

For Us or for All?

Old Habonim, the New Left, and a Transforming Jewish Radicalism between 1960 and 1976

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Introduction

Take a moment to consider this recurrent scene: a mess hall, half-lit by evening sunlight and incandescent bulbs overhead, its unfinished wood walls creating a dim, yellowish tint in the air. The four rows of tables are covered in food scraps and spilled water from cups knocked over by the commotion above. The benches on either side of the tables are shaking from the stomps of the youth, ranging from spirited eight-year-old campers to gregarious college-aged counselors, who stand where moments earlier they sat for dinner, joined in impassioned song. From out of the cacophony of voices, high-pitched, cracking, and baritone, you can hear a chorus: “For our hands are strong, and our hearts are young, and the dreamer keeps a-dreaming, ages long.”

Originally founded in the United Kingdom in 1929 and established in North America in 1935, the socialist-Zionist youth movement Habonim has instilled an idealistic fervor in the hearts and minds of Jewish youth for decades. The many summers at Habonim camps devoted to education on socialism, Labor Zionism, social justice, and Jewish peoplehood, combined with the mischief, play, and excitement of an environment lacking almost anyone over the age of twenty-two, reared Jewish young people to believe that they could bring about their own utopia. Beyond its summer camps, the youth movement ran after-school and weekend activities in cities across the U.S. and Canada, offering Jewish parents a community and sense of shared identity for their children that was adjacent to institutionalized religious life centered on the synagogue.

Initially an independent youth division of the Labor Zionist political party Poale Zion, Habonim’s ideological origins can be traced to nascent Zionist politics in late imperial Russia, where the Jewish struggle for emancipation converged with a socialist movement that would eventually produce the Revolution of 1917.¹ The nationalistic vision for auto-emancipation from

the tsarist regime arose among the radical Jewish *intelligentsia*, especially in the Pale of Settlement, amidst an atmosphere of political idealism and violent antisemitism.²

Socialist-Zionism, first developed by thinkers such as Nachman Syrkin and Ber Borochov, sought Jewish liberation via the mass exodus from the Russian Empire to Palestine and the development of a socialist society within which a proletarian Jewish cultural renaissance could take shape.³ This particular strain of thought found its material form in kibbutzim: Jewish communal agricultural settlements heavily inspired by the agrarian socialism of Russia's populist Socialist Revolutionary Party. Established by young radical immigrants to Mandate Palestine, kibbutzim served as the seed of an imagined socialist-Zionist utopia, mobilizing Eastern European Jews to abandon their spiritually and materially stunted existences in diaspora for the promise of national self-determination and socialism.

After the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, kibbutzim became canonized in the Israeli national mythos as the pioneer beginnings of a long-dreamt of society now actualized. The founders of Habonim explicitly modeled the movement's summer camps on the kibbutz environment, emphasizing collectivism, agricultural labor, and political education. The underlying hope was that one day, inspired by their experiences at summer camp, these members (colloquially known as "Habos") would move to Israel permanently. Once there, they would continue the work of constructing a socialist-Zionist society in accordance with the ideologies of their diasporic forebearers.

Habonim sought to influence the life trajectories of its members and accomplish its socialist-Zionist mission by emphasizing the concept of *hagshama*, Hebrew for "self-actualization." One of its longstanding five core pillars, *hagshama* was imbued in Habonim's youth both through the empowering and liberatory atmosphere of the movement's

summer camps and the didactic and political nature of its education.⁴ Habonim, through a political education that emphasized values over actionable political goals and mobilization, attempted to cultivate a personality type in its members. As a movement member described to Sandra Fox, author of *The Jews of Summer: Summer Camp and Jewish Culture in Postwar America*, if Habonim does not create the conditions for each individual's self-actualization through socialist-Zionism, then "we will fail in our attempt to develop him into the person we want": a future movement leader and kibbutznik in Israel.⁵

This educational focus on the individual and the movement itself rather than on other local, national, and international communities can shed light on the limits of Habonim's political involvement throughout its near century of activity in North America. Instead of pursuing a deep connection with the world it sought to change for the better, Habonim deferred its political project to its members' adulthood and offered instead a utopian subcultural experience. This experience was one that would ultimately leave its members idealistic yet alienated from much of the leftist political struggles that elicited their tentative engagement and with which they shared deep ideological commitments.

Hagshama, then, was a narrowly defined path that led either to simply sustaining the movement for future generations (through donations and alumni sending their children to Habonim programs), or *aliyah* (immigration of Jews to the land of Israel) to kibbutzim. To advance this aim, in 1950 the movement began its Workshop program, sending new graduates to Israel for a year in order to familiarize them with kibbutz life and live out their movement's values. The emphasis on the individual's fulfillment of the movement's prescribed life path left those who saw opportunities for enacting change elsewhere conflicted and disillusioned. Habos who found inspiration for political action outside of the movement were often forced to either

assimilate their ideas into Habonim's existing political education or go it alone, unable to shake the subculture from its comfortable and particularist moorings.

This tension was exposed in the 1960s and 70s, a moment in American history of widespread political activism and mobilization in response to nearly a century of Jim Crow discrimination in the South, the U.S. invasion of Vietnam, and the growing popularity of leftism after the McCarthyist repression of the fifties. This culture of social and political rebellion known as the New Left resonated with many in American society, including those who identified with consensus liberal politics, radical leftism, or a more apolitical but nonetheless progressive counterculture. While the New Left drew from the Old Left's vision for socialism in America and beyond, "the primary difference was that the New Left's version of socialism was highly utopian and humanistic and paid scant attention to issues such as class conflict and the vanguard role of the proletariat."⁶ The New Left was largely made up of students from affluent families attending universities across the country—a disproportionate number of whom were Jewish—and Black Americans desiring an end to racial inequality and marginalization, some with organizational affiliations to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Black Panther Party (BPP).

For Jewish youth who "did not desire to be tied to particularistic primordial groups and identities," the New Left offered the chance to join a "universalistic movement devoted to breaking down artificial and irrational barriers."⁷ Habonim members were among those attracted to this universalist activism. In fact, the first two high school chapters of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), one of the movements at the heart of the American New Left, were founded by members of Habonim in 1965.⁸ As the sixties progressed, however, many Jewish

New Leftists turned inward, away from the national stage, and toward a new Jewish radicalism that sought to bring change to the American Jewish community, believing that this was where their activism would be “politically significant and relevant.”⁹

Habonim found itself in the crosshairs of these developments, aligned with many of the New Left’s goals but deeply committed to its socialist-Zionist *raison d’être* of rearing future immigrants to kibbutzim in Israel. The movement sought to maintain the multiplicity of its political sympathies like other socialist-Zionists who, as kibbutz scholar Tal Elmaliach points out, “grappled with the tension between the particularistic-Jewish and leftist-universalist aspects of its thinking by fashioning a hybrid identity.”¹⁰ Habos oscillated between their own ideological specificity handed down from Borochoy and Syrkin and their universalist sympathies that embraced a big-tent political progressivism in dialogue with the New Left. As the sixties wore on, however, Habonim’s position within the shifting landscapes of the New Left, the American Jewish community, and the Zionist agenda became increasingly contested. The movement’s emphasis on *hagshama*, through its subject-forming educational enterprise, came to be at odds with the New Leftist solidarity politics that prioritized mobilization and ardent universalism (and eventually included an outright rejection of Zionism). As well, the movement utilized and built upon childhood as an ideal, which made it difficult to bring its members into the streets. To remain relevant in New Left spaces and stay true to its socialist-Zionist roots, movement members were constantly mediating the relationship between their ideological identities and the political moment.

This thesis examines Habonim’s history between 1960 and 1976, years that were marked by two major tensions—between the movement’s education and potential for political action and between socialist-Zionist particularism and New Left universalism. My research leverages the

rich internal documents from Habonim's archives and the oral history testimonies from its members. In the forthcoming chapters, I examine a variety of moments in which core tensions arise, including the controversial propositions of Max Langer to transform the movement's ideology and structure, a picket against segregation at a Jewish-owned business in Baltimore, the rise of Radical Zionism among American Jewish progressives in the wake of the Six-Day War, the memories of many summers at Habonim camps across the U.S., the life history of Berkeley radical and movement *mazkir* Ken Bob, and the refounding of a kibbutz outside of Jerusalem. I have aimed to capture and contextualize Habonim's place amongst the social and political upheaval of the sixties and seventies, as well as uncover the effect of the New Left on the movement, which reformed and then reconsecrated Habonim's educational and particularist structures.

Aside from published internal movement histories such as *Arise and Build* (1961) and *Builders and Dreamers* (1993), there has been no academic historical research conducted on Habonim and its place on the American Left. Throughout this thesis, I triangulate between secondary historical work done on American Jewish life, socialist-Zionism, and the New Left in an attempt to place my contribution of original primary source research on Habonim within the wider historiography. Additionally, I hope to contribute to the ongoing deconstruction of the "good sixties/bad sixties" historical paradigm, most clearly advanced by Todd Gitlin in *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (1987), which falls prey to teleologies of 'successful' activism and problematically stages the New Left's white, affluent members as the deciding voice for determining the success of the period's radicalism.¹¹ By following Habonim during this historical moment, I provide a case study analysis of a group forced to contend with the supposed onset of the supposed "bad sixties." In doing so, I seek to provide nuance to the often

over-simplified narrative of the movement's alienation from wider struggles. The story of Habonim is one of a movement mired in internal ambivalence, which led to disengagement when challenged by its critics from the New Left. This offers an alternative explanation to the fissures between the New Left and an ascendant particularistic Jewish radicalism.

Solidarity politics' reliance on a spirit of self-sacrifice for a given cause can sometimes privilege the promise of a new and undivided world over the intricate histories and circumstances of the peoples inhabiting the present one. Habonim's members in the sixties and seventies were largely concentrated in white, suburban Jewish communities in the northern U.S., isolated from the developments of social movements due to de facto segregation, their relative affluence, and the assimilating yet insular reality of the American Jewish community. Additionally, their membership being primarily made up of *children* drastically limited the mobilizing and action-oriented potential of the movement. And yet, despite their removed position from the epicenters of American social action, Habonim and its members did not shy away from the world they inherited and the challenges it posed to their ideology and subcultural specificity.

This thesis draws on a range of primary source material, including internal Habonim documents, periodicals, and interviews. My archival material consists of movement documents from the as yet uncatalogued storage boxes located at the Habonim Dror Central Offices in Philadelphia, the periodical collections at the New York Public Library, as well as periodicals from the California Digital Newspaper Collection made available by the University of California-Riverside. My first chapter relies heavily on internal movement documents related to educational programs and national conventions, as well as issues of Habonim's member periodical *Furrows* between 1958 and 1964. For my second and third chapters, much of the primary source material consists of oral history interviews with Habonim alumni.¹² These

interviews provide the project with an experiential texture and allow me to narrativize the impact of Habonim on individual lives. I also heavily consulted *Builders and Dreamers: Habonim Labor Zionist Youth in North America*, an edited collection of essays compiled by J.J. Goldberg and Elliot King to commemorate Habonim's fiftieth anniversary. Containing rich recollections from a wide range of Habonim alumni, *Builders*, at many points in this thesis, serves as the basis for situating my other primary sources in the greater history of Habonim and is itself the subject of my analysis. Given the subcultural nature of Habonim, I use a variety of terms that may be unfamiliar to the reader, originating from Hebrew and specifically Habonim vernacular, the jargon of a Hebraist movement in diaspora. A list of translated and explained terms can be found in the appendix.

Growing up as a member of Habonim myself, I am as intimately familiar with the tensions raised in this thesis as I am with singing my heart out while standing on a mess hall bench. Like many of the historical subjects that populate this thesis, I have struggled with the purpose of pursuing my education when the need for committed action is so great, and I endlessly search for a resolution to the persistent existential tension between my own Jewish identity and leftist political leanings. After the attacks of October 7, 2023, and the ensuing Israeli assault on Gaza, like many, I found myself unable to contend with the political moment, in profound despair and with no idea of how to respond. While my experience with activism was fraught, I found refuge in intellectual engagement, looking for answers by widening the scope of my historical understanding. In researching the experiences of Habonim members during the sixties and seventies, I have been able to think through today's politicized landscapes by learning from other idealistic Jewish youth, albeit from a different era of political possibility, who were wholeheartedly committed to bringing about a better world.

Chapter 1: Conflicting Paths Forward

Max Langer, a Baltimore Picket, and Internal Tensions in the Early 1960s

It is often overlooked by a generation's movers and shakers that their status as "radicals" is not necessarily a permanent one. As the years pass, the times a-change and new questions arise in the perpetual fight for a better world. The old guard cannot expect to rest comfortably on their laurels. The reflective radical must take up the task of resisting ideological stagnation and finding new avenues for political and social action, knowing that the struggle is both ongoing and ever-fleeting. After a period of manufactured postwar unity and rabid McCarthyism that forced much of the left-wing radicalism of the early twentieth century into the shadows, the youth of the sixties burst onto the scene, struggling to build upon their radical inheritances when confronted with the demands of the new moment. The youth of the dawning sixties demanded action, from each other and from themselves, in response to the perceived complacency of their parents' generation. The question of *how to act* radically was of utmost importance. Many points were agreed upon and vague ideals were eagerly discussed, but what was to come next?

Habonim was in no sense immune to these developments. Following the establishment of the State of Israel and in response to the anti-communist censorship of the fifties, Habonim had shifted toward a predominantly Zionist orientation, resolving at a national convention not to disavow their socialism but effectively pushing it to the wayside.¹ As it lost touch with the radical political character that made its programs an attractive youth experience, the movement stopped growing. The number of movement graduates making *aliyah* slowed and, with Israel now being an existent reality, the future of Habonim's chalutzic (pioneering) project was

uncertain.² The movement was unsatisfied with only sending a handful of *chalutzim* (pioneers) to Israel, and its programs seemed self-perpetuating rather than dynamic.

While many American youths coming of age in the late fifties and early sixties embraced the period's growing radicalism, Habonim found itself struggling in its own stultifying moment. Its members, conflicted as to how the movement should proceed, eventually pointed toward two directions of political praxis: a reinvigorated chalutzic Zionist mission of *aliyah* to Israel or a commitment to activism centered on American domestic issues, especially the growing Civil Rights movement. Both directions of Habonim's rediscovered energies were influenced by the rise of the New Left, which provided a youth environment that encouraged intellectual and political engagement, as well as a sense of purpose for movement members who demanded more from the world and out of their young lives.

Early in my research, while reading the edited volume *Builders and Dreamers*, I was struck by the recollections of movement alum David Twersky in his piece "We Were Filled with Ideas of Revolution."³ Reminiscing about summer of 1965, when he was sixteen, and the rebellious spirit that enraptured him and his peers, he wrote:

Our ideas were a heady mixture of anarchism, semidigested Marxism, and SDS new leftism. We quoted Borochoy at length, and studied the writings of Max Langer, whom most of us had never met. At our meetings, which lasted until the wee hours of the night, we debated camp rules and societal values. And we drove our counselors crazy.⁴

In these few sentences, the environment of political radicalism, counterculture, and youthful intellectualism that were characteristic of the sixties leaped from the page. These youth had political theorists to read, activists to revere, comrades to debate, and superiors to disobey. We recognize the terms in the constellation of their political universe: anarchism, Marxism, SDS,

and Poale Zion founding father Ber Borochov. But who was Max Langer? It soon became clear that he was so revered by Twersky's cadre of young Habos because he was one of their own.

As Habonim's controversial visionary of the early sixties, Langer sought to reinscribe the link between the movement's ideologically Zionist commitments and its practical effect of producing *olim* (immigrants to Israel from the Jewish diaspora) as well as increase the overall potential for the political mobilization of Habonim's members.⁵ After growing up in Habonim in the Vancouver area and writing his doctoral thesis in social psychiatry titled "An Adolescent Subculture — A Study of the Habonim Youth Movement in Vancouver," Langer reconnected with the Labor Zionists of his youth when he began his medical residency in Brooklyn in 1960.⁶ At the age of 25, he became the organizer for the Brooklyn *ken* (local chapter) for younger movement members and began to formulate his critique of Habonim's burgeoning political ineffectiveness. Langer's vision of an awakened Habonim, a movement whose programs were no longer iterative and ideology no longer compromising, emerged as a flashpoint for the organization as its members became enamored with the possibility of addressing Habonim's political stagnation.

Langer's critique of the movement was read widely by members and became the subject of internal debate. His essays were primarily published in *Furrows*, the bi-monthly Habonim periodical for which he would eventually become a member of the editorial board, as well as in his self-produced pamphlet "The Zionist Youth Movement in America," published in January 1962. This public forum allowed for conversations about Habonim's future to extend beyond the Brooklyn *ken* or Langer's closest peers. Many issues of *Furrows* from 1961 and onward contain letters to the editors in response to Langer's ideas, with varying levels of support for his radical suggestions.

Langer's vision for a renewed Habonim cannot be taken in isolation. Contextualized with the political upheaval of the sixties and the changing place of Jews in American life, from global precarity after the Holocaust to middle class affluence and pervading assimilation, Langer's doubling down on Habonim's *aliyah* focused mission is striking. He brings to the fore the tension between Jewish particularism and socialist universalism at the center of Habonim's history as a youth movement. Not only did *Furrows* contain polemics that sought to garner support around a renewed chalutzic American Zionism. The publication also included romantic portraits of kibbutz life in Israel, redemptive revisionist histories of events like the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, coverage on the plight of oppressed Soviet Jewry, and, notably, reflections on American domestic issues and their relevance to Habonim. It is in movement members' engagement with the seminal issue of the early sixties, civil rights for Black Americans, that the question of "how to *act*" becomes clear and the subject of debate.

The Langer Doctrine

What was Max Langer all about? What did he think Habonim should be, or rather, how Habonim should act? Primary for Langer was Habonim's potential as a political movement. Rather than overemphasizing a longstanding educational model that creates ideological adherents, he thought that Habonim could only be truly considered a movement if it could "mobilize effectively the personality type it creates to change the social order..."⁷ The sphere Langer wanted this political movement to influence was the American Jewish community and the Zionist community at large. Instead of remaining a niche phenomenon in both the American Jewish and Israeli political contexts, Habonim, and other so-called "chalutzic youth movements," should actualize their values to the fullest extent (make *aliyah* to Israel) and bring their ideology

to other American Jews along the way. Langer, in concluding his essay “Faith and Ideology in the Chalutzic Youth Movements,” uses an anecdote to express the difference between Habonim and other American Jewish youth organizations, writing:

Finally a young chavera [comrade] from one of the chalutzic Zionist youth movements arose and, to the considerable discomfiture of the delegates of the general Jewish youth organizations, spoke for all of us when she said: ‘It’s really very simple. We don’t want so much from our members. All we want is their lives.’⁸

This is what Langer sought out of Habonim: not an organization that briefly sent its members to Israel in a faint-hearted fulfillment of their pioneering socialist-Zionist vision, but a movement that enacted change through its ideologically fervent members with the fullest extent of their lives, giving everything to their cause.

Langer had many pragmatic proposals for rousing dedication, actualization, and independence in Habonim’s members. Primarily, he saw the need to free up the energies of college-aged movement leaders who were stuck in a cycle of Habonim’s preservation, leading educational programs that passed values on from one generation to the next and neglecting to become a critical movement with a drive for internal change. Langer did not mince words when he said that the chalutzic youth movement needed to free itself from this task of “babysitting,” for which he believed the larger American Jewish community was responsible.⁹ While he recognized the importance of a pipeline for younger children to fill Habonim’s ranks when they became teenagers, Langer lamented “the current emphasis on the very young to the exclusion of proper programming for the high school and college age groups” who could be mobilizing if they were not tied to their *hadracha* (counselor) roles.¹⁰ These teens, he argued, could be building stronger *kvutzot* (tight-knit cohorts) for their eventual immigration to Israel or spend time participating in educational pursuits more directly aligned with their capabilities and passions, as they did in 1963 when Habonim’s winter seminars were dedicated to education on

the Civil Rights movement.¹¹ Still, more than out of a desire to mobilize for the sake of the era's growing universalist social movements, Langer was mainly inspired by these movements' mobilization and sought to draw from their structures to actualize Habonim's particularist Zionist aims. For Langer, the New Left provided an effective roadmap to be used in the service of a very different cause.

Another aim of Langer's was to decouple the Zionist youth movement from the larger American Zionist bureaucracy. In the years after the State of Israel's founding, the American Zionist Youth Foundation was intimately involved with chalutzic Zionist youth movements, mainly Habonim and Young Judaea. The foundation sought to influence their educational undercurrents, promoting a redeemed Jewish identity through an emphasis on Jewish heroism and Israeli triumphalism, as well as financially supporting youth Israel programs.¹² For Langer, the Foundation bred complacency in youth movement leadership, who would offload responsibilities to the in-charge parent organization. For the youth to have their own voice, they could in no way be beholden to their elders in how they ran their programs. Langer wrote in "The Depoliticization of the Zionist Youth" that "the Youth Foundation does not service or further a Zionist youth movement—it services the need of all elements of the Zionist bureaucracy for maintaining their own continuity by means of a youth group."¹³ In this way, Habonim was failing to be a political organization and a trailblazing movement within the American Jewish community. To summarize his rebuke of the meddling adult Zionist organizations, Langer quotes fellow Habonim *chaver* (comrade) Judd Teller who said at the 25th *veida* (convention) in 1960 that the task of the movement leadership was to "rescue the revolution from the bureaucracy."¹⁴

A glaring inconsistency in Langer's argumentation is his belief that youth movement leadership should be older than the current high school and college-aged youth currently running Habonim's programs. Instead, he thought leadership should consist of recent movement graduates in their mid-twenties who he saw as benefitting from the clarity of being more mature and politically developed. It seems to be a direct contradiction of his rebuke of adult intervention on the part of the Zionist bureaucracy. To an observant reader, this is a clear attempt by Langer to justify his own rise to a movement leadership position as a late-twenties professional with a graduate degree. Another issue emerging from Langer's vision for youth independence is the question of funding, which he mentions but leaves largely unresolved. While he proposes the merging of the various chalutzic Zionist youth movements to centralize and cut costs, he seems ignorant of the fact that each of these movements are financially dependent on adults, either the Zionist bureaucracy he bemoans or the parents who generously fund their children's participation. Ultimately, however, for Langer, finances were secondary to the will to actualize, which he sought to manifest among Habonim members and the larger American Jewish youth community through his writings and argumentation.

To capture the spirits of the Jewish American youth and have them answer the call of socialist-Zionism, rhetoric bordering the primordial was required. For Langer, this primordial was the condition of Exile, which the chalutzic youth movement would seek to undo on both material and metaphysical grounds. Langer did not hold back in his use of Zionism's religious tendencies to infuse his political aims with a sublime character. American Jewish youth, he believed, should be motivated not only by the secular and material call for Jewish liberation globally, post-Holocaust via *aliyah*, but also by a spiritual tendency born out of an underlying Jewish messianism. In his second essay in a series of opinion pieces titled "Criteria for the

Chalutz Movements,” Langer’s first criterion of the six he identifies is Exile. He makes clear that exile does not solely relate to location (Jews in diaspora) but to “a moral concept as well.”¹⁵ He continues by explaining that not only is the task of the chalutzic youth movement to bring American and other diaspora Jews to Israel, but also to bring the world, in its current unjust and imperfected state, out of moral exile. Langer does not shy away from creating a hierarchy amongst these political aims in tension, in which the undoing of Jewish geographical exile takes precedence over the undoing of global moral exile. He writes later in the essay,

The task of mankind is seen as reducing social disorder and injustice everywhere. The Jewish people must also participate in this fight everywhere—this includes America and very definitely the American Jewish community. But the primary task of the Jewish people is the perfection of the Jewish National Home...¹⁶

In this statement, Langer qualifies any claim of fighting for universal justice that Habonim or any other chalutzic youth movement might make. He gives credence to the idea that combating “moral Exile” and the injustices of the day is imperative, but prevents any mobilization on this basis due to his ordering of commitments, with the totalizing mission of developing and perfecting Zionism’s particularist aim at the top of his list. In this way, Langer’s ideal chalutzic youth movement invokes the form of a universalist mission without any of the content. The religious tendency of his writing easily allows for this blatant prioritization of goals to be masked by a lofty and polemic tone. Langer is most interested in fulfilling the Zionist aims of his ideology. In an even further departure from Habonim’s socialist roots, he is no longer adamant about *aliyah* to kibbutz either, stating that “groups intending to have an impact on Israel to engage in social pioneering, must take into consideration all part of the Jewish National Home—Kibbutzim, Moshavim, development areas, and cities.”¹⁷

Langer stakes his vision for the movement around a singularly directed mission of American Jewish immigration to Israel while also critiquing the youth movement’s

depoliticization. He laments that the youth of the sixties no longer think critically, which he identifies as a symptom of a weakening tie between Jewish identity and social action.¹⁸ While many of the youth leadership are college-educated or college-bound, Langer is dumbfounded by their inability to bring their intellectual criticality to the movement. He writes,

One of the most disturbing characteristics which one finds among the Zionist youth today, some of them otherwise relatively sophisticated intellectuals, is their inability to use their academic knowledge to broaden their outlook on the problems of their work with Zionist youth groups. Habits of logical and orderly thinking seem to be jettisoned when it comes to Zionism. The quick generalization, the stop-gap solution and the failure to take into account a multiplicity of factors at work in a given situation is characteristic of Zionist youth leadership.¹⁹

To Langer, it seems like the youth are overcome with narrow-mindedness when they are tasked with actualizing what seems to be the ultimate aim of their, so far, short lives. I would argue that this dilemma is not symptomatic of some incapacity of American Zionist youth, who during this time were extremely active in domestic political movements, but rather a limitation of the Zionist ideology that Habonim, similar youth movements, and Langer himself were promoting. To challenge Langer, the lack of interest among youth might have had less to do with their capacity for critical thinking and rather with their interest in a more pressing issue: civil rights.

A Picket in Baltimore

As Langer's politicization campaign mounted in the pages of *Furrows*, in conversations within *kenim*, and among senior leadership, an incident at a Jewish-owned Baltimore restaurant called local members of Habonim to action. In December of 1961, a cadre of Yemenite Israeli merchant marines were refused service at the Mandell Ballow Restaurant because of the color of their skin. Although the dispute was 'settled' and the prospective diners did eventually have their meal at the restaurant, the incident roused members of Ken Ein Hadarom, Habonim's Baltimore

chapter, to resist the prejudice within their own community and demand an end to segregationist policies, at Jewish-owned businesses or otherwise. A picket ensued of around forty Habonim members and elicited the support of the Baltimore Board of Rabbis in the anti-segregation action. The *Furrows* editorial board showed their support for the picketers in the February 1962 issue of the periodical, writing in the comment section:

We can not find words to show our pride and respect for our chaverim. They continue to show that our movement believes that Zionism, besides being dedicated to aliya, is also dedicated to the continual fight for social justice and the rights of all men to be free and have equal opportunities. We in Habonim don't just talk. We act. Other Jewish organizations should act, too.²⁰

Similar to Langer's call for the program of the chalutzic movement to extend its influence into the larger American Jewish community, the editors praised Habonim's members as righteous actors that should inspire anti-segregationist sentiment and further action among the Jews of Baltimore. What is different here, however, is the lack of Langer's hierarchy between action for the sake of *aliyah* and action for broader social justice. There is an integration of diasporic social issues and the cause of Zionism, to which, in the eyes of Langer and others, Habonim is primarily beholden. This presented compatibility of the two aims does not remain. Debate between members with a particularist perspective and those dedicated to the universalist cause of equality and justice unfolds in the pages of subsequent *Furrows* issues.

The incident in Baltimore reappears in the May 1962 issue, in an article titled "In Baltimore: 'Attacked by Many'; 'Supported by a Few'" by Ken Ein Hadarom members Barry Krasner and Morty Cohen. The two authors contextualize the movement's picketing by describing the recent climate of anti-segregationist action, such as freedom rides along Route 40 and the successful integration of a number of Baltimore's local businesses. Much of the mobilization against discrimination was organized by the Maryland chapter of C.O.R.E. (the

Congress of Racial Equality). Many Maryland chaverim, living just below the Mason Dixon Line, yearned to be involved in the radical action of their fellow American youth.²¹ Their education in Habonim had prepared them for this moment; the time was now. Unfortunately, C.O.R.E.'s policy for most of its demonstrations involving civil disobedience were restricted to youth aged seniors in high school and older. Krasner and Cohen, as older movement members, "felt the need to actively introduce the rest of our Bonim to what is probably the most significant social action of our decade."²² The incident at Mandell's provided the opportunity to bring the struggle against segregation to younger movement members and have them actualize the principles instilled in them at their summer camps, during seminars, and through the *kenim*.

While they expected pushback from their local Jewish community, Krasner and Cohen were surprised by resistance to their action from within Habonim, specifically by some in senior leadership positions, who disapproved of their action because "as Zionists we were simply getting involved in things that were not our concern" and that "To participate in demonstrations as individuals was one thing, but to involve ourselves as Habonim was not our privilege."²³ Another criticism of the picketers was that their demonstration targeted segregation at a Jewish-owned restaurant when there were also many non-Jewish businesses that followed the same discriminatory practice. Why would these members of Habonim, as Jews, turn on their own community, putting Jewish livelihoods in jeopardy, and neglect to hold their non-Jewish neighbors accountable?²⁴ Rebuttals to the picketing that emphasize the need for Jewish unity elucidate the tension between, on the one hand, a post-Holocaust mentality of Jewish precarity, utilized in diaspora Zionist politics, and, on the other, the level of material comfort for many American Jews in the early sixties that allowed for their participation in the defense of other minority groups and not simply a 'protect one's own' psychology.

Amplifying and adding to Krasner and Cohen in a letter to the editor titled “We are Not a Chain of Discussion Groups,” Ken Ein Hadarom member Rozzy Garfeld defended the picketing action and leveled a scathing rebuke of the dominant movement currents that were skeptical of engaging in political action surrounding American domestic issues. Garfeld begins her piece framing the motivations for the Baltimore chaverim:

For many of the Maapilim in Baltimore Habonim, the words ‘social justice,’ which we have discussed for years, are not yet symbols of some vague distant goal which we can achieve by coming to meetings or going to Israel. Social justice is something which we can work toward in part by joining forces with other groups on the American scene in order to take direct action.²⁵

Garfeld attacks the rhetoric of movement pundits like Langer who emphasize aliyah as the primary task for Habonim members above all others. Rather than view “social justice” as an after-effect of securing a particularist future for American Jewish youth in Israel, Garfeld recognizes the logical desire of Habonim’s members to put their ideals into practice at home and in the only communities they know, especially for younger chaverim who are not yet old enough for Israel programs. While Langer advocates for the union of Habonim with other chalutzic youth movements, all with the same desire to send American Jewish youth to Israel, Garfeld envisions collaboration with “other groups on the American scene,” likely pointing toward building solidarity beyond Jewish and Zionist organizations and striving for justice alongside other American minority communities.

Garfeld follows this plea for a more American-facing activism from Habonim by criticizing the movement’s ideological misalignment with the prevailing attitudes among American youth in the early sixties.

Despite the Supreme Court ruling, most southern schools do not have even ‘token integration.’ Despite the Constitution, many Negroes do not have voting rights. Despite the many proclamations by civic and religious groups for integration, Negroes are refused service in public places. Where does Habonim fit into all of this? Unfortunately, on the

whole, it has not. While college students in general seem to have become more interested in the problems around them, Habonim has not followed this lead.²⁶

Habonim, in Garfeld's eyes, had failed to rise to the occasion. The sentiments of American youth in the sixties that the movement sought to embrace and mobilize had become captured by the struggle against segregation. The chalutzic dogma of Habonim, however, had alienated the very young people who should be leading their movement's political reawakening on the domestic front. For Garfeld, the chaverim in Baltimore, and others across the country, Habonim needed to get their priorities straight. They saw Langer's push for a particularistic Zionist fervor in a new generation of American Zionist youth as decidedly out of touch. While Langer and Garfeld disagreed about the role of Zionism and socialism within Habonim, they shared a unified call for greater action among movement members.

To make her argument resoundingly clear, Garfeld ends her letter to the editor by calling out Habonim senior leadership pushing a commitment to Zionist actualization and discouraging involvement in domestic issues like civil rights.

During a discussion of Habonim's role in American social problems, one of our seniors remarked: 'We are all standing with one foot on the boat to Israel. America's social problems are not ours.' If our Maapilim seriously believe that social action can be put off until they reach Israel, they are deluding themselves. One cannot disregard social problems in America and expect to create a just society in Israel. And aliya without thought of creating a better society is merely the transferring of bodies from one country to another. If we really believe that the betterment of society is one of our goals, and if we are a movement of action and not a chain of discussion groups, it is time our Maapilim looked around them and decided how they can best realize these ideals on the American scene.²⁷

Action is about getting involved here and now. Garfeld sees through the continued deferment of movement members fulfilling Habonim's ideals. Langer's attempt to cure political stagnation through a reassertion of an 'aliyah first, universal justice second' program for change could only bring more of the same for Habonim members who wanted the movement to truly free itself

from a cycle of ideological particularism that bred resentment and anger. The point of the youth movement was to allow the youth to decide what it should be, now and in the near future, not merely recreate its deepest dilemmas from one generation to the next, especially not at the behest of a movement alum in his late twenties leading a populist campaign for *mazkir* to bring the movement of his childhood back to relevance. If the Baltimore incident made anything clear, it was that Habonim had choices to make, especially if the youth in its ranks continued to be drawn to political mobilization for universalist causes in the American context. As we know from our privileged place in the future, the social movements of the sixties that so captured American youth seeking radical change were in no way slowing down.

Looking Ahead

By 1963, the focus of Habonim's membership had shifted away from Langer and the Baltimore picket. After his defeat in the 1962 *mazkir* election and subsequent stint in his opposition's secretariat, Langer metaphorically hung up his Habonim hat and made *aliyah* to Israel, actualizing the Zionist youth movement's values in the very way he had prescribed.²⁸ Despite his loss, however, his contention with Habonim's lack of political action and its Zionist passivity was built upon by his followers later in the decade. One of his main supporters in the 1962 race, Abba Caspi, was himself elected *mazkir* in 1964 and *Furrows* continued to publish a number of essays contending with Habonim's lack of "group ideology" and its inability to put much actualizing force behind its espoused ideals.²⁹ Langer's call for greater engagement with the movements' older *chanichim* took the form of the first *Machaneh Bonim* seminar in 1963, a summer program for sixteen year-old movement members, which, interestingly enough, primarily emphasized education on the Civil Rights movement in its early days. Despite the force of Langer's Zionist fervor, the tide of universalism could not be stopped. In classic

Habonim fashion, however, the programs were still oriented around education and not action, albeit with a more universalist outlook rather than an inwardly focused Zionist one. With these developments, we see a clear path chosen by Habonim leadership in the wake of the internal turmoil of the early sixties: stay relevant to American Jewish youth through educational endeavors and do not alienate these youth through controversial action.

Becoming an organization that steps into the political fray was far from where Habonim was headed. When one reads some of the other *Furrows* articles in response to the Baltimore picket, namely the piece “Picketing Criticized” by Shlomo Cohen, it is clear that there was still a large holdout within Habonim that championed Langer’s hierarchy of causes. The movement’s *modus operandi* of cultivating generations of individually actualizing Zionist youth was, for them, in jeopardy due to an increased interest in Civil Rights. This fear of losing Habonim’s original mission was unflatteringly stated by Cohen as follows: “We have blotted out the individual completely to pave the way for the liberation of the Negro.”³⁰ The internal friction between an old path and a new moment, with its unique demands, did not subside for Habonim even as it attempted to hold it all together by maintaining past ideological commitments while retaining socio-political relevance on the American stage. As the sixties progressed, social movements became fiercer, demanding more from the youth and those who deemed themselves radicals. Criticism of Israel, the Vietnam War, and the heights of New Leftism would test Habonim in ways it had not experienced before.

Chapter 2: The Rise of Radical Zionism

Habonim and the New Left after 1967

Habonim's history is inextricably linked to broader developments within the American Jewish community. Many of the developments over the course of the politicized and polarizing 1960s can be understood through the lens of Jewish precarity, or the perceived threat to Jewish cultural life and the associated response by Jewish institutions. It was in the early sixties that the basis for a collective memory centered around the Holocaust began to take root among American Jewry, brought on by historical developments such as the media's close attention to the Eichmann trial and emergent academic works that attempted to contextualize the rise of Nazism and ascertain its historiographical implications.¹ The shadow of the genocide of Europe's Jewry, combined with the social and economic mobility of Jewish Americans in the post-war years, provided fertile ground for an ascendant Jewish radicalism. The traumatic roots of this radicalism were intertwined with diverging priorities: the injustices of segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement, and the self-interested desire for a future of Jewish particularity, security, and prosperity. As the youth-led New Left took the country by storm, Jewish students assumed an outsized place within its ranks, their participation motivated by a recently precarious past and a cautiously optimistic view of the present in which greater freedom and equality might soon be won.² Involvement in the New Left and the development of a new Jewish radicalism was also the result of certain privileges that came with upward mobility. As Tal Elmaliach explains: "It was precisely the wealth acquired by Jews that provided the younger generation with the conditions it needed to be socially involved. Jewish affluence thus offers an explanation for the large Jewish role in the New Left, rather than contradicting it."³ While early on in the sixties the latent sense

of Jewish precarity was utilized in the name of universalist stances against discrimination and dehumanization, over the course of the decade, it morphed into a deep-seated anxiety over Jewish powerlessness and victimhood, culminating in a shift toward a desire for power and self-defense via Jewish statehood in the wake of the Six-Day War in 1967.⁴

Habonim's shifting position amongst these developments within the American Jewish community is overwhelmingly unique. On the one hand, the movement, as an organization of Jewish socialist youth invested in building kibbutz-utopias in the land of Israel, seemed to anticipate the broader Jewish radicalism born out of the New Left, a perfect form for this moment. On the other hand, as a vessel for political discourse and a space for building Jewish peoplehood and empowering youth, Habonim underwent its own development congruent to the era's transforming Jewish radicalism. Its members, by virtue of their political education in Habonim, were at the center of the conflicting pulls toward participation in wider New Left struggles and their deep-held loyalty to the project of socialist-Zionism and Jewish liberation. The alienation that Habonim members experienced as they contended with increasingly popular anti-Zionist rhetoric within the New Left and the consequential political realignment after the Six-Day War prompted the development of new avenues for political action. Habonim members, rather than abandon their movement education to be deemed acceptable by their SDS contemporaries, participated in organizations and political activities in which they could maintain their own socialist-Zionist nuance without having to disavow their ideological commitments to either universal justice or Jewish national liberation. In what follows, I will analyze the effect the New Left's ideological policing of its broad-tent of participants had on Habonim and its members as their Zionist sympathies increasingly made them a target of external criticism and concurrently served as an internally galvanizing force.

For J.J. Goldberg, whose frenetic energy seemed cramped into his small Manhattan office from where he took our interview, coming of age in the sixties was exhilarating. The political atmosphere of fervent hope and youth rebellion matched his eager and mischievous personality. When I spoke with him about his time in Habonim and his political participation in the social movements of the era, he moved seamlessly between detailed analyses of historical events and lessons he learned in organizing to off-hand comments about his romantic pursuits and comedic episodes featuring him and his closest friends contending with the absurdities of their young adult lives. He remembered his time in Habonim fondly and was quick to attribute his later-in-life career in activism and journalism centered around Jewish life, Zionism, Israel/Palestine, and Middle Eastern politics to his early consciousness-raising education in the movement. J.J. traced his eventual decision to move to Israel with his Habonim *chevre* and refound Kibbutz Gezer to his earliest memories at Camp Na'aleh in upstate New York, remarking that after watching a ceremony honoring the coming year's Workshop participants "I had decided I wanted to become a kibbutznik at age ten."⁵ His particular passions and skills made him the movement's quasi-historian, the perfect person to compile *Builders and Dreamers* for the movement's fiftieth anniversary in 1993.

Both inside and outside of Habonim, J.J. was an active member in the New Left social movements of the decade, joining SNCC when his family moved to Washington D.C. in 1963, picketing outside of the White House against the war in Vietnam after school, and attending a number of seminars run by Habonim that brought Black leaders to speak to movement youth about getting involved in the struggle for equality.⁶ He graduated from high school in 1966 and briefly attended George Washington University before dropping out and moving to New York City to join the Summer of Love, spending many hours at the Habonim central offices.⁷ The next

year, after working at Camp Na'aleh for the summer, J.J. went on Workshop to Kibbutz Urim in September of 1967, just three months after the Six-Day War, where he became invigorated by the spirit of a nation fresh off of a consequential military victory and, simultaneously, the political problems this turning point posed, namely the worsening situation of the Palestinian people as Israel's military occupation began.⁸ Interestingly, Rick Glaser, J.J.'s peer on Workshop, told me in an interview that the group went on a camping trip to the newly occupied Gaza Strip, further complicating Habonim's position as an ideological opponent to Israeli militarism with such tacit normalization.⁹

For the American Jewish community as a whole, the Six-Day War was the event “that cemented the bonds of total solidarity [with] Israel.”¹⁰ Before this moment, American Jewry had yet to come out in full support of the Jewish state. Israel did not take up much space in domestic Jewish politics, education, and communal life, largely a downstream effect of American Jewish prosperity during this period and a lack of strong political ties between the U.S. and Israeli governments until 1967. The amassing of military troops by Israel's Arab neighbors in the early summer prompted “widespread fear of a second Holocaust” and brought back to the fore the sense of Jewish precarity that had been hidden in the recesses of the American Jewish collective consciousness during the post-war years, only to be “followed by the relief and jubilation felt after Israel's swift and stunning victory...”¹¹ The dramatic shift in the concern over Israel's continued existence, which skyrocketed after the war even in the wake of decisive Israeli victory, demonstrated a new identification with the Jewish state in which “the Jews of the world [saw] Israel's fate and their own.”¹² J.J. Goldberg, in his writings from the nineties, clarified Habonim's place amid this change in sentiments after the war, highlighting that those “looking for some sort of expression of that millennial transformation in the literature of Habonim...will not find it, for

a simple reason: unlike most diaspora Jews before 1967, Habonim was already Zionist.”¹³ The movement, although already deeply committed to Zionism and the future of the Jewish state, did take the war as an opportunity to reaffirm their loyalties and cement themselves as leaders in a nascent American Zionist hegemony. A memo from the national office dated June 1967, beyond recognizing that forty-five of the first 200 volunteers headed to Israel after the start of the war were members of Habonim, offered a unifying imperative for the movement’s path forward:

The crisis which, turned from a terrifying fear for the very existence of the state of Israel, to a great military and psychological victory, proved to us that we are not alone in our love for Israel. Now we must keep this spirit alive in times of peace as well as in times of war.¹⁴

This continued “spirit” after the war would threaten Habonim’s place on the New Left and its established identity.

Throughout our interview, J.J. was acutely aware of his own position amidst the changing Zionist politics of American Jewry in relation to his place in Habonim and the New Left. Quick to identify the similarities between the Black nationalism promoted by Stokely Carmichael and the Jewish national project in the land of Israel, he commented on the comparatively dissonant “denunciations of Zionism” at SDS conferences when the organization began to form ties with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).¹⁵ J.J.’s year in Israel, combined with the growing anti-Zionist sentiments within the American student movement, prompted a decisive shift in his political passions, mostly abandoning his old New Left circles in favor of Jewish and Zionist organizations. For Habonim members who were dedicated to progressive liberatory politics but unwavering in their utopian kibbutzic aspirations, their position in many leftist coalitions became increasingly untenable and justifying their ideology to their critics virtually impossible. David Twersky, a longtime friend of J.J.’s and one of Habonim’s most active members during this period, reflected on Habonim’s fraught position, writing:

It soon became clear, however, that our ‘comrades’ on the Left were rebuffing our overtures. Israel, our so-called allies told us, was a white settler colonialist state, guilty as sin. As Zionists, we were not their comrades...Our dispute with the left over Israel forced us to stand back and reconsider a wide range of issues...¹⁶

This reconsideration in response to their rebuke by the larger New Left led Habonim members to commit themselves to activism that could contain both their leftist tendency toward universalism and their *chalutzic* zeal as well as attempt to organize the broader spectrum of American Jewish youth around their newfound ideological niche, aptly labeled as Radical Zionism.

Born out of what Tal Elmaliach describes as “a dissonance between established ways of thinking in both the New Left and Zionism, and in newly emergent political and social conditions,” Radical Zionism for Habonim not only included standing by its kibbutzic ideal but also levelling harsh critique at the Israeli government in the aftermath of the Six-Day War.¹⁷

While the movement shared the New Left’s major issues with Israel’s actions, namely its blatant disregard of international law in its occupation of the Palestinian territories, Habonim, along with its Radical Zionist contemporaries, was by no means intent on scrapping the Zionist project. The movement instead found ideological guidance in “a vigorous reassertion of the traditional progressivism of Labor Zionism” that could coexist with “demanding Israeli acknowledgement of Palestinian national rights.”¹⁸ With a slate of organizations promoting Radical Zionism after the war, including other youth movements like Hashomer Hatzair, campus groups like the Jewish Radical Union, and more established institutional voices like Americans for Progressive Israel (API), a new Jewish radicalism that was not beholden to the New Left’s mandated intolerance of Zionism began “gaining the hearts and minds of young Jews.”¹⁹ In an essay titled “Is Zionism Compatible with Radicalism?” for the 1973 edited collection *Jewish Radicalism*, J.J. Goldberg himself highlighted what he perceived to be a double standard in the New Left rhetoric, which supported movements like Black nationalism and Vietnamese anti-imperialism yet opposed

Zionism, which he argued was the path toward “Jewish liberation.”²⁰ To the SDS leaders that wanted nothing to do with Habonim socialist-Zionists and their ilk, J.J. responded with defiance. He made rhetorical and controversial use of the Uncle Tom stereotype and equated Jewish acquiescence with that of enslaved Black people in the American South: “Jewish kids who are tired of tomming to the *goyim* are learning from Israel, from the blacks, from the Vietnamese that it’s better to extend the hand in solidarity than in charity. The radical Zionist movement is getting its shit together again, and we won’t be denied.”²¹

When he returned to the States from Workshop in 1968, after an intense year of Labor Zionist education and idyllic kibbutz life, J.J. enrolled at McGill University, marking the beginning of his transition toward a Radical Zionist form of political commitment, although not completely leaving behind his New Left convictions. J.J. was a leader of the organization Student Zionists at McGill, an organization actively engaged in dialogue with Arab student groups on campus over issues of progressive Zionism and Palestinian national rights, and travelled around the country to speak at the national conferences of the Radical Zionist Alliance (RZA) and the American Zionist Youth Foundation (AZYF), which had recently come under the advisorship of the new chairman of the Jewish Agency’s Youth and Hechalutz Department, Mordechai (Morele) Bar-On. The connection shared between the college-aged J.J. and the older, ideologically assured Bar-On greatly influenced J.J.’s political sympathies. Bar-On is widely considered to be the architect of the pro-Zionist response to the growing anti-Zionism of the New Left, encouraging existing Zionist movements in the U.S. to move away from an aliyah-centered approach to connecting the American diaspora with Israel and instead focus on the “reinforcement of Jewish-Zionist identity” in the States.²² Bar-On’s personal background as a Labor party Israeli against the increasingly undemocratic actions of the Israeli government, as well as his position as

an agent of the Zionist agenda in the American diaspora, signals that his attempt to instill Radical Zionist sentiments within the Jewish American left was both his own personal mission and state-supported ideological project, helping to usher in a future of widespread popular support for Israel among American Jewry.

Prior to the World Zionist Congress in 1970, with financial support from Bar-On and the AZYF, J.J. organized a conference for Zionist students in Montreal, with attendees coming in from across Canada and the United States.²³ It was at this conference that he began his friendship with the late Vivian Silver, an eventual member of Habonim's Kibbutz Gezer and a renowned peace advocate in Israel/Palestine who was killed during the attacks on October 7, 2023.

Beyond Zionist student politics, J.J. and his Habonim *chevre* played an outsized role in the development of the North American Jewish Students Network (NAJSN), again with the help of Bar-On and the AZYF. The goal of the Network's "Woodstock-type" events was to bring Jewish students with a variety of religious and political commitments together to build a shared identity.²⁴ J.J. remembered clearly the hodge-podge union of disparate Jewish college students which included "Lubavitcher youth, the Jewish Defense League, the Radical Zionists, and the Bundist youth" as well as members of Ramah and Habonim.²⁵ To illustrate how preposterous this environment seems in retrospect, J.J. provided the following anecdote: "I remember [my friend] David, who was very working class and a left-wing Radical Zionist, playing touch football with Meir Kahane. It was that sort of atmosphere."²⁶ The encounter of one of J.J.'s peers enmeshed in the developing politics of a new Jewish radicalism engaging with an ultra-nationalist terrorist to-be speaks both to the possibility of a new Jewish unity in the wake of the Six-Day War but also the profound isolation that was felt by Zionist Jewish students who had nowhere to go after

their abandonment by the New Left, which in its own way had increased feelings of Jewish precarity on the American political scene.

Habonim and its Radical Zionist contemporaries, in addition to being critical of the Israeli government and organizing the wider American Jewish youth, also took up the mantle of protesting the allocation of resources among Jewish institutions and advocating for vulnerable Jewish populations at home and abroad. Twersky tells us of Habonim that

Indeed, our agenda went beyond mere defense of Israel, or the broader issues of the Middle East. We were involved in Soviet Jewry work; we fought for changes in the spending priorities of local Jewish federations, demanding more money for Jewish education, more attention to the plight of the Jewish poor and elderly; we fought for a more cohesive, democratic, and self-assured Jewish communal and political life. In much if not most of our agenda, history has borne us out.²⁷

As can be found in the pages of *Furrows* (Ch.1) and in the testimony of Ken Bob (Ch.3), Habonim was on the frontlines of moving the American Jewish community forward. The movement's particularist interests in the Zionist project of kibbutz and bringing their progressive values to the halls of American Jewish institutional power helped set the tone for a New Left inspired Jewish radicalism in the late sixties and early seventies.

In the New Left spaces where they remained involved, Habonim became increasingly outspoken about its socialist-Zionist position. At the National Mobilization to End the Vietnam War in November 1969, Habonim marched with "several hundred young Jews...as a Zionist contingent."²⁸ The night before the march, movement members stayed at J.J. Goldberg's parents' home. In our interview, his description of the entire episode was still imbued with the political spirit of their activism, the youthful mischief associated with the decade's counterculture, and the figure of the older generation embodied in J.J.'s mother.

It was like hundreds of thousands of people crowding into the National Mall in Washington. There were like sixty or seventy Habonim people from the Midwest who were coming into Washington and we put them up at our house...sleeping bags on the

floor...and my mother insisted that the boys be upstairs and the girls downstairs, which didn't really work but she was asleep by then. She also organized sandwich brigades. She realized that there'd be these hundreds of thousands of kids milling around the mall and nothing to eat. So she bought a ton of peanut butter and jelly and bread and lined us up and we are making peanut butter-jelly sandwiches. We made hundreds with little slices of tape on the top to close it up, and it said "Socialist-Zionist."²⁹

Participation in the march seems to have been Habonim's attempt to stay supportive of largely New Left efforts to end the Vietnam War but decidedly on their own terms. They would not conform to their mounting mass of critics, among both the New Left and the moderate to right American Jewish community; they were socialist-Zionist and wanted any would-be ideological opponents to know it.

As the movement entered the seventies, its political isolation on the Left prompted members to look inward, in search of change that could bring the movement back to relevance. At Machaneh Bonim in 1971, taking inspiration from the attempted reforms of Max Langer nearly a decade earlier and the political form of New Left activism, David Twersky and Sydney Nestel drafted the "Christie Manifesto," named after the diner in the Catskills where it was composed.³⁰ The document called for Langer-esque reforms to the movement, such as getting rid of programs for younger children, restricting the power of *schlichim* (movement leadership from Israel), and focusing on the mobilization of high school and college-aged youth.³¹ It also showed signs of Habonim's political isolation beyond the New Left and in an Israeli society that was shifting right-ward as well, citing "the growing alienation in Israel, felt strongly by American movement members, between the Labor party and the Zionist left—a product of mounting anxiety over the continued occupation of the territories."³² Twersky and Nestel's proposed changes failed to pass in a movement-wide referendum at the end of the summer. As was the case in Langer's failed attempt to alter how Habonim functioned as a youth movement, the fact that Twersky and Nestel's ideas did not gain traction illustrates how "education and political

action were never to be an either/or proposition in North American Habonim...”³³ The movement, while instilling the individual desire to actualize change and providing the leadership education to do so, could not risk the potential backlash of taking a mobilized stance, putting in jeopardy the work that created such driven members in the first place.

Despite the movement’s skepticism of adopting a committed stance at the institutional level amidst its growing political isolation, Radical Zionism became the normative position among Habonim members and in movement education. Alongside cultivating future kibbutzniks, summer camp and *ken* spaces began to stress the importance of being peaceniks as well. No just solution to the worsening Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be found, they thought, without deep consideration of the Palestinian people and challenging the Zionist status quo that they viewed as having compromised on its universalist responsibilities. After five years at Kibbutz Gezer, and overstaying his three-year visa, J.J. Goldberg returned to the U.S. to avoid conscription into the Israeli military. Picking up where he left off in college, he reunited with Bar-On to continue the Radical Zionist push for peace and democracy, becoming an organizer for Peace Now in Los Angeles and eventually a journalist.³⁴ His career culminated with his tenure as Editor-in-Chief of *The Forward* from 2000 to 2007. J.J.’s pragmatic idealism, learned from his time in Habonim and his years as an organizer, remains today, even in the face of the current precarious political climate in which Radical Zionism and its offshoots have lost much of their legitimacy among American Jewry.

Chapter 3: Ken Bob

An Exemplary Habo in the Sixties and Seventies

Chapters one and two advance the notion that it was not in activism, with boots on the ground and ideological consistency, that made Habonim such an impactful presence in American Jewish and Zionist history. Rather, its education—the methodical task of challenging and molding minds to be value-oriented, demanding of change, and filled with the belief of their own actualizing power—set Habonim apart. Many of the youth organizations of the sixties and seventies, SNCC and SDS among others, as organizations seeking to have direct impact, understandably focused on a fixed set of political goals. Once they were accomplished or deemed unrealistic—as in cases when these organizations were unable to surmount the challenges they faced—these movements faded from relevance. Habonim differed in that it was not solely dedicated to the explicitly political, but also to value-based education and fostering a sense of Jewish peoplehood. While strict political agendas can quickly become irrelevant, education, values, and community are long lasting and powerful vehicles for a range of activities and causes.

In early 2025, as I was in the process of formulating my thesis topic, I attended a Habonim seminar in Philadelphia for *madrichim* leading counselor-in-training programs at their respective camps in the upcoming summer. Between educational activities and trainings in preparation for taking care of seventeen-year-olds, I was able to have a conversation with Judah Altman, the Habonim *mazkir* from 2023 to 2025. We had both been assigned *toranut* (dish duty) after Saturday evening dinner and I picked his brain as we took turns scrubbing the inside of a burnt pot of pasta sauce. Judah, in his two years as *mazkir*, had spent endless hours meeting with Habonim’s alumni base and had a number of connections. When I floated the idea of writing

about Habonim during the sixties and seventies, he immediately thought of Ken Bob and texted me his number as I switched back to scrubbing.

It would be a few more months before I would officially reach out to Ken, but after our first phone call in the fall I knew I was on the right track. He was affable, eager, and enthusiastic, traits that made it clear he was well-suited to be an organizer and had been in the past. Ken's experience exemplified the multiplicity of Habonim's ideological manifestations and tensions over the course of his childhood and early adulthood in the sixties and seventies. He was a product of Jewish Midwestern suburbia and the political counterculture of the Bay Area, an activist student at Berkeley and a founding member of a kibbutz, an educator and an actualizer. Ken's youth experience exemplifies the integration of Habonim's different ideological elements, cultivating within him a politically and socially active person who acted as vessel for the movement's overarching goals and sympathies. Ken's story is also an illustration of Habonim's emphasis on both the content of their political education and, almost more importantly, the process of forming politically engaged and committed youth. While the narrative that unfolds in this chapter follows one individual member of Habonim, it is emblematic of the journey Habonim youth took since its founding in the United States. Ken's central place in Habonim's history provides a unique lens through which to better understand the movement's aims, successes, and shortcomings during this tumultuous period in American history.

Ken Bob was born in South Orange, New Jersey in the summer of 1952. His parents met in Troy, New York while his father was an engineering student at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. The family moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1956 for his father's job when Ken was four years-old and this was where he spent his "formative years."¹ Their first home in the Midwest was in Southeast Minneapolis, a part of town close to his father's work at the

Honeywell industrial manufacturing plant but lacking in Jews and Jewish community. The Bobs, viewing participation in Jewish institutional life as non-negotiable, moved to St. Louis Park, a suburban neighborhood with a substantial Jewish population, as soon as Ken's older brother was able to attend Hebrew school.² While they were less politically active than their son would later become, and geographically distant from the Civil Rights struggle of this period, Ken's parents were no doubt community organizers. His mother taught baking classes at the synagogue, his father was an usher, and they formed what Ken referred to as the "Married Couples League."³ While they lived in the American heartland, the Bobs' existence was very much shaped by a parochial dynamic of communal Jewish life. Ken became enmeshed in the fabric of their Minneapolis Jewish community as he grew older, from being ever-present at services by parental command to eventually leading community events himself, like Israeli dancing he learned from Habonim and services for other teenagers.⁴ Although Midwestern Jewish communities were small compared to their coastal counterparts, their members were highly affiliated and eager to build shared cultural experiences for their families.

Ken positioned his parents' involvement in institutional Jewish life as a substitute for broader community activism and American political involvement, in contrast to some of the Bobs' friends in Minneapolis who were outspoken about the social issues of the time.

...another family that I remember that we were friends with who did not belong to our synagogue, but a different one, also had been very involved in civil rights activity. I remember sitting around the Shabbat table or the Passover table with them and hearing their stories about civil rights. It wasn't something that my parents were particularly personally involved with. They were very, very involved synagogue Jews, both in New Jersey and then when we moved to Minneapolis conservative synagogues. That was a lot of where their energy went. So politically they were liberal, it just wasn't an area where they were spending personal volunteer time.⁵

The choice to build a local Jewish community should not be taken as a rebuke of the social movements that were fomenting in the United States early in Ken's childhood, but rather as a

signal of those movements' reach among the broader American populace. For the Bobs, as suburban American Jews, their synagogue community was a world unto itself, one that needed their devoted attention.

Ken's first memories of Habonim primarily take place during the summer of 1965 at Camp Tavor, the movement's Midwest stronghold. His experiences from when he was twelve largely center around the newness of the youth-led environment and the physical space in which he led his routine existence for those couple of months.

...at Tavor in '65, all of a sudden I'm living in a tent with a bunch of other boys and having a counselor who didn't seem that much older. I have memories of realizing the old line from *The Wizard of Oz* "we're not in Kansas anymore." This is amazing! This is so cool!...this thing of creating a community of youth...the sense [that] these are kids gone wild...I remember all these visceral feelings that this is different.⁶

For Ken, the liberatory memory of the camp environment had little to do with the political education campers were receiving. In fact, he "can't point to a specific *sicha* or...*peulah* program at camp" that centered on the Civil Rights movement or other landmark political events of the era.⁷ Instead, what left such a fervent effect was the "total life experience" at Tavor that so deeply contrasted with the adult-surveilled life of his home in Minneapolis.⁸ Camp was a place with its own "culture, norms, and routines" in which Ken could nurture his own sense of independence.⁹ This fostered sense of independence is crucial to understanding how Habonim molded its youngest members for a lifetime of value-centered activism, what Ken describes is an essential part of the movement process, separate from any explicitly ideological political education. Ken's recollections point to a nostalgia for some dream-like place, one far removed from reality, not one that poses a direct challenge to the world's issues that caused such a desire to retreat in the first place. Tavor, for Ken, was a little like Neverland—he and his bunkmates playing the roles of the Lost Boys for a couple months, although not at all orphans or, in fact,

lost, rather intentionally guided toward a future political existence. The political function of Habonim, viewed through Ken's early memories of camp, thus did not seem to be the movement's sole primary purpose. In many instances, providing spaces for children to make meaning, build their own individual identities, and enjoy their youth took precedence. From this microcosm that gave youth an experience of a new way of life, Habonim members often became devoted to actualizing such an environment for themselves, in-line with their own contexts and political sympathies. In giving American Jewish youth these empowering camp spaces, the movement was able to establish a new way of relating to Judaism, divergent from the first and second generation immigrant experiences of their parents in the United States.

Where the political appeared most memorably for Ken Bob and other young Habos of the era was through song. The folk tradition laid the groundwork for conjuring up a spirit of leftist possibility that had been stifled by McCarthyism in the early fifties. The music, pushed forward by a new generation of artists, became the voice of youth radicals in the sixties and seventies.¹⁰ Todd Gitlin describes the situation of folk music at the end of the fifties as follows: "The Old Left was confined to its enclaves, but it could invent an artificial 'people' to sing about; folk music was 'for the masses' the way the Communist party had stood for 'the people,' whether the actual people embraced it or not."¹¹ The songs of Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Phil Ochs were sung constantly at Habonim camps, in addition to songs from Jewish history with similar sentiments, including the Yiddish "Song of the Partisans" and the scriptural "*Lo yisa goy...*".¹² While an obsession with folk music was not unique to Habonim among the wider American youth culture during this period, the environment of movement summer camps, already working to foster the experience of a youth-led liberated utopia, created a space where folk lyrics were imbued with heightened feeling. Ken reminisced that "[When] you are singing

songs, you listen to the words, you discuss the words...My first engagement with civil rights was introduced by folk songs and singing them with such belief and fervent hope.”¹³ The same was true for his first engagement with the issue of the Vietnam War—when Pete Seeger was blacklisted after singing his subversive “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy” on national television in 1967.¹⁴ For Ken and other Habos, their heroes of the era were less often the political actors that promised a more equitable and just future, although they sympathized with their plights, and more prominently the cultural figures that spoke to their spirit of revolution.¹⁵ Folk music also seems to have been a passive way to introduce young campers to some of Habonim’s leftist political values before they were able to read difficult texts and discuss current events and theory at a higher level.

The rest of Ken’s childhood and early adolescence was tinted by the political questions of the era, whether he engaged with them in removed Habonim spaces or in casual, low stakes debates with his parents.¹⁶ His first true engagement as an activist and organizer would occur after his move to Los Altos, California as a senior in high school in 1969. At 17 years old, having spent the entirety of his remembered childhood in Minneapolis, Ken was forced to leave his tight group of friends and his well-established school and extra-curricular life to start over again at an age when his new peers were not necessarily interested in meeting new people. Some aspects of the move excited Ken, particularly the San Francisco music scene to which he would have easy access. The Bay Area was a national center for the countercultural and political movements occurring in the U.S. and, in Ken’s words, certainly “not the sticks.”¹⁷ Beat poetry, psychedelic experimentation, politically active college campuses, and the ascendent Black Panther Party founded in Oakland in 1966, added to the atmosphere of radicalism that gave the region national attention. In the midst of an unfamiliar city and with no sense of community, Ken sought out the

only group of people with whom he could have an automatic sense of connection and camaraderie: “There were some Habonim [members] in San Francisco. They had already heard I was coming...Los Altos was about 45 minutes south...and so I got to go to meetings in San Francisco when I could.”¹⁸ Ken would eventually start a local chapter in the Los Altos area alongside two Habonim members who attended Camp Gilboa (Habonim’s summer camp in Southern California) during their summers.¹⁹ Despite this connection to the youth movement, the new place provided Ken with a fresh start in which he could explore and meaningfully choose how he spent his time, no longer beholden to the synagogue habitus of his parents that created the boundary of his world in Minneapolis. When the Bobs moved to California was “really when I got so deeply involved in American politics.”²⁰

The national politics that Ken had been hearing about in the songs he sang at camp, the news his parents watched on the television every night, and the occasional scenes of political action in largely isolated Minneapolis were now just beyond his doorstep. He recalls attending talks held at Stanford by a variety of activists and left-wing political figures, including famed Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver, attending a number of local anti-war demonstrations, and regular outings to Kepler’s Bookstore where he “read almost anything that one of those radicals put out.”²¹ His interest in music led him to explore new social circles and engage in different aspects of the era’s flourishing youth counterculture. Ken told the story of how he met his first friend at his new high school in Los Altos, which comes off like a classic depiction of late sixties hippie culture.

...a kid in my social studies class tapped me on the shoulder and said “Do you like music?” I said, “Yeah, I do.” He [responded] “Do you want to go to the Winterland Ballroom and see the Grateful Dead?” “Yeah, yeah, I’ll do that”...we’d stop in Chinatown on the way back, fairly stoned, and get some Chinese noodles, get in the car and drive home. My parents would be asleep when I’d come home. My dad the next morning would say “How was the concert?”²²

Despite being the new kid in school, Ken's affable nature and remarkable confidence allowed him to easily acclimate. He joined the drama club, playing the lead role in the fall production of *A Thousand Clowns*, and wrote for the school newspaper as he had done in Minneapolis. Encouraged by his friends in the drama club, Ken ended up running for student body president in the spring semester after the incumbent dropped out of the race. His campaign, focused on students' rights and the implementation of an open campus structure, as well as being a talented public speaker, got him elected. All of a sudden he was attending meetings with the school board and lobbying for a student body he had been entirely new to only a few months earlier. No doubt that Ken inherited some of his charisma and community organizing skills from his parents, but he gave all the credit to Habonim. "I always look back on Habonim and the things I learned...leadership development [is what] Habonim is really good at."²³ Not only did Habonim instill a sense of responsibility over one's community, largely derived from the emphasis on the kibbutz structure at summer camps, but it also educated toward the goal of leading that community in accordance with their values. Ken, having experienced the feeling of institutionally upheld youth autonomy at Camp Tavor and at Habonim seminars, was uniquely positioned to advocate for something similar on behalf of his classmates at Los Altos High School. His passion and effective lobbying helped him win the favor of the principal who was "starting to figure out he's got a guy who is going to do stuff and...he wanted to partner with me where he could."²⁴ It is hard not to see how Ken's ability to build power and connections within the school community was a product of his upbringing in Habonim. The character that Habonim had aspired to create could not only organize Jewish youth to make *aliyah*, but also to commit themselves to being agents of change for alternative causes. This Habonim skill would quickly

be put to use by Ken as the national climate surrounding student activism intensified in the spring of 1970.

After the shooting of four students at Kent State University by the National Guard troops sent to quell the protests that had broken out in response to Nixon's invasion of Cambodia, organizers on college campuses across the country called for nationwide strikes and demonstrations. Universities closed their campuses in fear of further violence, but this did not prevent the weeks of protest that would follow, with "probably between 50 and 60 percent of students in the United States [taking] part..."²⁵ Following the example of their older peers, Ken and some of his politically active classmates formed a "mobilization committee" to speak out against the invasion and advocate for their rights as students.²⁶ Putting posters around the school in the afternoons, the committee would meet at eight in the morning every day in the central quad, ignoring the first bell that would ring at 8:05.²⁷ The principal's protestations were short-lived and he quickly acquiesced to the students' activities, giving Ken and his crew the entirety of first period to organize their classmates.

The culmination of the mobilization committee's organizing was a school walkout to nearby Shoup Park, at which Ken and his peers were able to bring a number of speakers, hold study groups, and demonstrate in opposition to the war and student suppression nationwide.²⁸ Not only did the Los Altos school walkout mirror what was happening on college campuses and high schools across the country, it was also attended by one of the country's most outspoken countercultural voices of the time, folk music icon Joan Baez. She and her husband, draft resistance organizer David Harris, lived in the area. After his arrest on school property while speaking to students about avoiding conscription, she was inclined to support the students. Ken spoke about requesting Baez's appearance at the demonstration in his interview:

David Harris was a leader of the draft resistance, like where you would burn your draft card. He had a reasonably famous wife: Joan Baez. They lived in Los Altos Hills. David came to the high school the first spring I was there. This guy Lou tapped me on the shoulder, he was my source of all information in the first couple of months of high school, and said "David Harris is going to be in the front lawn at lunch. You should come!" So I did. The police were ready. They arrested him for coming to talk about draft resistance to high school students. For trespassing. So when we decided to do this walkout, we said "Well, let's call Joan. Maybe she'll come." So we called her and she had just had her baby, Gabe...And she said "I'll come. This is where David got arrested right?" I said yes and she agreed to come to our walkout...We were saying "Come join the Los Altos High School and Joan Baez for a walkout to Shoup Park."...She spoke and then sang a capella, I think Amazing Grace.²⁹

Baez's presence at the demonstration, besides adding a level of celebrity to Ken's story, no doubt added to the sense of empowerment that those organizing for the Los Altos High School mobilization committee must have felt. To have a cultural inspiration like Joan Baez stand with them in solidarity could only have fomented further dedication to their values, prompting them to continue their activist journeys later in their lives, as Ken himself would do.

Parents' reactions to the walkout were mixed. Some supported their teenage children in their protest endeavors, excusing them from school beforehand. Others disapproved and did not resist the school's attempt to give their children unexcused absences following their truancy. When the school's administration called Ken's mother to inform her of her son's activities, she did not shy away from supporting him: "They called my mother and said 'Do you know where your student is?' [and she said] 'Of course! He's leading a march out of school and I'm very proud of him!'"³⁰ This encouragement to act on what he believed in was a main factor in propelling Ken's commitment to an ideological lifestyle later on. When it became clear that the school was intent on making sure the protesters were punished, the students took a stand. Ken recalled that "none of us would accept an excused absence status if they were not going to give an excused absence to everybody."³¹ This solidarity when facing the consequences of their disobedience speaks to the level of commitment and organization of the Los Altos students,

likely increasing the level of respect they earned from their wider community and helping Ken and other mobilization committee members fund their next step: a lobbying trip to Washington. Paid for by a mixture of bake sale earnings and other crowdfunding methods, two teachers and six students, including Ken, went as an anti-war delegation to meet with national representatives, including California senator Alan Cranston, Sen. Ted Kennedy, and anti-war New York Republican Sen. Chuck Goodall.³² Ken remembers finding a voice amongst those in the halls of American political power as “an incredible experience,” understanding that it was extremely unusual and largely the result of his “confidence to be in leadership and follow my principles” that he gained from his time in Habonim.³³

After graduating high school and avoiding draft service by successfully obtaining a conscientious objector’s exemption, Ken headed back to Tavor for his first summer as a *madrich*, and then to the University of California at Berkeley. At Tavor in 1970, Ken remembers it being “a very different time in America” compared to 1967.³⁴ Camp had become an environment immersed in the countercultural movement: “All of us had been at rallies and marches, were wearing peace symbols and long hair, with bandanas around our foreheads and everything else.”³⁵ Current political events were a central feature of Habonim education and, at Tavor in 1970, deeply integrated into camp programming. Role playing games were common at Jewish summer camps during this period, often focusing on historical events like the Holocaust or Aliyah Bet, a wave of illegal immigration to Palestine postwar, in order to “bring campers to sites and times of imagined Jewish authenticity through the power of imagination itself.”³⁶ These activities would imbue a sense of collective identification with the given scenario’s heroes and an ascribed sense of social values in *chanichim*. Ken clearly remembers when his *madrichim* “woke kids up in the middle of the night and told them that they are going to be illegal immigrants who

are going to sneak into Israel...” to prompt the movement’s *aliyah* goals.³⁷ While Habonim’s sociodramatic role playing games were often centered around Zionist history, Israeliness, and “Jews as courageous, muscular, and victorious soldiers, pioneers, and builders of the land [that] served as a counterpoint to stories of diasporic tragedy and victimhood,” Ken remembers programming of a different variety during his first summer as a *madrach*.³⁸ “We had a special day about campus demonstrations and we dressed up one of the *machaneh* vans as a cop van. Some of the *madrachim* came out and sort of fake beat up the demonstrators.”³⁹ What followed was a day of teaching *chanichim* about their rights as potential protestors and about organizing their peers to achieve anti-war goals. Acting out an American political demonstration was a sign that Habonim wanted its members to actualize their values on the home front, as Ken had done in Los Altos earlier that year. While it on occasion upset parents, who in one instance picked up their child before the session was over because they didn’t want their children attending a “commie camp,” the *madrachim* at Tavor that summer were dedicated to running educational programming that touched on important issues of their time and would prepare their *chanichim* to go out into the world with a better sense of how they could act on their values.⁴⁰ While the issues of the day would shift throughout Habonim’s existence, it was the call to be engaged, involved, and seek leadership that remained consistent over the decades.

While Ken had considered Workshop, Habonim’s Israel gap-year program, he was drawn towards staying in the U.S. and attending college.

I think I really wanted to go to college...I’d stopped seeing my Tavor *chevre* so regularly. I had to go back to Tavor to work but I wasn’t seeing all my friends. [I was] writing letters to my friends in Chicago, Detroit, and Minneapolis...but I was less in touch with them. They were less central to my life, to be honest. I had this new political thing I was doing in Los Altos...I got into Berkeley...and so that was what I wanted to do.⁴¹

His reflections on why he chose to deviate from the movement's widely accepted *hagshama* path illustrate not only Ken's distancing from his *kvutza* and his other Habonim relationships after the move to Los Altos but also the belief that he could live by his values in the U.S. and not only the kibbutz utopia that he had been raised to revere. After his activism in Los Altos, Ken saw that there was more to actualizing than perpetually recreating the sentimental and ideologically specific environment of movement spaces. He had experienced what it was like to effectuate change without his Habonim community based on the values that the movement had ingrained in him. In Ken's case, Habonim's education was not merely self-perpetuating but instead pushed him to leave the nest of his youth and embark on his own ideological journey.

When Ken arrived at Berkeley, he was eager to enmesh himself in the activist scene on campus. The university had made headlines in the spring of 1969 after the fatal confrontation between police and student demonstrators at People's Park, eventually leading to the deployment of National Guard troops on the campus.⁴² Berkeley promised Ken not only a place in the epicenter of leftist politics in the United States but also a greater sense of Jewish community, something he had grown to miss after his family had moved away their tight-knit community in Minneapolis. Rather than live in a dorm his freshman year, Ken immediately joined what promised to be a cooperative house for radical Jewish students. While this plan fell apart after the Fall quarter due to the organizers being "a couple of megalomaniacs," the experience introduced Ken to the Berkeley chapter of the Radical Jewish Union (RJU) and he "fell in with a very intellectual crowd of upperclassmen."⁴³ Through the RJU, Ken quickly found his niche at Berkeley, both socially and politically. He volunteered to help with the group's newspaper publication, contributing to layout and eventually writing articles himself, and represented the RJU at a meeting of the Berkeley Student Mobilization Committee, borne out of an SDS-led

coalition of student organizations, during his first few months on campus, describing the latter as a “seminal moment” during his time at Berkeley.⁴⁴ Ken had “no distinct memory of...having a dilemma about Israel and being a leftist” prior to entering college.⁴⁵ The rebuke that he would receive from the Mobilization Committee therefore left him confused and surprised.

When a large demonstration in San Francisco was being organized and needed co-sponsors, Ken volunteered the RJU. His eagerness to help was immediately shot down when another student responded that “We don’t really want you guys as a co-sponsor because you’re pro-Israel.”⁴⁶ Despite his insistence that the RJU was highly critical of the Israeli government and “pro-Palestinian,” the Committee’s decision was final.⁴⁷ The RJU still attended the rally and held their own signs despite being denied co-sponsorship, which Ken admitted “did not mean much” but still made him feel ostracized from his non-Jewish leftist peers.⁴⁸ Both socially and intellectually, his time at Berkeley returned Ken to a more particularist worldview. While he was still deeply invested in universalist and American political issues, his focus was redirected toward enacting change within the Jewish community, discussions of *aliyah* and kibbutz, and a tight-knit circle of Jewish friends that he did not seek to expand.⁴⁹

When RJU members were ostracized from fully integrated participation in the student activist communities on campus due to their intellectual interest in Zionism and Israeli politics, their strategies for actualizing their values changed course. While they still attended anti-war and adjacent political actions, their desire to be leaders in a struggle pointed their attention off-campus toward the institutions they felt they could influence the most. It had recently come to light that the two Jewish Day schools serving the San Francisco area were under financial duress due to the actions of the Jewish Welfare Federation, which was evicting one school from its building and had proposed to stop funding the other. After discussing their concerns with

Federation officials, the RJU wrote a letter to be published in the San Francisco Jewish Bulletin to spread the word about the Federation's neglect of Jewish education. The Bulletin, being heavily reliant on Federation funding, refused to publish the letter out of fear of retribution if they allowed criticism of the JWF in their pages. Upon the realization of the Federation's pervasive power in San Francisco institutional Jewish life and the lack of community knowledge about their actions, the RJU, alongside other local Jewish organizations, decided to stage a sit-in Shabbat at the Federation's offices. The stated goals of the action were "1) to impress the leadership of the JWF with the validity of our demands and the urgency of the situation, and 2) to catalyze support for our concerns from the Jewish community at large."⁵⁰

The newly formed Jewish Education Coalition entered the Federation building on Friday, April 30, 1971 and remained there until late Saturday evening. The protestors, disregarding the threats leveled by Federation executives, led Shabbat services, ate meals together, sang, and participated in reading circles on a variety of texts, including Jewish scripture and more contemporary literature such as Philip Roth's "Eli the Fanatic," which they deemed fit for the occasion because it "dramatically illustrates...the conflict between certain American and Jewish values."⁵¹ Around a month after the sit-in, a large section of the Spring 1971 issue of RJU's publication *The Jewish Radical* was dedicated to recounting the demonstration and uncovering the Federation's history of partiality toward the San Francisco Jewish community elite.⁵² In the issue, the Coalition's action was admitted to have not achieved any changes in Federation funding allocation, which they chalked up the executives being beholden to the wishes of the organization's wealthy donors rather than the larger San Francisco Jewish community it was meant to serve. The article did, however, deem their demonstration a successful start given that it garnered widespread attention to the issue of institutional disinvestment in Jewish education.⁵³

Ken remembers the Shabbat sit-in well, considering it one of most empowered moments as a member of the RJU during his time at Berkeley.

[The Federation] is busy having galas and parties and yada yada and they don't fund Jewish education... They ignored us when we wrote them a letter and demanded a meeting... So we held a sit-in at the Federation. We marched in, got in the elevator, went up on a Friday afternoon and took over the Federation offices. We were so outrageous! We brought already cooked chicken and kugel, wine and challah. We were going to celebrate Shabbat in the boardroom of the Jewish Federation. There were around 30 or 40 of us. It was just amazing.⁵⁴

While not mentioned by Ken in his interview, but highlighted in the pages of *The Jewish Radical*, Habonim's San Francisco branch participated in the Federation sit-in as well, likely a result of Ken's connections and outreach to his movement *chevre* who he knew would be excited to join along. Ken discussed the demonstration at the San Francisco JWF offices in his reflection on the number of actions led by the RJU that attempted to expose the ills within the Bay Area Jewish community: "We were on the left and the Jewish community was very critical of us because we were so critical of the Jewish community."⁵⁵ Ken also recalled an exposé written in which the RJU took a stand against a prominent Oakland slumlord who was "overcharging black residents and not fixing their houses" and happened to be an important donor to the Oakland Jewish Federation, which provided funding to the RJU at Berkeley.⁵⁶ This incident led to a conflict over possible funding cuts that was eventually resolved, though it shows how committed the RJU's members were to pursuing the actualization of their values in their local communities, in which they had an outsized influence compared to some of the more nationally oriented struggles during this same period. This strategy is reminiscent of Habonim's Baltimore picket discussed in Chapter 1 and occurring over a decade earlier, in which action in accordance with the values of the American Left was largely taken in response to an injustice perpetrated within or by the Jewish community.

Heading to Tavor for the summer of 1971, Ken's political consciousness had taken a sharp turn from where it was just a year before. Before the summer of 1970, Ken had been enamoured by the American political scene, eager to share the energy and enthusiasm that he had gained in Los Altos back to Habonim. He had little to no interest in going on Workshop despite many of his peers heading to kibbutzim instead of beginning college. In 1971, Ken's disposition had drastically changed. Ken and his Berkeley peers

weren't thinking that college was four years to go to football games and get drunk and figure things out afterwards. We were really talking about what we were going to do with our lives... We knew we wanted to do something together... We really coalesced towards the idea, many of us, not all of us, of making *aliyah* to kibbutz. I had been brought up that way in Habonim, and there were these other people who had not, who, all of a sudden, glommed on to the idea that we could do this together and go change Israel."⁵⁷

In the pages of *The Jewish Radical*, articles about kibbutz, Jewish communal farming, and setting up *garinim* (literally meaning seeds, but also referring to groups making *aliyah* together) were in almost every issue.⁵⁸ The *hagshama* path that had been instilled in Ken since his early days as a kid in Habonim had now returned with a renewed fervor. Ken's commitment to actualization of his Habonim-influenced values had come full circle and now, even amidst his RJU contingent, he saw moving to Israel as his life's mission. At camp in 1971, Ken remembered feeling like he could better impact education at Tavor, especially when coming from the radical Jewish intellectual environment at Berkeley where "Israelis, Palestinians, and Israeli politics" were a primary focus, with student demonstration reenactments no longer centrally located in his ideological agenda.⁵⁹ While Habonim had always educated on American social issues and did not shy away from their relevance, Ken's confidence on the educational front in the context of his renewed interest in historical and contemporary Labor Zionism demonstrates a clear ideological alignment between himself and the movement, one in which their end goal of *aliyah* to Israel was shared.

Upon his return to Berkeley in the fall of 1971, Ken became dissatisfied by the monotony and pointlessness of his college life outside of the RJU. After submitting a paper on Jewish communal farming in Petaluma, California that he was particularly proud of to a professor and then receiving a B-grade, he began to think about dropping out.

I worked so hard and spent so much time and put everything I had into this paper. [I thought to myself] 'Maybe I'm not doing the right thing here. Maybe I should find something else to do with my time. That would be more productive.' I was surrounded by all of these people who were not only loving school, but succeeding at school. So I decided to drop out and stay in Berkeley, find money to support myself and be happier.⁶⁰

Leaving aside Ken's high standard for success for himself, Ken's decision to drop out of Berkeley demonstrates the deep-seated imposter syndrome that he felt at college, both academically and possibly politically. Berkeley, for Ken, was a place he found no political sympathizers except among his RJU comrades. His decision to stay in Berkeley despite no longer being a student signals the deep bond he felt with the friends he had made in just one year at college, similar to his friendships from Habonim that were largely based in a shared Jewish radical identity. Ken, at Berkeley, found himself replicating the environment that had first given him a sense of political possibility and fostered deep connections with others that transcended the often passive and convenient dynamics of basic friendship.

To pay his rent and fill his free time, Ken took a job as a youth advisor at a conservative synagogue in Oakland and worked for the Berkeley Hillel putting up flyers around campus.⁶¹ The rest of his hours were devoted to the RJU, continuing to write articles for *The Jewish Radical* and organizing with his friends who were still students. Ken recalled there being a number of SDS actions that year related to a Berkeley professor teaching eugenics in the classroom and Nixon's decision to bomb Laos, the former of which he took part in after he was reached out to by a friend from high school who was an SDS member. While he still made an

effort to be involved in wider campus activism, from his interview testimony it seems that Ken was more propelled by his personal relationships rather than the political missions of the demonstrations themselves. He still supported their causes and was extremely sympathetic, but the purely political appeal was no longer enough, especially when he had already decided on making *aliyah* to kibbutz as his path to political fulfillment.

In the spring of 1972, while he was still working in Berkeley, Ken found himself back again within the fold of Habonim, taking on a more active role than simply working at Tavor during the summer. He was elected to the National *merkaz* (central committee) of Habonim and attended a movement wide meeting in Los Angeles, where he reunited with some of his friends and got close with two of the movement's most radical members: David Twersky and Sydney Nestel. On a spontaneous outing during the conference that involved driving in the San Francisco Habonim vehicle (which happened to be an old milk truck that had been purchased for five hundred dollars) to the Pacific Ocean to retrieve some sand for one of Twersky's friends on the east coast, Ken was approached with the proposition of running to be the head of Machaneh Bonim, the movement summer program originally proposed by Max Langer that focused on the political education and leadership training of Habonim's sixteen year-olds, for the upcoming summer. The program had been plagued by drug use and "complaints about no discipline and not a lot of programming" for the past few summers and Twersky and Nestel, a few years older than Ken, though he could be the fresh face that would bring it back to the place it was intended to be.⁶² After discussing the proposition with Brad Burston, Ken's friend from the RJU and new Habonim member who served as his closest confidant during these years, Ken decided to run for the position and he was quickly elected the next day by the rest of the *merkaz*.

The summer of 1972 arrived and Ken, only twenty years old, found himself at the helm of educating Habonim's future leadership, and in the process becoming a recognized movement leader himself. He focused his programming on "intellectual exploration on Zionism and American politics" and remembers catering to the "different levels of political sophistication" among the *chanichim*, many of whom were already experiencing drastic shifts in political consciousness as Ken attempted to channel their nascent radicalism into the framework of Habonim.⁶³ Having been personally shaped and molded by the movement, Ken now found himself responsible for the continuation of Habonim's core reason for being—instilling purpose and ideological commitment in the next generation. Besides Machaneh Bonim's expressly political component, there were still normal camp activities including Israeli folk dancing, a variety of sports, labor activities designed to emulate life on kibbutz, goofy role-playing games, and the development of close friendships among Habonim members from different camps around the country that would end up lasting a lifetime.⁶⁴

As the summer came to a close, Ken made the decision to move to Israel and live on a kibbutz to improve his Hebrew. He had been enticed by an offer to work on George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign, but chose to make *aliyah* instead, which in retrospect proved to be a worthwhile choice given the Democratic nominee's historic defeat against Nixon at the ballot box. Ken's choice is very much aligned with the trajectory of his political development up until this point. The movement had reasserted its place as the main vessel through which Ken could actualize his values. While in Israel, Ken volunteered at kibbutz Kfar Aza and travelled around the country visiting Habonim friends who were either on Workshop or participating in other programs.⁶⁵ He made a variety of connections within the kibbutz movement and on the Israeli Left, cementing himself as a devoted Habonim member and changemaker who had a future both

in the U.S. as a leader within Habonim and then, ultimately, on kibbutz as an invigorated immigrant to Israel. Ken returned to the U.S. in the summer of 1973 to lead Machaneh Bonim once more and then was immediately elected Mazkir Habonim, head of the North American movement, a position he would serve in until moving to refound Kibbutz Gezer in 1976 with other Habonim members from his youth, including J.J. Goldberg, David Twersky, and his best friend Brad Burston. In deciding where his *garin* of like-minded Habonim alumni who had been reared to be socialist-Labor Zionists amidst an atmosphere of leftist cultural revolution in the United States should settle, Ken advocated for Kibbutz Gezer in part because it was originally established by Americans. He explained his preference in a memo, writing:

“...it is personally important to me to have the freedom in setting up the religious, cultural, and political life on my kibbutz...Someone may ask if I want to live on an island of Americans in Israel all my life. My answer is no. I would like to attract like-minded Israelis, South Americans, Europeans, and others...My idea is to set up a life-style and attract others to it rather than go to someone else’s way of life and either change it or be marginal.”⁶⁶

Even in Israel, the spirit that had been instilled in Ken since his first summer at Camp Tavor in 1965—one of building intentional community, remaining idealistic and uncompromising, and actualizing his utopian vision for himself and his *chaverim*—animated the choices he made and the future desired.

Ken’s story is at once a personal narrative of growth and meaning-making and, at the same time, representative of Habonim’s ideal life trajectory. In the over eleven years that he spent in the movement before making aliyah, Ken transformed from a typical American suburban Jewish youth into a politically conscious and empowered leader, seeking to be a link between the particularist utopia building project of kibbutz in Israel and the ideal of the American leftist political culture that he left behind.

Conclusion

On Kibbutz Gezer, for Ken and J.J., and for the other Habos and Jewish radicals of their *kvutzot* that made *aliyah* in the mid to late seventies, the spirit of *hagshama* instilled in them during their childhoods at summer camp reached its ultimate fulfillment. Growing up in Habonim set clear standards for members who wanted to make meaning out of their lives. The totality of the kibbutz experience, in which work and leisure, joy and heartache, friendship and romance were bound up in the spirit of the collective, became inseparable from the belief in an individual's transcendence through *aliyah*, and the lives of Habonim members took on a utopian spirituality. It is notable, however, that neither J.J. nor Ken, in contrast to Max Langer, remained on kibbutz for the full extent of their adult lives. Both were pulled away from Israel and moved back to the U.S. to begin their respective careers as a journalist and a tech entrepreneur.¹

While kibbutz living may have been the culmination of their idealistic, socialist-Zionist childhood and early adulthoods, the reality of the requirements of life in Israel also became a struggle. J.J. moved away to avoid service in the Israeli military, though also mostly for social reasons (no girlfriend on the weekend, an age gap with younger soldiers).² While he did not say so explicitly, his decision signals an uneasiness with the statist requirements of life in Israel after making *aliyah*. In his early twenties when he moved to Gezer, the authoritarian quality of military service was far from what he had in mind when he imagined his communal utopian future on kibbutz, which emphasized a non-hierarchical distribution of power amongst its members. J.J.'s persistent critique of the occupation of the Palestinian territories and the right-ward turn in Israeli politics also made participation in the military undesirable. For Ken, who remained at Gezer until 1990 and lived a larger part of his adult life in Israel, the move

expressed both the urge to put the skills he learned as treasurer of the kibbutz to further use and spend more time with his family. His career success as the founding CFO of the tech company Lightstone and the death of his father in 1991 made returning to Gezer less likely.³

Even as their lives took them away from a life of movement *hagshama*, the alums' ardent dedication to Habonim remained. J.J.'s work on *Builders and Dreamers*, the seminal work of Habonim's history following its predecessor *Arise and Build* (1961), put his skills as a writer, journalist, and historian to use for the movement's benefit. The book has given the next generation of Habos like myself a written record of events, experiences, and reflections to learn from and build upon as we attempt to contextualize and make meaning of our own childhoods in the movement. Ken's participation in the founding of the Habonim Dror Foundation in 1994, aiming to provide the movement with financial support to run its camps and programs, has allowed alumni to continue to stay involved and maintain the organization that shaped their youth. Through his leadership in progressive Zionist organizations like J-Street and New Jewish Narrative, Ken has continued speaking out on ideological and political commitments he made as a young person in Habonim and at Berkeley. The scope of their involvement did not end in Israel, and was not solely a youthful phase either. J.J. and Ken's experiences in Habonim have manifested throughout the entirety of their lives.

In this thesis, I have attempted to uncover the role of Habonim in the reborn political climate of the American left during the sixties and seventies, as well as elucidate the tensions for movement members who struggled to reconcile their ideological commitments to both leftist universalism and Jewish particularism, specifically as leftist discourse around Zionism became increasingly fraught. The trajectory of the American New Left and its eventual implosion as a result of factionalism, state repression, and general youth disillusionment can be analyzed as an

illuminating counterbalance to the developments within Habonim during the same period. As a student-led movement unfettered by the organizational structures that movements like Habonim provided, the New Left knew no limits. While this ideological independence made mobilization around its politics much easier, with no conceivable responsibilities to fulfill other than a dogged pursuit of raising the world on new foundations, it also left the far-reaching movement vulnerable to breaking apart as the bonds of solidarity frayed due to an array of political differences. Habonim, prior to the revitalization of leftist politics in the U.S., struggled to make its programs and educational mission appeal to American youth and their parents, who were increasingly steeped in an individualistic culture of the fifties and less sympathetic to the movement's collectivist and socialist identity. The rise of the New Left provided Habonim with the cultural moment on which to hitch its subcultural wagon.

By incorporating the touchstones of New Leftism into its own politics, especially on universalist issues to which its members were particularly devoted like civil rights and the Vietnam War, Habonim was able to align its purpose with the ascendant political youth culture. In the same vein, its focus on kibbutz aligned perfectly with the spirit of leftist utopianism, particularly for Jewish students who saw their own peoplehood reflected in this historic and ongoing culturally progressive phenomenon. In this way, while always politically left-wing, Habonim adjusted its educational and organizational frequency to match that of the New Left and thereby pushed itself onto a vibrant American political scene. Even as fragmentation of the New Left began and Habonim's socialist-Zionist position became increasingly untenable amongst a coalition of SDS, Black Panthers, Yippies, and slew of groups with ultra-leftist ideologies, Habonim's members still used the political form of student dissent and counterculturalism to actualize the movement's goals. From its critique leveled against the

establishment Jewish community to its idealistic commitment to the original ethos of socialist-Zionism in the face of Israel's betrayal of those very values, Habonim's members took the New Left political world around them and applied it to their Jewish particularist venue of actualization, all while mediating their relationships to the universalist struggles that were simultaneously internal and external to their conceptions of Jewish radicalism.

The status of Habonim in the Jewish American community during the sixties and seventies points us to another major cultural shift: the changing idea of what it meant to be Jewish in the U.S. From the urban centers of Jewish life in the early twentieth century to the suburbanized communities of the post-war era, Jewishness began to shift from a reality that permeated everyday life to a more self-selected and participatory communal identification. Ritual Jewish life, pushed further into the background by assimilation and secularization, became replaced with a new Jewish politics paradigmatically different from any before. For the Jewish radicals of the sixties and seventies, Jewish ethics were transformed into a politics that reflected distillable "Jewish values," and Jewish peoplehood was increasingly homogenized to fit the romantic vision that Zionism advanced. Habonim, as both a movement committed to political education and to the functional task of Jewish childrearing, was an essential part of the changing form of Jewishness in American cultural life, giving Jewish youth a new foundation on which to connect to their forbearers and build their own identities.

After the events of October 7, 2023, and Israel's war on Gaza, the politics of Jewishness are more fraught than ever. Widespread support for the Israeli state among American Jewry has been undoubtedly exposed and any critical intervention against the forces of American Zionism has been difficult to mount. In early 2025 at Habonim's national *veida*, moved by the atrocities committed by the Israeli military in Gaza and by the American Jewish community's deafening

silence, movement members proposed to replace the “Progressive Labor Zionist” foundational pillar with the “Collective Liberation of Israel and Palestine.” After intense debate on the proposal that represented the deep ideological reckoning of socialist-Zionism in the twenty-first century, movement members voted to incorporate the new pillar, amended to the “Collective Liberation of the Peoples of Israel and Palestine,” and not to reject their Zionism, instead hoping to hold these two values in constant tension. Whether the movement can effectively hold such ‘nuance’ in a political climate that demands taking a decisive position is yet to be determined. What is clear is that Habonim is currently situated on the shrinking island of progressive Zionism in a climate of polarization around Israel/Palestine and tied to the fate of a Left that is floundering in the face of nascent American fascism. The movement must become intimately aware of its history, and the persistent tensions between its universalist and particularist sympathies, if it hopes to remain politically relevant and capable of rearing future generations of American Jewish youth.

Appendix

a. List of Hebrew terms and their definitions

aliyah (עֲלִיָּה) — Jewish immigration to the land Israel from Exile/Diaspora

chalutz (חֲלוּץ) — “pioneer,” used to describe those moving to Israel/Palestine to live on kibbutz

chanich (חֲנִיךָ) — “camper,” how younger movement members were referred to at summer camp and in the *ken*

chaver (חֵבֵר) — “friend/comrade,” used by Habonim members in reference to one another

hadracha (הַדְרָכָה) — “guidance/counseling,” what Habonim members must learn to become movement leaders

hagshama (הַגְשָׁמָה) — “self-actualization/fulfillment,” used to describe Habonim’s end goal for its members

kvutza (קְבוּצָה) — “group,” a cohort that grows up in Habonim and makes *aliyah* together

ken (קֵן) — “nest” or an abbreviation for *kvutzat noar* (youth group), used to describe local chapters of the movement in cities across the globe

madrich (מְדַרִּיךְ) — “guide,” a counselor at one of Habonim summer camps or in the *ken*

mazkir (מְזַכֵּיר) — “secretary,” as in Secretary-General, the highest position in Habonim leadership

veida (וַעֲדָה) — “convention/congress,” the North American convention of Habonim members in which proposals are voted on by present participants

- b. Consent form for conducting J.J Goldberg’s oral history interview. All interviewees read over and signed this form during the initial 30-minute meeting prior to a more extensive interview.

Consent Form

1. You are being invited to participate in an oral history project conducted by Aitan Avgar, a student at Cornell University and an alum of Habonim, about your experiences in Habonim as a young person, your life history, and your political opinions and activity during the period of study. Your interview will be used in a research project on Habonim and its involvement in the U.S. social movements of the 1950s through 1970s as well as the internal politics of the movement during the time. You will not be identified unless you give separate permission (below).
2. The interview will focus on your memories and experiences as a young person in Habonim and on your broader life history and the impact of Habonim on your political development. These interviews will be extensive, likely lasting multiple hours, so please plan accordingly. You may be contacted for an additional interview if more time is needed to hear about your thoughts and experiences. There are no known risks to participating in this research. Your participation is completely voluntary and you have no obligation to answer the questions you are asked. You can choose how you respond to and decline to answer any questions you might be asked. At any point you are free to withdraw from the interview. You may withdraw from participating even after your interview has been completed before the publication of the research’s final form.
3. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded and stored on the researcher’s computer. This interview may be transcribed and used for the researcher’s final product. Your word could be altered for clarity, but care will be taken to ensure that meaning is preserved.
4. The contents of this interview will be shared with the researcher’s honors thesis committee.

I agree to participate in this interview: ☒ YES ☐ NO

I agree to be audio-recorded: ☒ YES ☐ NO

I would like to remain anonymous: ☒ YES ☐ NO

Interviewer’s Signature Aitan Avgar Date 1/8/2026

Narrator’s Signature Jonathan J. Goldberg Date 1/8/2026



REVISIONS NEEDED

RE-EXAMINE WORKSHOP PROGRAM

By MAX LANGER

It is with interest that I read Dani Kerman's article on the future of the Habonim Workshop and I find myself in agreement with most of the objectives he sets out for it.

However, I have real reservations as to the possibility of realizing his expectations with our Workshop groups as they are presently constituted.

Dani states:

"During this experience the

movement member crystallizes his relationship to the movement ideals as far as he personally is concerned. He also prepares himself for the next step in the youth movement educational process wherein he will assume greater responsibility for the movement as a whole."

I feel that this assumption is neither realized nor realistic because the average Workshopper is too young to crystallize such a re-

Max Langer is a former merakez and chaver Merkaz. Now in Israel, he is expected to attend the forthcoming v'ida.

MAY, 1962

7

HCA KINUS STRENGTHENS CAMP PROGRAM

By HAL GOLDSTEIN

Forty-eight persons actively engaged in the running of our nine camps recently met to exchange ideas, report on their camp's plans and set up a Habonim Camping Association (HCA) that will be strong and meaningful.

Emerging from the two-day conference in the Farband House, New York City, was a concise philosophy of Habonim camping, a constitution for HCA and a set of resolutions that if followed should go far in molding the movement's camp program.

Adopted also were a set of principles which will be the guideline for the philosophy of Habonim camping.

The principles, inspired by the ideals of the kvutza in Israel, were self-labor, democratic group living, cooperation, scouting and physical fitness, Hebraism, and a Labor Zionist educational program.

Said the introduction to the aims and principles:

"Ichud Habonim sees in the work of the chalutzim in the

kvutza and kibbutz in Israel, the highest expression of its national and social ideals."

BUZZ SESSION

Significantly, with the financial aspects of our camps becoming more technical, a business managers' buzz session was held.

Topics discussed at the meeting ranged from cooperative buying to keeping parents informed about improvements in camp; from joining the Association of Private Camps to obtaining increased support from the Jewish community.

Long and at times painful discussions marked the debate on the constitution of HCA.

The document (printed below) as adopted now formalizes the inter-relationships of the movement's camps, HCA, and the camp committees.

Among other things, each camp accepts the statement of philosophy of Habonim camping and the authority of HCA.

The new constitution says that

Hal Goldstein is a Maapil of Ken Yehuda, Queens, N. Y.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WE MUST MOVE FORWARD

Dear Editor:

It seems to me that it is very clear to most observers that the movement has reached some sort of stagnation point. It is chiefly concerned with perpetuating itself, with little regard for what and why it is perpetuating. In fact, the task of perpetuation is often ascribed to be the main function of the movement organization, by the organization men themselves.

No better description of the movement has been put forth than that of Max Langer in *HaMaapil* (Vol. II, No. 2). Our movement is a chalutzic movement whose main tool is education. But to class us as an educational movement is to make us into no more than a propaganda school, and a weak one at that.

The effectiveness of our movement cannot be judged by the number of children in our "school," but rather by the number of adults who have dedicated themselves to the movement's development. This is because the commitment of a child is at best only tentative, but the number of committed adults is an indication of the maturity of the movement. Note, it was said above, dedication to the movement's "development," development not perpetuation—for perpetuation of the status quo is a decidedly conservative and very non-chalutzic concept.

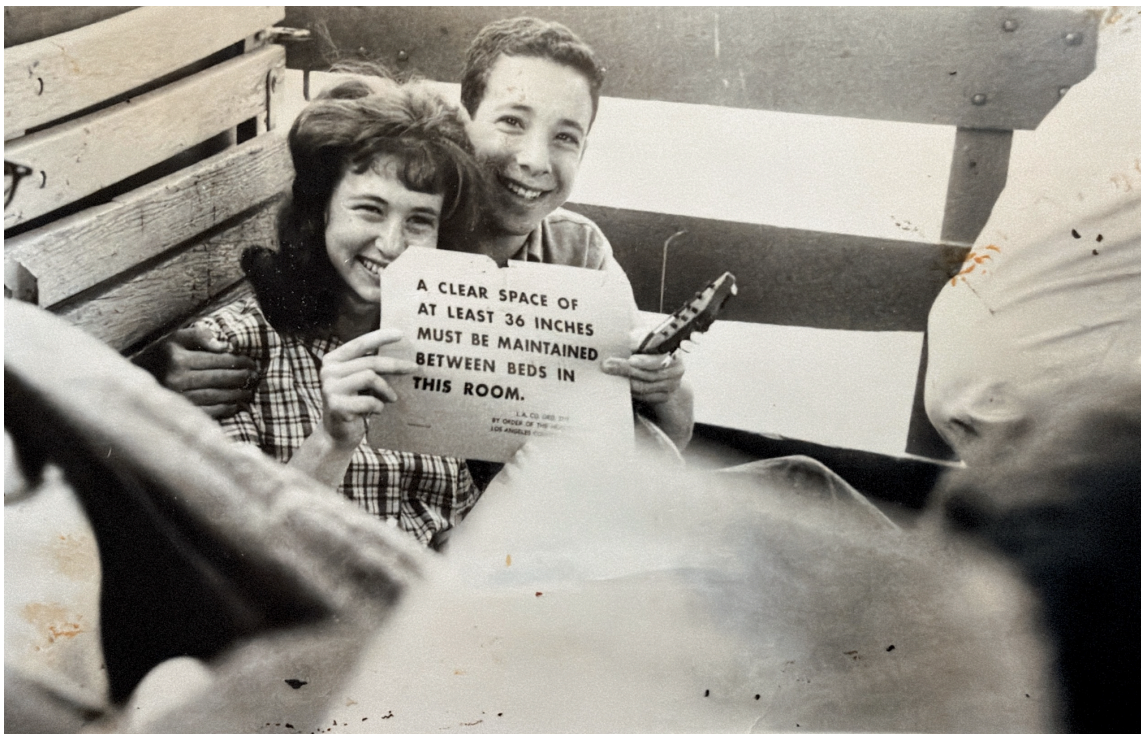
A movement holding the status quo is by definition no movement, for a movement must move, and a chalutzic movement must move forward—into the realm of ideas heretofore unknown or unreached. It cannot be afraid of taking new steps, of being daring, of saying and doing things which may not meet with general approval. This is the sort of attitude which children have unconsciously, but which they lose in later life; and it is in the period of young adulthood that the decision of whether or not to lose it is made.

Therefore, we must concentrate on our young adults, giving them hope, vision, insight, information, technique, to see that along with the aging process of the body does not come a loss of spirit of the mind. We must give our young adults the courage to be young in mind, for it indeed requires courage in the face of the fight for status quo.

MAIER FRIEDMAN,
Chaver Merkaz

- d. Photos of Habonim Camp Gilboa in Southern California from Summer 1967 located in the HDNA Archives.





- e. Documents sent to author by Ken Bob from the Los Altos High School walkout and his lobbying trip to D.C. a few weeks later.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AMIDST A CRISIS

We propose the following alternatives to school Friday, May 8th, 1970.

7:55- Assemble in Quad--move to bus zone.

8:15- Walk-out to Shoup Park
(Route: Gordon-Angela-San Antonio-Edith-University).

9:30- Rally begins-- Introduction of speakers:
William Brown, Helen Chauncy, Sue Ho- Asian History Dept,
John Rutherford- candidate for state senator. Stanford.
Stewart Burns- Institute for Non-violence, Palo Alto.
Joan Baez Harris
& others.

12:00- Workshops

Leaders: at least fifteen Los Altos High faculty members
community leaders
representatives from Pacific Studies Center
morning speakers
representatives from the Mid-Peninsula Free University
student leaders.

Topics: Military Invasion of Cambodia
Violence on Campus
ROTC
War Economy
Progress through Politics
Letter Writing and Telegrams
Representative Democracy
Draft Resistance
Stanford Strike
Community Canvassing
Economic Boycott
Financing Representative Trip to Washington
Other Suggested Topics

3:30- Final assembly for discussion of future plans.

We are walking out today. It is our belief a non-violent walk-out during school hours (combined with a substantial educational program concerning the problem) is the most effective way to show Mr. Nixon we are opposed to American military involvement in Cambodia. It is time to commit ourselves to the things we believe.

NOTE OR NOT ---- COME!

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ Midpeninsula high school students planning strike

Elsewhere on the Midpeninsula, students and 15 teachers at Los Altos High School said they would boycott classes Friday and hold an antiwar rally at Shoup Park, according to Ken Bob, a student body president, and Tom Jenkins, an English teacher.

Bob said singer Joan Baez, whose husband, David Harris, was arrested at the campus last spring, will join in the march from the campus to the park, where she will be one of the speakers.



(Times photo by Gene Tupper)

Before the march

Folksinger-pacifist Joan Baez Harris clutches her son, Gabriel, at today's anti-way rally at Los Altos High School.

Students march by hundreds

Peninsula high school and junior college students by the hundreds marched from campus to community today to demonstrate against and discuss U.S. military involvement in Cambodia.

Police said all marches were orderly.

Here is the picture:

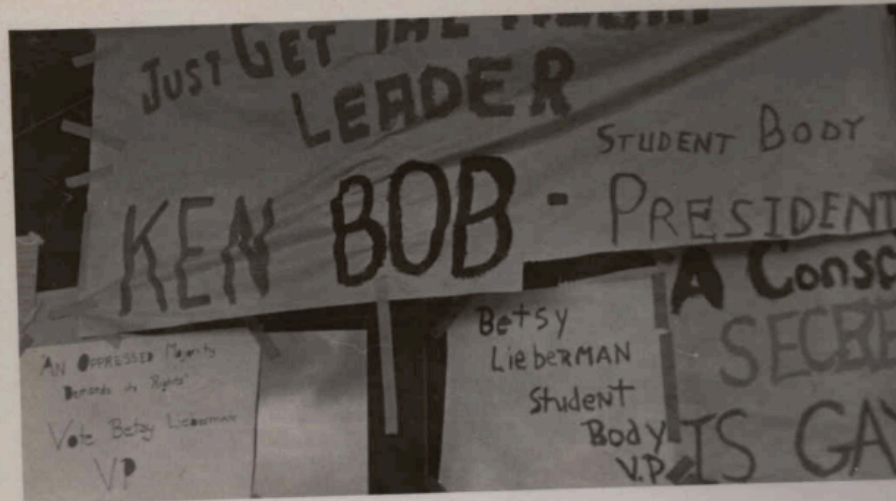
—More than 350 Los Altos High School students and 15 striking teachers marched 1½ miles from the school to Shoup Park for a rally.

Folksinger Joan Baez, (photo on page 2) who carried her infant son, Gabriel, along the entire one-mile march to the park, and Art Bushkin, an official of the Midpeninsula Moratorium Committee, were among the speakers at the rally.

On campus, principal Dushian (Dude) Angius said PTA volunteers were helping to notify parents of the missing students by telephone. Those without parental permission would receive the normal disciplinary action for cutting classes.

Angius said the 15 teachers who supported the students had all provided him with an individually signed form letter early Thursday. The letter announced the intent of the teachers to not be at work today, and said that lesson plans and other necessary materials would be provided.

Each of the teachers "also communicated with me personally and expressed their moral convictions" about recent national events and support for the students, Angius said.



9 Altos students to fly to D.C.

Nine Los Altos High School students — including the son of the school board president — and two of their teachers will meet legislators in Washington next week in an attempt to learn more about presidential policy and express their feelings about current national affairs.

Jim Wheat, son of Mrs. Mary Wallace Wheat, president of the Mountain View-Los Altos High School District trustees, will join eight other students in the three of four day trip.

The others are Ken Bob, Greg Minshall, Melissa Bails, Terri Martin, Barbara Ignatius, Betsy Lieberman, Eric Van Dyke and Ben Leifer. Bob is student body president and Leifer is senior class president.

The teachers, chosen by the students to accompany them, are Tom Jenkins and John Levin, both English teachers. Levin, a professional tennis player, teaches part-time while attending Stanford University to earn a master's degree.

The trip is an outgrowth of a campus strike two weeks ago, when 350 students and 15 teachers left campus to hold a convocation at Shoup Park on the Cambodian situation.

Jenkins, speaking for the group, said there were basically four areas of concern that formed the basis of the trip.

"We hope to gain an understanding of both what can be done on a local level to object to the direction of national policy and what lay behind the president's decision," Jenkins said.

"We want to give some understanding of how we feel and think and to give a picture of what high schools are doing in this area and show the type of person opposed to the present situation. We also hope to change some points of view, especially among those legislators on the fence about the McGovern-Hatfield Amendment."

Jenkins said the group represents only those students, teachers and community members who are helping to finance the trip and who oppose "the current direction of U.S. foreign and domestic policy, particularly in Indochina."

Appointments have been confirmed with Senators Alan Cranston, Edward Kennedy, Clifford Case and Charles Goodell and Congressmen Jerome Waldie, Don Edwards, and Don Fraser of Minnesota.

Three of the students left today for Washington and the rest will leave Sunday. All the students have their parents' permission.

The question the teachers' salary for work missed has not been resolved.

SCHEDULE OF APPOINTMENTS -- WASHINGTON DELEGATION

Monday, May 25

10:40 a.m. Rep. Charles Gubser (R., Cal.)
11:30 a.m. Ernie Fitzgerald -- Businessman's Education Fund
1:30 p.m. Rev. John Turnbull -- National Council of Churches
2:00 p.m. Rep. William Moorhead (D., Pa.)
2:30 p.m. Sen. Joseph Tydings (D., Md.) -- Kathy August
3:00 p.m. Sen. Edward Brooke (R., Mass.) -- Roger Woodworth
3:30 p.m. Sen. Clifford Case (R., N.J.) -- aides
4:30 p.m. Dr. Raymond Bauer -- White House Goals Committee

Tuesday, May 26

10:00 a.m. Sen. Edward Kennedy (D., Mass.)
1:30 p.m. Mayor Joseph Alioto
2:00 p.m. Senate vote on Cooper-Church amendment
2:30 p.m. Rep. Jerome Waldie (D., Cal.)
3:30 p.m. Sen. Alan Cranston (D., Cal.) and Bob Gray
3:30 p.m. Sen. Robert Packwood (R., Ore.) -- Stan Heislars
4:30 p.m. Sen. William Saxbe (R., Ohio) -- aides
5:00 p.m. Sen. Charles Percy (R., Ill.)
5:30 p.m. Law Students Against War, Geo. Washington Univ.

Wednesday, May 27

10:30 a.m. Sen. Frank Moss (D., Utah) -- aide
10:30 a.m. Lt. Col. Vincent R. Tocci (USAF) -- Pentagon
11:00 a.m. Sen. Harrison Williams (D., N.J.) -- Mr. Edes
11:00 a.m. Vice President Spiro Agnew -- Special assistant
12:00 p.m. Sen. George Murphy (R., Cal.) -- office staff
1:30 p.m. Rep. Allard Lowenstein (D., N.Y.)
2:00 p.m. Rep. Donald Fraser (D., Minn.)
3:00 p.m. Rep. B.F. Sisk (D., Cal.)
3:30 p.m. Sen. Charles Goodell (R., N.Y.)
4:00 p.m. Mr. Brad Patterson -- White House Assistant
4:00 p.m. Rep. Harold T. Johnson (D., Cal.) -- Dwight Barnes
5:00 p.m. Rep. James Corman (D., Cal.) -- Harry Rubin

Thursday, May 28

10:00 a.m. Rep. John McFall (D., Cal.)
11:00 a.m. Rep. David Henderson (D., N.C.)
12:00 p.m. Rep. Alphonzo Bell (R., Cal.) -- Linda Sommers
1:30 p.m. Mr. Swede Kramer -- Vietnam Info. Center, Nat. Sec. Cou
2:30 p.m. Mr. Carpenter -- State Department Public Affairs
3:30 p.m. Mr. Lindsey Grant -- National Security Council

- f. A photo of Ken Bob, likely taken at the Salute for Israel March in New York City on May 11, 1975. Later that day, Ken and his Habonim peers attended the storied “The War is Over” peace rally and concert, featuring artists such as Phil Ochs, Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, and Harry Belafonte.



Notes

Introduction

1. *Builders and Dreamers: Habonim Labor Zionist Youth in North America*, ed. J. J. Goldberg and Elliot King (Herzl Press, 1993), 19–21.
2. Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 51, 133.
3. *Ibid.*, 298.
4. The 5 original pillars of Habonim are Judaism, socialism, progressive Labor Zionism, actualization, and social justice. A new sixth pillar, added in 2025, stands for the Collective Liberation of the Peoples in Israel and Palestine (abbreviated to CLPIP).
5. Sandra Fox, *The Jews of Summer: Summer Camp and Jewish Culture in Postwar America* (Stanford University Press, 2023), 65.
6. Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left* (John Wiley & Sons, 1979), 539-40.
7. *Ibid.*, 561.
8. *Jewish Radicalism: A Selected Anthology*, ed. Jack Nusan Porter and Peter Dreier (Grove Press, 1973), xxii.
9. Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, 581.
10. Tal Elmaliach, “Americans for Progressive Israel: Radical Zionism in the United States, 1967–1973,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 93 (2022): 213.
11. Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Random House Publishing Group, 2013); Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (Verso, 2002), 8-9.
12. Over the course of my research, I conducted three long-form oral history interviews, all over Zoom and split into two parts. The first was a thirty-minute introductory meeting in which the project was explained and consent forms were signed. The second was a long-form informal interview, varying between 2 and 4 hours in length.

Chapter 1

1. *Builders and Dreamers: Habonim Labor Zionist Youth in North America*, ed. J. J. Goldberg and Elliot King (Herzl Press, 1993), 177.
2. *Ibid.*, 193.
3. David Twersky, “The Bronx, the Late 1960s: “We Were Filled with Ideas of Revolution,” in *Builders and Dreamers*, 194.
4. *Ibid.*, 196.
5. Riv-Ellen Prell, “Jewish Summer Camping and Civil Rights: How Summer Camps Launched a Transformation in American Jewish Culture,” David W. Belin Lecture in American Jewish Affairs 13 (2006), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.13469761.0013.001>.
6. “About Me,” Dr. Michael Livni, accessed November 16, 2025, <http://www.michael-livni.org/index.php/about>; Meir Ciporen, “The Toronto Convention, 1962: The Radicalization of Habonim,” in *Builders and Dreamers*, 186.
7. Max Langer, “The Impact of Zionist Youth,” ed. Abba Caspi, *Ichud Habonim Labor Zionist Youth, 1965*, Box 102, p. 12, Habonim Dror North America Archives in Philadelphia.
8. Langer, “The Impact of the Zionist Youth,” 10.
9. Langer, “The Impact of Zionist Youth,” 13.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Ciporen, “The Toronto Convention, 1962: The Radicalization of Habonim,” in *Builders and Dreamers*, 188.
12. Langer, “The Impact of Zionist Youth,” 24.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 25.
15. *Ibid.*, 14.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, 22.
19. *Ibid.*, 26.

20. "Furrows Vol XVIII No. 3 February 1962," 4.
21. "Furrows Vol XVIII No. 4 May 1962," 11.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 26.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. "About Me"; Ciporen, "The Toronto Convention, 1962: The Radicalization of Habonim," 187.
29. "Furrows Vol XIX No. 1 October 1962," 21; Ciporen, "The Toronto Convention, 1962: The Radicalization of Habonim," 187.
30. "Furrows Vol XVIII No. 5 August 1962," 11.

Chapter 2

1. Dov Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict over Israel* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 38.
2. Tal Elmaliach, "Americans for Progressive Israel: Radical Zionism in the United States, 1967–1973," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 93 (2022): 205.
3. Ibid.
4. Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe*, 38–39.
5. J.J. Goldberg, interview by author, January 13, 2026, 00:06:45.
6. Ibid., 00:56:18, 00:59:00, and 00:58:00.
7. Ibid., 00:01:10.
8. Ibid., 00:01:45.
9. Rick Glaser, interview by author, January 10, 2026, 00:50:45.
10. *Builders and Dreamers: Habonim Labor Zionist Youth in North America*, ed. J. J. Goldberg and Elliot King (Herzl Press, 1993), 207.
11. Waxman, *Trouble in the Tribe*, 35.
12. *Builders and Dreamers*, 207.
13. Ibid., 207–8.
14. "From the national office, June 1967" in *Builders and Dreamers*, 208.
15. Goldberg, interview by author, 01:08:43.
16. Twersky, "The Bronx, the Late 1960s: 'We Were Filled with Ideas of Revolution,'" in *Builders and Dreamers*, 137.
17. Twersky, "Entering the 1970s: Habonim and the Jewish Student Movement," in *Builders and Dreamers*, 215.
18. Ibid.
19. Elmaliach, "Americans for Progressive Israel," 209.
20. J.J. Goldberg, "Is Zionism Compatible with Radicalism?," in *Jewish Radicalism: A Selected Anthology*, ed. Jack Nusan Porter and Peter Dreier (Grove Press, 1973), 72.
21. Ibid., 81.
22. Elmaliach, "Americans for Progressive Israel," 210.
23. Goldberg, interview by author, 00:04:50.
24. Ibid., 00:34:50.
25. Ibid., 00:34:30.
26. Ibid., 00:34:55.
27. Twersky, "Entering the 1970s: Habonim and the Jewish Student Movement," in *Builders and Dreamers*, 217.
28. Ibid., 214.
29. Goldberg, interview by author, 01:05:20.
30. Goldberg, *Builders and Dreamers*, 230.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Goldberg, interview by author.

Chapter 3

1. Kenneth Bob, interview with author, January 25, 2026, 00:01:20.
2. Ibid., 00:02:14.
3. Ibid., 00:09:00.
4. Ibid., 00:12:50.
5. Ibid., 00:05:20.
6. Ibid., 00:28:30.
7. Ibid., 00:31:50.
8. Asher Meltzer, “A Program Guide for the Jewish Camp” (American Zionist Foundation, 1972) referenced in Fox, *Jews of Summer*, 51.
9. Fox, *The Jews of Summer*, 51.
10. Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 74–75, 111.
11. Ibid., 74–75.
12. Bob, interview with author, 00:31:15; “Songs of Social Ferment,” Songbook, Ichud Habonim Labor Zionist Youth, 1965, HDNA Archives in Philadelphia.
13. Bob, interview with author, 00:31:33.
14. Ibid., 00:39:00.
15. J.J. Goldberg does not remember how he reacted when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated while he was on Workshop but does remember his inconsolable despair upon learning about the death of Woody Guthrie.
16. Bob, interview with author, 00:39:15.
17. Ibid., 00:50:40.
18. Ibid., 00:51:35.
19. Ibid., 00:52:00.
20. Ibid., 00:52:13.
21. Ibid., 01:09:00.
22. Ibid., 00:52:38.
23. Ibid., 00:55:49.
24. Ibid., 00:56:05.
25. Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 410.
26. Bob, interview with author, 00:57:30.
27. Ibid., 00:57:36.
28. Ibid., 00:59:20.
29. Ibid., 00:58:14.
30. Ibid., 01:00:49.
31. Ibid., 01:00:20.
32. “Schedule of Appointments—Washington Delegation” sent to me by Ken Bob. Scan available in section (e) of the appendix.
33. Ibid., 01:12:20, 01:02:43.
34. Ibid., 00:45:51.
35. Ibid., 00:46:03.
36. Fox, *The Jews of Summer*, 78–80.
37. Bob, interview with author, 00:36:14.
38. Fox, *The Jews of Summer*, 83.
39. Bob, interview with author, 00:46:15.
40. Ibid., 00:46:45.
41. Ibid., 01:16:54.
42. Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 342.
43. Bob, interview with author, 01:24:45, 01:21:02.
44. Ibid., 01:27:22.
45. Ibid., 01:19:00.
46. Ibid., 01:27:45.
47. Ibid., 01:27:50.
48. Ibid., 01:28:30.
49. Ibid., 01:46:05.

50. "Jewish Radical 1 June 1971 — California Digital Newspaper Collection," 2, accessed March 14, 2026, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=JEW19710601.1.2&c=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-The+Jewish+Radical-----1.>
51. Ibid., 4.
52. Ibid., 3.
53. Ibid., 4.
54. Bob, interview with author, 01:30:42.
55. Ibid., 01:29:35.
56. Ibid., 01:29:50.
57. Ibid., 01:35:04.
58. "Jewish Radical 1 October 1971 — California Digital Newspaper Collection," 2, accessed March 14, 2026.
59. Bob, interview with author, 01:40:53, 01:39:17.
60. Ibid., 01:53:04.
61. Ibid., 01:54:05.
62. Ibid., 02:01:15.
63. Ibid., 02:06:11, 02:09:29.
64. Ibid., 02:12:43.
65. Ibid., 02:13:33.
66. Goldberg, *Builders and Dreamers*, 241.

Conclusion

1. Goldberg, interview by author; Bob, interview by author.
2. Goldberg, interview by author, 00:08:00.
3. Bob, interview by author; *Long Island Business News*, "Kibbutz MBA."

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