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Kibbutz Samar

Meir Turniansky

1997

I must admit that one of the main reasons (apart from being an anarchist at heart) for which I read “Freedom” are the lively and varied reports on international affairs. Reports on the situation in remote places such as Indonesia, Ecuador and Paraguay always gave me a feeling that I am correctly informed on the social developments in these places.

Therefore as a “Freedom” reader who lives in a Kibbutz I was somewhat shocked by the poor representation of the situation in the Kibbutzim today in the article: “end of Jewish utopia” (“Freedom” 6th of September). This article quotes outdated sources from 50 years ago. While being bleak and unclear it gives facts which are either wrong or distorted. I would like to try to give more ample and correct information on the Kibbutzim then and now.

First of all the Kibbutz movement was never Jewish-Arab but based purely, like the rest of the Zionist movement, from its beginning in the turn of the century, on Jewish immigrants from east Europe who were influenced by marxist ideas. Anarchism was not really part of the game as Russia was revered as the almighty father (the main title in the kibbutzim newspaper on

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the day of Stalin's death in 1953 said: "the sun of nationalities has turned off").

The Kibbutzim adopted a strict communal lifestyle which interweaved with the then vigilant (as now in a way) situation of Jewish settlement in Israel. All private property was banned, even clothes were communal. The Kibbutz members lived in rooms which had virtually nothing in them apart from a bed. All decisions were made by the members assembly in a democratic way including the names of the first babies! Eating was (and still is) done in a dining hall with a central kitchen, laundry was also communal and so was the kindergarten. The children did not sleep at home with their parents but in a dormitory in the kindergarten/school with one parent in shift guarding them. The idea in these central/communal facilities was also to liberate women from the endless toil of the housework by shifting it to central facilities thus also making it more efficient. After all there is hardly any doubt that it is more efficient and economical to cook for a few hundred people in one central kitchen or laundry than each family for itself. The members were requested to work a similar amount of hours a day and received their consumption needs according to a general budget or allocation decided concerning health, housing etc. All the profits and the assets belong to the community which decided how to use it, there were no private bank accounts. All budgets were similar thus creating a society where people were (materially) equal.

From the period of the beginning of the century until the 1980's about 300 different Kibbutzim were built. They were hailed as containing the *crème de la crème* of Israeli society (the state was established in 1948), many artists but also leaders, and generals of Israel came from the Kibbutzim even though they contained only 3% of the population in Israel. Indeed many saw the kibbutz as a utopia at that time, and it became the most sociologically researched society in the world. The nature of the society was absolutely secular excluding a few religious kib-

butzim. Unfortunately apart from one attempt there was never any real effort to merge with the arab population in Israel. The kibbutzim took what is revered to as a “mild left wing stance”, while advocating peace and co-existence with the Arabs within and without Israel, they remained strictly arrogantly Zionist, therefore never willing to compromise on the Jewish only character of Israel.

The article claims “that the last of the kibbutz has given up”. This is again only partially true (as is the picture drawn by the too short article in the “Raven” on new life to the land), the thing which has been given up by the last kibbutz is the communal dormitory of the children and not the whole ideology which contains much more than that. It is true that the kibbutzim are changing. Israel has grown and became a much richer capitalistic Americanized and less ideological country. The kibbutzim whose fate was bound with Israeli society begun to change also. At first a private kettle was allowed in the rooms then furniture then books kitchens and all the other wonders of private property. Today a house of a family in a kibbutz looks just like a typical house in the city. The dining hall still exists but members can choose if they wish to cook at home or eat in it. All property is allowed and is bought according to a members budget where he can even create his own credit account. The communal lodging of the children has been renounced and the children sleep at home. Many central facilities still exist: the launderette, the central office which manages the managing, accountancy and governmental paperwork for all. Many Kibbutzim are taking steps towards becoming a capitalist society, meaning:

1. private accounts for members which will account to every expense of the member including those which previously were not accounted for such as meals, electricity etc.
2. The gradual leasing of the kibbutz assets to the members until their final purchasing by the members.

3. Nomination of boards of directories to manage the kibbutz.
4. Differentiation of budgets between the different members according to the responsibility of their work meaning: salaries.

Indeed here the article is right, many Kibbutzim are not a utopistic society anymore but a society in transit towards a rural town on the scale of a small village. Still the Kibbutzim were never “pioneers of anarchism” except a few rare examples which I feel one of them is the kibbutz I live in which like some others still maintains it’s revolutionary way of life but in a different way than the original kibbutz.

The kibbutz in which I live (it is called Samar) has an ideology of non intervention with the members life which remarkably reminds anarchist theories. The main points of social “order” here are:

1. Everybody decides for himself where and how much he works.
2. There is no budget, everyone draws cash as he wishes.
3. decisions are reached only by dialogue or the assembly.
4. There are hardly any committees to monitor internal affairs as in other Kibbutzim.
5. All facilities e.g. kitchen, office etc. are open all the times – there are no locks anywhere.

These features or customs of our life style are possible because here lives a small group of people which decided it wants to live this way. Of course this requires much self control from the member since this whole system is based on the fact that people will consider the communal property, money and works

to be done as their own and therefore will work well and spend the money sparingly, but all is done according to their decision. The belief is that this freedom will lead to better results than the usual systems of control and coercion societies usually use. Up to today things are working fine, this place is prospering and has a strong social spine. There are about 150 residents living here including 80 members. We grow dates and vegetables and have a dairy farm and some tiny factories. Maybe the most interesting thing regarding “Freedom” readers about this place is the fact that you will not find here more than five people who know who Kropotkin was. The word “anarchy” is hardly ever mentioned, and is sometimes even abused in it’s negative misleading conception (equal to just one big mess where nobody cares about anything). This place emerged as an anarchistic society without people planning it ideologically. The healthy society here is more a result of people from well-to-do houses being fed up of the rotten systems they grew up in (many of them were raised in old and stagnated kibbutzim) having an opportunity to act freely and manage their own lives from A to Z as a small desolate rural place like Samar makes possible.

I feel that in Samar it is proven that true anarchy can exist and benefit the people who practice it. People here are always willing to defend the way of life we live even if it means restraining themselves since eventually they do prosper and enjoy a good deal of freedom. Readers who would like to contact us to learn more about Samar or to come and volunteer here are invited to write to:

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