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The Kibbutz Movement in Historical Perspective

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In the words of the call for papers, the development of the kibbutz movement is a – perhaps the -- paradigmatic case of the way in which intentional communities “encapsulate their zeitgeist or reject it, epitomize their socio-political context or criticize it”. Like the great majority of communes, it is a European phenomenon, transplanted onto the soil of Palestine (and, from 1948, Israel) through its connection with the Zionist movement. This connection is a central factor in its creation and development, and I shall return to it later on. I shall begin, however, with a short sketch of the history of the kibbutz movement, followed by a rather more detailed analysis of some of the demographic, geographic and historical factors which affected its development.

Throughout its history, members of the kibbutz have seen it as part of the Zionist enterprise, and its special way of life has been regarded both as an end in itself and as a means of realizing the aims of Zionism – the return of Jews to Palestine and to productive, particularly agricultural, labour. By 1907, when the founders of the first kibbutz arrived in the country, there already existed some thirty Jewish villages, based on small-holdings owned by Jews but largely dependent on Arab labour. Degania, the first kibbutz, came into existence in 1909-10, as the culmination of a series of tentative experiments in communal life and labour whose aim was the creation of a Jewish working-class leading eventually to the establishment of an independent socialist Jewish society in Palestine. By the end of the First World War Degania had evolved the social structure of the classic kibbutz: a close-knit community, living on “nationalized” land (owned by the Jewish National Fund, which held the land in trust for the Jewish people), but controlling its own society and economy, and subsisting on the labour of its members alone. It was governed by all the members gathered in their weekly meeting; meals were eaten in common in the central dining-hall, which also served as a social and cultural center, and other items of consumption were distributed freely, or in accordance with the principle “to each according to his/her need.” In its early stages all decisions were taken in common by all the members. From the mid-twenties onwards administration was devolved onto a growing network of committees and elected part- and full-time (unpaid) officials serving in rotation. But the weekly general meeting remained sovereign in all spheres of kibbutz life.

This became the model for the network of kibbutzim which developed from the end of the first World War onwards.

The nuclear family was a recognized element in kibbutz society. Women worked a full day, and children were cared for in small groups, conceived of as a means of practical education for kibbutz life. Each group was looked after by a *metapelet* (carer) and, as the children grew, was absorbed into a kindergarten and, later, a school. The children spent several hours in their parents’ home after working hours, but in most kibbutzim returned to spend the night in the children’s house.

The economy of every kibbutz was based on agriculture, attuned to local conditions such as climate, availability of water, size, and the members' skills. Cultural activities, too, varied greatly, but their common element was the framework of the Jewish year, with its weekly Sabbath celebration and the cycle of Jewish agricultural festivals -- cultural, rather than religious, events.

After the establishment of the British mandate in 1919 thousands of young pioneers began to enter the country, and many of them joined or founded kibbutzim. The Mandatory government limited the number of immigrants, and many waited for years until they were allowed to enter the country. The waiting period was often spent in training kibbutzim in the Jewish Diaspora. They recruited from the pioneering Jewish youth movements, which combined scouting and other recreational activities with Zionist and socialist education, and were the main source of manpower for the kibbutzim; on the eve of the Second World War they had some 100,000 members. By 1928 there were 41 kibbutzim in Palestine, with a population of almost 2,400 adults and some 300 children. This, however, was less than 2% of the Jewish population; and, although the kibbutz population grew constantly, it was never more than a small fraction of the Jewish community – 7.6% at its peak in 1948.

In their early years the kibbutzim enjoyed wide public support, since they were seen to be the spearhead of the Zionist enterprise, broadening Jewish settlement to places and under conditions where others could not survive. But this virtual monopoly was broken in 1921 with the establishment of the moshav (pl.: moshavim), a village based on family holdings, though– like the kibbutz – settled on nationally owned land, and practising the principle of self-labour. Though there was a good deal of cooperation in the moshav, particularly in purchasing raw materials and marketing produce, it was considered to be a more “normal” form of settlement than the kibbutz, and the Zionist authorities tended to prefer the moshavim when allocating land and granting start-up loans. In the mid-thirties the *moshav shitufi* – like a kibbutz in its economic organization, though consumption is based on the nuclear family – was created.

In order to protect their interests, by 1930 the kibbutzim had created three nation-wide movements, differing both in their political affiliations and in their concepts of the nature of kibbutz society: the biggest advocated the "great and growing" kibbutz, expanding to the limits of its economic possibilities, and based on industry as well as agriculture; another was more selective, and its members were drawn only from its own youth movement; while the smallest deliberately limited its kibbutzim in size in order to preserve the quality of the members and the "intimate" relationships between them, and engaged only in agriculture. In 1934 the Religious Kibbutz Movement, a movement of orthodox religious Jews, was founded. By now each movement was recruiting and educating young people both in the Diaspora and in Palestine in a parallel progression from its youth movement groups in town via the kibbutz training farm to a kibbutz in Palestine.

Over the years, the social structure of the kibbutzim in the different movements became more similar. But, unlike most communal movements, they aspired to influence the surrounding society, and from an early stage each had its own political affiliations: the smallest of the movements was identified with the Labour Party (Mapai), the hegemonic party in the Zionist movement and, eventually, in the State of Israel, while each of the other movements controlled a party of its own; together, they constituted a left-wing opposition to the Zionist establishment.

From 1932 to 1936 flight of the Jews from Nazi Germany and the resulting influx of capital led to an unprecedented increase in the Jewish population, from 175,000 in 1931 to 350,000 in 1935. The proportion of the kibbutzim in the Jewish population remained steady – even though, with their austere way of life, they found it hard to compete with the temptations of town life as the economy of Palestine prospered. They made great efforts to provide homes for refugees from Europe, most of them graduates of the Zionist youth movements, often at the expense of the standard of living within the kibbutzim. One of the outstanding innovations of this period was the Youth Aliya (Youth Immigration) organization, which brought young people fleeing from Nazi persecution to Palestine and educated them in the kibbutzim.

In 1936 there broke out the armed struggle against the Zionist project and the British mandate known as the Arab Revolt. It was defeated by strong military measures on the part of the British authorities, but the final result was the White Paper of 1939, which foresaw an independent, overwhelmingly Arab, Palestine within ten years.

These events influenced the kibbutz movement deeply. During the Arab Revolt crops were destroyed and settlements attacked. Kibbutz members were recruited to the police force, and small groups of volunteers, based on the kibbutzim, fought under the aegis of the British army. Politically, Zionist thinking was dominated by the possibility of the partition of the country into a Jewish and an Arab state, as recommended by the Peel Commission in 1937. This led to a policy of "strategic settlement", designed to ensure that the area of any future Jewish state should be as broad as possible, and its borders defensible. The kibbutzim played a leading part in this effort, spearheading the creation of the "tower and stockade" settlements, kibbutzim (less frequently, moshavim) founded in one day, and protected from attack by the prefabricated constructions which gave them their name. The kibbutz movements, backed by their extensive youth movements in the Diaspora and in Palestine, were the main source of manpower for this operation, and it was given preference by the national authorities. The image, and self-image, of the kibbutz, changed radically: to the basic characteristics of fraternity, austerity and hard labour was now added bravery, even heroism. The kibbutz was widely held to exemplify the best qualities of the Jewish community in Palestine.

These qualities, and the prestige and public support they attracted, continued to characterize the kibbutz throughout the second World War and the three years which followed, until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the War of Independence. During the World War many kibbutz members volunteered for the British forces, straining the economic system to the utmost. This period also saw the foundation of a unique military force, the Palmach (Striking Force), supported by the British in its early stages, but later operating clandestinely. Recruited largely from the kibbutzim, each unit lived and worked in a kibbutz, but the soldiers devoted about a third of their time to military training and operations. It developed a special way of life, attuned to the democratic and egalitarian spirit of the kibbutz. From 1945 to 1948 the Palmach was active in the struggle against the British, performing acts of sabotage, guarding and helping illegal immigrants, and defending new settlements. During the War of Independence it developed into one of the crack units of the Israeli army.

From 1942 onwards the economy of Palestine prospered. So did the kibbutzim. Despite an acute shortage of manpower they expanded agricultural branches to supply the needs of the Allied forces, and many of them began to develop non-agricultural branches such as canning factories, garages, carpenters' shops and boarding-houses (for soldiers on leave). New settlement continued, though at a reduced rate; specially noteworthy are the experimental kibbutzim in the Negev desert.

The post-war period was marked by the struggle against the British government for increased immigration, particularly of Holocaust survivors, and by the diplomatic conflicts which resulted in the partition of Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948. Kibbutz members were prominent in organizing the movement of refugees from Europe and their illegal immigration, which were a major factor in these developments. They also re-established the youth movements which had been their main source of manpower until 1939, and groups from the Diaspora and the local Zionist youth movements created many new kibbutzim.

During the War of Independence (1947-9), many kibbutzim stood in the way of the invading Arab armies, and virtually all, supported by the Israeli army, fought heroically. Nine were conquered and destroyed; one whole bloc of kibbutzim (the Etzion bloc, south-west of Jerusalem) surrendered, and many of its inhabitants were massacred. The Palmach was expanded, and won victories on many fronts. And, even during the war, new kibbutzim were set up along the borders of the new state, and in strategic areas abandoned by the Arab population. Casualties were high, however: some 10% of the relevant age-group in the kibbutz movement were killed, as against 6.6% in the general Israeli population.

In the fourteen months of the War of Independence 57 new kibbutzim were established – an unprecedented intensity of settlement. But this was the end of the massive expansion which had begun in 1936. The Holocaust had reduced the Jewish communities of Europe and, within them, the manpower reserves of the kibbutz movement, to a pitiful remnant; and the youth movements of Palestine and the non-European Diaspora were comparatively very weak. Settlement in the areas abandoned by the Arabs continued, but mainly in the form of moshavim, most of them founded by new immigrants: in the year following the end of the war (July 1949) 22 new kibbutzim were established, as against 110 moshavim.

This was only one aspect of a crisis which beset the kibbutz movement from 1949 onwards. Most of its traditional functions – settlement, defense, absorption of immigrants – seemed now to be outdated or beyond its capacity. The aim of creating a socialist society remained relevant, but it was far from immediately attainable, and increasingly out of tune with the aspirations of the Israeli public and political establishment. There remained the economic function of the kibbutz, which it fulfilled extremely well, after a short period of rehabilitation. Its contribution to Israel's economic independence was seen to be one of the main justifications for the existence of the kibbutz. Over the next thirty years, the kibbutzim prospered, and developed a whole network of industries, many of them outstandingly successful. Their standard of living also rose steadily, in a process sometimes described as *embourgeoisement*. And they became increasingly alienated from the less privileged classes, most of them of Middle Eastern origin, many of whom lived in towns and moshavim close to the kibbutzim, and were often employed by the kibbutzim or in concerns controlled by them; for there was a chronic shortage of labour in the kibbutzim, and the principle of "self-labour" was subject to constant erosion.

In the early 1950s the crisis was intensified by political tensions. The party controlled by the two biggest kibbutz movements (Mapam -- United Workers' Party) was in opposition to the dominant Labour Party, particularly on foreign policy: it supported neutrality, or alliance with the Soviet Union, in the Cold War. However, about a third of the members within the biggest of the movements, the Kibbutz Me'uhad, supported the Israeli political leadership. In the frenetic atmosphere of the Cold War, when a third world war seemed not unlikely, it proved impossible for these two factions to live together, and in May 1951 the biggest kibbutz movement split into two. Six kibbutzim were divided on party lines, and many groups of members left their homes for other kibbutzim. It was a traumatic experience, some of whose effects are still felt. The pro-Soviet stance of Mapam began to change from 1952. Although the kibbutz movements have continued to be active in politics, their principal contribution has been their substantial support for the peace movement from the 1980s onwards.

From the mid-fifties prosperity increased. The population grew steadily, recruiting kibbutz-born children, youth movement graduates, and families from towns in Israel and abroad. Standards of housing, food and clothing improved, and the system of distribution of consumer goods was gradually changed to give the members greater freedom of choice. Cultural activities, both in the individual kibbutz and on a regional and national level, often reached a professional standard (e.g., the kibbutz orchestra, choirs and ballet company). But certain problems which had existed for many years began to intensify. Material inequality between members, mainly resulting from the use of resources from outside the kibbutz, grew steadily. Face-to-face democracy was still an integral part of the system, but in virtually every kibbutz there existed a *de facto* oligarchy, often strengthened by the complexities of kibbutz industry, and by the development of regional enterprises run by a managerial class of kibbutz members. Moreover, women played a smaller part than men in the government of the kibbutz, their managerial skills were used mainly in such "feminine" areas as education and culture, and most of them worked in traditionally female occupations such as child-care, the kitchen and the clothing store. These matters were the subject of frequent, often stormy, controversy, and many modifications to the system were made: managerial positions were held in rotation; committees were always of mixed gender, and women had greater choice of profession as the economy became more varied; general meetings and other important events were broadcast on closed-circuit television. But many of the problems persisted, and one, that of hired labour, proved intractable: by the mid-1970s it had become an integral part of the system.

Meanwhile, a new generation was entering the system. Demographically, population growth was never high enough to sustain kibbutz society without recruitment from outside its ranks. But the educational system grew steadily. High schools were created: in one movement, boarding-schools for the children of each area; in the others, within the individual kibbutz or, increasingly, on a regional level. Despite these organizational differences, all kibbutz schools had a good deal in common: broad humanistic education, with the addition of nature study and "practical geography" in the form of rambles; education to labour, either by working in a kibbutz branch or running the "children's farm"; emphasis on artistic expression and practical work. By the mid-1960s, however, there was an increasing tendency to mould the school curriculum to national norms, and to accept the matriculation examination as an educational aim. Equally, by the 1970s the principle that every kibbutz child had a right to university-level education was widely accepted. All of these developments brought kibbutz education closer to the accepted norms of Israeli society in general.

From the early 1960s there was increasing pressure, particularly from mothers of young children, to abolish the system of "communal sleeping". By 1992 this change had been accepted in all the kibbutz movements. But the system of "toddlers' groups" remained stable, and was buttressed by the acceptance (for payment) of children from outside the kibbutz.

The Six Day War (1967) led to fundamental changes in Israeli society and politics.

Israel proved its military ability in the face of attack, and conquered extensive areas, which it still controls. In the war itself, the younger generation of the kibbutz played an important role, again at the cost of a disproportionate number of casualties, and was widely recognized as an elite group in Israeli army and society. In the subsequent political controversy about the future of the occupied territories, the kibbutz movements and their political representatives were to be found at all points on the political spectrum, from the Greater Israel Movement which was opposed to the return of any of the conquered lands to those who advocated unconditional withdrawal. The orthodox religious movement renewed its pre-State settlement in the Etzion bloc, and many of its members fervently advocated settlement in the occupied territories. But the great majority followed the (Labour) government in its

policy of settlement only in areas which it planned to retain in a final peace settlement. 27 kibbutzim were founded between 1967 and 1977, a frequency twice as great as in the previous fifteen years. In the Yom Kippur War (1973) kibbutz members again fought well, and suffered many casualties, in the framework of the Israel Defence Forces. Several kibbutzim on the Golan Heights were evacuated in the face of Syrian attack, but their members returned after the war. In 1982, under the peace agreement with Egypt, three kibbutzim in North Sinai were moved to sites within the pre-1967 borders.

Despite the tensions caused by war, terrorist attacks, and bombardment of border settlements, the trends noted above continued throughout the seventies: increasing economic efficiency and growth, marked by wide-spread industrialization -- almost every kibbutz now had at least one industrial enterprise -- the creation of cooperative regional conglomerates, a high standard of cultural creativity, steady expansion of the kibbutz population, a growth in familialism and a certain loosening of the rules of the kibbutz way of life. The latter process was heightened as the kibbutzim were joined by large numbers from among the younger generation (as well as their partners, often not kibbutz-born themselves), whose approach was more pragmatic and individualistic than that of their elders. From the early seventies there was also a growing tendency for kibbutz-born young people to leave the kibbutz, and this had grown to alarming proportions by 1980.

The political atmosphere in Israeli society changed radically in 1977, with the defeat of the Labour Party by Menahem Beigin's party, Herut (later: the Likud). In addition to its expansionist settlement policy and hawkish views on defence, this party and its political allies strengthened the trend to market economics and its ideological backing already discernible in Israeli society. Moreover, the kibbutz movement's support for Labour and other left-wing parties, its refusal to settle in the occupied territories, and the fact that it was mainly part of the hitherto dominant ethnic group (Jews of European descent) put it firmly in the opposition to the new establishment: it had lost the moral and political support afforded by the Labour-controlled leadership over four decades.

One reflection of this support had been financial aid, particularly in times of crisis. The kibbutzim's new situation was clearly expressed in the mid-1980s, when the whole of the Israeli economy underwent a severe crisis as the result of the resolution of a period of runaway inflation. Many firms went bankrupt, while others recovered only with the help of government aid. The great majority of kibbutzim were saddled with huge debts; and it was only through government intervention (with the help of a Labour Finance Minister in a coalition government) that a global rescheduling arrangement was made.

The economic crisis, which was focused precisely on the area where for a whole generation the kibbutz had been most successful, catalyzed a wide-spread failure of nerve with regard to the kibbutz idea as such. Added to the still unresolved uncertainties about the functions of the kibbutz in the State, the anti-socialist ethos now prevalent in Israel – and, indeed, in the world -- and the dissatisfactions felt by many ordinary kibbutz members with the strains of day-to-day life, this produced a wide variety of ideas which only a short while earlier would have seemed heretical. The concept of “the new kibbutz” was born.

The “new” or “privatized” kibbutzim – now about half or more of the kibbutz movement – are based to a great degree on market forces, as against the communal structure and values of the classical kibbutz. While the means of production are still owned by the community, as far as possible, they have the legal status of limited companies. Many more members than in the classical kibbutz work outside their own community; and, whether they work inside or outside the kibbutz, receive salaries according to the market level, and pay an internal tax to cover the expenses of the community and support members in times of unemployment, sickness and old age. The democratic structure tends to be modelled on that of parliamentary (or local) government, with voting by closed ballot on key issues; the period of rotation of managerial posts is much longer than in the classical kibbutz, and rule by an elected elite is institutionalized. Many functions traditionally performed by public institutions have been taken over by the family: for instance, few “privatized” kibbutzim now provide three meals in the dining-hall, and a few have even closed their dining-halls completely. Many observers, therefore, doubt whether such societies can properly be called kibbutzim, though legally and in the eyes of the public they retain their traditional name.

On the other hand, a number of kibbutzim (about 40 in a total of almost 270) stubbornly retain the structure and principles of the classical kibbutz. And the last decade has seen a tiny spurt of what may be called kibbutz revivalism: some fifteen small kibbutzim (or, as some call themselves, communes), some in slum areas of Israeli towns, others in rural areas, have been founded. Few of them are based on agriculture; for the most part their members engage in various forms of social work, education and the like. Their members are virtually all graduates of the Israeli youth movements, and take pride in the belief that they are continuing the kibbutz tradition of service to society, though in a different and “purer” way than that taken by the veteran kibbutzim.

Currently, the total kibbutz population is about 102,000 – about 1.8% of the population of Israel. But this is, of course, only one stage in a lengthy historical process. Beginning as a tiny minority of the Zionist settlers of Palestine, the kibbutz grew in numbers, influence and prestige, reaching its zenith at about the time of the establishment of the State of Israel. Since then, though participating in the general prosperity of the country during the sixties and seventies, it has gone into a steady (though not always obvious) decline, intensified and made manifest by the economic crisis of the nineteen-eighties.

<b>Approximate dates</b>	<b>Main geographical concentration (countries of origin; major scene of action)</b>	<b>Dominant intellectual influences</b>	<b>Results in practice</b>
1908-14	Russia	Jewish emancipation, revolutionary movements	Collective experiments; first kibbutz founded
1918-30	Eastern Europe	Nationalism, socialism	Zionist youth movements; kibbutz movement grows
1930-1936	Eastern Europe, Germany	Anti-fascism, Communism	Diversification and politicization of kibbutz movements
1936-1948	Eastern Europe, Germany, Palestine	Anti-fascism, Communism, democratic socialism	Relative and absolute strengthening of kibbutz movement
1936-48	In Palestine	Jewish-Arab conflict	Increasing militarization of kibbutzim
1948-1965	In Israel	Nationalism; social-democracy; cold war	Kibbutzim as part of establishment; prosperity and its consequences.

			Cold war leads to split in biggest kibbutz movement
1965-1977	In Israel	Capitalist backlash; consumerism; occupation and settlement; wars of 1967 and 1973	"Liberalism" and familialism in social framework; variegation in politics
1977-1985	In Israel	Right-wing political and intellectual hegemony	Revisionism, further political variegation
1985 onwards	In the world	Globalization and the reaction. Peace agreements and Intifada	Social, economic and ideological crisis.
1985 onwards	In Israel	Economic crisis; political/security deadlock	Signs of disintegration; drastic changes in internal structure. The end of the kibbutz?

A close look at the above table reveals how, in every period of its history, the kibbutz movement was influenced by developments in the outside world, and particularly in the Jewish world. I shall give a few examples here, and add to them in the course of the workshop. The group which invented the kibbutz – the first settlers of Degania – were all young men and women who grew up in Russia in the period of social and political fermentation which culminated in the revolution of 1905. They were deeply influenced by the revolutionary streams of thought – from the Narodnaya Volya to the nascent Social-Democratic party – current at the time. In addition to their Zionism, they evolved a social utopianism which found its expression in the kibbutz. Their successors, who arrived in Palestine after the first World War, saw themselves as being part of the double revolution – national and social – represented in their case by Zionism and Communism, and drew clear political conclusions from this. In the following period, the bifurcation of world socialism had its effect, and each of the kibbutz movements crystallized its political stance, in ways which eventually led (in 1951) to a disastrous split in the biggest kibbutz movement.

The kibbutzim played a major role in intensive Zionist settlement under physical threat (the “Arab Revolt”) from 1936 to 1939, and reached the zenith of their influence and esteem. But their natural reserves in the Zionist youth movements were destroyed in the Holocaust, and they were unable to compete with the moshavim in the effort to absorb the mass immigration of the early 1950s. Parallel to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 there began a decline, both in the world and in Israel, of the socialist and egalitarian values which had until then had provided the kibbutz with ideological backing; and this decline was accentuated with the fall of the Soviet Union and the discreditation of Communism. Thus, the changes in the Zeitgeist and in the fortunes of Jewish people had a direct effect on the state of the kibbutz movement.

During the seventy years of its existence (1910-1980) the classical kibbutz was undoubtedly the most successful form of communal/intentional society. Only seven such societies (or groups of them) – the Hutterites, the Shakers, the Bruderhof, Amana, Oneida, Twin Oaks and the kibbutzim – have survived for one generation or more (about thirty years)<sup>1</sup>. In terms both of longevity, of economic success and of demographic growth, the Hutterites, the Bruderhof and the classical kibbutzim surpass all other communal movements. Most scholars have attributed the success of the North American communes to their religious (often fundamentalist) faith, and seen Zionist and/or socialist ideology as the equivalent in the case of the kibbutz. I would emphasize a number of other factors, in addition to the world-historical elements already mentioned.

1. The kibbutzim, like the Hutterites and Bruderhof, have had considerable success in absorbing the younger generation, by close supervision of their education, and, in the case of the kibbutzim, by the creation of a unique educational system. In the case of the Hutterites, the indoctrination, strict control and limitation of the educational development of the younger generation has combined with a substantial birthrate to ensure demographic growth. In the case of the kibbutz, the birthrate has not been sufficient in itself to ensure survival. Since the early 1920s, the Zionist youth movements have been its chief source of manpower.

2. Of all communal bodies, only the kibbutzim have developed the youth movement as a means of demographic growth. A number of historical factors have combined to this end: Zionist motivation, which led tens of thousands of young Jews to see the kibbutz (and the youth movement, which educated and selected candidates for kibbutz membership) as a way of escape from poverty and endemic anti-semitism in the Jewish Diaspora; and the socialist orientation of virtually all the youth movements, which chimed well with the Zeitgeist of the inter-war years.

<sup>1</sup> The Doukhobors have a chequered record of communalism

3. From its earliest days, the kibbutz has enjoyed the support of the Zionist movement, and, after 1948, of the State of Israel, in a variety of ways: support for the youth movements and their training farms; allocation of land; legal and political help; collaboration in matters of defence; financial support; and more.

4. Like many of the American communes (though on a larger scale) the kibbutzim have always seen themselves not as isolated communities, but as part of a movement: primarily, the various kibbutz movements (with their affiliated youth movements), but also the Zionist movement (particularly its labour wing) and, in the broadest sense, the world socialist movement – though, in the latter case, with no formal affiliation. Thus, each kibbutz both gained support from a network which spread far beyond its individual boundaries and saw itself as contributing to a cause with universal significance.

5. The sacrifices and hardships which were an unavoidable part of daily life, particularly in pre-State Jewish Palestine, were seen to be justified in the light of an all-embracing aim: the establishment of an independent Jewish community in Palestine.

The unique structure, demographic growth and economic success of the “classical” kibbutz enabled it to survive and prosper, and it was undoubtedly the most successful of all communal movements until the crisis of the eighties. The status of the “new” kibbutz – even more so, of the contemporary kibbutz movement, which contains a great variety of social structures, and an even greater range of social and economic success – is far more precarious. The reasons for the crisis and subsequent decline seem clear, in the light of the factors enumerated above – more exactly, in light of the fact that in the twenty-first century they are less relevant, or no longer apply :

1. Though the kibbutz educational system still exists, much of its special character has been eroded in the process of adaptation to the needs and pressures of modern Israeli capitalist and technically-oriented society; as a result the proportion of young kibbutz-born people who leave the kibbutz on adulthood has increased steadily over the past decade.

2. The youth movements continue to exist, both in Israel and in the Diaspora; but they are numerically tiny compared to those of pre-Holocaust times.

3. With the end of the hegemony of the Israeli labour movement in 1977, the institutional support for the kibbutzim has withered away, and they can no longer be sure of help from the government or the Zionist movement at times of crisis.

4. No less important than all these specific factors, the crisis of faith which engulfed the kibbutz movement in the early 1950s, when it seemed as if many of its former functions had been taken over by the State, has taken its toll: there is no longer a consensus within the kibbutz movement or outside it as to the aims of the kibbutz in the modern age.

On the other hand, as has been said, a number of "classical" kibbutzim still exist, and seem to be prospering both economically and in demographic terms. Moreover, the changes in the kibbutz have opened up possibilities for the small groups mentioned above which have grown up over the past decade. Freed from the dependence of the kibbutz movement on the political and economic establishment, they see themselves as part of the counter-culture, striving to promote values and ideals which the veteran kibbutzim have in large part neglected. Their members are mainly graduates of the Israeli youth movements, and they have a small but enthusiastic source of recruitment. And they are free to choose for themselves the areas in which they aim to serve outside society: some of them concentrate on ecological issues, others have taken on responsibility for education in the area where they live, others again promote social and cultural activity among under-privileged youth. So it looks as if they are here to stay – though they are bound to be small and lacking in influence relative to the veteran kibbutz movement. In all of them there is an emphasis on the communal experience – the psychological expression of *Gemeinschaft* – which is the binding force of their communities. To quote:

The collective experience often arises spontaneously when men and women of good will live, work and think together. In this sense, it is universal - or, perhaps more accurately, eternal, as fire is eternal : not that it never dies, but that it will always break out afresh, in places ever new and often unexpected.

The kibbutz today is in many respects like other communes, past and future. It looks as if it will survive, as they do, as a counter-cultural component of the wider society, much

smaller and more varied than in the past, but still distinguished by the principles of mutual aid and social solidarity.