

Nationalized Land

DAGANIA IS A KIBBUTZ, a communal farm, located on the banks of the Sea of Galilee in Israel. The Jordan River flows through its fields. The oldest kibbutz in Israel, it was established by Jewish immigrants to Palestine nearly forty years ago.

I lived at Daganian for three days. Let me tell you about some of the people I met there.

Sam Shavin is an American, an officer in the American army during the war. He graduated in chemical engineering in South Carolina. His young wife, Gilda, comes from Georgia, and they have two children, a three-year-old boy and a baby girl. Like most immigrants to Israel from English-speaking countries, they are endowed with an ideal. Like all the other families in the kibbutz, they live in a comfortable room. Daganian is one of the few kibbutz where the youngsters live with their parents. They eat in the central dining room with the other people on the farm. During the day Sam works in the orchards and vineyards on the farm. Gilda may serve in the dining room, wash clothes in the community laundry

or darn holes in khaki colored socks. In the kibbutz even the socks are darned communally. Many of the women work on the modern poultry farm taking care of the 11,000 White Leghorn laying hens or helping milk the 260 head of black and white Dutch cows that resemble our own Holsteins. The cows must give 8,000 pounds of milk per year on three times a day milking, or go to market. Each day green feed is hauled to the cattle lots. They do not graze out in the pasture.

Jack Weiss, a young man, was formerly an interior decorator. He lived in England until the beginning of World War II, when he went into the British army. In the early days of the Jewish-Arab war, he went to Palestine to fight in the Israeli army. At the end of the war he stayed on in Israel and eventually went to Daganian. Like all the people of Daganian, he earns no salary. His clothes, meals, room, and even cigarettes are furnished by the kibbutz without charge. Like Sam and Gilda Shavin, he came to Daganian because he wanted to. He stays because he wants to — because of an ideal.

Across the table from me in the dining hall sat a man and his wife. They always ate in silence. Sometimes they sat for a moment staring off into space. They were Polish Jews. Their family was shot by the Germans during the war, their home destroyed. On her arm the woman still carried the dull blue tattooed number from Belsen concentration camp. Unlike the earlier immigrants to

Palestine, they came to escape their past. Unlike the Shavins and Weiss, they did not come because of an ideal — there was no other place to go.

Mother of Daganian is Judith Gilead, the wife of the agricultural teacher and community poet. Judith Gilead and her husband were among the little group of people who left the Ukraine, now a part of Russia, in 1907. They were idealistic, but originally they had no intention of living communally. Her eyes lit up and her face became stern as she told of the early days at Daganian. At first they were day laborers. They saved their money. Even so, no one had enough to start a farm of his own, so they pooled their funds and started Daganian, the first communal farm. Since the women demanded equality in the community, at first they demanded equal jobs and Judith Gilead worked day after day alongside her husband, breaking stones for roads and buildings. There were quarrels within the group and their ideals changed. Said Judith Gilead, "When you see the long tree-lined walks and comfortable houses, don't think it was always like this."

Democracy at Work

The kibbutz is completely democratic. Once a week the members meet for a community business town meeting. Expenditures of more than \$1,200 must be voted upon by the entire body of members, the *asephate*. The governing body or *chav-erim*, a committee of five people elected each year,

runs the affairs of the farm. All the various jobs are broken down into committees of members. A committee meets each night, after each committee member has completed his own day's work, and assigns jobs for the following day. Other committees look after food, take care of the library, arrange adult classes and musical programs, and run the modern kindergarten and schools.

You probably would not want to live in a kibbutz. I wouldn't. Communal life doesn't appeal to many of us. It doesn't appeal to many farmers in Israel. But it has furnished an ideal way of getting immigrants on the land. Agriculture has high priority on the government's development program. At present, 72 per cent of the people live in the three population centers of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa.

Most of the new immigrants come to Israel without money — many of them with only the ragged clothing on their backs. At present there is need to increase food products. Too much foreign exchange goes for daily food instead of badly needed factories and farm equipment. The chief agricultural lending organizations, the Jewish Agency and the Jewish National Fund, semi-official financing organizations left over from the British mandate, must put as many people on the land as possible. The communal farms can absorb large numbers of people with low capital investment. Ein Harod, the largest communal farm or kibbutz in Israel, has about 2,500 people. Even so,

no one is forced to go to a kibbutz, the choice is up to him.

Today many of the immigrants come from eastern Europe. Communal life does not appeal to people fleeing from Russia, and the Jewish tribes coming from Arab-held countries have strong family ties.

Cooperative Farm Communities

The second type of planned farms are the *moshavim* or cooperative farm communities. Typical of the older moshav is the little village of Ramot Hashavim, hidden away among the dark green leaves of orange groves and tall pointed cypress. Here each farmer lives in his own three or four room white stucco house. The family takes care of their individually owned one-half acre poultry farm. In Israel the farms are tiny, the farming intense. This is necessary in a country about the size of the state of Maryland where eventually one and a half million people must live. Like most of the people of southern Europe or the Middle East, the people live in villages. Sometimes located in hostile areas, the villages were easier to protect from the Arabs than individual farms.

Each farmer at Ramot Hashavim has as many chickens as he wants and can care for on his own farm. Because of the grain shortage, the government has limited the number of laying hens owned by one farm to 2,000 birds. According to the original rules of the community, each farm family

must take care of its own farm. There is no absentee ownership here. Originally no one could employ hired labor, but with the large number of immigrants, many of them unemployed, this rule has been relaxed. Even so, most of the farmers do their own work. Everything needed for the poultry farms is bought cooperatively and all the eggs, poultry, and vegetables are sold cooperatively through the "government smiled upon" marketing cooperative, Tnuva, which handles in the neighborhood of 70 per cent of the Jewish agricultural products of the country. In the moshavs and kibbutz it is compulsory to market through Tnuva. Likewise, in the cooperative communities or moshavs, it is compulsory to buy from the community cooperative.

At Ramot Hashavim, the cooperative mill mixes the mash and feed for the 65,000 laying hens in the community. Protein feeds are imported from as far away as New Zealand and Australia. This may explain in part the high cost of eggs to the Israeli housewife — about \$1.20 a dozen. Each day the farmers deliver eggs to the egg grading plant. Here they are sorted, graded, and each egg stamped with the trademark of Tnuva, and taken into Tel Aviv a few miles away.

Ernst Moses, the cooperative supervisor, explained as we walked down sandy roads along the white houses, "Most of the people of Ramot Hashavim came from Germany in 1933. Many of us came from near Berlin. With the little money

we had ourselves and loans from the Jewish agency, we were able to start. Twenty-five of the group were doctors and lawyers in Germany."

Moses himself was a doctor. His red-headed wife interrupted us to tell that the building on the right was the community hall dedicated to Toscanini, the world famous musical conductor. Toscanini visited Ramot Hashavim several years ago on a tour of the country. Because of his interest in the community, the citizens presented him with a tract of land which he gave back to the community as a recreation center.

We turned into one of the farm houses to meet the farmer Adalbert Lechner and his wife, Elsa. They both worked on a poultry farm and both spoke excellent English. Lechner was a businessman near Berlin and was one of the original ten farmers who settled at Ramot Hashavim. His brother is a member of the Metropolitan Opera in New York City.

Even by American standards they would be called good poultrymen. With hens almost piled on top of each other on their limited half acre, they raise their pullets in close confinement. Because of its individual ownership, the cooperative village normally produces more per man than the generally less efficient kibbutz. Nor does it have the possible friction between individuals that may develop in the too close living together of the communal farms. The added incentive of private ownership is lacking on the communal

farms, and even though everyone benefits from increased production it may not be so quickly apparent.

It takes more capital per person to establish the cooperative village, and some farmers may not have the experience or training to operate their own farms. One cooperative community farmer said, "Even the goats give more milk in the cooperative village."

Large tracts of Arab-held land were left behind when the Arabs fled during the war. This explains the empty look of some of the country. These tracts were taken over by the government, and at present are being sold to the Jewish National Fund. Approximately 137 thousand acres have been transferred to JNF, giving it a total land holding of about 350 thousand acres.

Land Leases

Land is not deeded to new settlers. The deeds are held by JNF and leased to the communal farm or to individual cooperative community farmers. For an example, let's say you wanted to start farming in Israel as an individual farmer. First you could join a new or already organized cooperative community. In a few cooperative settlements, the farmers own their own land. But in most, and in all newly formed communities, the land is leased for 49 years. At the end of that time it is automatically re-leased to you or to your children, provided you or they meet the qualifications of the

cooperative farm — to farm the land yourselves without hired labor, and to sell and buy through the community cooperatives. The land you could lease would vary from one-half to eight acres, depending upon what kind of crops you could grow. You would pay JNF approximately 2 per cent of the assessed valuation of the land as rent each year. Secondly you might decide to farm completely outside any settlement. But here you would find land difficult to buy and very high priced. You would have to find someone who owned land before the Jewish State was established who would sell — and such land is definitely limited.

American farmers would not like this very well. We have long considered land ownership as a right and one of the cornerstones of democracy.

Let's look at the reason behind Israel's national land. The Israelis who favor such a land policy — and there are many who do not — defend national land with these arguments. They say it stops land speculation. People don't buy land and hold it with the hopes that it will increase in value or prove to be a safe investment. Frightened capital, fearful of higher taxes or inflation, doesn't rush to the country to buy farms because the investors feel that land is a hedge against inflation. Here in America we have recently had this rush of frightened capital from the city to the farm.

The Israelis further argue that any increased value of the land accrues to the state. They point out that it keeps the land from being bought up

into big estates such as those that have long plagued many countries of the Middle East. They further say that national land will maintain the agricultural character of the country. Boiled down, it means that cities cannot be built or expanded into rural areas without permission of the semi-official Jewish Agency. Industries cannot take over good farm land without their permission and approval.

There is nothing new about state ownership of land. In the ancient days, the country was generally considered the property of the king, and the king in those days was the state. In some countries like Arabia, most of the land still belongs to the state and could be called public domain. Most of the people are nomads and roam at will over the countryside. Private ownership for them would be a burden. It is only when people stake their tents permanently along the valleys and begin cultivating the land that land ownership becomes a problem.

During feudal times land was generally given in large tracts by the king to the noblemen and the church. In some countries the land has been conscripted from the large landowners and broken up into small farms either given or sold to the farmers themselves. During the Russian Revolution the estates of Russia were seized and became property of the state.

The theory of national land in Israel is in sharp contrast to our own system of free land ownership.

Following the American Revolution Congress passed our own land policy for public domain. Eventually it became cemented into the Homestead Act when land was sold cheaply — \$2.50 an acre — to the farmers themselves who homesteaded the land by clearing it, building homes, and breaking up the soil. The plains of the Middlewest became the home of thousands of farm families.

It will be interesting to follow the development of Israel's national land policy of land owned by the people as a whole in a democratic country.

Americans would be pretty well agreed, however, that nationalized land has little in common with American tradition of the individualistic farmer. Whether he likes to think of it or not, the American farmer is a capitalist through and through.