

A Search for Identity . . .

The writer, Steve Safran, is the head of the Jewish Agency's department for training of youth leaders.

Time was when the machinery of the Zionist movement catered for the committed Zionist alone. At the recent Anglo-Jewish youth workers' seminar in Israel you might have expected to see the staunch blue-shirted members of Hashomer Hatzirim, Habonim and Dror, among others.

The first surprise I received was when I looked round to see which youth organizations were represented. The three classical Zionist

youth movements cited above were conspicuous by their absence. So was Hanover Hatzioni.

Present in the cosy living quarters of the youth and hechalutz seminar centre in Southern Jerusalem as night turned into morning were three FZY recruits, two fresh Herutniks, a member of YPZ and one from YJNF and three from the Orthodox camp (Hamishmeret Hatzira and Bnei Akiva).

It is probably true to say that the participation of the non-chalutzic youth organizations — even the charity collectors' department — is a reflection of the

growing involvement of the youth and hechalutz department in the wider diaspora community.

Ever since the establishment of the 1968 Zionist Program and the emergence then of the New Left groups among the traditional supporters of the Zionist establishment, this trend has been growing. But the question I asked was whether the absence of the classical secular Zionist youth groups meant that the establishment had over-reached itself at their expense. Was their lack of participa-

tion intentional and vindictive or just indicative? Jonny Wachsman, 21, of Herut's Brit Hachashmonim, put it succinctly when he said: "The trouble is that these classical groups can no longer look their younger members in the face and say that kibbutz is the best form of self-fulfilment."

"They don't know what to do with themselves. Members have returned home from Israel and told them that it's dirty and muddy and that it's hard on kibbutz."

"We've seen for ourselves here that the Zionist dream is in trouble. You can't sell Israel today through the kibbutz. You have to

face reality and present the challenge." The inference? — they just weren't interested.

But whatever the truth, only ten British youth workers made it to this very impressive seminar. Planned at a high level, the participants were taken on a two-day trip through the West Bank and the Golan Heights meeting with soldiers, Israeli settlers and, most important, with immigrants of their own ages who have settled in a variety of social frameworks and experimental settings.

"It's a crying shame that more people didn't come on the seminar," said Elaine Brewer, of Herut. "It's a reflection of the whole youth scene in Britain."

Last year, after the Yom Kippur War, some forty participants came to be "updated".

We heard all sorts of excuses about exams, other commitments, and the like, but the tone of the discussion as the night wore on gave a clue to what was really going on in Britain. It appears that the image of Israel is gradually being corroded.

And from Israel it seems strange to think that that bastion of Zionist activity — Britain, the birthplace of so much that turned the tide of Jewish history in this century — should become the arena

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