economy requires manpower with none to spare. Yet, a major purpose of kibbutz living is to engage in building the land of Israel. That requires people, both skilled and unskilled. The confrontation within each kibbutz between those who insist that everyone must remain at home and those who stress the duty of helping others has plagued many a general meeting. Kibbutzim are endlessly requested to

contribute people to the national organization, to guide new settlements, to the Histadrut (labor organization), for *shlichut* (representation abroad), to the defence forces, for political activity, for welfare tasks, and on and on. To cope with these requests, a fixed percentage of the population is allocated by the kibbutzim for national service. The specific decisions are the subject of complex, tough bargaining.

*Coping with Private Income.* Kibbutz members' private income has again become a matter of great moment. The first crisis arose when German reparations were paid on an individual basis. Since the possession of wealth is not consistent with the collective idea, some members left kibbutz. The vast majority remained and presented the reparations monies to the common treasury, usually for public edifices. The kibbutz in turn agreed to permit to the recipients one time expenditures such as a trip overseas or desirable consumer items. Since then, other sources of private income have surfaced: inheritance, residue from missions abroad, gifts from wealthy relatives, hobbies, frugal accumulations from modest annual budgets, and other less legitimate sources. A kibbutz cannot long tolerate discrepancies in economic status even though daily life is absolutely equal. A solution is yet to be found.

### THE IMPACT OF THE 1977 LIKUD VICTORY

As the kibbutzim grappled with their cumbersome problems, external events exerted new influences. The elections of 1977 toppled the coalition government dominated by Labor. The Likud upset the tradition which had dominated Israeli politics since 1948. Suddenly the kibbutz, which had been the acknowledged favorite, turned orphan (or at best was trimmed down in influence to its numerical size). This was a trend which had been developing within Labor as well, but not vociferously or rapidly. For the Likud, a socialist society was unsavory. A successful socialist society was an ideological threat since it upset the proper order of things.

No less an authority than Simha Ehrlich, the late minister of finance, accused kibbutzim of evading income tax payments. When shown that the law was adhered to scrupulously, he accused the law of favoritism. The resultant outcry caused him to appoint an impartial committee chaired by the head of the auditors' association. When the commission reported that, in fact, kibbutzim overpaid on their taxes and were entitled to a rebate, an effort was made to bury the findings in the files. The controversy ended, there was no rebate, but the rumor persisted that kibbutzim were tax dodgers.

The political upheaval changed the priorities of the settlement policy. Henceforth, the funds would be allocated to Judea and Samaria. The vast majority of kibbutz membership and leadership preferred development within the Allon Plan (green line plus unpopulated areas and essential defence areas). Conflict was inevitable. It persists to this day.

One issue about which there is overwhelming agreement within the kibbutz movements is the location of NAHAL (*Noar Halutzi Lochem* — Fighting Pioneer Youth) units. As originally conceived and until recently implemented, the purpose of NAHAL was to form nuclei for new settlements or to buttress existing ones, primarily kibbutzim. Until their settlement, NAHAL groups would serve the army wherever needed. Since the Likud administration, NAHAL has been sent by the army to areas outside of the designated points for movement settlement. The army sends them to *maahazim*, which are strictly military outposts and to *heiachzuyot*, designated settlements in Judea and Samaria. The kibbutz movements maintain that in both cases the result is the disintegration of the units.

A major encounter with the Likud government was over agricultural policy. The policy for decades had involved planning, allocation of resources, organized export, subsidized research, and high national priority for development. Implementation was entrusted by agreement and rotation to either a kibbutznik,

moshavnik, or sympathizer as minister of agriculture. The Likud's new approach aimed to achieve greater liberalism and freedom. The past was alluded to as favoritism. The net result as of 1983 was a major crisis in agriculture with dozens of moshavim facing bankruptcy. Some agricultural exports were seriously injured by unchecked competition. Kibbutzim were damaged but had the industrial backup to weather the economic crisis.

In January 1977, Israel's inflation was 10.2 percent and would have reached 27 percent by December. After Simcha Ehrlich's liberalization and after the policies of subsequent finance ministers, inflation rose to a rate of 400 percent by mid-1984. This has changed the kibbutz economy by adding a new dimension. What used to be agro-industrial is now a financial and banking operation as well. Kibbutzim were forced to join in the financial manipulations of the stock market to protect their incomes from shrinking. This posed endless soul-searching and controversy. Until the economy stabilizes there seems to be no release from financial juggling. This is a far cry from original intent.

Probably the worst aspect of the political upheaval was the ideological onslaught led by then Prime Minister Begin. He left no doubt that kibbutzim were not his favorites and thereby polarized the conflicts: exacerbating existing ones and creating new ones. His lieutenants understood the cue and did not restrict themselves to words. The best example is provided by the development towns and the regional industries. Development towns and kibbutzim have been thrust together and are inseparable. There were years of honeymooning, periods of aloof coexistence, times of close cooperation and times of open conflict. Delicately stated, the Likud government did not add to good neighborliness.

The connection between the development towns and kibbutzim came about as a method of solving two dilemmas: that of wage workers in the kibbutzim on the one hand and of unemployment in the development towns on the other. It was decided to transfer certain operations to the development towns. Thus, the regional industries were started and grew to formidable proportions. Sorting of apples, pears, avocados, citrus, potatoes, etc; dressing plants for chicken, turkey, beef; feed mixing, storing, pelletizing; canneries; cold storage; bakeries; motor transport and garages -- were all needed services which could benefit from large, joint operations. The beginning was auspicious but in time workers resented that the managers and owners were kibbutzniks. What was acceptable in a capitalist economy was not seen as valid for socialists. The number of workers involved is very small -- less than five thousand -- but the implications reach far and wide. The national kibbutz movement, the Histadrut, and the political parties argued the issue. Individual kibbutzim adopted position papers. The Likud added to the turmoil. It is an ongoing debate.

#### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TAKAM (1979)

Partly in response to the rise of the Likud government but mainly because of natural maturation, two of the three largest national kibbutz organizations united. The HaKibbutz HaMeuchad (United Kibbutz) and the Ichud HaKvutzot veHaKibbutzim (Union of Kvutzot<sup>2</sup> and Kibbutzim) united to form the Tnua HaKibbutzit HaMeuchedet (United Kibbutz Movement) -- TAKAM. Each organization had a long and involved history of unions, schisms, and political affiliations which are fully documented in Hebrew. (Some material is available in English).

This union had organizational implications for the structure of the Brit HaTnua HaKibbutzit (Kibbutz Movement Federation) which is the loosely federated coordinating body. Prior to the establishment of TAKAM, the federation had included the Kibbutz HaMeuchad and Ichud HaKvutzot veHaKibbutzim movements as roughly equal partners with HaKibbutz HaDati (Religious Kibbutz movement) as a minor partner. TAKAM united the first two into one body, thus drastically shifting the balance of power within the federation.

TAKAM also had sizeable impact on the internal politics of the Labor Party. The two newly united movements had little difficulty integrating economic, educational, and organizational functions, but political nuance and style cast long shadows. It had been easier to resolve political differences at the old Brit conference table. Meanwhile, because of its size, new political blocks flourish. TAKAM has sustained a small loss on the 1984 Labor Party list. However, TAKAM is becoming a potent force. It is no small matter to speak authoritatively on behalf of 194 communities.

## RESPONSES TO THE 1982 WAR IN LEBANON

The war in Lebanon gave rise to a host of predicaments. The "doves" (the majority of kibbutzniks) and the "hawks" (the minority) organized to advance their views. An active group of young members banded together, calling themselves Tz'irim L'p'ilut Politit (Youth for Political Activism) or TZALAF for short. This group was mainly dovishly inclined. To counteract TZALAF, a smaller group of prestigious army officers from kibbutzim met to exert educational pressure. The official kibbutz bodies steer a cautious course. Without inhibiting either individual or group initiative or expression, only decisions taken at legally constituted meetings are sanctioned.

An unhappy result of the war in Lebanon is the appearance of individual protestors who refuse to serve in the army if assigned to Lebanon. Although very few in number, the very thought of a kibbutznik refusing an army command created shock waves. There had been dissatisfaction with serving on the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) before the war, but that had never reached the vociferous proportions of the reaction to the war in Lebanon.

Another unnatural phenomenon that emerged was that of the *rosh katan* (literally, small head). The meaning of this expression is to avoid responsibility and stay invisible — a completely atypical response for kibbutzniks and a departure from the behavior of previous generations. The *rosh katan* syndrome has been of concern to many. It is a reaction to Begin and Sharon who were deeply mistrusted even before the war.

## CONCLUSION

That, in a nutshell, is a cross-section of the kibbutz 1983-1984. It is far from being comprehensive. There is much to be said about the arts, about education, and a host of other matters that are integral to kibbutz life. Yet the facts and issues outlined above go a long way toward defining the reality of kibbutz today and will have an important impact on what its future will be.

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1. *Moshavim* are smallholders' cooperative agricultural settlements where homes and holdings are owned individually though there is cooperation in the purchase of equipment, etc. On *moshavim shitufim*, homes are owned individually but the agriculture and economy are run as a collective unit.
2. *Kvutzot* were small communes of pioneers constituting agricultural settlements. Today, these are not distinguished from the kibbutzim.

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