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Chapter 11

Paths to Utopia: The Kibbutz as a Movement for Social Change

One of the major assumptions behind the thought and actions of all the major kibbutz movements has always been that the kibbutz can, and should, influence the rest of society. Ways and means have varied greatly. All of them, however, aim at applying the values of the kibbutz – Zionism, self-labour, equality, democracy and mutual responsibility – to the State of Israel (or, before 1948, to the Jewish community of Palestine) as a whole. These ways and means form the subject of this chapter.

Over the past eighty years, the kibbutz movements have developed some thirteen different strategies for social change. I shall describe and classify them, with some comments on the historical circumstances in which they evolved. One would, of course, also like to know to what extent these strategies were effective. This is a complex question, and I do not believe that it can be fully answered in the present state of the research. Here, I shall only ask which of the strategies described are considered by the members of the kibbutzim to have been successful in the past or relevant in the present, and which have been explicitly or tacitly abandoned. In my concluding comments I shall suggest that some of these strategies were conceptually flawed, and therefore bound to fail; some became outmoded in the course of history; while others seem prima facie to have been relatively successful.
Kibbutz Holism

Before discussing the strategies themselves, I shall say something about aims. The first countrywide kibbutz movement, Gedud Ha’avodah, aimed at establishing a “general commune of all the Jewish workers of the Land of Israel.” Open to all who were willing to accept its principles and very stringent way of life, it aimed to expand until it included the whole of the working class; and, since the “general commune” would eventually cover the whole of the Jewish economy, it would thus become the Socialist Zionist society (Shapira, Anita).

I shall call this variety of ideology kibbutz holism. Today, when the kibbutz numbers less than 3 per cent of the population of the State of Israel, this aim may seem ludicrously over-ambitious. But it was not always so. In 1939, when the kibbutz population had grown from 2.7 per cent of the Jews of Palestine to 5.3 per cent in less than three years, and more than 100,000 young members of the Jewish pioneering movements in Europe were waiting to join them, it certainly did not seem an impossible dream. Indeed, although Gedud Ha’avodah ceased to exist in 1929, this dream informed the ideas and actions of its successor as the major kibbutz movement – the Kibbutz Me’uhad – right up to the early 1950s. Throughout this period, the very existence of the belief in holism was a source of strength to the kibbutz movement. Under conditions of poverty, political weakness and military danger, the vision of a future all-kibbutz society created a confidence which was certainly not self-evidently grounded in the real situation of the kibbutz.

Whether the holistic vision could ever have been realized we shall never know. Any possibility of unlimited growth of the kibbutz was cut short by the Holocaust, which destroyed its reserves of manpower viciously and completely. Although during the period of mass immigration to the State of Israel in the early 1950s the kibbutz movements declared themselves willing to absorb unlimited numbers, the social composition of the new Israelis – survivors of the Holocaust, and Jews from the Arab countries – led to a drastic reduction of the kibbutz population in relation to the State
as a whole. Today, all are agreed that in any foreseeable future the kibbutz will be one sector in a pluralistic society. Kibbutz holism was one of the myriad unseen victims of the Holocaust.

Kibbutz Marxism

In some versions of kibbutz ideology, the emergence of the holistic kibbutz society is called “the kibbutz revolution”. One of them, which I shall call “constructive Marxism,” was current in the Kibbutz Me’uhad in the 1920s and early 1930s. The Marxist schema of class struggle and revolution was translated into terms of the formula generally accepted in the Labour Zionist movement: constructive socialism. According to this theory, the Jewish community of Palestine would be built as a socialist society, thus obviating the necessity of class struggle in the usual sense and the destruction of the old society. In the interpretation of this doctrine adopted by the Kibbutz Me’uhad, class struggle became competition between various social forms: the kibbutz; the moshav (a village made up of individual leaseholds on nationally-owned land); the town; and the moshava (a village comprised of privately owned farms on private land). The revolution would consist in the victory of the kibbutz; in other words, the achievement of kibbutz holism (Near, Kibbutz and Society 94–100).

Another kibbutz movement, the Kibbutz Artzi, achieved a different synthesis of Marxism and kibbutz theory. According to the “Theory of Stages”, the immediate task both of the kibbutz and of the Labour Movement as a whole was to build a Jewish society in Palestine, in collaboration with the bourgeoisie, and, indeed, with all sectors of the Jewish people. The revolution would come about after the fulfillment of Zionism. Under such circumstances, the immediate strategy had to be a combination of constructivism (that is, building kibbutzim) in the present, and political and educational work which would prepare the kibbutz members and
all those they could influence for the future revolution (Margalit, 1971, 135–49, 303–4).

In a third variant of kibbutz Marxism, adopted by the left wing of Gedud Ha’avodah, the kibbutz is “the avantgarde of the revolutionary movement [...] a fighting, conquering unit that expresses the collective will of the Labour Movement” (Horowitz 279). On this view, the chief task of the kibbutz is political education and organization, and its social and economic activities afford a material basis for this revolutionary activity. The kibbutz is an avantgarde in the classic political sense of the term, a Leninist revolutionary party. Many members of the kibbutz movement which adopted this view became Communists, abandoned Zionism – and Palestine – and made an unsuccessful attempt to rebuild their commune in the Soviet Union (Margalit, Kibbutz, Society and Politics 234–82, 382–7).

These three doctrines have been eliminated by history no less than the idea of kibbutz holism. No kibbutz group or movement today would rely on the simplistic Marxist formulae of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, or on the inevitability of any sort of revolution. All contemporary kibbutz ideologies assume that we live in an age of uncertainty. The future may hold a socialist revolution, or a holistic kibbutz society; but nobody is prepared to base a strategy for social change on the assumption that it does.

Commendatory Holism

Holism as I have described it so far was couched in the prophetic mode: it was both a forecast of the future and an expression of approval of that future. It also existed, however, and still exists, not as a forecast, but purely as a value judgment: whether or not the kibbutz will encompass the whole of society, this version of holism says that it should do so. I shall call this attitude commendatory holism, to distinguish it from the prophetic variety previously described. Any version of kibbutz theory and practice must take
into account the need of the kibbutz to survive, and, therefore, to shepherd and increase its resources. Commendatory holism says much more than this. It sees the reinforcement and expansion of the kibbutz as the only permissible aim. All of its relationships with the outside world – in politics, in the educational sphere, in the struggle for governmental support – are directed to this end. This view was expressed in 1979, in the course of a discussion between the leaders of two kibbutz movements: “Even today, the uniqueness of Israel lies in the existence of the kibbutz. This is the quintessential expression of the idea of ‘salvation’ in Judaism. [...] It’s only the kibbutz that gives the country whatever it has that’s special.” 1 If this is so, only one strategy can be relevant: the strengthening of the kibbutz by any means possible.

Such an attitude is by no means uncommon today. It is also found in much earlier periods, when the kibbutz had much greater confidence in its ability to influence the society around it. A pertinent example is the attitude of the leaders of the kibbutz to the moshav. The most extreme of the kibbutz movements, Gedud Ha’avodah, opposed its acceptance by the Histadrut on the grounds that it was a capitalist form of enterprise. This view was rejected both by the majority of the Labour Movement, and by all the other kibbutz movements; but, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the question of the legitimacy of the moshav arose in various forms. In 1924 Ben Gurion addressed the conference of Hechalutz, the comprehensive organization of Jewish pioneers. He demanded that the enthusiastic young delegates should see the moshav as a legitimate part of the Labour Movement, even though, in his view as in theirs, it was “not sufficiently Zionist and not sufficiently socialist” (Near, Kibbutz and Society 151). Nonetheless, in practice if not always in theory, the moshav was always in the position of a stepchild in the Hechalutz movement.

1 The speaker was Yehiel Shemi, a well-known sculptor, and at the time secretary of Kibbutz Kabri. Shemi’s remarks seem to have evoked no particular reaction from the other speakers, from which it may be inferred that they were not thought particularly eccentric (Dialogue on the Unification of the Kibbutz Movements 19–20).
The attitude of the leaders of the Kibbutz Me’uhad, which held a dominant position in Hechalutz, was also not substantially different. Since their underlying philosophy was prophetic holism, they believed that the moshav had no future, and was therefore undeserving of the support of the Zionist authorities. By the early 1930s the theory of constructive Marxism was in temporary abeyance, and the Kibbutz Me’uhad was learning to live in a pluralistic society. This, however, did not prevent it fiercely opposing the expansion of the moshav movement, on the grounds that it was a capitalist social form. This attitude was encapsulated in the punning phrase adopted by Yitzhak Tabenkin, the leader of this movement: the moshav must enjoy equality of rights; but it should not be viewed with equanimity. Clearly, if the moshav was considered inferior to the kibbutz, and not worthy of political or financial support, the same must apply, a fortiori, to the rest of the Yishuv. There could be no more unequivocal statement of the principle of commendatory holism.

It seems, however, that this concept of the place of the kibbutz in society has certain built-in disadvantages. In 1926, one of the leaders of the kibbutz movement suggested that the tendency of the Histadrut bureaucracy to rigidity and insensitivity to the real needs of the workers could be corrected by sending its officials to the kibbutzim, to renew their contact with the working class and its essential values. This suggestion was castigated by one of the leaders of the Labour Movement as “kibbutz imperialism”. Again, in the struggle of interests between the kibbutzim and the moshavim in the early 1930s, the kibbutz was described by its opponents as a “sect”, or a “faction”. (Near, Kibbutz and Society 212–14) Naturally, these terms aroused the ire of the kibbutz members, who were convinced that it was “only the kibbutz which gave the country whatever it had that was special.” Simply to state this, however, is not necessarily to convince.

This situation is even more critical today. Not only is there wide acceptance of the fact that the State of Israel – and, within it, the Histadrut-owned enterprises known as the “workers’ economy” – is a pluralist society, encompassing a wide variety of social forms, but there is also no longer the

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2 In interview with author and Baruch Ben Avram, 1975.
wide consensus on social values which was held by most of the population of the \textit{Yishuv}, according to which the kibbutz was indeed the embodiment of ideals theoretically accepted and admired by society at large. Moreover, the very success of the kibbutz has led it to acquire resources and rights, and to establish positions of social strength. In short, it has become part of the Israeli establishment, and must, therefore, compete with other sectors of that establishment for economic and political power. Thus, what may seem to the kibbutz members themselves to be “the expression of the idea of ‘salvation’” may well be, in the eyes of those outside the kibbutz, the struggle of one interest group among many for the preservation of its rights and privileges. A contemporary example is the dilemma of the kibbutz movements in the economic crisis of the 1980s. In a situation of runaway inflation, it was virtually impossible for them to preserve the value of their resources and provide individual kibbutzim with working capital without recourse to the money market and the Stock Exchange. Such activities are in conflict with the traditional principle – and the accepted image and self-image – of the kibbutz, that it must live on the products of its labour alone. Thus, when certain kibbutzim, and some officials of the kibbutz movement, were found to have been making speculative, and even ethically questionable, deals this was widely held to prove that the kibbutzim were “no better than the rest of the country”: and this was often said with no small degree of \textit{Schadenfreude}.

Pioneering and Revolution

Most of the strategies adopted by the kibbutz do not assume a holistic approach, of either type. The next three to be described were historically often associated with the Marxist analysis. In fact, they are logically independent of Marxism; and, as we shall see, they were often couched in non-Marxist terminology. All of them, however, derive from a firm belief in a new, revolutionary, socialist and Zionist society. In 1932 Israel Bar Yehuda,
one of the leaders of the Kibbutz Me’uhad, said: “We are not teachers or leaders. We are merely pioneers (halutzim), going along the road before the host” (9). In this use of the term halutz, the kibbutz is a forerunner of the new society, doing on a small scale today what the whole of the people, moved by the ineluctable forces of history, will do in the future (see chapter 8). Close to this view, though not identical with it, is the idea that the kibbutz is a “growing-point” of the new society. The kibbutzim seek “new spiritual sources, and arouse hidden cultural forces which will be the basis of the new society”. In the words of Meir Ya’ari, the leader of the Kibbutz Artzi movement, there will be a progression “from commune to communism” (Margalit, Hashomer Hatza’ir 135–49).

I find no contemporary version of the concept of the forerunner; scepticism is too deeply embedded in our way of thinking for it to seem feasible. Yet that very scepticism about a future perfect world has bred what may well be interpreted as a variant of the “growing-point” concept: the belief that the kibbutz, and similar scattered communes throughout the world, can be the basis for reconstructing the world after an ecological or nuclear or social catastrophe. This is, of course, very far from the orthodox Marxist prognosis. Yet, like that theory in its time, it reaches out beyond the local – Jewish, Zionist, Israeli – concerns of the kibbutz, and links it with universal ideas and problems.

The Kibbutz as a Reference Group: Models and Prototypes

Historically, the earliest theory of social change in the kibbutz movement is expressed in the phrase used by the members of the very first kibbutzim: they were attempting to create an exemplary society. The individual kibbutz aims at perfection in the relationships between its members, in economic progress, and in its social and cultural activities. If it is successful, others will see this perfection, and do likewise. The result will be, in the words of one of the earliest kibbutz writers, “a Land of Israel sown with kibbutzim”
(Shatz 92). Joseph Baratz, one of the founders of Degania, the first kibbutz, said in 1923:

The question of the place of the kibbutz in mass settlement has never greatly concerned me. On the one hand, our way of life is suitable for the masses – and, indeed, for all mankind. But, equally, it is obvious that the masses (including the so-called mass immigration to Palestine at the present) are not yet suited to communal life. (quoted in Katznelson, *The Kvutza* 19)

The kibbutz must improve its social, moral and economic standards, and wait until historic conditions produce a generation which will live up to them. Then it will become, in contemporary terms, a model for others to copy.

Related to this view, but significantly different, are two other versions of kibbutz ideology. The first is a moderate form of the “exemplary society” doctrine. At various periods, and particularly in the 1950s, at the nadir of the kibbutz’s status in Israeli society, there was much talk of “radiation of values”. In this view, as in the concept of the “model”, the kibbutz influences by being; however, here it is not the kibbutz as a model of society which is being imitated, but particular aspects of its social being: the existence of kibbutz democracy has a positive influence on Israeli society as a whole; kibbutz members working together with new immigrants, themselves members of *moshavim*, educate by example to such values as social equality, self-labour, agriculture, Jewish cultural forms; and so forth. Third in this group of strategies is the concept of the kibbutz as a prototype: a view embodied, for instance, in the constitution of the Kibbutz Artzi movement as long ago as 1927 (Margalit, *Hashomer Hatza’ir* 303). Note that a prototype is not simply a model, but a model that may be amended: if anything goes wrong, one can always go back to the drawing-board. The difference was exemplified in the mid-1930s with the establishment of the first *meshek shitufi*, a village where production is organized as in the kibbutz, but income is distributed according to family units. The founders of the first *meshek shitufi* saw their society as a sort of kibbutz; so much so, in fact, that they applied for affiliation to the Hever Hakvutzot kibbutz movement. Their application was rejected; the leaders of the kibbutz movement still saw the kibbutz as a model, to be imitated but not changed (Ben Avram 127–8).
was only in the 1970s that the Ihud movement accepted some meshakim shitufim into its ranks, and thus acknowledged that they are a legitimate variant of the kibbutz idea.

What is left of these three doctrines? The idea of the model is certainly still alive, if one is to judge by the number of times kibbutz writers echo Buber’s well-known phrase “an exemplary non-failure.” There are also some theorists who speak of the possibility of increasing the handful of Israeli cooperatives and communes which derive their inspiration from the kibbutz, but experience seems to teach that there is little prospect of such communities’ being established on anything more than a very small scale. The “model” terminology appears most frequently today in discussions of the relationships between the kibbutz and its neighbours in the relatively underprivileged “development towns,” and, in particular, those who are employed in the economic conglomerates owned by the kibbutzim and moshavim in different regions. One suggestion is that kibbutz members, instead of engaging in various forms of social and charitable work in the development towns, and thus creating a relationship of patronage, should act as “agents of change”, helping the people of the development town to create networks of mutual aid and cooperative organizations. The final result will be, according to this theory, a complex of cooperative units based on the kibbutz model. Similar ideas have been proposed for solving the problem of the cooperative conglomerates, which would be integrated into an overall regional organization in which each enterprise would be controlled by its own workers. Here again, the concept of the “kibbutz model” frequently appears.

This concept does not appear only in an Israeli context. Such phenomena as the Harvard University Project for Kibbutz Studies, or the triennial conferences on kibbutzim and communes of the International Communal Studies Association, bear witness to the considerable interest in the kibbutz on the part of the very widespread (and highly differentiated)

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3 “Exemplary” is better than the standard translation, “a signal non-failure,” (Paths in Utopia, 1949, 142) since it points up the echo of the phrase frequently used by the ideologists of the early kibbutzim, “an exemplary society” (hevra le-mofet).
movement of communes, workers’ cooperatives and other forms of workplace democracy. In the deliberations of such groups, the word “model” is often used. In terms of my analysis, however, this is a terminological error in both the regional and the international context. When one of the theorists of the German communal movement expresses the hope that the kibbutz will “free itself from its Zionist ideology”, or when a leader of the American communal movement finds that the kibbutz has failed to solve the problem of the woman, neither of them sees the kibbutz as a model. It is, rather, a prototype, which they study in order to learn from its mistakes, or adapt its social system to their own circumstances. Similarly, there is no real expectation that the new social forms to be created in and around the development towns will actually be kibbutzim. Rather, they will be adaptations of the kibbutz idea to the circumstances and wishes of their members. And even the currently relatively flourishing urban kibbutzim and communes emphasize that they are variants of the kibbutz original, and not copies.

The phrase “radiation of values” is still sometimes used. For instance, in Alexander Barzel’s *Categories of Social Existence*, published in 1984, we find:

Can [the kibbutz] exist in a world whose principles are opposed to those of the cooperative community? [...] If the answer is positive, the basic alternative [...] is an attempt to radiate the communal idea [...] into a world dominated by the philosophy of atomism. (182–3)

It is far from being self-evident, however, that this radiation can take place without some more active policy to help it. In this connection, the speech of the deputy minister of agriculture, Avraham Katz-Oz, one of the founders and leaders of the United Kibbutz Movement, at that movement’s conference in 1985, is instructive. He emphasized the importance of the social morality of the kibbutz and the kibbutz movement as an essential element in their relations with the outside world, and particularly the

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4 Both views were expressed in an informal discussion group at the conference of Utopian Studies Society, Europe, Plymouth, UK, 2007.
political system. Without this, he maintained, the kibbutz would not enjoy the esteem which was essential for it to influence the world outside. Yet he did not see the moral superiority of the kibbutz as in itself ensuring this influence; on the contrary, he demanded more intensive political and educational activity.⁵ Neither he, nor any contemporary leader of the kibbutz movement, believed that the kibbutz can change the world around it simply by existing.

Leadership and Service

The next two strategies to be described have been viewed, historically, as variations of the halutz concept. I have noted the change from prophetic to commendatory holism. A similar progression can be seen in the interpretation of the notion of the halutz. In one formulation, he goes, not before the host, but at its head: showing the masses not necessarily where they will go, but where they should go. In other words, the kibbutz has often been thought to have a function of leadership, even outside the Marxist avantgardist context.

Naturally enough, this strategy has frequently been applied in the area of politics. Three kibbutz movements have initiated and played a leading part in political parties or factions. The fact that their members rarely achieved more than minor office may be the result of electoral failure rather than refusal, on ideological grounds, to join a governmental coalition. Nonetheless, it is true that, historically, the kibbutz has always been hesitant about playing an independent role of leadership in politics. Its typical roles have been either that of a left-wing opposition within the Labour Movement, or of a minor partner in a coalition led by the major party in that movement (Mapai or the Labour Party). Typical ministerial positions

⁵ At conference of United Kibbutz Movement, 1985. Minutes in Yad Tabenkin archives, Ef’al.
of kibbutz members have been education, health, and transport; and a typical political function, that of party secretary at a period of inner tension between competing factions: a status of honest broker rather than policy maker. This applies no less to the Kibbutz Artzi, whose political rhetoric has been revolutionary in the extreme, than to the other movements.

When discussing the political power of the kibbutz, it is usual to emphasize its overrepresentation in the elected institutions of the *Yishuv* and the State of Israel; for instance, the fact that the strength of the kibbutz movement in the Knesset between 1951 and 1965 was between 3.7 and 4.3 times as great as its proportion in the population, and that even in the mid-1980s, when its influence had greatly declined, it was overrepresented by 250 per cent. The question asked here, however, is not whether the kibbutz movement had political power, but for what purpose this power was used. From the first government of Israel until the defeat of the Labour Alignment in 1977, the total number of months for which all cabinet ministers served was 5,823. Of these, kibbutz members served for a total of 1,100 months (19 per cent of the overall total). If we divide the ministerial positions of the kibbutz members between policy-making ministries (prime minister, deputy prime minister, foreign minister, defence minister, and finance minister), and all other ministries, kibbutz members served in policy-making positions for 241 months, as opposed to 859 months in other positions (*Near, Kibbutz Movement* ii, 256–60, 327–31).

In a sense, this analysis is purely formal, and does not take into account the possibility that kibbutz members played a leading role in policy-making in such informal groupings as that known during Levi Eshkol’s term of office as “our ministers”, and Golda Meir’s as “Golda’s kitchen”. Until the aforementioned critical account and detailed research is available, this question must remain open. It may be said, however, that in the accepted version of the events only Israel Galili (of Kibbutz Na’an and the Ahdut Ha’avoda party) appears to have wielded any substantial influence of this sort, as a result of his personal influence with the Prime Minister, Golda Meir.

It seems, therefore, that the political function of the kibbutz has less frequently been leadership than another of the connotations of the term *halutz*: the idea of service. “To be a *halutz*” said Ben Gurion in 1924, “does not mean to demand rights, but to amass duties” (“Hechalutz in Russia” 17).
An extreme version of this view is the saying, widely in use in the 1930s, and considered an expression of pride, that the current generation of halutzim is “dung for the fields of Israel” (see chapter 8, above).

The implications of this idea are, of course, far wider than the political sphere. To take one example among many: the “heroic age” of the kibbutz was undoubtedly in the late 1930s and the 1940s when the kibbutzim played a major, and generally admired, role in settling and defending the borders of the future State. In the changed circumstances of the State of Israel, the concern for security was (and still is) epitomized by the part played by kibbutz members, and especially the younger generation, in the Israeli Defence Forces. In both cases, the kibbutz has contributed to the physical security of the wider community far beyond its numerical proportions; and it is rewarded in a variety of ways, from prestige to political and economic support. This example could be repeated in many other spheres: particularly those of agricultural settlement, economic development, and culture. For the kibbutz has always prided itself on its contribution to Israeli society, and considered itself to have earned whatever special status and privileges it has by this contribution. Indeed, were one to sum up in quantitative terms the relation between the kibbutz and the outside world as perceived by its members, there is little doubt that this approach would predominate. The kibbutz, in this view, is, and aims to be, a serving elite.

It should, perhaps, be stressed that the service done to Israeli society as a whole is not considered by the kibbutz members to be a by-product of their achievements in building a viable socialist community. On the contrary, the desire to create a Jewish society economically stable and militarily secure, imbued with the values of love of physical labour and of the land, and creating a modern Hebrew culture, was part of their social vision from the very first. It is part of the conventional wisdom of the kibbutz that, at any rate until the establishment of the State of Israel, it was largely successful in promoting these aims; and that in some of them – particularly settlement, security and economics – it still enjoys no small measure of success.

As I have implied, both of these strategies – leadership and service – and the immanent tension between them are an intrinsic part of current kibbutz ideology. In the political field, the state of affairs when this
essay was first written, in July 1986, is almost a textbook illustration of this conflict. For many years, the two major kibbutz movements – the United Kibbutz Movement and the Kibbutz Artzi – had aspired to leadership in the Labour Movement; indeed, one of the reasons for the formation of the United Kibbutz Movement was the dissatisfaction of the two movements which united to create it (Ihud Hakvutzot Vehakibbutzim and the Kibbutz Me’uhad) with their lack of real political power, and their desire to assume a role of leadership within the Labour Movement. Still, in terms of practical politics and their place in the system, they consistently served rather than led. Thus, in the general election campaigns of 1973, 1977 and 1981 they provided a major part of the logistic support for the Labour Alignment: volunteers for door-to-door canvassing, special teams for outdoor propaganda, transport on polling day, and many other organizational functions. There is no evidence that they received positions of political power commensurate with this effort: in fact, it seems certain that, in terms of their public image and influence, they actually lost. For the realization of their importance in the Labour Alliance’s political effort led the anti-Labour Likud bloc to attempt to delegitimize them, and to present them as “arrogant millionaires” with no common language with the real working class.

In the election campaign of 1984, the Labour Alignment tended to assume that this effort had been successful, and deliberately played down the part of the kibbutzim in the campaign.

These conflicting aspirations – to leadership, and to service – exist within each of the kibbutz movements, and can be seen in almost every discussion of tactics or of general policy. In general terms, however, it may be said that kibbutz ideology has, on the whole, not succeeded in adapting itself to the social realities of Israel, which have been so dramatically reflected in the political situation since the first right-wing party to achieve power (the Likud) took office in 1977. In this respect, the kibbutz is widely seen – by its members no less than the rest of the populace – as part of the economically ascendant Ashkenazi establishment. Many of the strategies which seemed feasible in the past – leadership, example, value radiation – assumed a national consensus on aims and values. It is far from clear that such a consensus exists today. Indeed, in the political sphere it looks as if the efforts of the kibbutz movement, whether they aim at leadership or
at service, are directed mainly at what may be called its own social constituency. The recently increased emphasis on strategies which reach out to international circles and universal problems is, in effect, only an extension of the same constituency. For, while it can certainly be argued that the communal movement is concerned with problems which affect all of mankind, it speaks mainly to the educated, middle-class citizens of the developed world. The parallel is too obvious to need emphasizing.

Education

From the mid-1930s on the kibbutzim began to use the educational forces which they had developed in order to help absorb and educate young refugees from Nazi repression in the framework of what is still known as Youth Aliyah, although now it has become a scheme for educating young people from underprivileged areas of Israel. Only a small proportion of these young people actually become kibbutz members; and this and similar schemes are normally looked on as methods of education for citizenship – another variant of the concept of service.

Youth Aliyah recruits are almost all Sephardi Jews; and all the youth movements follow a policy of ethnic integration, particularly with regard to the Nachal (Agricultural Corps) groups which join the kibbutzim after their army service. Thus, one of the results of the educational work invested in both types of organization is to effect a slow change in the ethnic composition of the kibbutz population. In both of these schemes, however, a conscious attempt is made to educate to the specific values of the kibbutz; and there is some evidence that their graduates retain these values after they leave the kibbutz, and attempt to apply them in their new circumstances (Avnet). Thus, education is seen as a tool – slow, but perhaps the most effective that the kibbutz possesses today – for changing the values of the surrounding society (see also chapter 10, above).
Conclusions and Comments

In conclusion, I shall sum up the processes and conceptual categories described here, and add some more general comments. For, even though the state of the research may not yet enable us to reach final conclusions, both history and logic can help us to make a tentative evaluation of their effectiveness. Let us start with kibbutz holism.

I have said that the major factor in the defeat of holism as a realistic aim of the kibbutz was the Holocaust: in other words, the very specific historical circumstances of the destruction of the pioneering youth movements, and the foundation and growth of the State of Israel. I also added that, had things turned out differently, the holistic aim was not altogether unrealistic. Nonetheless, few if any kibbutz members or ideologies would today advocate kibbutz holism, even as a distant aspiration.

Doubts about whether kibbutz holism is a possible aim do not only spring from the events of the past fifty years. The founders of the kibbutz movement had an almost unbounded belief in the perfectibility of man. Over the past century this belief has been eroded, not as a result of philosophical argument, but in the light of the actual experience of the kibbutz. Many of the founders of the kibbutz believed that a combination of a non-competitive environment and an educational system attuned to it could produce a generation entirely suited to kibbutz life and values. Today, most kibbutz members would agree that, even in the best kibbutz, with the most effective educational system, a certain proportion will be found not to be suited to kibbutz life. If this is true of those born in the kibbutz, then it is so a fortiori of non-kibbutz society. In that case, a holistic communal society is indeed an impossible dream, not because sociological and historical developments will always prevent its realization, but because of the nature of man.

Have we, then, advanced no further than the ideological confrontations of the early days of the kibbutz, when the possibility, inevitability or impossibility of the kibbutz's survival was argued from general, and sometimes irreconcilable, philosophical premises? I think not. The very
fact that kibbutz members themselves have changed their ideological stance as a result of their experience points to a change in the logical status of the question. It is seen as being arguable on empirical grounds. On these grounds, the current conventional wisdom is a pluralistic view of human nature: some people are suitable for kibbutz life, others not, and it is far from clear how such tendencies are established. It may be that a further examination of the evidence, or advances in the social and educational organization of the kibbutz, will cast doubt on this view, and reinstate the concept of holism as a possible aim. The achievement of the kibbutz so far has been no more than to provide some of the empirical evidence on which such assessments and reassessments can be based.

Commendatory holism raises a number of quite different problems. Both in the past and in the present, this principle is, in effect, a moral protest by the kibbutz against the direction taken by a predominantly individualistic society – including, not infrequently, the Labour Movement which theoretically supports the kibbutz idea. It has two basic flaws, however, as a theory of social change. In the first place, if the holistic prophecy is abandoned, commendatory holism in itself has no suggestion for dealing with that part of society which will in all probability remain outside the kibbutz. Also, as we have seen, while the moral superiority of the kibbutz may be self-evident to its members, it has certainly not always been so to all other Israelis, or even to the rest of the Labour Movement.

There is a third flaw in commendatory holism which is even more fundamental than these; for it raises doubts about the very state of affairs which is to be commended. Historical circumstances never required the leaders of the kibbutz to give a direct answer to the question: “Do you want all Israelis to join the kibbutz?” It is clear that most kibbutz members would answer in the negative, for the kibbutz is, and always has been, a voluntary society. In kibbutz literature, the kibbutz is more than once contrasted with the kolkhoz,\(^6\) not only in terms of the differences between their respective structures, but because the kibbutz depends on the will

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\(^{6}\) Collective farm in Soviet Russia.
of its members to live this way of life. A holistic kibbutz society would eliminate this element of free choice, and would radically change the nature of the kibbutz. So it is no accident that, though the kibbutz movement has always attempted to ensure the backing of the Zionist and Israeli authorities, it has never contemplated the possibility of enforced expansion by means of legislation.

All three versions of kibbutz Marxism seem to have been consigned to the rubbish-bin of history. During the 1950s, both the Kibbutz Artzi and the Kibbutz Me’uhad revised their pro-Communist stance in world affairs, and to a large extent abandoned their Marxist ideology. As in other parts of the world, the abandonment of Communism was often followed by the adoption of various forms of neo-Marxian ideology, but these are not dominant in any part of the kibbutz movement today. On the other hand, it is certainly relevant to the current situation of the kibbutz that what I have described as the surviving remnant of the revolutionary prophecy – the survival, or post-catastrophic, theory of communal life – seems still to be alive in certain circles. Prophecies of doom are perhaps the most rational estimate of the future of man in the twenty-first century; so it may be that this is the best hope that kibbutzim (and similar types of communes) have to offer in a world with small grounds for hope.

Models, prototypes and sources of value radiation are all positive reference groups; and we have seen that the only concept among them which seems still to be relevant to the kibbutz is that of the prototype. The kibbutz was once seen as the embodiment of the values of a united Yishuv; but today it is almost universally perceived as a component of one sector in a society divided both in economic and ethnic terms and in terms of national and social values. So it is not surprising that it no longer functions as a reference group for Israeli society as a whole. There is a target popula-

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7 Robert Nozick maintains that “under conditions as ideal as the real world can produce, nine per cent of the people would choose to shape their lives in accordance with socialist principles” (22–3). Nozick’s article is scarcely more than a jeu d’esprit; but the question which it raises is legitimate, and merits more serious consideration.
tion for the prototype concept: but it is today to be found largely outside Israel, in sectors which share its overall scale of values.

The same problems bedevil any attempt to use the traditional terminology of pioneering in relation to the kibbutz. Even if we disregard the ethnic element in Israeli society, there is a deep rift on such questions as relations with the Arabs, and the future of the occupied territories. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the “hawkish” element of the Israeli public relates to such groups as Gush Emunim as the majority of the Yishuv related to the kibbutzim in the late 1930s. In the eyes of those sectors which approve of their political aims, such groups are seen as pioneers in all senses of the word. By their refusal to support the Likud government’s plans for settling the occupied territories in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the kibbutzim lost the virtually unanimous approval which they once enjoyed.

Even though the terminology of pioneering may no longer be relevant to the current circumstances of the kibbutz, the distinctions which have been drawn in the course of this analysis are certainly so. For the tension between an attitude of service and an aspiration to leadership seems to be one of the dilemmas immanent in the situation of any small group which aims to influence the society around it, and certainly of a socially oriented intentional community.

Finally, a few words about education. Many leaders and thinkers of the kibbutz movement believe that this has been its most successful stratagem in the past, and that the main thrust of its activities in the wider society should be in this sphere. Many social movements have proclaimed their belief in the “revolt of youth”, and seen this period in life as the best opportunity for the basic change in the fundamental attitudes and values without which no social revolution can take place. It has always been the boast of the kibbutz movement that, in contrast to other youth movements which either disintegrated, lost their ideals, or became corrupt with the transition to adulthood, the kibbutz found a way of translating the essential ideals of “youth culture”, such as equality, community, self-realization, and the love of nature, into the realities of adult life (see chapter 10, above). There is a very real sense in which this still applies: indeed, any increase in the
numbers and influence of the kibbutz in the near future seems likely to come from this source; and the growth of the “communes”, initiated and nurtured by the youth movements, which are today a small but dynamic part of the kibbutz movement, confirms this view. Education is still the kibbutz movement’s last best hope.