Solidaric Work-Groups in Collective Settlements

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The aim of this paper is to explain the wide differences in solidarity observed in work-groups on collective settlements (Kibbutzim) in Israel. These differences will be explained in terms of the structure of the Kibbutz and the position of different work groups in it, informal communication and control, as well as formal controls.2

Procedure

The research on which this paper is based constitutes part of a broader project, directed by Dr. Y. Garber-Talmon3 in twelve Kibbutzim in Israel. In each Kibbutz, 25% of the members were interviewed, about many aspects of their lives. Fifty-one questions concerned work relations and attitudes. In two Kibbutzim special interviews were conducted with all members of seven work-groups. From the answers to the questions, the following indices were formulated to determine the degree of solidarity of the different work-groups:

1) The degree of consensus of the group members with regard to work, production-policy of the Kibbutz and general matters.
2) The degree of "we" feeling.
3) Positive, neutral or negative relations between members.
4) Subjective estimates of the amount of mutual aid in the group.

Information gathered through observation, was added to these indices.

Observation was conducted according to a written guide and covered relations between members of work teams during working hours, rest-intervals, after work and on days off; and relations between members of work-groups in the communal dining hall, during recreational activities, etc. A few members of the research team participated in the work-groups. On the basis of the interviews and the systematic observations, the solidaric work groups were located and their relation to the community established.

The Work Situation in the Kibbutz

Kibbutzim in Israel4 are of the mixed farming type and therefore contain various branches such as cattle, poultry, field crops (falba), etc. Collective consumption is also organized by branches. The communal kitchen prepares and serves food to all members in the communal dining hall. The topol provides care for younger children during the day and sleeping quarters for them at night.

Every evening the work coordinator assigns members to the different branches after the managers of the branches5 have advised him of their manpower needs. Members desiring leave, transfer to a different branch, side-leave, etc. also apply to the work coordinator. The manager of the branch serves as the main channel of communication between the administration of the Kibbutz and the particular work-group. He also holds the only recognized position of control in the work-group.

Managers of branches, the work coordinator, and all other members assigned to authoritative roles are appointed by and are under control of the weekly general assembly of the Kibbutz and its organs. Generally speaking, there is little differentiation between the work situation and other social situations.6 As long as gaps in the channels of communication between the community and the work-group do not arise, the workers are directly under the formal and informal control of the whole Kibbutz. Every significant event in the sphere of work is known to the whole community soon after it has taken place.

Nevertheless, differences in the amount of social control exercised upon the various work-groups in one Kibbutz are easily discernible.7 These differences result from gaps in the channels of communication connecting work situations with certain other social situation in the Kibbutz.

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6. In the communal showers, where the gathering of members after work has a social character, discussions concerning work are held. In the late afternoon, after work and shower, members meet on the big lawn, generally situated in the center of the Kibbutz, where again one of the main topics of conversation is work. See R. D. Schwartz, "Social Factors in the Development of Legal Control: A Case Study of Two Israeli Settlements," Yale Law Journal, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Feb. 1954), pp. 471-490.

Conditions for the Segregation of the Work Group

We have found four conditions under which segregation of a work-group from general Kibbutz control, i.e., a gap in communication occurs:

1. The “Client.”

The products of the Kibbutz are consumed by two kinds of “clients”: 1) non-members (e.g., merchants) who buy the products, and with whom a transaction is concluded which resembles any other economic transaction carried out in a market setting; and 2) members, who receive services and commodities from other members, e.g., food in the communal dining hall. The latter do not have to pay and do not have to prove their identity in any way. Thus they are clients in the sense that they consume products, but in another sense are not clients since no economic transactions and no interpersonal relations are involved. They are given their share by virtue of being members of the community. This, of course, implies their obligation to participate in producing and in giving service, as well. For want of any better term for this type of consumer, we also call him “client.”

1) A branch whose clients and workers are both members of the same Kibbutz is under greater informal control than a branch which caters to people outside the Kibbutz. A comparison was made between the work-group in the communal kitchen and the work-groups in branches marketing their products in the neighboring town. The communal kitchen prepares the meals for all members; therefore, its clients are members of the Kibbutz itself. Information as to the quality of “production,” efficiency of labor organization, labor relations, etc., in it, was found to be more abundant than similar information on other branches, whose clients were not members of the Kibbutz.

2) The intensity of the relationship with clients has great influence upon the degree of social control. Relations with the kitchen work-group are more intensive than with that of the tippul in two respects: first, members generally eat in the communal dining hall three times a day; hence contacts with the kitchen workers are frequent; second, this relationship includes all members of the Kibbutz, thus contacts are extensive. On the other hand, the contacts of tippul workers with clients are less frequent and extensive. Members meet the tippul workers only once a day, in the afternoon, when they come to take their children for a few hours. Generally, no worker of the tippul is present when the children are put to bed by their parents in the communal children’s house. Their relationships are also less extensive since they include parents only and not all members. However, from the point of view of involvement, contact with the tippul is more intensive than contact with the collective kitchen. The involvement of a member with his children is naturally greater than

his involvement with food. Thus the intensity of contact with the communal kitchen and with the tippul is comparable. The stronger involvement in the tippul balances the more extensive and frequent contact with the communal kitchen.

3) We have found that the institutional definition of the clients’ position in relation to the branch must be taken into consideration. Supplying the clients’ needs in the communal kitchen is considered the main purpose of the workers. This means that the clients have a legitimate right of control. The main interest of the tippul, on the other hand, is the upbringing of children according to educational principles accepted by the whole Kibbutz society. These principles do not always coincide with the wishes and needs of the parents or even with those of the children. Obviously, the satisfaction of parents and children is considered desirable and is an important source of reward to the workers; yet it is supposed to be secondary to the “children’s welfare” as defined by the explicitly formulated educational principles which are interpreted by the “educational committee” and by the general assembly. The clients do not constitute the major reference group of tippul workers’ service aspirations. Hence, from the point of view of the above factor, the power of the clients’ control here is more limited than it is in the communal kitchen.

4) Defined standard versus lack of standard. No accepted definition exists in the collective kitchen as to the quality of the services rendered to its clients. It is not clear what “good food” or “enough food” means. This “unstructured” situation is defined by the attitude of the members.

In this connection, an important development in the informal control of another branch supplying services to all members of the Kibbutz, the clothing store, is of interest. Here members’ clothes are sewn, laundered, ironed, and mended collectively. In some Kibbutzim most of the members’ clothing is stored in the communal store. Workers in the clothing store purchase the clothing (especially work clothes and bed linen) and distribute it to the members. In the twenties, when the Kibbutz movement was beginning, the leading principle of distribution (of all clothing) was: “to each according to his needs.” Each member received a different amount of shoes and clothes according to his personal needs. A standard, defining what was due to each, was lacking; therefore, this system involved potential tension. Since solidarity was generally more intensive than it is today, mutual confidence greater, and interest in consumption as a whole smaller, this tension usually remained beneath the surface. These conditions have changed, and the hidden tension has come into the open. Today, in most Kibbutzim, standards have been defined determining clearly the number of shirts, pairs of shoes, trousers, etc., to be allocated to each member annually or the quantity which should be at any member’s disposal. When comparisons were made in client-store worker relations, much less tension was found in Kibbutzim which had introduced these standards than in those which had not.

5) Specialization. Another factor is the degree of specialization and complexity of knowledge necessary for evaluation of the performance of different roles. In the dining hall, every member considers himself and is considered by others, an “expert” on food, competent to judge what “good food” is.
On the other hand, workers of the *tippul*, who are specifically trained. Education is recognized as a key factor and individual members will not always choose to themselves to criticize the workers of the *tippul*.  

6. Direct criticism versus indirect criticism. The criticism of the kitchen is direct criticism. Members who are not satisfied, voice their complaints in the dining hall since the cooks and those who wait upon the tables may hear. This gives rise to many conflicts. Waiting upon the tables in the communal dining hall is considered most “nerve-racking.” The pressure of the client is especially strong here. Since there is no mediating factor, this pressure often causes considerable tension both among the workers of the kitchen themselves and between workers and clients. Criticism of the *tippul*, on the other hand, is mediated by a special committee appointed by the general assembly, responsible for the *tippul* and for sanitation. Both workers and parents address their complaints and suggestions to it. Many a children’s nurse was heard to cry to parents, who came to her with their complaints: “You better tell that to [Chairman of the educational committee].” Members usually accepted such an answer as legitimate, although few actually complained to the chairman unless they considered the matter important.  

b) The dining hall of the Kibbutz, where food is eaten in common, presents an opportunity for the individual (by complaining about the food) to give vent to undifferentiated and unfocused tension, which he has regarding the collective. (The same applies to mess rooms in factories and in the armed forces, as was revealed by other research projects.) Such an opportunity for voicing complaints is not present in the *tippul*, since there is no such direct contact with the entire collective. Usually not more than five fathers or mothers meet at the children’s house at one time. Thus the reinforcement of clients’ pressure on workers in the kitchens by the presence of many members is not present in the *tippul*, and pressure on the workers of the *tippul* is consequently weakened.

II. The Rate of Workers’ Turnover.  
It is customary for workers in the Kibbutz to change their place of work after an interval of time. However, the rate of turnover in different branches varies. As a rule a branch with a low rate of turnover is subjected to less pressure from members and is more segregated from them than are the branches with higher rates of turnover. “Closed” workgroups, which have permanent crews are relatively more segregated from public opinion and few members are acquainted with the problems of these segregated branches. There is little knowledge of workers’ ability and effort, and less of what the expected or actual productivity is.

1) The rate of turnover should be considered in relation to the size of the branch. The smaller the number of workers in a branch, the less the amount of communication concerning it. A greater number of people are, obviously, more knowledgeable about a large branch than a smaller one, even when the absolute number of those who join or leave it, is equal in both.

Kibbutz A was located some 45 miles away. Few members lived in it and most of them were marginal in the Kibbutz. Most of its clients were outsiders. Direct contact between Kibbutz members with this branch was very small. However, owing to a large deficit in this particular branch, the production coordinator and the work coordinator began paying considerable attention to it. The production coordinator visited this branch more often than others. Problems concerning the falha were often discussed in the local newsletter and at the general assembly. The manager of the branch reported three times during the year to the general assembly on the development of this branch (in contrast to the accepted custom of one annual report.) Thus, although direct contact by the Kibbutz members with the work-group was minimized, the manager received intensive communication concerning the situation in the falha through the formal hierarchy.

We compared this branch with the same branch in Kibbutz B. Here similar conditions of segregation existed with one important difference. In Kibbutz B there was a gap in the flow of formal communication as well as a minimization of direct contact. This gap resulted from tension existing between the manager of the branch and the production coordinator. The work-group in the branch sided with the former, while the elite of the Kibbutz supported the latter, thus combining gaps in both channels of communication. The work-group was segregated from direct contact by a distance from the Kibbutz (its members would come only for weekends) as well as from formal communication through the organizational hierarchy because of the conflict between the branch manager and the functionaries.

Relating Segregation to Solidarity
When we compared the degree of solidarity in the different branches of the two Kibbutzim discussed above we found:

1) The highest degree in the falha of Kibbutz B;
2) The second highest in the falha of Kibbutz A;
3) The lowest in the kitchen in both Kibbutzim;
4) The tippul was somewhere in between.13

When the degree of solidarity was related to the factors segregation discussed earlier, it was found:

1) The kitchen, in which solidarity is the lowest, has the most contact with and pressure from clients; the highest rate of turnover of all the branches in the Kibbutz (actually it is the one most desired by women. Most tippul workers are permanent. The prestige of the tippul is "medium." It still is a service, not "real" work; it is a source of expense rather than income; but the work is professional; moreover, tippul workers handle the most sacred part of the Kibbutz—children—in contrast to the "materialistic," products of the kitchen. Work relations are pleasant, solidarity is high compared to the kitchen, but by no means as high as in the falha.

To summarize: The relationship between segregation and the emergence of solidaric work-groups seems to be fairly clear in the cases discussed. We shall now try to explain this relationship in somewhat more general terms.

Discussion
The Kibbutz as a community with an elaborate set of ideological commitments, has a large network of specified norms of behavior. These are inculcated in young children and new members; they are reinforced in special courses, ceremonies and other specific activities. However, the most fundamental mechanism for reinforcement is informal social control, which is an element present not only in special situa-

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tions and invested in special roles, but is part of all interaction. As long as nothing is concealed from the community: public opinion is the main device of control. This means, that a high degree of informal communication is continuously going on, keeping members abreast of developments in different parts of the Kibbutz and conveying the attitude of the public to the actors involved. If negligence occurs in a certain branch, 1) the community must know that this has happened, and 2) those responsible for the negligence must know the attitude of the community. If either the informative or the evaluative flow of communication is impaired, departure from the norm is likely to go unpunished.

As the Kibbutz grows and becomes more complex, these informal channels of communication are no longer sufficient. They have to be supplemented by a formal line of communication and control. Consequently, a formally organized hierarchy is established. Reports to the general assembly, the local newsletter and other formal media are employed to supply information to the community. Still, even here, the main source of control, is general public opinion.

However, some work-groups are more segregated than others. In some cases, there is little direct contact with the community (as in the case of a branch being some distance from the Kibbutz and having non-members as its clients) and formal control is rejected (as in case of conflict in Kibbutz B) or avoided (when members of the work-group enjoy high prestige). What is apt to happen in these cases, to such segregated groups?

15. Informative communication—communication of facts; evaluative communication—communication of judgments.

Two possibilities emerge: 1) An uncontrolled situation will prevail with the behavior in the segregated group not sanctioned by public opinion or other mechanisms of control, and the community; or, 2) an alternative mechanism of control independent of the community will develop. In the former instance, we could expect to find cases of deviant behavior. This, however, is only a theoretical possibility, since in the fourteen work-groups observed, no uncontrolled situation was found.

In the segregated work-group the following actually found: Since the workers' solidaric ties with the community are weakened, being collectively oriented, they are very likely to develop more intensive emotional relations with each other thus giving rise to a solidaric work-group. Once this solidaric identity is apt to act as a mechanism of informal control, each member reinforcing the norms of his co-workers.

Theoretically, the group could embrace values and different from those held by the Kibbutz and thus, instead of reinforcing conformity, it would give rise to conflict with the community. However, this has not been the case. The reasons why this is not so, are subjects for research. We believe that the strong indoctrination of members and the continual reinforcement of Kibbutz values in non-work situations, may account for the tendency of the solidaric work-groups to function in this capacity.