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Tal Elmaliach. *Hakibbutz Ha'artzi, Mapam, and the Demise of the Israeli Labor Movement*. Translated from the Hebrew by Haim Watzman. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2020. 328 pp. ISBN 9780815636649.

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Nation-building projects in the twentieth century were often linked to socialism, and the Zionist movement was no exception. After all, if you are going to build a new nation, why not build it free of the ugly exploitation, inequalities, and class conflicts of modern capitalism? It is therefore a great historical irony that Israel, built and for decades led by a hegemonic socialist movement, now has the dubious honor to be ranked together with the United States among the most economically unequal of developed countries. How did this happen? This is the question that Tal Elmaliach, a historian at the University of Haifa, sets out to answer in his book *Hakibbutz Ha'artzi, Mapam, and the Demise of the Israeli Labor Movement*. Published as part of a series in the Modern Intellectual and Political History of the Middle East, the book is based on the author's doctoral dissertation and an earlier Hebrew-language monograph published in 2018, but it expands upon these works in major and important ways to highlight the significance of the research for an international audience. Although the book may appear at first glance to have a narrow scope, it speaks in fact to more general questions, which will surely make it of interest to nonspecialists in both history and the social sciences.

While orthodox Marxists typically refused to approach the Jewish question as a national question, Jewish intellectuals began to forge creative syntheses of socialism and Jewish nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This political project led, among other things, to the formation of the socialist-Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatza'ir (The Young Guard). Established during the First World War in Galicia (then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and still existing today, Hashomer Hatza'ir sought to “normalize” Jewish economic life by encouraging young Jews to work the land of Israel rather than pursue commercial occupations in Europe. In 1927, the movement's kibbutzim (communal farming settlements) in British-controlled Palestine joined together to form Hakibbutz Ha'artzi, the National Kibbutz Movement. Hashomer Hatza'ir also helped to create the Israeli political party Mapam (Hebrew abbreviation for United Workers' Party) in 1948. “The Zionist party farthest to the left on the Israeli political spectrum” (p. 3), Mapam advocated a pro-Soviet policy in its early years, notwithstanding the antisemitic Slánský Trial in Prague in 1952 and the so-called Doctors' Plot in the Soviet Union in 1953.

At the simplest level, Elmaliach's book is a case study of Hakibbutz Ha'artzi and the Mapam Party, but Elmaliach invites us to learn from this case and not merely about it. He describes these institutions as “microcosms” of Israel's wider socialist

Zionist left or labor movement (p. 127), which came to power within the larger Zionist movement in the 1930s and fell into decline with the Israeli electoral upset of 1977; and in seeking to explain the demise of that larger movement, he also develops new insights into the decline of socialist movements elsewhere in the world. Elmaliach uses the term *movement* in a specific way to mean “an amalgamation of linked organizations and institutions that together constitute a self-contained environment that provides a specific public with everything from ideology, political representation, housing, health care, and employment to entertainment, newspapers, books, theater, and sports leagues” (p. 3). Accordingly, his point of departure is the integration of economic, political, and cultural functions in the Israeli labor movement. “Offering economic and social services, political representation, and culture,” he explains in his related article “The Demobilization of the Israeli Labor Movement” (2020:136), the movement “aimed to provide workers with all their needs.” The movement’s kibbutzim, kibbutz movement leadership, and party machines played crucial mediating roles, linking individuals (or institutions in the case of the kibbutzim themselves) to concrete economic and social benefits. The more dependent individuals were on these institutions, and the more that relationship excluded other affiliations and loyalties (p. 25), the more these movement organizations resembled what the sociologist Lewis Coser (1974) called “greedy institutions.” Elmaliach’s description of the Israeli labor movement also dovetails with the theory of power-dependence relations developed by the sociologist Richard Emerson (1962), which treats power as a property of social relationships rather than of individuals in the relationships. Elmaliach’s core argument is that this “holistic and sustainable structure,” which served the needs of the movement and its individual members alike, was the movement’s “mobilizing force” and “secret power.” When the movement’s economic, political, and cultural components “operated in harmony,” he argues, “the movement prospered,” but “when they worked at cross-purposes,” the movement “lost its mobilization capacity” and deteriorated (Elmaliach 2020:123, 131, 136).

Elmaliach’s explanation for the decline of the Israeli labor movement begins, in Marxian fashion, with changes in the economic foundation of Israeli society. The economic growth and prosperity of the late 1950s and 1960s had several important consequences. First, it fostered the rise of a new middle or professional class (pp. 62–67) and was associated with growing economic inequality (pp. 67–73) as benefits and services were granted primarily to party members and kibbutzim, not the wider group of people who voted for the labor parties (including newer Mizrahi or “Eastern” immigrants, i.e., Jewish immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East). Second, members of the new middle class became less dependent on the movement’s “mediating apparatuses” for the provision of economic benefits and social services and therefore less committed to the movement. Third, new currents arose within the labor movement that criticized, from different perspectives, the unequal distribution of the benefits of prosperity: a sectoralist current of white-collar professionals demanding better wages, benefits, and status (pp. 91–100); a democratic current critical of “the labor-movement machine’s inequitable allocation of power” (p. 101), friendly to the global New Left, and after the Six Day War in 1967 increasingly con-

cerned about the fate of the occupied territories (pp. 100–118); and a current of working-class, Mizrahi voters excluded from the economic privileges conferred on party members and kibbutzim (pp. 118–126). As Elmaliach puts it elsewhere (2020:132), all three currents “grew out of the same sociopolitical process of demobilization as a result of the failure or redundancy of the movement’s mechanism for providing economic advantages and social services.” The labor-movement leadership tried to counter the influence of sectoral interests, co-opt or suppress the democratic critics of the party and movement machines, and regain the support of working-class, Mizrahi voters with the establishment of a universal welfare system in the 1970s (pp. 132–143), but none of these efforts fully succeeded. Instead, internal conflicts paralyzed the movement’s political parties. Lastly, as economic growth and prosperity fueled the expansion and commodification of the movement’s cultural activities, the movement lost its ability to “control the cultural sphere,” and “culture turned from a tool of indoctrination to an autonomous space comprising a variety of manifestations of opposition to the establishment” (pp. 165–166). The cultural sphere thus nurtured “the establishment of new political forces ... offering themselves as alternatives to the labor hegemony” (p. 220).

Elmaliach’s monograph reads like a tour de force, offering a comprehensive new interpretation of Israel’s labor movement. It traces the Israeli labor movement’s demise back to developments in the late 1950s and 1960s, when the movement appeared to be at the zenith of its power and influence, and (in dialectical fashion) to the movement’s “internal structural contradictions,” not merely external “events beyond its control” (p. 8). Ironically, the leaders of Hakibbutz Ha’artzi and Mapam “remained steadfastly Marxist on the theoretical level yet put most of their energies into preserving a political-social superstructure that had been fashioned for a different set of circumstances. In this tactic, they disregarded the very dialectic materialism that they preached and became an extreme example of a socialist paradox” (p. 226). Perhaps of most interest to readers of *Laboratorium*, the book’s conclusion suggests that the disintegration of Hakibbutz Ha’artzi and Mapam illuminates not only the fate of the broader Israeli labor movement, but also the history of other socialist movements elsewhere in the world that similarly lost their strength when “new conditions of production encountered traditional political structures” (p. 226). In short, because Elmaliach treats Israel as a paradigmatic and not an exceptional case, his book will interest not only historians of Israel but also historians and social scientists seeking to understand the broader crisis of the “global Left” (p. 225).

REFERENCES

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