c.A.L.L.

Communes At Large Letter

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNES DESK

YAD TABENKIN

No. 33

Winter 2010/11

Dear Readers,

True to our name, the International Communes Desk presents you with a truly international issue of C.A.L.L., laden with articles which feature communities spanning the globe.

We feature reports on eco-villages, collectives, communes and kibbutzim from China, Russia, Australia, Germany, Austria, Canada, Ethiopia, UK and Israel. That's five continents represented! If you are looking for something rural or urban, well-established or relatively new, big or small, income-sharing or not, we have it all here.

Much research has gone into the phenomena of virtual communities, and although they can no way replace the face-to-face interaction which living with others engenders, they do enable us to share knowledge, experiences and opinions with like-minded others from around the world.

With a view to nurturing a safe, user-friendly, aesthetically pleasing and engaging environment in which to communicate with one another, we're in the process of updating our rather rickety old website with a brand spanking-new one. It will include more up-to-date information, articles, a forum, and pdf versions of our publications – C.A.L.L. in English, and our revived Hebrew publication KOL. You can keep track of our progress at http://www.communa.org.il/eng/index.html - Come give us a visit, and keep coming back because we'll be adding to it all the time!

As we celebrate here in Israel the 100th year of kibbutz, I'd like to leave you with a few wise words from one of the founding fathers of the first kibbutz, Joseph Baratz:

> Mutual aid was the basis for our work and success. We regarded the group as our family and aspired to create a just way of life… We opted for our unique way of life because it fit our ideals. We aspired to establish a small unit, a just society which might serve as a model for others.

This 'model' has indeed been an inspiration for 'others'. Many around the world have looked to kibbutz as *the* example for what is achievable with a combination of belief and hard-work. In Israel, with over four generations of community-building already behind us since Baratz, together with ten other visionaries, formed Degania, and despite reports to the contrary, the communal idea and practice is experiencing a rebirth and is starting to flourish again. Here's to the next 100 years!

You can send us your suggestions, corrections, contributions and retributions regarding C.A.L.L., or our new website, to the usual email address,

Anton
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www.communa.org.il

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100 YEARS OF KIBBUTZ – NOW WHAT AND FOR WHAT?

By Michael Livni, Kibbutz Lotan

The 100th anniversary celebration of kibbutz, held in Degania on Oct. 4, 2010 and the special session of the Israeli parliament marking the anniversary recognized the seminal role the kibbutz played in the Zionist movement and in the establishment of the state. Significantly, the emphasis was on past achievements. Focus on the future was avoided. The facts on the ground are that many Israelis view the kibbutz as an anachronistic icon.

Currently, one-quarter of the kibbutz movement is collective. In the last twenty years, the rest have opted for differential wages and have, in effect, become a class society. There is no longer a kibbutz "movement". The "movement" is an organization of kibbutzim whose function is to further common (mainly economic and legal) interests.

Significantly, kibbutzim – including most of the collective kibbutzim- are no longer **intentional communities**. In the beginning, the intention of the kibbutzim was to pioneer a community based value-world which, *in micro*, would point the way and lead to the value world of future Israeli society *in macro*. The kibbutzim drew ideological inspiration both from the prophetic tradition of social justice in the Jewish heritage as well as from various streams of socialism current at the beginning of the 20th century. True, the kibbutzim were also the willing handmaidens of the Zionist establishment in creating an agricultural and military infrastructure for the nascent state. This was critically important for Israel's establishment to which the kibbutzim saw themselves as full partners. However, it was not the ultimate purpose of the kibbutzim.

The state of Israel exists. The spirit of the times in the Western world (very much including Israel) is post-modern, neo-liberal and focuses on individual self-fulfillment rather than the collective good. Yes, there is a back-lash. The evidence is the emergence of city kibbutzim and communes in Israel which see themselves as intentional communities impacting on the social and geographic periphery of Israeli society.

On November 17th – 18th, the collective stream of the kibbutz movement met in Israel's far South where kibbutzim constitute a bastion of the collective spirit and ideology. The motto chosen for the convention was "The Next Hundred Years of Collective Cooperation". The collective stream declared itself to be an "autonomous union" within the kibbutz movement. Will the crack lead to a split?

Stay tuned. The jury of history is still out on the verdict of "now what and for what" will the kibbutz be in the 21st Century!

Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage is an intentional community in Rutledge, Missouri, USA, practicing ecological sustainability. Here is a report from November 2010, written by member Alline Anderson, who originally hails from the San Francisco area.

If you had asked me, when I first moved to Dancing Rabbit eleven years ago, what I thought life here would look like, I probably would have waxed rhapsodic about a simple life – relaxing in front of the fire in the winter, growing vegetables in the summer, taking long leisurely walks in the fall. I imagined spending a lot of time chatting with friends, lounging in the sunshine and reading, baking crusty loaves of bread to be topped with home-made jam, and generally living the good life.

In the years since my arrival I have found that reality is often in conflict with my vivid imagination. I have also learned that compromises are required in virtually every part of my life, and that the simple life requires a lot of work.

While lounging and relaxing are certainly a part of my Ecovillage life, they are just a teeny little smidgen part. Unlike life in well-established towns and villages, members of Dancing Rabbit spend an inordinate amount of time creating structure for ourselves. This is enormously time-consuming, but also enormously gratifying. Imagine being able to have a say in every decision made about your community – from roads (where they go, what they are made of, where the drainage is, what they are named), to cemeteries (what will they be like – rows of markers or a more natural conservation area? Do we allow embalming? Who can be buried here?), to energy policy (should we start planning for a huge wind turbine?), to pets (how many free-roaming dogs are too many? What about cats and songbirds?), to social events (who is hosting Thanksgiving this year? What will we do for New Year's?). We do it all. And it takes hours and hours and hours.

Additionally, when something happens here at Dancing Rabbit, good or bad, we are the ones we call. Is that downpour flooding the road and the Community Building? Then we had better all get out there with shovels to divert the flow, since we can't exactly call MoDot. An outbreak of chicken pox among the children, and we have a pregnant member and several members with compromised immune systems? We had better figure out a way to keep everyone safe and healthy while taking care of the little itchy ones. So-and-so's dog snapped at someone? We had better evaluate what happened and take appropriate action, since we will not be calling Animal Control. Maikwe's

roof just blew off? Well, let's get over there and cover up the hole so the rain doesn't get in.

We all serve on at least one committee; most of us serve on several. There are committees for virtually everything: Long Term Planning, Kids, Pets, Vehicle Co-op, Land Use Planning, Tree Team, Outreach, Development, Oversight, Goals & Priorities, Membership, Land Clean, Donations, Infectious Disease, Roads, Parking Lots, Conflict Resolution, Mem Dem column, Retreat Planning, Decision Making…

In addition to all of this we are raising much of our own food, chopping and hauling firewood, building homes, educating children, running businesses, and trying to demonstrate that it all can be sustainable.

The Community of Dancing Rabbit

What do I like best about our chosen way of life? We get to live here, with people we respect and admire. We are living lives that feel true to our values, even if we might not have everything figured out yet. We get to observe the seasons changing on 280 gorgeous acres of rolling hills and prairie that we are restoring and stewarding. We get to watch our children and the children of our friends grow and flourish. We have a community with which to share the triumphs and celebrations, as well as sadness and disappointments.

So in this season of Thanksgiving, I would like to express gratitude to all of my fellow Dancing Rabbit members, both past and current. Thank you for all of the time you give to make this a better place to live. Thank you for the hours you spend on committee work. Thank you for all of the little things you do to improve our village, working behind the scenes, that no one ever knows about. Thank you for all of the things you do that feel unacknowledged. You are making a difference. And you are appreciated. Thank you also to all of the families and friends of Rabbits, whose support is invaluable. Thank you to those of you in the wider community who have become friends over the years – you help to make our lives here rewarding and full. Thank you all!

BBC NEWS

Life in one of China's last communes

In the village of Nanjie in northern China, workers begin the day by singing in praise of the country's former leader Mao Zedong. More than three decades after his death, Chairman Mao is still remembered fondly across China, but in Nanjie he has a special significance.
The village is one of the country's last remaining communes, where workers still abide by many of the former chairman's principles.
Most communes were disbanded years ago as China's leaders began to turn the country's planned economy into one governed by the market. But the Nanjie commune is still going strong, providing its residents with their daily needs. Few people want to see it disappear.

Zunxian Huang, 71, is one of about 3,000 commune members. He was assigned this three-bedroom apartment and nearly all the furniture in it, down to the sofa cushions.

Economic disaster

Mother-of-one Hu Xinhe is one of the commune's 4,000 or so permanent residents. "I feel very relaxed and secure living in Nanjie. Whether we're talking about work or life in general, I'm very satisfied," said the 34-year-old.
As China's Communist Party celebrates 60 years in power this week, it is emphasising the country's bright future. But this commune is a reminder that some people think the past had much to offer. Nanjie lies in the rural heartland of Henan province. Villagers have just harvested their crop of corn, which is currently drying on roadsides and in open spaces around Nanjie. The commune also has a number of small food-processing factories that make products such as beer, chocolate, hot sauce and noodles. Some noodles are even sold abroad - to Australia, the US and Canada.

Collective ownership

But there are reminders that capitalist ventures are not the main goal. A statue of Mao takes pride of place in the village square. It is flanked by giant posters of other communist revolutionaries, such as Lenin and Stalin.
With its clean and tidy streets, Nanjie looks well-ordered and pleasant.
Communes were formed in the late 1950s as Chairman Mao tried to force rural people to live a more communist way of life. Villagers had to pool their land, animals, tools and crops, and work for the collective.

In the early years, communes proved to be an economic disaster; they contributed to the deaths of millions of people through starvation between 1958-61. They were finally abandoned in the early 1980s as villagers began to farm their own plots of land.
But a handful of communes - like the one in Nanjie - stayed as they were.
Wang Hongbin, the village's Communist Party secretary, said it had been the people themselves who had not wanted to disband the commune.
"They chose to have collective ownership. And if people want it, we - the party - have a responsibility to carry on with this system," he said.

Struggle to pay

In Nanjie, workers continue to toil for low wages, but in return are provided for in other ways by the commune. "I earn about 400 yuan a month ($59; £37), but get very good welfare benefits," said Mrs Hu, who works as a quality control inspector in the village condiment factory. "I get free medical care and housing - even gas, water and electricity are free."
Her son, nine-year-old Wang Haoyuan, also gets free education in the commune's schools. The collective will even pay for him to go to university. It is this kind of security that makes life in Nanjie commune so attractive.
When China embarked on economic reforms in 1978, many benefits, particularly for China's farmers, disappeared. They can now sell their own crops for profit, but some still struggle to pay school fees for their children or medical bills when they are sick.
Tens of millions of farmers have decided they cannot make ends meet and have left their villages to seek work in China's booming cities.


Commune worker Hu Xinhe gets a range of benefits

Uncertain future

Villagers who live near the Nanjie commune look on with envy at those inside.
One woman, surnamed Liu, said: "Living in Nanjie is so good - everything is supplied by the village. Although their salaries are low, they don't have to worry about other things.
"Our village doesn't give us many benefits, and I can't survive by farming alone."
Nanjie collective does have its critics, some of whom point out that it is not as communist as it makes out.
They claim the commune is in debt and does not treat its outside workers as well as it does permanent residents. They also point out that it tries to trade on its communist credentials by encouraging tourists to visit.
There is a special hotel for visitors where workers wear military-style uniforms, presumably to reinforce the village's revolutionary history.
But while the commune may have its flaws, the people who live here say they genuinely believe in its aims.
At a time when the wealth gap between rich and poor is rising in China and life is uncertain for many, Nanjie offers the security and certainty of a bygone era.

Abandoning the metropolis for a better future

Russia's new homesteaders: from city life to wilderness utopia

By Anna Nemtsova, special to Russia Now (http://rbth.ru/index.html)

November, 15 2010

Thousands of Russian professionals have lost hope for a better life in cities. They have taken to the forests to create their own utopias independent of the state. The eco movement has increased several fold in recent years.

Yevgenia Pystina is a medical doctor who was once a scientist at the Novosibirsk Medical Institute, the prestigious research facility in Siberia's largest city. Three years ago, her husband, a concert pianist, told her about some green movement activists living off the grid on communal land about 75 miles north of Novosibirsk, along the banks of the Ob River.

The Land of Plenty ecological commune in south-central Siberia offers an escape from city life

"I laughed at his fairytale but he said, 'let me take you there, so you see with your own eyes'" she recalled. "That is how we arrived here and stayed."

Pystina, her husband, and her seven- and eight-year-old daughters now live among 51 other families in the Land of Plenty commune whose members range in age from one to 91.

New communities of homesteaders have sprung up across some of the most remote sections of Russia in the past decade, including Siberia, attracting thousands of Russians in search of a simple, self-sufficient and environmentally friendly lifestyle free from state control and big city corruption.

The number of "eco-communes," as they are called in Russia, has grown dramatically in the last decade, and the movement back to the land is drawing professionals weary of the country's corruption, pollution and new consumerism.

A tall, slim woman, with a long dark braid, Pystina sings through her busy day, stacking cabbage heads on her veranda, pouring her honey in cans for

the winter, and painting eggs with her daughters, Angelina and Polina.

"Since the day I moved to the Land of Plenty commune, my new interests in art, singing, science and agriculture wake me up every morning," she said.

Not everyone is charmed by the romantic aspirations of these activists. The Russian Orthodox Church has criticized the communes as sects selling false Gods. And some suspicious local authorities in rural areas have challenged the attempts of various communes to establish ownership of the land they have homesteaded.

Land Of Plenty is situated north of Novosibirsk

Environmentalists at the Land of Plenty commune said they are not a threat, and every house is open to guests who want to visit and sample the commune's honey, pumpkin pies, and goat milk. They also stress their differences with some of the religious communes that have also emerged in Russia at the same time.

Organic farming forms the basis of the vegetarian diet followed by the commune members. Families here also believe in home schooling their children with members with particular expertise teaching that subject area. Pystina, for instance, teaches chemistry.

Each household contributes something to the common good at Land of Plenty, members said. The family of Valery Popov, a former physicist, helps newcomers build their log cabins. The Nadezhdins, a family of dentists, serve as the commune's bakers. Klavdiya Ivanova, a former music teacher, is famous for her hand-made, traditional clothes. Her husband, a former army officer, helps the commune recycle.

"All my life, I've been a part of the system: at school, as a university student, then as a faithful officer but the system fell apart before my eyes, destroyed by liars, by thieves, by outrageously corrupt managers," said Dmitry Ivanov, offering a commonplace rationale for many people seeking a new life at the commune. "We are here to create a new social model free, professional and self-confident individuals. And it is focused on decreasing our negative impact on the environment."

It is hard to get exact numbers of Russia who have moved into the wilderness. But clearly the numbers are growing. Dozens of ecological settlements have emerged in the last two years in the Altai Mountains, Karelia and on the Volga.

Here we publish a letter and photos we received from a reader from Franziskusgemeinschaft, a small religious community in rural Austria.

14th August, 2010

Dear Anton, Dear Joel,

After reading C.A.L.L. No. 32, I thought I might write to answer the question: how are communities doing when their members get older and no new younger ones join? The Franziskusgemeinschaft was founded in 1981 – at that time 7 grown-ups and 8 children. The community has grown to 16 members (4 married couples, 8 singles) and 3 children. Living with us is one older relative who is 90 and needs 24/7 care and one "homeless" person who has been with us already 6 years! We have many, many guests, often up to 3 months at a time. At the moment we have a 43 year old Congolese living with us for 5 months.

Our community house - we built it ourselves

The members have gotten older. Our founder, Fritz Giglinger, is 75 and our youngest member is 44. The years have taken their toll – but we still manage our farm, our daily life, the seminars, the handcrafts etc quite well – our many guests are a great help, but we have to plan changes: from two cows to one, less sheep, less bees etc. However we enjoy the fact that although we haven't grown into a larger movement, we have left our footprint very definitely in the Austrian countryside.

We live in community of goods, all work in the community, we have a good daily structure and "fear not the future!" So far we have cared for and buried 2 members, we don't really know how things will develop when, in 10 years, we are all that much older, but we trust in God and each other that things will work out.

New members are hard to come by – people tend to love it here, are delighted that we live this way but in the end don't want to give up their private income or their

"freedom" and go back to their old way of life with their stress, their jobs, their debts etc.

We come together at 6:00, 12:00 and 18:00 for prayers, work and eat and cook together. We take in refugees, help people in need, share our income and goods with others, travel to countries in the third world to help and encourage people in need. We try to live a simple life, not to consume things, to eat the food that grows in our gardens and fields (rather than strawberries in December) to use less and give more. We lead a very fulfilling life. Wouldn't change it for the world!

Shlomo Etzioni [the late former general secretary of the ICD] visited us years ago. That was wonderful! We are very good friends with the Bruderhof and have learned and profited from this friendship. They visit us, we visit them.

Bringing in the potatoes

Our children, (there were 11 at one time living here) have not joined our community, but come often, love it here, appreciate our way of life – they are all wonderful, caring people – that is the most important thing for us.

We older ones have given over many responsibilities to the younger members and do our best to support them as they continue to form and lead the community.

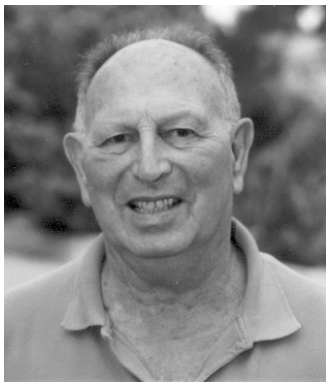
So, thanks for C.A.L.L. – we send you twice a year our magazine "Francesco" in return, and are grateful for your work. Come and visit us!

God's blessing bring you peace and happiness,

Yours,

Susie Reitlinger
Fanziskusgemeinschaft
Am Kalvarienberg 5
7423 Pinkafeld
Austria

KALEIDOSCOPE



The Communitarian Scene from all Over and Under
Compiled (and partly translated) by **Joel Dorkam**

Witnessing the next, imminent global conflict looming ominously over the Near and Far Eastern political horizon, I felt bound to ask myself – and not just as a purely rhetorical question, but rather a very realistic, rational one – where do we stand and what should I do as an Israeli Jew, a kibbutznik and incidentally also as a human being - if I happen to find myself caught in the middle of a fight which is not mine and I would be obliged to take a stand on either side?

For some people this is mainly a question of theology or at best of faith, any faith, be it religious or secular or philosophical or whatever, provided only that you belong to that very rare species who practice what they believe, even under extreme circumstances. This brings to my mind a discussion between some Jewish Israeli Kibbutz members of the Urfeld Circle and a few of our German Catholic partners from the Integrierte Gemeinde, whom we consider as the liberal wing of Christianity. One of their priests, who are a special breed by themselves, a smart, well educated, open minded person frankly admitted that his father had been a ranking commander in the notorious SS-troops. "I once asked my father, whether he had taken any part in the horrendous persecutions of German Jews. He denied it, but I didn't believe him. By the way, at wars end he became a teacher in our local school. I tried to have him dismissed, but that was hopeless. There wasn't much choice: after the end of WW2, when Germany laid in ruins (a fact which is hardly ever mentioned in German school-books or in class…) and the municipalities had to reconstitute some kind of half-normal life, there were few teachers, judges and physicians, not to mention civil servants and policemen - available, who hadn't been actively involved, or at least had collaborated, with the Nazi authorities. I frequently had to ask myself, how would I have reacted under similar circumstances, when just a few words of dissent could have constituted a death warrant?"
This unexpected statement left me somewhat dismayed, until I happened to get hold of the latest "Plough", (no. 53 of Autumn 2010) from what used to be the Bruderhof, recently renamed "Church Communities International". There it was, right under my eyes - part of the answer to my musings, in several variations: from the life story of the late Siegfried Ellwanger, beginning with his enrollment into the "Hitler Youth", through his draft into the army, his assignment first to the eastern and later to the western front where he was captured and held as a POW. But let us go back to the beginning:

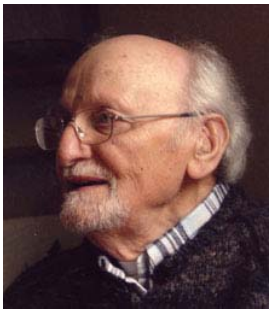
Like millions of Germans of his generation, Siegfried joined the junior branch of the Hitler Youth at ten, and thrived in the atmosphere of camaraderie and community he found there.

> We would march in uniform, sporting banners, fanfares, and drums; there were camping holidays, solstice celebrations, torchlight processions, and tests of courage. Our slogans – one for all, and all for one, and service before self – filled us with enthusiasm. We learned about our Fuhrer and his plans for a wonderful new Germany. Patriotic films shook us to the depths of our young souls. We were taught to be utterly devoted to the Fatherland; ready to die for it, proud and laughing. Could there possibly be anything greater?

Nazism's sinister aspects lurked in the shadows. Jewish classmates disappeared, as did the family's Jewish doctor. But the official explanations satisfied him, as they did most young people: "We were told they had moved abroad, or gone to work in labor camps". In any case, such uncomfortable issues were sidelined by more pressing ones: inflation, mass unemployment, and political instability – and Hitler's promises to solve them decisively.

At 18, Siegfried was drafted, and headed off for battle with the Fuhrer's call for a new "German kingdom of honor and power" ringing in his ears. The echoes faded quickly. By December 1942, he found himself on the eastern front, marching toward Stalingrad behind a horse-drawn artillery wagon in knee-deep snow, biting winds, and subzero temperatures.

Ruined villages - abandoned farms - frostbite and fear of death - the stomach-churning discovery of a gully full of dead young Russians - all this gnawed at the young soldier. "What had these men done to me?" he asked himself. "Why did they have to die? For what? For whom?"



Siegfried Ellwanger

Sometime later his company captured an enemy platoon. Meeting the prisoners face to face he realized, to his horror, that they were not subhuman monsters, as he had been indoctrinated to believe, but "human beings just like us, sighing with relief that their lives had been spared."

Imprisoned first in one POW camp, and then another, and then held in France for three years of forced labor (until 1948), Siegfried had no shortage of lonely hours during which to consider the nightmare of the previous years, and to solidify his deepening conviction that war was a senseless, unnecessary evil.

It wasn't only the wreckage around him - the bombed-out towns, empty-eyed mothers, and endless heaps of rubble - but a sickening realization that the glamorous propaganda of the Third Reich had masked the most devilish regime imaginable:

> Now I heard the terrible reality: that millions of Jews had been murdered - killed in concentration camps, tortured and tormented, along with countless other so-called inferior peoples. Germans, too, had lost their lives, after having recognized Hitler and the Nazis (for what they were), and resisting them. What did it mean now, that my life had been saved?

In contemplating the past, Siegfried refused to take shelter in the thought (common enough among soldiers of his generation) that he had simply "done his duty" or been swept helplessly along by the tides of history, or fate. On the contrary, he felt personally responsible for his past - and so strongly that he saw his stint of forced labor as an act of contrition:

> These years, which brought me into close contact with people I had previously fought, meant a great deal to me, despite the long separation from my loved ones. Indeed, I could accept this time as a kind of penance for my involvement in the war.

There seems to be some kind of virus going around, infecting newsletters with items about WWII, the Holocaust and Israel. Could that perhaps be a belated result of the activities of all kinds of voluntary associations all over the world that have patiently spread information about the fate of the Jews in Germany during the Nazi regime and the fate of a few righteous ones who tried to resist - and paid dearly for it? Actually, nowadays almost everybody is ready to believe almost everything about the human beast, contrarily to that period when some escaped Auschwitz inmate arrived at the synagogue in a little Polish shtetl and warned the inhabitants of what was happening and what was in store for them – but they took him for a madman and dispatched him to the nearest asylum.

"An Embassy Besieged" tells us the story of the Rhoen Bruderhof people, who tried for a short period to stand up to Hitler's henchmen, of course without success. After many years the Bruderhofers, who emigrated to England and later to South and North America, have made several attempts to re-establish themselves in Germany, but have encountered many obstacles due to what appears to the local inhabitants as outlandish customs and goals. We appreciate their courage and perseverance all the more because of it.

An Embassy Besieged
The Story if a Christian Community in Nazi Germany
A new book by Emmy Barth

Here, for the first time in print, is the story of a group of Christian dissidents who dared to confront Adolf Hitler and his Third Reich with the love of Jesus Christ. Avoiding covert resistance on the one hand and complicity and compromise on the other, the little communal congregation known as the Rhoen Bruderhof boldly witnessed to the politics of the kingdom of God at the risk of their lives. Although conscious that they were, on the words of their courageous leader Eberhard Arnold, "less than a gnat to an elephant," this small cell of men and women were confident that as God's ambassadors, their best weapon against the evils of National Socialism was love. The dramatic account of a community that stayed true to the nonviolent way of the Cross despite the relentless opposition of a dictatorship that threatened to snuff it out, this story is also a remarkable example of God's protection and leading in a dark time.

Now to "The Leaves of Twin Oaks" that provides us as usual a little vignette that holds a lot of significance, served with a smile and a rather promising caption: Politics at Twin Oaks by Valerie

Here at Twin Oaks, we generally consider ourselves beyond conventional conversation restraints; this becomes immediately obvious by listening to a mealtime discussion of the lurid details of gruesome symptoms related to the latest sickness going around.

When it comes to talking about politics, it becomes a little more complicated. There are certain topics that we can all discuss with ease and generally agree upon. However, somehow there are others that are more like opening a can of worms while walking through a field of landmines...

Acceptable: global warming and polar icecap melt

More delicate: what temperature to set the communal hot-water heater, and the ecological implications of using ice-cubes

Acceptable: Obama versus Hillary

A bit trickier: Organic versus Local

Acceptable: increasing water shortages and the evils of the bottled-water industry

Tread carefully: the fact that a certain communard-who-shall-remain-nameless replaced the low-flow shower head with one that delivers the approximate force and volume-per-minute of Niagara Falls, without any process.

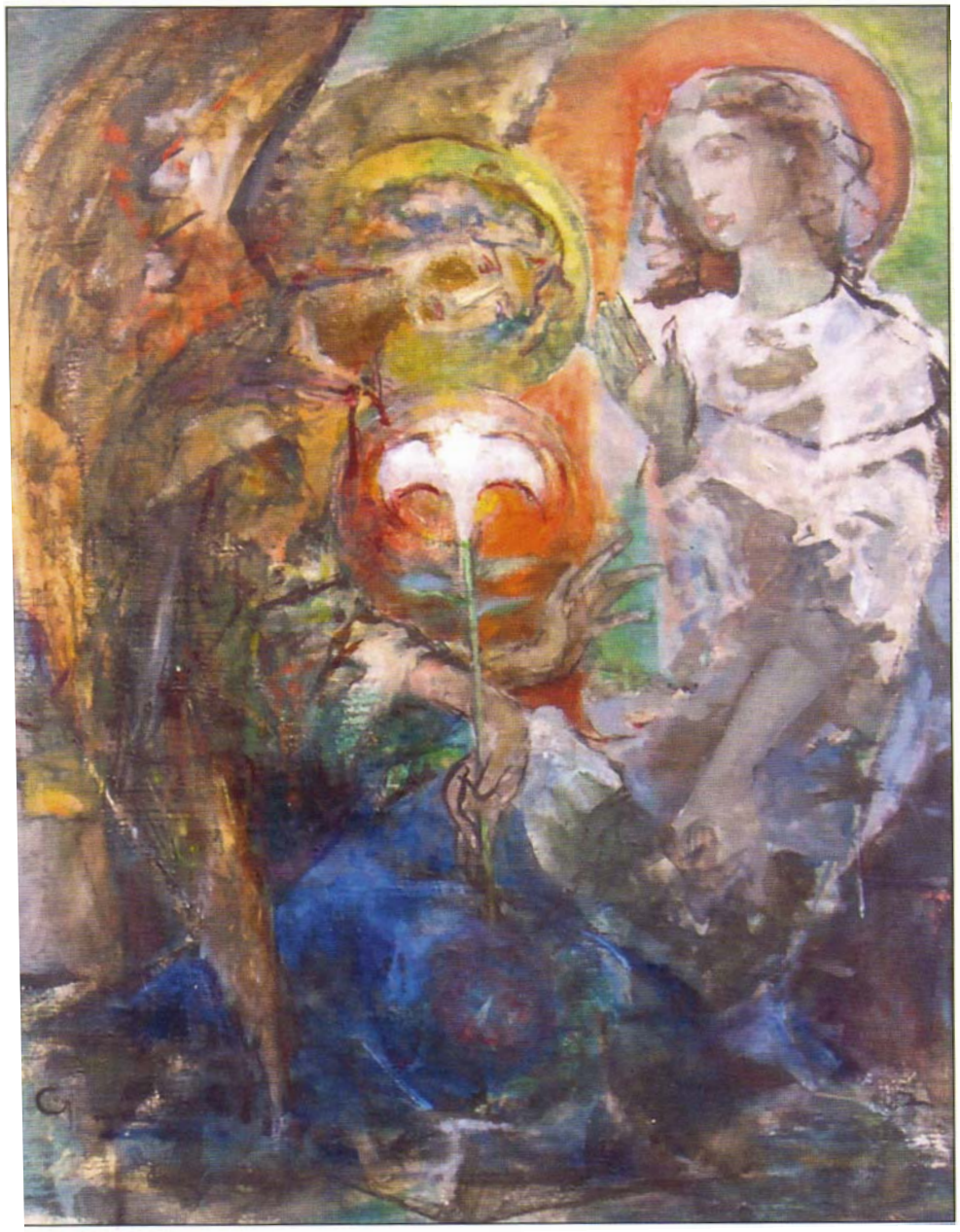
Acceptable: the discriminatory aspects of impending US immigration policy

Walking on eggshells: our membership process about whether to accept athat controversial visitor from the last visitor period.

Acceptable: gay marriage

Call in the Process Team: your lover announces their desire to form a polyamorous triad with that statuesque blonde who arrived as a new member last week.....

Camphill Correspondence (may we suggest a slightly shorter name: "Camphill Courier"?), treats us on its cover page to a recently discovered painting by Hermann Gross "the Annunciation" and right under it a somewhat coarse, but very effective citation by Wendell Berry, and we sign off with a very thoughtful piece about what Harriett Sherwood chose to call "Israel's Utopian Dream"



Rats and roaches live by competition under the laws of supply and demand; it is the privilege of human beings to live under the laws of justice and mercy.

Wendell Berry

Where now for Israel's utopian dream?
The Guardian
By Harriet Sherwood

Today, of the 273 kibbutzim in Israel, only about 60 still operate on a truly communal basis, in which all members are paid the same basic sum whatever their work, with services provided by the collective. Most of the rest have introduced reforms in response to what the Kibbutz movement calls "a severe socio-economic crisis [that] threatened the future of numerous kibbutzim – they owed huge

debts to the banks and thousands of young people were leaving the communities. The kibbutzim were in danger of falling apart."

The principal reforms were to introduce differential wages and privatise some of the services. It was not an easy process. George Ney, 74, who has lived at Kfar Hanasi for almost 50 years, recalls in a memoir: "It was a long, slow process, whose milestones were intense and sometimes bitter discussions. The embers of our idealism haven't died out, and we even have a few firebrands still, but today I think there is little doubt that the side of the individual outweighs the one of the community."

At Kfar Hanasi, the debate began in earnest when, in the early 1980s, the kibbutz discovered it was bankrupt. "We weren't earning enough to cover our standard of living," Ney says now, recalling people who left electric fires on all day when they were at work because they were not responsible for individual bills.

Degania, established 100 years ago this year.

The reforms included making individual members pay for services such as electricity, telephones, postage and laundry out of an allowance. The communal dining room – previously the heart of the kibbutz – which had served three free meals a day, introduced charges and eventually closed. Previously, the slogan had been "whatever the kibbutz decides"; now it became "personal choice", according to Ney's memoir.

But the "earthquake" was the introduction of differential wages. It turned the kibbutz philosophy on its head. "The jobs we once thought were the elite jobs – physical work in the fields and orchards – turned out to pay the least," recalls Ney. Managers were paid more than labourers, and productivity was rewarded. The kibbutz factory was sold to a private investor, a bed and breakfast enterprise to attract tourists was launched.

Other kibbutzim around Israel were facing their own earthquakes. Degania Aleph, the first kibbutz to be established in, October 1910, and where the centenary celebrations will take place in the autumn, voted three and a half years ago to partially privatise itself. It was a hugely symbolic moment.

The members receive an allowance based on their jobs, although the differential between the lowest and highest paid is capped at around 25%. The kibbutz provides housing, health, education and all community services. "We wanted to keep the old idea of the collective but also to be connected to the outside world," says Shay Shoshany, Degania's elected chairman. Ninety-five per cent of the members voted in favour of the reforms, he says. "The world around us has changed, and we can't be an island."

Other kibbutzim are holding firm to the collective ideal, where everyone is paid the same regardless of what they do. At Kibbutz Ba'ram, a few kilometres from the Lebanese border, 90% of the community still take three meals a day in the communal dining room, where the food is excellent and free. Raviv Gutman, 42, was born at Ba'ram, left for seven years and returned 12 years ago. There has been some change, he concedes, citing the fact that cigarettes and televisions are no longer distributed free.

To an outsider, it seems a model of collective living. Everything from nappies to piano lessons are provided for children; there are 100 communal cars that members can book on the kibbutz intranet; jobs are allocated by a committee; there is a gym, a swimming pool, a theatre showing movies and shows, even a kibbutz pub that opens two evenings a week. Members who choose to work outside the kibbutz pay their entire salary into a central fund. Even the climate is good. "We don't have a problem with people leaving [the kibbutz]," says Gutman. "Why would you want to leave? People have a good life here."

Cheers, bye, Joel Dorkam

Welcome to "Kibbutz Shorts", where we discover what's new on the Kibbutz in an update from around Israel.

Compiled mainly from the Kibbutz weeklies by Yoel Darom, Kibbutz Kfar Menachem

A Whole Century Long

This is a very special year for many of us: dozens of festivals, story-telling, film shows and exhibitions, memorials and all kinds of artistic performances, and of course lots of soul-searching and festive speeches given up and down this country to celebrate a Hundred Years of Kibbutz. It was in 1910 – before the First World War – that a group of 6 people (5 men and one woman) said: we are fed up with working for others, we shall prove that a group of workers is able to do their jobs without the constant interference of managers and organizers. They did, and did well, and with much courage and a profound Socialist drive, with deep conviction that they were laying the foundations for a homeland for Jews all over the world – became the first Kibbutz. They named themselves Degania, a field flower, some new people joined them in the hottest corner of this country, but when they counted 16 members and a small group of youngsters came to join them, they refused: if this Kibbutz is going to realize its vision to fulfill the place of the "New Family", we cannot grow without limits, and–split into two. Now we have Degania A and Degania B, but in course of the century both Kibbutzim grew far away from the New-Family concept and each of them holds today a few hundred members and children (fifth generation).

Are We Still A Kibbutz?

During the last 10-20 years, while many Kibbutzim went through the difficult period of planning and implementing deep changes in their life, many said: this is definitely the end of the Kibbutz. Finito! They - most of them of the older generation – fought a courageous battle against the new trends, but in most Kibbutzim they had to retreat under the pressure of the majority who went along with the "modernization" of the collective, reciting an old truth: this is not a new-trend revolution, the Kibbutz has introduce changes in his life from the very beginning! In its first years, when ideology was still burning hot, most of them decided at one stage to sew personal clothes for each, men and women, after the initial period where everyone got his/her clothes dealt out to them every Friday ("the eve of Shabbat"). Some considered this as "the beginning of the end of the collective", and that was the war cry, too, when the first little electric kettles appeared and so on every few years.

But now, the changes many Kibbutzim underwent, turning more and more areas of collective life over to private responsibility, this fearsome prophesy is becoming much more real. BUT – remember that most of these "New Kibbutzim" guard some of the old important principles: taking care of "special cases" (children as well as adults), holding well-organized activities

for all, especially for the elders, heavy subsidies for health and education expenses and more.

Praise from the Right

Most Kibbutz members belong to the left-wing parties, and had to withstand often vicious attacks from the right. This year the centenary carried with it a broader appreciation of the Kibbutz movement, and we listened with wonder to the short speech by the Knesset member Orly Levy, who could not deny the great part the Kibbutzim contributed to the building of Israel, especially by their agricultural task of "turning the desert into flourishing gardens". I myself live on a Kibbutz, she said (not as a member!) and love the place, especially the well-organized and progressive education there that my children enjoy.

Against any Form of Discrimination

Lately we see with much joy and satisfaction, new feminists: members of the religious Kibbutzim. Lali Alexander, member of Kibbutz Ein Tzurim (where she was born and raised), works at the national center for victims of sexual attacks, but tries to bring about changes on all fronts: the Kibbutz: as a girl I already refused to work in the kitchen or as childrens' help, as an adult I joined the movement for religious women's equality, and I am happy to note that this movement conquers an ever larger area in the Kibbutz Dati (Religious Kibbutzim). This opens new vistas for the feminists in Israel and the world.

No Life Without Change?

Nathan Shaham

A new, very well-written book, Tabula Rasa, appeared lately (and will probably soon be translated from Hebrew into English). Its veteran Kibbutz writer Nathan Shaham, is the first one who deals with the "New Kibbutz" (some say "No Kibbutz"), that leads a life of "privatization", including differential wages and paying for everything you need. For about 80 years such an arrangement was unheard and un-imagined on a Kibbutz, but in the last 25 years thorough changes brought forward a Kibbutz type that nobody thought possible before. The life our writer describes so realistically is still being opposed by many, especially the founding and other older members, but fully accepted and subscribed to by the younger generation.
The book's hero, Hanan, is an artist whose paintings were enthusiastically accepted by all and used to be displayed on the walls in all public places, but at some stage Hanan joined, heart and soul, a modern school of abstract, and from that moment found himself under heavy criticism from all sides, all members, including his own wife. His maxim "I don't want to display reality, but the scratches that reality leaves on my heart", stays without power of persuasion. At the age of 70, when he finds out that he can live on the Kibbutz pension but certainly not pay for all his frames and papers and cloth and colors, he gives in and goes back to his original realistic "beautiful" art, because that is "the kitch that ordinary people in the Israel love and pay for".

Today the majority of Kibbutzim have undergone these or similar changes, and the discussion goes on: are we still entitled to call ourselves Kibbutz? What do you think? Nearly all of you readers of C.A.L.L. are members of communes and other communities, and I imagine that your thoughts and answers might help us see ourselves more objectively. So please, voice your opinion, write and enrich our internal soul-searching!

Founder-member Christobel Munson, writing this piece especially for C.A.L.L., tells us about life in Jindibah Community, overlooking Byron Bay, NSW, Australia

In 1994, when my partner Christopher Sanderson and I moved to a rural area near Byron Bay on Australia's east coast, we realised it would be far more fun to create a community to share with like-minded friends than trying to manage five acres by ourselves.
So with two other couples, we bought a 113-acre (46ha) run-down dairy farm and created Jindibah – an intentional community for 12 households. It **is** more fun – but working things out with other people rather than making your own decisions as 'king of your own castle' is far more complex and takes heaps more time.

At a working bee to plant 1000 native rainforest seedlings

We decided to set up the community focusing on the 'triple bottom line'; that is, balancing the environmental, the economic and social. The 'social' is probably the most challenging – and rewarding.
House lots take up about 22 acres (9ha), with the other 91 acres (37ha) divided between agricultural land and areas where we are regenerating sub-tropical native rainforest. Each year we plant and maintain another 1,000 indigenous seedlings along our creek and on the steeper rocky slopes less suitable for providing pasture for our herd of 25 beef cattle.
Today, we have 22 adult lot owners aged between 31 and 74 who have a total of 13 school-age kids. Living onsite are 16 adults (including three renters), and seven children between 4-15 years, with more houses currently under construction.
To operate the community, we elect an executive committee each year, as well as eight work groups. They cover **Property Management**; **Farm Management and Infrastructure Maintenance** (eg the 1.8km of paved internal roads, bridges, cows, pasture, water supply); **Information Technology** (website and wireless broadband network); **Regeneration** (We've planted 7,305 trees to date needing fencing and ongoing maintenance until they mature); **Admin, Book-keeping and Legal**; **Communications and Relationships**; **Bushfire and Emergencies**; and **Business Opportunities, Finance and Planning**.
Every aspect of efficiently running the community happens through these groups, five of which have budgets to cover necessary expenditure. Lot owners choose which of the groups they'd like to join and teams meet as needed. A 'Neighbourhood Management Plan' sets out by-laws.

A monthly breakfast in our community hall by Sleepy Creek

Ideally, the executive team convenes about every six weeks for a 90-minute meeting, depending on how smoothly things are running. Informally, we meet more often. Each year we hold about four externally facilitated half-day workshops to deal with interpersonal relationships, learning more about each other and ourselves. We all try to get together once a month to have a community breakfast by the creek, in the building built in the 1950s as a dance hall for the local dairying community. It's a great location for meetings, parties and celebrations.
www.jindibah-community.org

Green living thrives in communes, eco-villages

USA Today
Aug 23, 2010
By Eileen Blass

Shared eco-friendly living is becoming increasingly popular in places that range from communes to co-housing, eco-villages or intentional communities.

Alex Gibbs, 9, left, and his brother Austin Gibbs, 8, ride a pony cart on the grounds of Lake Village Homestead in Kalamazoo, Mich., in July 2007.

These are not the hippy, free-love communes of the 1960s, but living arrangements that focus on organic farming, green building, communal spaces and other aspects of sustainability.

"The future of housing, in general, is sustainable communities," Laura Mamo, a sociology professor at the University of Maryland and co-author of *Living Green*, tells *Green House*. She argues that single-family homes on large suburban lots have failed society, because they've created social isolation, dependence on personal cars and intolerably hefty mortgages for homeowners.

Mamo cites Takoma Village, the first co-housing community in the Washington area. Located in Takoma Park, Md., it has 43 apartments and townhouses that open to a central courtyard and a common building where residents eat together.

Compact, walkable and energy-efficient neighborhoods are the goal of a program launched nationally in April by the U.S. Green Building Council, known as the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) for Neighborhood Development.

"From Ithaca to Japan and Oregon to Sweden, green utopias are sprouting around the world," writes *The Huffington Post*, citing examples from Ithaca, N.Y., to Detroit, Ore. It elaborates on seven of these modern-day eco-living alternatives:

1. **EcoVillage** (Ithaca, N.Y.) Ithaca, New York's answer to a modern day commune is EcoVillage, a green utopia that houses 160 residents. Its 60 houses are split into two housing groups, FROG and SONG, and are all low-impact and energy-efficient. The third housing group, TREE, is currently being constructed and will house 30 more homes. EcoVillage has a CSA vegetable farm and a U-Pick berry farm along with a root cellar and community gardens. 80 percent of the commune's 175 acres will remain as green space, 55 acres of which are already under protection through a conservation easement from the Finger Lakes Land Trust. Residents volunteer 2 to 3 hours a week by building furniture, farming or assisting with other necessary maintenance. Future endeavors for EcoVillage include creating organic orchards, greywater recycling, and biodiesel and vegetable oil fuel production.

2. **Dancing Rabbit** (Rutledge, Mo.) Missouri's Dancing Rabbit is an intentional community and eco-village that houses 50 residents. The goal of the intentional community is to maintain the rural prairie by restoring the land to its pre-residential state. With 10,000 trees planted already, Dancing Rabbit is on its way to achieving this goal. All power stems from renewable sources, including solar and wind power, and the homes are built from natural materials: straw veils, cob, and reclaimed lumber. The water supply comes from rainwater.

3. **Toyosato**, a Yamagishi village (Mie Prefecture, Japan) A main component of the Yamagishi movement, Toyosato, a sustainable farming cooperative, is home to 550 residents. Started by ten families in 1969, Toyosato is now one of the main farming corporations in Japan. Toyosato also attempts to make the neighboring area more sustainable. The cooperative donates compost to neighboring farms and also uses factory byproducts from soy sauce and tofu production as livestock feed. Since 1960, the Yamagishi movement has created 30 villages.

4. **Breitenbush Hot Springs** (Detroit, Ore.) Breitenbush Hot Springs is a cooperative that runs an on-site hot springs retreat and conference center. Each year, the commune hosts 25,000 guests. Located east of Salem, Oregon in the Cascades, Breitenbush houses 50 full-time residents with 30 summer time employees. The commune uses geothermal power and hydropower as off-the-grid energy sources. To join the commune, members must work for the cooperative for one year and purchase a member share for $500.

5. **Twin Oaks Commune** (Louisa, Va.) With 85 adults and 15 children, Twin Oaks commune in Louisa, Virginia is a communal living destination. Started in 1967, the residents at Twin Oaks share their incomes and work 42 hours per week in the communal sectors by making tofu, creating furniture and hammocks, farming, milking cows and aiding with childcare.

6. **Kolonilott and Understenhodgen** (Stockholm, Sweden) Kolonilott are Swedish communes ranging from gardening specific communes to summer only communes. In the 1900s, Sweden's government devoted land to be used for gardening as part of an act to provide land to the lower classes. Although developed in Denmark, cohousing communes are sprouting throughout Sweden. Located in Stockholm's wooded "green fingers" area, Understenhodgen composes 44 cohousing homes. This eco-friendly lodging is a car-free location that offers district heating, waste recycling and a kindergarten program.

7. **Nubanusit Neighborhood And Farm** (Peterborough, N.H.) Nubanusit Neighborhood And Farm is a cohousing community that boasts an organic farm, communal office space and residences ranging from single family to four-unit dwellings. Located adjacent to Nubanusit Brook, residents reside in their own homes yet share seventy acres of farm land, woodlands, pond and fields. The residents all participate in a CSA and rely on on-site cows and chickens for dairy and milk. Each residence in the commune is LEED Platinum certified.

Germany : Kommuja - Commune Treffen 2010

Natali from KoWa (Kommune Waltershausen) reports:

The 22nd meeting of the German network of political communes, **Kommuja**, took place in the grounds and buildings of the **KoWa** commune in Waltershausen, Thuringia, between 3rd and 6th of June, 2010.

Kommune Waltershausen

In the sunny meadows and open spaces around the KoWa the 14 hosts from the commune and 40 members of other German communes enjoyed workshops dealing with many aspects of communal life. How is it possible to reconcile or combine self-employment with a communal economy? How do you find a balance between "work" and really free time? How do the organisational structures have to adapt to fit the quantative growth in communities? These were the themes of a number of talking circles which presented their results every evening at the large plenary meeting.

The stored up solar energy was released by many into wild dancing at the party on Friday. Who ever had not had enough of heat and talk could enjoy the Saturday evening chatting by a camp fire through the mild night.

What did we take home with us? Lots of positive stimulus, new contacts, happy memories.

The planning for **Los Gehts 2011** and for the **Kommune InfoTour** has started. It is clear which groups will put out the next issues of the "**Kommuja"**, our internal bulletin. [The communes that are part of the Kommuja network take it in turns to produce this publication]. A commune book is in preparation. There are ideas for a joint political action by the network. The first, small fine step in this direction is the network's common solidarity statement against the nuclear waste dump at Gorleben which was decided upon at this commune meeting.

And, oh yeah, we got a message from this year's **BUKO** (Bundeskoordination Internationalismus – the Federal Coordination for Internationalism), saying they had decided that **"On the 22nd of April, 2011, capitalism will be abolished"**. Before that really happens we still have a lot to clear up and do.

Here we publish a report by Bill Metcalf about the recent International Communal Studies Association (ICSA) Conference held in Israel this summer. This article was originally written for Communities Magazine.

Early Monday, 28 June, about 130 ICSA members assembled at Emek Yezreel College, Israel, for our tenth conference. We had come from Norway, Australia, Spain, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, Italy, Mexico, Poland, USA, UK and, of course, Israel.

The boring process of registration and orientation was frequently interrupted by warm greetings from old friends and colleagues – and soothed by excellent coffee and cakes. ICSA President, Professor Michal Palgi, had arranged everything so efficiently that we were soon doing what we all do so well: talking and listening about a wide range of communal studies issues.

We spent our first day in one of two parallel sessions with titles ranging from "Cooperatives" to "Women's Changing Perceptions of Motherhood". In the evening, our ICSA conference was officially opened, after which awards were bestowed upon Professors Donald Pitzer and Yaacov Oved, the founders of ICSA in 1985. Awards were also bestowed on ICSA past Presidents, Professor Pearl Bartelt, Dr Saskia Poldervaart, Dr Bill Metcalf, Professor Tim Miller, Professor Dennis Hardy and Dr Michal Palgi. A Special Service Award was presented to Ruth Sobol, our long-serving and universally respected administrator. Ruth has a special place in the heart of every past president. Yaacov Oved, Bill Metcalf and Dennis Hardy then formed a panel and briefly addressed members, recounting humorous accounts of their experiences with ICSA over the past 25 years. After so much talk we were relieved to be entertained by members of the Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company, and a witty video presentation.

Then, at long last, we sat down to a superb dinner with excellent wine, and were able to catch up with old friends and make new ones.

The second day, perhaps due to the effects of all that excellent wine of last night, started off slowly, again with parallel sessions. Titles ranged from "Facing the Challenges of Ecology" to "Kibbutzim & Higher Education" and "Conflict & Participation in Partnerships". We then went to Merhavia, a very important historical site, where we toured the grounds, and were entertained by 'Shani' an excellent Arab-Jewish girls' choir. We dined outside in Merhavia's courtyard. The food was not so good as the first night nor was the wine either as good or as plentiful — so we went home with clearer heads.

The final day of our conference again saw us in sessions with titles ranging from "Leadership and Political Thought" to "Judaism & Communes" and "Old Dreams — New Horizons? Kibbutz Women Revisited". Anton Marks and Jan Bang led an innovative session devoted to Community Story Telling, which was enthusiastically received.

The conference concluded with a plenary session "The Relevance of the Communal Idea in Today's Society", chaired by Professor Eliezer Ben Raphael. Panelists Yaacov Oved, Bill Metcalf, Jan Bang, Nomika Zion and Graham Meltzer pointed out ways that communal ideas are more relevant than ever in our contemporary world. By then, however, most of us were just about talked (and listened) out.

The next morning we set off, by bus, on a post-conference tour organised by James Grant-Rosenhead, of Kibbutz Mish'ol. We started at Kinneret Courtyard, a crucial site in the development of the kibbutz, then to Degania, the first kibbutz and now 100 years old. Our final stop for the day was at Kibbutz Lavi, an Orthodox Jewish group who adhere to traditional kibbutz ways and appear to be prospering. We were shown around by members, then dined with them in their luxurious Hotel Lavi. This huge hotel is one of their main businesses.

On the second day we started off at Kibbutz Beit Ha'emek where long-time ICSA member Professor Henry Near welcomed us. A panel of kibbutz members told us about their privatisation process, with some being enthusiastic, others with reservations and some seeing it as disastrous. We were deeply affected by the strong emotions which privatisation evoked at Kibbutz Beit Ha'emek. Enthusiastic proponents of 'privatisation' do not like that term, preferring instead the Orwellian newspeak term of "renewal kibbutz".

We dined in an Arab café in Sachnin, then visited nearby Kibbutz Eshbal, a recently formed group of young people engaged in education and support for 'at-risk' young people. Far from the comfortable, almost luxurious ambience of the kibbutzim Degania, Beit Ha'emek and Lavi, Eshbal showed us the hard-edged reality of being a rural kibbutz pioneer in the 21st century.

Our tour ended at Kibbutz Mish'ol where we were addressed by several members, then joined kibbutzniks in their Shabbat ceremony and meal. Kibbutz Mish'ol was a very welcoming and appropriate conclusion to our post-conference tour.

As always, the ICSA Board met during the conference under the convenorship of President Michal Palgi. We decided to hold our next conference in June 2013 at Findhorn Foundation, Scotland, with Dr Graham Meltzer responsible for conference organisation. ICSA's new President is Jan Bang, of Norway. The ICSA Board welcomed new members Olive Jones (from New Zealand), Professor Marisa Gonzales de Oleaga (from Spain), Professor Maria Foelling-Albers (from Germany) and Shlomo Getz and Yona Prital (from Israel).

For me, our conference and post-conference tour were successful not because I learned new information about intentional communities but because I reconnected with old colleagues and friends, and made new connections. My good memories are not based on seeing yet more examples of communal living but because I once again shared the passion of communards.

I thank Michal Palgi and Shlomo Getz and their team at Emek Yezreel College, as well as the four Kibbutz research Institutes: The Institute for Research of the Kibbutz and the Cooperative Idea, University of Haifa, Yad Tabenkin, Yad Yaari and Oranim, for organising the conference so efficiently. I also want to thank James Grant-Rosenhead for organising the excellent post-conference tour.

I look forward to being at ICSA2013 at Findhorn Foundation and hope that you will join me.

Bill is one of the foremost researchers in the intentional communities field. A former president of ICSA, Bill has written several books on the subject, based on his own experiences of living communally, and his visits to over 100 communities.

Save the Planet, Share a Roof
By Chris Cannon, 28 April 2010, TheTyee.ca

Tucked away in the residential Dunbar neighborhood of Vancouver, Canada - just steps from a busy Kitsilano thoroughfare - the Mackenzie Heights Collective has been functioning since 1970 as an "intentional community," the popular term for a collection of residents that prefer to live in a group house for economic, environmental, and social reasons. Dozens of residents have called the Collective home over the years, evidenced by a bulletin board of dated photos and a downstairs full of inherited furniture and board games.

Currently housing five adults (ranging in age from mid-20s to mid-40s) and a toddler, the Collective is a model of shared-resources commitment. "We've got 2,700 square feet in the house that none of us could afford individually," says Colin Van Uchelen, who has lived in the house since 1993.

"One family would have filled this whole house rather than five adults. We don't need more than one lawnmower, one drill, one shovel, one BBQ. We each contribute 29 dollars a month in a shared fund, and that fund is used to buy things of benefit to us all, things that contribute to all our well-being and our communal property."

"It enlarges me psychologically in the same way it enlarges me practically," says the Mackenzie Collective's Colin, whose PhD work, coincidentally, focused on empowerment in collectivistic systems. "What I have access to is so much bigger than what I'd have on my own in a little apartment. It equals your access to resources, both physical space and social space."

The cornerstone of a shared living model is rooted in the intertwined benefits of practical savings and social enrichment. The garden at the Mackenzie house -- featuring salad greens, peas, beans, squash, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, leeks, and herbs -- doesn't just allow grocery savings, but provides an opportunity for group effort that benefits the collective. The rest of the groceries are purchased from local, organic sources using a common food fund. Each resident takes a turn cooking dinner once a week, and then everyone cleans the kitchen together afterwards.

For some, though, the opportunity to connect with others may be reason enough. As Colin admits, "I just like having people to say hi to when I come home."

Ethiopian egalitarian community thrives | Newsdesk.org

Natalie Orenstein
November 2, 2010

Nestled in Ethiopia's rural Debub Gondar Zone exists Awra Amba, a small, utopian community in which men cook supper and religious observance is taboo. Sixty-three-year-old Zumra Nuru, a longtime promoter of gender equality and religious freedom, founded the society in the 1980s. As a child, Nuru was skeptical of the inequality he observed on a daily basis.

Zumra Nuru

"My mother woke up long before it was dawn and started to mill grains," he said in an Action Aid report. "My father never helped her. He rather slept until late in the morning. I questioned why things should go this way but nobody had the answer. I kept on inquiring into these and other unacceptable practices for which no one had the answers."

In Awra Amba, which now boasts four hundred members and a long waiting list, labor is divided equally among male and female residents. Both participate in traditionally gendered tasks, such as plowing and caring for children. Each member belongs to either the development committee, or one of nine sub-committees that specialize in areas including education, care for the elderly, and agriculture.

"This community is a haven for women," said new Awra Amba member Fantaye Adem in an IPS report. Adem was married at 13, before Ethiopia declared a minimum marriage age of 18 in 2005. Though this recent national law is frequently neglected in other parts of the country, Awra Amba has had a minimum marriage age of 19 for women and 20 for men since its conception.

Men and women weave together

Additionally, Awra Amba women are granted three months maternity leave and domestic violence is forbidden. In the rest of the nation, female genital mutilation and domestic abuse is prevalent.

"Our men do not oppress us and we have established a tradition of correcting one another's mistakes through discussions," an Awra Amba woman told the Ethiopian Students Association.

Religious observance is handled in a similarly unconventional manner. Though Ethiopia is a heavily religious nation, and all community members were previously practicing Orthodox Christians or Muslims, worship is outlawed in the commune.

"I thought, why not make one family?" said Nuru, who was raised a Muslim. "There is one God. So why not unite? Honesty and love for fellow human beings is our religion." Community members have explained that they believe God wants them to use their energy to create a just and humanitarian society, instead of to worship.

Nuru, whose name means "Father of the Village," recalls being beaten by his parents when he ate meat at a Christian friend's house as a child.

Though Awra Amba could claim only 19 members when Nuru founded it, the thriving community has received international acclaim in recent years. It has also been the subject of several documentary films.

"I regard it as the model for the world community on how gender issues should be treated," said EU Ambassador to Ethiopia Tim Clarke in a Christian Science Monitor report. "I have come across nothing else like it anywhere in Africa—and indeed the world. I am using it to inspire the work of my office here on gender mainstreaming and empowerment of women."

"These people have developed their own values and we know all members observe these values voluntarily," said Zelalem Getachew, a spokesperson for the Amhara Regional State Women's Affairs Bureau.

Though the commune's social success is evident, it has had its share of the poverty that plagues surrounding rural villages. Because much of their forty-three acres is unfertile, community members cannot make a living by farming. Instead, they sell woven items made with both modern and traditional weaving machines. They also possess three donated grinding mills, which bring in additional income.

Weaving is typically associated with women and the lower class in Ethiopia, but men and women work together at Awra Amba's plant. Nuru stresses the importance of manual labor and craft skills while ensuring that each member of the community learns to read and write as well, though he never did.

The residents hope to raise money to install a sewage system, pave the roads, and expand the community. In the meantime, anyone can take a tour.

"I was completely captivated by my visit to the community," said Clarke.

C.A.L.L.

Yad Tabenkin
Seminar Efal
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