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## GUSH EMUNIM AND SETTLEMENT-TYPE IN THE WEST BANK

David Newman

One of the most intractable problems concerning the negotiations over Palestinian autonomy on the West Bank is the issue of Jewish settlement. Under the Mapai Government of 1967-77, settlements were established along the line of the Jordan Valley in accordance with a policy of securing the borders as laid down in the Allon Plan conceived of by Yigal Allon. Following the 1973 Arab-Israel War there was a move towards greater government flexibility with regard to territorial compromise in exchange for peace. In opposition to this change in policy there arose the Gush Emunim pressure group, who saw this shift as a danger which threatened the retention of the whole of the Biblically ordained *Eretz Yisrael* ('Land of Israel'). Their objectives were, and remain to this day, settlement throughout the West Bank and particularly in the densely Arab-populated areas of the highlands of Judea and Samaria. This was the centre of the ancient Jewish kingdoms and therefore there was felt to be a strong emotional attachment to the area. By settlement they hoped to establish a permanent Jewish presence which would not be moved. They based themselves on the tradition of never dismantling an existing Jewish settlement. Although largely rebuffed by the Labour government, they managed to establish a foothold, and subsequently, with the advent of the right-wing Likud government following their election win in the spring of 1977, the Gush were able to expand their settlement activities to a point where today they have a network of twenty settlements. This is negligible in numbers relative to the indigenous Arab population. In fact, the Arab population of the West Bank is over 600,000 as compared with the Jewish population of 13,700 (non-urban). The natural increase of the Arab population since 1967 thus far exceeds the total Jewish population in that time (even allowing for another few thousand in urban settlements). Nevertheless, the network of settlements represents a formidable element in the general uncertainty as to the future status of the West Bank.

No extreme pressure group in Israeli history has had such a profound influence on society. This is witnessed by the continuous media coverage given to the Gush. Although much is being said as to their political relevance, there has been little examination of their actual settlement structures, and I would like briefly to discuss this issue in the rest of this paper.

Israel is renowned for its *kibbutz* and *moshav* type of cooperative settlements based on agricultural activities. The establishment of a Jewish society in Palestine has taken much of its inspiration from the pioneering development of the *kibbutz* builders. The collective and cooperative ways of life have become a source of study for social scientists. However, it is not so widely appreciated that these developments have served as factors which have undermined the importance of urban values. Until the establishment of the State in 1948, only Tel-Aviv and

Afula had been established as Jewish towns in their own right. All the other urban developments of that period had been a natural outgrowth of the private enterprise *moshavot* from the earliest period of Jewish settlement. The New Towns policy of the Israeli government recognized the need to establish urban places for their own sake, but the same priority and resource allocation accorded the small ideological rural settlements was never given to these places. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the population are urban dwellers, and it is a major paradox of Israeli society that the rural settlements have been granted a disproportionate share of resources and importance. Any demand for a middle-class way of life in which a person can work in his town profession but live in rural surroundings has largely gone unheeded. Such a person would have to be prepared to accept the socio-economic obligations of the cooperative frameworks if he wished to live in a rural area. The one major intrusion into the traditional ideological foundations of Israeli settlement planning has been the insertion of increasing amounts of rural industry. This has enabled the establishing of new rural settlements in areas devoid of agricultural resources but deemed important to settle on political grounds (e.g. the Galilee, the Golan Heights). It also caters for groups of highly skilled and professional immigrants who are prepared to live within a cooperative framework but who are not prepared to forego their professional training. Groups of second generation *moshav* dwellers with no land of their own also benefit from this policy. It has given rise to the 'industrial village' concept of the early 1970s, which proposed the establishment of rural settlements based on highly technological industry within a cooperative framework. The most advanced implementation of this concept today is the Segev Regional Planning Project in the Galilee. This plan is based on the establishment of six villages with a central industrial and services area. Employment is mainly in computer software and hardware, electronics, metalworking and highly skilled component manufacture of one kind or another.

The Gush Emunim settlers who wished to settle in the West Bank highland areas were faced with opposition not only from the government on political grounds, but also from the settlement authorities. The Gush settlers were not part of the ideological cooperative tradition and felt no need to become part of the traditional settlement sector. The area in question has no unused agricultural tracts of land but even were it to have, it is unlikely that this would be attractive to many of these settlers. Similarly, the majority of the settlers are not interested in becoming part of a cooperative framework even in industry. Once they have achieved their initial political aims of settling in the West Bank, they are intent on living and working within a free enterprise system in which each individual can work wherever he wishes providing it is not to the detriment of the settlement as a whole.

As the Gush Emunim movement grew in power it realized that it

needed to have a settlement framework in which the long-term continuity and viability of its settlement aims could be achieved. The Gush leadership gave backing to the newly developed settlement concept known as the *Yishuv Kehillati*, formulated towards the end of 1975. Its author was a leading Israeli planner, Uzi Gdor, who at that time was head of the newly established Movement for New Urban Settlements. This movement represented the interests of the government-approved urban settlements over the green line (e.g. Kiryat Arba, Katzrin, Ofira). He saw that there was a wide demand by many of the Israeli population to live in rural surroundings but within a freer socio-economic environment. Should such a framework come into being, it could prove applicable to specific areas such as the Galilee and the West Bank Highlands and thus attract settlers to these areas.

The *Yishuv Kehillati* (literally 'community village') would remain, by Israeli standards, a 'rural' settlement. This meant that its size would be limited to 250-350 families (the average *kibbutz* and *moshav* has 100-150 families). But all the other traditional rural settlement planning factors would not be applicable. Thus, instead of a cooperative framework and home-based agriculture or industry, each individual would be allowed to establish his own private factory on land rented from the settlement, or even to commute to his job in town. Virtually all of the highland area of the West Bank is within an hour's journey of either Jerusalem or Tel-Aviv, and the majority of settlers have their own cars. However, the idea that a person would be able to commute was revolutionary in that, although many of the *moshavim* in the coastal plain have developed certain limited commuting tendencies over time, these have been only as a secondary additive factor to the agricultural base. The *Yishuv Kehillati* concept called for a settlement based on commuting in the first instance, and this was an anathema to the traditional ideological concepts of Israeli planners. The Settlement Department of the Jewish Agency rejected the concept as a viable settlement alternative. Nevertheless, Gush Emunim adopted it as the most appropriate means of attaining their objectives.

The advent of the hard-line Likud government of Menachem Begin in 1977 witnessed a swing to the right not only in foreign policy issues, but also in the socio-economic field. Revisionist Zionism was not an adherent of the collectivist-socialist approach. It placed a greater emphasis on individual initiative and enterprise. Thus, Gush Emunim received a certain degree of government sanction for locating settlements throughout the West Bank and also were able to push for the recognition, by the settlement authorities, of the *Yishuv Kehillati* concept. The government realized that such a settlement based on individual enterprise could be established with less central planning than was necessary in the case of the *kibbutz* and the *moshav*. Since the policy of the new administration was to establish settlements in the West Bank speedily, this gave support to the calls for recognition of the concept. The three existing semi-official Gush Emunim settlements of Kedumim, Ofra and Ma'aleh Adumin were

legalized by the government. Furthermore the government also started to put into effect the Gush Emunim Emergency Plan which had been presented to them, calling for the recognition of twelve new additional sites by the end of that year. In this plan (the second of Gush Emunim's three settlement plans to date) there was an appendix on the *Yishuv Kehillati* as being the most appropriate form of settlement framework for the implementation of the plan.

The Settlement Department reviewed the concept and gave it recognition as a valid settlement alternative with the proviso that, in the long term, commuting would give way to a situation in which all the inhabitants of a settlement would work in home-based industry. In this way, the attachment to the settlement and the local area could be emphasized. In fact, the two oldest Gush Emunim settlements, Kedumim and Ofra, have now reached the stage at which they will accept only such new members as are prepared to work in the settlement itself. At the other extreme are settlements such as Beit El where virtually the whole population commutes to work, mostly in Jerusalem. It is unlikely that in such settlements the economic way of life will be changed by any outside authority. The possibility exists that two types of *Yishuv Kehillati* could develop in the future, depending on the settlers' wishes in each settlement.

Today, all the *Yishuv Kehillati*-type settlements except one are in the West Bank and are associated with Gush Emunim. The Gush are now recognised as an official settlement movement and have the same rights and status as the older *kibbutz* and *moshav* movements. Theoretically, there is nothing to stop the development of *Yishuv Kehillatis* in other areas, such as the Galilee, or under the auspices of other freer movements such as the Liberals, or *Herut*. The fact remains however that, even with an influx of new faces and ideas in the Settlement Department in the post-1977 era, there remains much inertia and resistance to wholesale change owing to the traditional Zionist ideological values, and there seems to be little chance of much development in this field in the near future outside the West Bank. The one exception to this, Garlin Raphael in the Segev Region, underwent a long struggle before gaining recognition in the post-1977 era, having had it rejected by the previous administration. Since the *Yishuv Kehillati* concept was not yet a valid one, the Settlement Department had originally given the group an ultimatum. Either they would settle within a *moshav* framework or disband altogether. The group accepted the former decision at first, but renewed their demands for the new framework when the Likud came to power.

It is too early to say whether the *Yishuv Kehillati* type has potential long-term economic viability. In today's political climate, Gush Emunim are receiving a major part of governmental resources, so that the earliest stages of *Yishuv Kehillati* development show a rate of subsidization far exceeding the norm for the typical new settlement. Usually, a new settlement is provided with basic infrastructure and temporary dwellings and

will then expand in a gradual progress over a number of years in accordance with its own rate of development. Since the present government find it necessary to emphasize the long-term duration of the Gush Emunim settlements in the landscape, many of the earlier stages have been leapfrogged, and there has been an immediate insertion of better infrastructure and higher quality housing. Yet private industry could well prove to be financially beneficial to the settlement as could the wages from commuters working in highly paid jobs in town. The aim is that each settler should eventually buy his own house and thus repay much of the development costs. However, the overall picture will take a few more years to become clear, and that is irrespective of the political changes that might take place as regards sovereignty on the West Bank.

I have deliberately avoided discussing the Gush Emunim justification for locating settlements where they do. Briefly, the Gush were at first interested in settling anywhere, providing it had a religio-historical significance, regardless of the actual suitability of the topographic conditions. Now that they are a recognized settlement movement, the professional Settlement Department examines these factors first. Nevertheless, the Gush still aim towards areas with Biblical connotations, and the names of virtually all their settlements reflect this. The wider political issues, with all their international connotations are fairly well known and can possibly be discussed elsewhere. What I have tried to emphasize is one of the less well-known aspects of a very complex issue and have attempted to show the results of the interaction of both traditional and ideological factors in affecting the West Bank landscape.

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