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AGRARIANISM IN ISRAEL'S PARTY SYSTEM

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The agricultural sector of Israel's Jewish population is not very large; nevertheless the role of agriculture in the political life of the country is of the utmost importance. Seven of the sixteen members of the present cabinet (July, 1956) are members of kibbutzim (collective agricultural settlements). Twenty-six of the seventy-five Jewish members who support the government coalition in the 120-member Knesset (Israel Parliament) are members of kibbutzim or of moshvei-oudim (co-operative agricultural settlements). David Ben-Gurion, Israel's outstanding leader, who is the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, retains his affiliation with a kibbutz and declares himself to be an agricultural labourer. Recently, for example, he relinquished all his official positions and left for a year and a half to do agricultural work in a kibbutz in Israel's pioneering frontier area, the Negev. The Minister of Finance, the Director General of the Ministry of Defence, and the Secretary General of the Histadrut (Federation of Labour)—three of Israel's key positions—consider themselves members of kibbutzim and take pride in their past as agricultural labourers. The Chief of Staff of the Israel Defence Forces, a most popular figure with the youth of the country, was born and raised in a co-operative agricultural settlement, and his father, himself a farmer, is a member of the Knesset.

A third of all the kibbutzim and most of the moshvei-oudim are connected with Mapai (the Israel Labour party), which is the principal partner in the three dominant coalitions in Israel: the government, the executive of the Jewish Agency, and the executive committee of the Histadrut. The policy of Mapai is influenced to a great extent by the collective sector, and many of its leaders and active members came from that sector in the not very distant past.

*This is a revised edition of a paper submitted to the round-table of the International Political Science Association, Geneva, Sept., 1956. It was written when I was a graduate student and research assistant at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and I am indebted to Professor Benjamin Akzin for his comments, which helped me considerably. For the general background of democracy in Israel and an analysis of the political parties of the country, see B. Akzin, “The Role of Parties in Israeli Democracy,” Journal of Politics, XVII, 1955. This paper deals with Jewish agriculture only. Arab agriculture in Israel and its political life are so fundamentally different from Jewish agriculture that they warrant a separate discussion.

1As at Dec. 31, 1954, the Jewish population in Israel totalled 1,526,009, distributed as follows: urban, 1,161,030; rural, 360,637; in special homes for immigrants, 4,342. The rural population of 360,637 was distributed as follows: moshacot (agricultural settlements based on private ownership), 61,610; moshvei-oudim (co-operative agricultural settlements), 89,850; kibbutzim (collective agricultural settlements), 76,115; other kinds, 133,062, including special kinds of moshavim and maabarot (new immigrants' settlements) and immigrants' camps. (Israel Statistical Yearbook, no. 6, 1955–6.)

2The kibbutzim and moshvei-oudim together constitute what is generally referred to as the "collective sector" of Israel's agriculture, as distinct from the "private sector" grouped mainly in moshavot, that is, settlements based on private ownership.
Would it be true, then, to say that an agrarian group has seized the reins of government in Israel and is leading her in the direction of a policy that will suit its own interests? Here we have to differentiate between two periods. During the pre-state (pre-1948) period there was no such seizure, but there was a marked accord between the general interests of the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine) as a whole and the interests of what has gradually emerged as the principal agrarian group—the group of collective settlements. In the years since the establishment of the state of Israel this harmony has been considerably reduced. Agrarianism appears increasingly as a pressure group, and at the same time there is a noted decline in its over-all influence and importance. But whereas this decline is rather rapid in the social and economic life of the country, it is not yet serious within the political sphere. At the present moment, therefore, a temporary gap exists between the socio-economic significance of Israel's agricultural sectors and their political position.

I. The Pre-State (Yishuv) Period

The social and political life of the pre-state period (1878–1948) was distinguished by the influence of one dominant set of values: the Zionist ideology, which extolled agricultural, physical, and productive work. Zionist theory described the Jews in the diaspora as a minority of the middle classes, engaged in marginal or tertiary occupations, such as trade, free professions, and white-collar work. The solution of the Jewish problem was envisaged as the establishment of a complete Jewish society in Palestine, a society which would be self-sufficient in all its economic and social functions. The establishment of such a society would necessitate the transfer of Jews from the tertiary sector to the secondary and primary sector, and, in particular, to agriculture. The central slogan was "reverse the occupational pyramid," which was also called "productivization." An immense prestige was attached to agriculture; any other work, and particularly any urban occupation, was regarded as inferior.

Agriculture was preached also by the Socialists, who since 1904 have played an ever increasing role and, since 1918, a central role in the Yishuv and in its leadership. They have created two new social forms, the kibbutz and the moshav-ovdim, which combine Zionist pioneering values with Socialist values. Because of the agricultural character of these social institutions (no urban kibbutz or moshav-ovdim has yet been established), the prestige of this new, "just," way of life came to be attached also to agriculture.

Because the period was "idealistic" in character, political life was impregnated with these pioneering and Socialist values, and the political hierarchy was largely built on its affinity to them. As a result, during the last thirty years before the state, collective agriculture constituted the strongest and most crystallized group in the Yishuv and it emerged victorious in the struggle of

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3For a full comparative study of the pre-state (Yishuv) and Israeli society, see: S. N. Eisenstadt, The Absorption of Immigrants (London, 1954); and Akin, "The Role of Parties in Israeli Democracy," 515–17. See also N. Bentwich, Israel (New York, 1953).
the élite. Many leaders—heads of political and other institutions and party functionaries—were recruited from the pioneering sector, that is, mainly from collective agriculture. The moral superiority of this group was recognized by a majority of the Yishuv as well as by a large segment of Jews abroad.

In addition to these ideological factors, there were other factors that helped to elevate the collective agricultural group to its pre- eminent position in Yishuv society, and hence also to the top of the political hierarchy. In the first place, the agricultural settlements served as the principal means of increasing Jewish land-holdings in Palestine and thus of broadening the territorial basis of the Yishuv. The renewed Jewish settlement of Palestine started in 1878–82 with the establishment of a few scattered holdings, and it was gradually expanded by the establishment of additional agricultural and fortified settlements throughout the country. When the mandate over Palestine was conferred on Great Britain, the proposed international boundary between Palestine and Syria was redrawn so as to include three Jewish agricultural villages which had been established in the far north of the country. The present territorial boundaries of the state of Israel, except for the Negev and central Galilee, are almost identical with the limits of the Jewish agricultural settlements in the pre-state period.

In the second place, the agricultural settlements served as the major bases and arms depots for the Jewish underground forces that were raised by the Yishuv when its development and growth caused tensions between the Jews and Arabs and between the Yishuv and the British mandatory government. The Haganah constituted the principal component of the underground forces. These factors, both of them connected with what might be called the "foreign policy" of the Yishuv, increased the prestige of the collective agricultural settlements. The establishment of each new agricultural settlement, every enlargement or consolidation of an existing kibbutz or moshav-ovdim was regarded as a national achievement. A considerable part of the national capital, invested during this period in Palestine by Jews, was invested in agriculture, and the pick of the Jewish youth who immigrated into Palestine from the diaspora, as well as of the second-generation settlers in the country, turned to these settlements.

In the final analysis, the interests of the Yishuv and those of collective agriculture were largely the same. This identity of interests, as we have seen, was founded on the congruence of the predominant values and the political needs of the Yishuv with the values and economic needs of the collective settlements. Thus agriculture was elevated to its pre-eminent position in the Yishuv's political life without arousing the antagonism of other social groups, such as trade unions and the urban middle class.

Composition and Structure of the Agricultural Group

During the pre-state days, agriculture was composed of three major groups: kibbutzim, moshvei-ovdim, and moshavot. Whatever has been said thus far applies fully only to kibbutzim, and, with minor reservations, to moshvei-ovdim, whereas the moshavot illustrate the obverse aspect of our thesis.
It should be noted that both kibbutzim and moshvei-ovdim are based on land owned by the Jewish National Fund (a land-holding public corporation), and that they are financed by voluntary contributions, controlled by the Zionist movement, supported now by the state of Israel, and devised to further Jewish agricultural settlement in such a manner as to avoid misuse and speculation in land-holdings. In the moshavot, on the other hand, ownership of the land is mainly vested in individual farmers, but in some cases it is vested in the Jewish National Fund or other public or private landlords.

Kibbutzim⁴ are collective agricultural settlements, organized on the principle of common ownership of the means of production, combined with a way of life in which the community rather than the family is the predominant unit in respect of consumption and education. They are based on considerable social solidarity and on intensive identification with Socialist and Zionist values. The kibbutzim constituted important centres of the underground forces and kept secret caches of arms. They also bore the major burden of the politically motivated policy of settlement. A great part of the Yishuv’s general élite originated in the kibbutzim, which preserved an intense connection with them.

Moshvei-ovdim⁵ are co-operative agricultural settlements, organized on the basis of individual holdings of land and individual ownership of buildings, livestock, and most implements, and considerable co-operation in cultivation, marketing, and purchasing. The moshvei-ovdim were considered by the rest of the group of collective agriculture, and as often as not also by themselves, as second-class members, because of the relative “backwardness” of their pioneering activity and because of the existence of individualistic economic elements in their co-operative structure. Their share in the élite was relatively minor. Their share in land, in capital allocated by various Zionist agencies, and in manpower was also of secondary importance. Until the formation of the state only 64 moshvei-ovdim were established as against 137 kibbutzim.

During the last thirty years before the establishment of the state, the moshavot played an entirely different role. In their organizational pattern they conform closely to agricultural villages in other countries. They are made up of small farms and medium-sized holdings (mostly orange groves and vineyards). These farmers are not Socialists; on the contrary they are firmly attached to the principles of private enterprise. Any co-operative arrangements that might exist are based on purely commercial and economic factors. Moreover, the moshavot did not participate fully in the Zionist endeavour to create a “complete society.” The older moshavot employed Arab labourers, becoming in effect a thin colonizing stratum employing “native” labour. Thus, they acted contrary to the avowed Zionist aim, which was to further a mass return of Jews to Palestine to take up physical labour and other primary occupations, so as to correct the imbalances in the occupational structure of Jewish society. However, due to the increase of tensions between the Arabs and the Jews


and to the struggle of Jewish workers for greater opportunities for employment, more and more Jewish labour began to be employed in the moshavot, and this particular problem lost much of its acuteness. In this case, again, Jewish agricultural labourers from the collective sector represented the broad national interest as well as their own interests. Nevertheless, almost up to the establishment of the state, Arab workers were employed occasionally in the moshavot, particularly during the harvesting seasons when agricultural labour became scarce and especially since they were considerably cheaper than Jewish labourers. Even moshavot that were originally established for idealistic motives underwent during the years a transformation of their \textit{Weltanschauung}, and economic considerations became predominant in their policies.

For all these reasons the prestige of the moshavot was low as seen by the collective sector, and this attitude had its repercussions on a major part of the Yishuv. The moshavot were conceived as being "reactionary"—obstructing the establishment of a new society—and insomuch as they did not employ Jewish labour they were presented as obstructing the Zionist cause. Their economic motivation was considered irreconcilable with the pioneering considerations which were mainly evaluative and sometimes political in character.

The special position of the moshavot was clearly reflected in the results of the struggle for membership in the general élite. Only a few personalities originating in moshavot achieved general recognition by the Yishuv. Their share in the organized division of Jewish National Fund land and Zionist Funds was minor. They did not attract the young people; on the contrary, they lost many of their second and third generation. Some of the sons of moshavot farmers left for the city or took up urban occupations; some of them joined kibbutzim and moshvei-ovdim; only a minority continued the way of life of their fathers as farmers in the moshavot. Many moshavot gradually were transformed into semi-urban settlements and townships.

The special case of the moshavot demonstrates clearly that collective agriculture established its élite position in the Yishuv, and also furthered its own interests, only because of its readiness for national service and its immediate attachment to the pioneering-collective, that is, the dominant, ideology. The moshavot were not fully integrated with these aspirations, their prestige was low, their influence on Jewish national politics was restricted, and their share in the élite and in the publicly allocated funds was minor.

One of the special characteristics of Jewish agriculture in Palestine was the almost total absence of a permanent agricultural proletariat. The kibbutzim and moshvei-ovdim operate on the principle of self-work, that is, all work is done by the farmer and members of his family. Even though violations of this principle are known to have occurred, it is still true that there was no place for a permanent agricultural warge-worker either in the kibbutzim or in the moshvei-ovdim. During the harvesting seasons the kibbutzim receive additional labour in the form of volunteer labour camps made up of high-school students and members of youth movements which are ideologically close to the kibbutzim. Toward the close of the pre-state period certain units of the underground forces were stationed in kibbutzim, where they engaged alternately in agricultural work and in military training. Groups of young people
who intend to form a kibbutz often serve a two-year apprenticeship in an older kibbutz, and thus constitute an important labour factor. All these various sources of manpower are of a temporary nature, and do not create a type of agricultural wage-earner.

Moshvei-ovdim utilize these sources to a somewhat more limited extent. Since the land is owned by the Jewish National Fund, any possibility of accumulating several farm units in one hand is eliminated, and as a result the farm unit remains small and is gauged to the possibilities of one farmer and his family. In times of crisis, such as prolonged illness, the principle of mutual help among the members of the moshav-ovdim is acted upon.

In the moshavot, which are based on the principle of private enterprise, there is no limitation on the size of individual holdings, and there are some medium-sized farm units. No ideological barrier to the use of hired labour exists. During the picking season there is need for a considerable number of seasonal workers. Nevertheless, even in the moshavot no Jewish agricultural proletariat came into existence, if we include in the meaning of that term agricultural labourers who wander from one place of employment to another according to the seasons of the year, and hands who live permanently on a farm. The labour problem was solved in the moshavot in the following ways. First, a substantial number of small farms even in moshavot can be worked by the owner alone. Secondly, until the 1930's the moshavot used to employ a considerable number of Arab labourers (there was an agricultural proletariat in the Arab sector). Thirdly, many members of the early kibbutzim served long periods of apprenticeship in moshavot, thus functioning in the capacity of temporary agricultural labourers, until they established their own settlements. In addition, during the first few years of their settlement on the land and before they were consolidated, many young kibbutzim and moshvei-ovdim used to send some of their members to do “outside work” as agricultural labourers in neighbouring moshavot. Finally, a few scattered agricultural labourers were to be found in the moshavot. However, it would be futile to inquire into the political influence of the agricultural proletariat in pre-state days, because as a group it was non-existent.

II. THE STATE OF ISRAEL

Changes in Values and Social Structure

Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, tendencies which were already discernible in the later pre-state period, and especially in the thirties and forties, have grown rapidly. Israeli society is undergoing a change in values which is evidenced by a general weakening in the intensity of its attachment to values in general and by an increasing severance of political action from ideological attachment. The clear domination and the great power of the collective-pioneering values have been declining. Individualistic economic values are now becoming prominent. Ideological and élite groups have been transformed into groups which are mainly interested in the fulfilment of their particular interests. The collective agricultural group is no longer an élite
pure and simple, whose importance is acknowledged by all and whose superiority is admitted by most; moreover it is becoming a powerful interest group.

Parallel to the change in values a structural change is taking place. The establishment of the state has resulted in the great expansion and development of new occupational groups, among them the civil service and a professional army. The gap widens between the collectivist sector on the one hand and the intelligentsia and the professions on the other. The importance of trade unions increases. Private agriculture in the moshavot is legitimized by the increasingly individualistic values, and for the first time after a long interval it has become fully integrated in the social structure. Many moshavot are linked with right-wing parties. The pre-state Yishuv was a society in which an evident priority was given to the collective agricultural group, which in its turn strove to isolate any group, such as the moshavot, which did not accept its values and leadership. Seen from this point of view, the position in present-day Israel is more "normal." There is an abundance of groups struggling for political power and, although certain groups have a relative advantage, not much of the admitted superiority of collective agriculture is left.

The rise and growth of new groups (such as the bureaucracies of the civil service and the regular army, which have important functions to fulfill in the society) are not the sole reason for the decline in the prestige of collective agriculture and in its actual importance. The reverse of this phenomenon is the forfeiture of functions of the former élite group. Agriculture no longer plays such an important role in "foreign affairs," and army camps are not in kibbutzim. And although some functions of local defense are left in the hands of these settlements, the major responsibility for defense has been taken over by the army. Moreover, collective agriculture does not surpass any other sector in the implementation of the "ingathering of the exiles," the economic, social, and cultural absorption of the hundreds of thousands of immigrants, most of whom came from under-developed countries—a central task of Israel today. In the pre-state period, special formal organization to accomplish that task was not particularly important, but the state of Israel has established extensive bureaucratic organizations for the purpose. A major portion of the new immigrants was absorbed in cities, townships, and specially provided camps (maabarot). Only a fraction of the post-state immigration was absorbed by collectivist agriculture (see Table I). However, although the growth of the agrarian sector as a whole was numerically greater than that of the urban sector, it has to be borne in mind that a substantial part of this increase occurred in immigrants' camps and settlements. These are located in rural areas, but their agricultural activities are far from determined. Kibbutzim, moshavim, and moshvei-ovdim have absorbed altogether some 100,000 immigrants as against 400,000 who went into cities and towns.

All these changes had their impact on the relative decline of the agrarian

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6For a thorough sociological analysis of the problems of change see T. Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, Ill., 1951), chap. xi.
7See Eisenstadt, *The Absorption of Immigrants.*
TABLE 1
JEWISH POPULATION IN ISRAEL, DECEMBER 31, 1949, AND INCREASE TO DECEMBER 31, 1954*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dec. 31, 1949</th>
<th>Increase† by 1954</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>930,133</td>
<td>595,876†</td>
<td>64.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>768,724</td>
<td>392,306</td>
<td>51.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>161,409</td>
<td>199,228</td>
<td>123.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moshavot</td>
<td>30,183</td>
<td>31,427</td>
<td>104.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moshavei-ovdim</td>
<td>31,242</td>
<td>58,608</td>
<td>187.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kibbutzim</td>
<td>63,518</td>
<td>12,597</td>
<td>19.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>36,466</td>
<td>96,596</td>
<td>264.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See n. 1.
†The main increase is from immigration.
‡This total includes 4,342 immigrant houses.

The share of agriculture in the national income has gone down from 18.5 per cent in 1939⁹ to 17 per cent in 1950 and to 12.9 per cent in 1955. This decline is also expressed in the diminished share of the group in national expenditure. In 1953 not less than 32 per cent of the total investments were still devoted to agriculture. In 1954 the sum was reduced to 27 per cent, and in 1955 to 22.5 per cent.

Recently, a great number of special privileges accorded to agriculture have been subjected to public criticism. These privileges are presented as anachronistic relics from a time when agriculture was the privileged occupation in the nation. There is public resentment against the income tax reductions accorded to kibbutzim, co-operatives, and agricultural marketing associations. The government has recently abolished subsidies on certain agricultural products, but some other products still qualify for such subsidies. Agriculture still receives considerable sums in the form of long-term and short-term loans on convenient terms from public institutions.

The youth of Israel and the new immigrants, the two main sources for any manpower increase in agriculture, no longer look on agriculture as the foremost occupation. Although there has been an increase in the number of persons gainfully engaged in agriculture, there has been a slow but steady decline in the percentage: in 1955, 15.3 per cent were gainfully employed in agriculture as against 19.3 per cent in 1939.

In the political élite, agriculture is still strongly represented, at least numerically. In pre-state days, many a politician was recruited from the agrarian group, he retained his intimate connection with it, and his political status was justified by this connection. Generally, there was no conflict of loyalties between his immediate agricultural group and the broader organizations he served, such as the party or the nation, primarily because there was a considerable measure of harmony of interests between them, as already noted.

In the state of Israel two types of agrarian politician are distinguishable. First, there are the representatives of agricultural groups, that is, of particular agricultural interests, who participate in the various political bodies such as party headquarters, the Knesset, and the government, on behalf of their groups,

⁹Ibid., and D. Horwitz, The Development of the Palestinian Economy (Tel Aviv, 1948) (Hebrew).
and are expected to fight for those groups' interests. They are not supposed to disregard the "general interest," but it is their specific task to watch out for that part of the body politic which they represent while they are engaged in formulating the general synthesis and in determining the principles on which resources and rewards are to be allocated.

Second, there are individuals who, for reasons of personal history or ideological attachment, are connected with agriculture and retain in many instances their formal membership in a kibbutz or moshav-ovdim. They attach a certain prestige to such a symbolic connection, but they represent, in effect, other and more general interests (the party, which in most cases has also an urban wing, or the state) which are today frequently in conflict with agrarian interests. This second group of agrarian politicians is, nevertheless, sympathetic to requests of kibbutzim and moshvei-ovdim and predisposed in their favour, sometimes for sentimental reasons and frequently because the kibbutzim have a strong representation in the party secretariat (central committee) and apparatus. However, this predisposition should not be misconstrued to include full support of agrarian interests. Gone are the days when the average politician considered it his duty to come to the assistance of agriculture almost without deliberation and without reservations.

The political significance of agriculture is, therefore, declining, but so far the decline has been a slow and minor process. A greater decline is noticeable in the social significance of agriculture. In this respect agriculture has lost the manifest primacy it held during the pre-state period. A struggle is taking place between the collective-pioneering values whose influence has been weakened, and the individualistic economic values which now strive for a fully legitimate position and perhaps even for superiority. In this way also the ideological emphasis on agriculture in general, and on its collective branch in particular, is lessening. A further reduction of its political significance, as expressed in terms of representation in the Knesset, the Jewish Agency, and the various party headquarters, is, therefore, to be anticipated. At the moment there are still quite a few politicians left over from pre-state days who owe their positions to the erstwhile pre-eminence of agriculture. Some of these have reversed their former outlook and have become representatives of more general bodies and interests and their attachment to agriculture has been impaired. Others have become representatives of agriculture as one pressure group among many, and still others are destined to disappear sooner or later from the scene and thus to make place for the representatives of the new non-agrarian groups which are in the ascent.

Nevertheless, it would be a misconception to conclude that the appeal of agriculture has vanished entirely and that it has lost its value. Even today agriculture is considered to be one of the important branches in the development of Israel's economy, albeit not the only important branch. Even today a segment of the city youth is attracted by agriculture because of its pioneering and collective elements. Most of the youth movements adhere to the pioneering ideology, and they educate their members to take up a collectivist or co-operative way of life. The state encourages these activities by various means. The Compulsory (Army) Service Law stipulates that every soldier has to serve
one year of his army service in an agricultural settlement. Although this provision is not as yet fully operative, a good many units (called nahal) do serve in agricultural settlements, and their members, after the completion of their compulsory service, have even established new agricultural settlements of their own, some of them in the arid southern Negev.

**Changes in the Composition of the Agrarian Group**

The changes in Israeli society and values have not only altered the position of the agrarian group as a whole, but they have also affected its various sub-groups in diverse ways.

The moshavot, most of them organized in the Farmers' Federation, have reached full legitimization. With the establishment of the state, their special relations with the Arab sector ceased. The ascending economic values assist this social framework of individualistic agriculture based on private enterprise. The political isolation of the moshavot was overcome by linking themselves with the General Zionist party.\(^{10}\) They have not thereby achieved great significance, because this party comprises other crystallized groups, such as the Israel Manufacturers' Association, importers and exporters, and merchants and landlords, whose interests do not always coincide with those of farmers and growers.

As explained earlier, the kibbutzim were most severely struck by the general causes which affected the position of Israel's agriculture. Most of the tasks that were withdrawn were taken away from kibbutzim. The fallen prestige was mainly theirs. And last but not least: the mass immigration which came from "under-developed" countries did not fit into their collectivist way of life, and relatively few immigrants were absorbed by the kibbutzim. The moshvei-ovdim, on the other hand, were successful in increasing their members and settlements considerably through the absorption of immigrants. At the time the state was established, there existed 137 kibbutzim and by the end of 1955 their number had risen by 96, whereas to 64 moshvei-ovdim in 1948 not less than 198 were added in the same period of time.\(^{11}\)

Just as, for historical reasons, agriculture as a whole retains a disproportionately strong position as compared with its declining social and economic power, so the kibbutz movement is over-represented as compared with the moshvei-ovdim. Only four of a contingent of twenty-six agrarian supporters of the governmental coalition in the Knesset are members of moshvei-ovdim. Of the sixteen-member cabinet, two have an attachment to kibbutzim and five more are members of kibbutzim and may be looked upon as their representatives, whereas there is not one minister who is a member of a moshav-ovdim. This disproportion served as the background for a serious clash which took place recently within the ranks of Mapai (the Israel Labour party) when the moshav-ovdim movement (a great majority of which belongs to Mapai) insisted on the appointment of one of their members as Minister of Agriculture,

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\(^{10}\) For a description of the various political parties mentioned hereinafter, see Azkin, "The Role of Parties in Israeli Democracy."

as against the kibbutzim who were equally adamant in their demand for the same post. This time the kibbutzim were victorious, but by way of compensation a member of the moshvei-ovdim received the post of Deputy Minister of Education. After the next Knesset elections this struggle will undoubtedly be renewed, but it is most unlikely that it will be resolved similarly. The moshvei-ovdim, as the main agricultural organization absorbing immigrants, are becoming more powerful and their prestige is rising.

An agricultural proletariat is beginning to develop in Israel. There is a need now for such a proletariat. During the Yishuv period Jewish agriculture was in the main an intensive and mixed agriculture. Since the establishment of Israel the need has increasingly been felt for large-scale agricultural production for export, and for new agricultural industries, since the old branches (producers of vegetables, milk, and eggs, for instance) have reached their saturation point. Monocultures such as cotton and peanuts have been introduced, which are produced on what are, for Israel, large farms, a form of agricultural organization almost unknown before 1948.

However, the fact that there now exists a great unskilled agricultural labour force constitutes a problem. Although the public authorities endeavour to settle the new immigrants as farmers, a growing group of immigrants has emerged for whom only inadequate funds were available and the necessary construction and tools were not forthcoming. The immigrants themselves do not possess the necessary funds, with the result that they cannot be established as independent farmers. In other cases, even though all the prerequisites are available, these new immigrants, who had never been farmers in their lives and, for that matter, had never been engaged in agricultural work, have preferred to become agricultural labourers rather than take upon themselves the responsibilities and hazards of independence. In this way an agricultural proletariat has emerged. The labourers live in moshavot and in immigrants’ camps and villages, move from cotton- and orange-picking to peanut-collecting and similar harvesting, and are thus employed periodically throughout most of the year in seasonal work. The kibbutzim and moshvei-ovdim continue to practise the principle of self-work, but in an increasing number of cases they are obliged to transgress it, both because of the pressure of the authorities to employ the idle labour force and because of a certain weakening of the principle itself, as a part of a tendency toward a decline in social values since the establishment of the state. This process has also contributed to the emergence of an agricultural proletariat. But this new group is as yet far removed from political influence. Like agricultural labourers in other countries, and particularly like those who are also recent immigrants the agricultural workers in Israel are politically passive and apathetic and devoid of any pronounced political orientation. They are not unusually subject to the influence of any extremist or left-wing parties. They are not organized in a separate trade union, but are individually members in the general trade union. Moreover, rather than organizing themselves they are enrolled by others. At the present time they are absolutely without political influence, whether as floating voters or as a separate organization.
Has Israel Agrarian Parties?

At the present time all Jewish parties in Israel have both rural and urban wings. The total floating vote in agriculture (excepting the new immigrants) is inconsiderable. Any party which seeks to control the government, or, since the régime is basically a coalition, seeks to increase its share in the government, must turn to the urban electorate. In addition, as compared with the United States or even England, the political life of Israel is still dominated by ideology, notwithstanding the decline in ideological intensity from the pre-state period. Any party that openly declared itself to represent an interest group such as farmers would lose at the polls. For that reason all parties stand for general national interests and general ideology. As a result, and notwithstanding the great significance of the agrarian factor in political life, there is no party in Israel that calls itself or endeavours to be a farmers’ or agrarian party.

On the other hand, all the parties have an agrarian wing. Even the rightist parties such as the General Zionists and Herut run a small number of collective agricultural settlements. These settlements go back to the period when the collective-pioneering values were dominant in the Yishuv, and signify that the parties are anxious not to remain outside the accepted forms of pioneering activities. Private agriculture (the moshavot) votes for these two parties, but to all intents and purposes the urban wing is preponderant. City voters form the greater part of their electorate, and their agrarian groups are of little significance.

The Progressive party, Israel’s liberal party, has also an agrarian wing, composed of two sections: kibbutzim, organized in the Ha’oved Hazioni; and a special type of moshvei-ovdim, with greater emphasis on individualism. Nevertheless, the urban wing is dominant in the Progressive party. Among the five Progressive Knesset members there is not one agrarian representative.

Mapai, the dominant factor in all of Israel’s coalition governments, is clearly based on both its rural and urban wings. Most of the moshvei-ovdim (82.7 per cent in June, 1956) are connected with the party, and so are about a third of the kibbutzim. But, on the other hand, the party has broad support among urban labour and other urban groups. There are eight members of kibbutzim and eleven members of moshvei-ovdim, (the real agrarian representatives), among the forty Mapai members of the Knesset. Of the nine Mapai members in the cabinet, two retain their attachment to kibbutzim, but only one, the Minister of Agriculture, who is actually a member of a kibbutz, may be considered a genuine agrarian representative. The same situation exists, mutatis mutandis, in the main religious party, Ha’apoel Hamizrachi; there also is found an urban wing, and an agrarian wing which comprises kibbutzim and moshvei-ovdim.

The two parties whose voters are mainly recruited from the agrarian sector are left-wing parties: Ahduth Ha’avoda and Mapam. Ahduth Ha’avoda has nine members in the Knesset of whom seven are members of kibbutzim; of Mapam’s nine Knesset members, six are members of kibbutzim. In both of these parties the agrarian wing is clearly dominant, and in both cases the
predominance is of the kibbutz type, that is, of the collectivist-agriculture type. Each of these two parties has an association of kibbutzim affiliated with it. But almost no moshvei-ovdim belong to either. Both parties are openly pro-agrarian in their internal policies. They generally support rising prices for agricultural products, object to the curtailment of agricultural subsidies, and demand larger agricultural credit and increased investments. The urban youth organized in their youth movements are indoctrinated with the spirit of settlement in kibbutzim only. Mapam, with its pro-Soviet orientation, considers itself to be the vanguard of the revolution in Israel society. Its kibbutz association, the Kibbutz Artzi, it regards as the vanguard of the vanguard. Nevertheless, both parties are reluctant to appear openly as agrarian parties, for the reasons mentioned above. Both have urban branches, most of whose members are city workers, and both are cognizant of the fact that increased strength depends on their appearing to be general parties, not parties representing agrarian interests alone.

To sum up: the further to the left a party stands in the range of Israel’s major parties, the greater the significance within it of agriculture, and, in particular, of collective agriculture. But even the two left-wing parties\(^\text{12}\) cannot be called agrarian parties in the full sense of the term, though they do represent the interests of agricultural organizations (kibbutzim) that are allied with them.

In the political life of Israel, agrarianism is of great significance, but no fully agrarian party exists. Each party has its agrarian wing because, in the past, ideology, prestige, and the division of the national resources sided with agriculture to a large extent. But no party is willing to tie its future completely to agriculture, because agriculture as an occupation is receding from its former role as the main channel for rehabilitating the social structure of the people and is becoming something like an ordinary occupational group. As such, its special political significance is decreasing.

\(^{12}\text{This paper leaves out the Communists, because they have only a very limited hold in Israeli agriculture.}\)