

THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN ISRAEL

By Esther Vilenska

AS a result of the municipal elections held in Israel on November 14, 1950, the big bourgeoisie strengthened its position in the large cities of the country.

The election program of the General Zionists (party of the industrialists and landlords) had an unmistakable class character: annulment of all price control, unfettered freedom for the big capitalists, legalization of the black market, raising of profits, lowering of wages. The percentage of votes received by the General Zionists in cities was as follows: in Tel-Aviv, 31 per cent (seven per cent in January 1949); in Ramath Gan, 38 per cent; in Petekh Tikva, 30 per cent; in Haifa, 22 per cent; in Nathanya, 22 per cent; and in Jerusalem, 16 per cent. The General Zionists made

their biggest advances among the small merchants, the artisans and the small producers. These groups had been hard hit by the shoe and clothing rationing decree, which caused a sudden and drastic cut in their income. This decree aided the big bourgeoisie in removing small producers and artisans from competition in the market. The big bourgeoisie was strengthened tremendously by this decree. Yet, the middle class groups that revolted against the decree made the mistake of supposing that the bourgeoisie could save them from ruin.

The growth of the General Zionists was also a consequence of the pro-American orientation of the Mapai leadership. This leadership had consistently fostered the conviction that dependence on the American government is both desirable and necessary. It convinced many that the country's economic difficulties could be solved not by

ESTHER VILENSKA is the labor secretary of the Communist Party of Israel and a member of the Knesset.

struggle against the big bourgeoisie and the levying of heavy taxes upon them, but by freeing them from heavy taxes and by American loans. The Mapai leadership furthermore tried to persuade our people that the outrageous terms which accompanied these loans (such as restrictions upon native industry, colossal increase in unnecessary imports, granting of military bases, paralyzation of our natural resources, support of American aggression, etc.) are necessary and unavoidable in meeting the economic crisis. The petty bourgeois groupings of the urban Israeli community logically concluded from this pro-American policy that the big capitalists, who are partners in American firms or the agents of American companies, are, in a good position to curry favor with the American government.

It is no coincidence that the Washington conference for a billion dollar loan to Israel devoted a great deal of attention to the strengthening of "free enterprise" in Israel. United States Secretary of the Treasury John Snyder, who spoke at the conference, deliberately hammered away at the point that American capitalists must change the relationship of forces in the world. *Davar*, Histadrut organ, made no effort to conceal the fact that strong pressure was exerted at the conference to strengthen capitalist political influence in Israel. *Haaretz*, spokesman for the industrialists and generally expressing General Zionist views, declared on November 16 that "there was marked satisfaction in Western diplomatic circles over the victory of the General Zionists. These circles had feared growth in the strength of Mapam and the Communists."

Mapai Losses

Thus it is evident that the pro-American policy of the Mapai leadership, as well as the pressure of American capitalists, contributed directly to the strengthening of the big bourgeoisie in Israel. Mapai leaders had paved the way for the victory of the big bourgeoisie by their policy of splitting the working class and their continuous acquiescence to the demands of the big bourgeoisie. By splitting the labor front the Mapai leaders sowed defeatism among many circles of the workers, artisans and petty bourgeoisie. On the other hand, these leaders strengthened the economic position of the bourgeoisie, enlarged its political influence and made its future growth easier by regularly agreeing to the demands of the big bourgeoisie on the issues of increasing inflation, elimination of price control, smuggling of foreign currency out of the country, etc.

The Mapai leadership carried out an historical mission for the bourgeoisie by convincing certain parts of the working class that acquiescence to the speculative demands of the bourgeoisie and lowering of the standard of living were "helping the people."

The Mapai leaders suffered a severe defeat in the municipal elections. In the Knesset election in January 1949, Mapai received 34 per cent of the total vote. Now, less than two years later, Mapai lost 11 per cent of its support in the city of Tel Aviv and received only 23 per cent of the total

vote there. This loss of over 10,000 voters is serious. Mapai lost heavily in other cities as well. In Haifa, for example, the percentage of Mapai votes fell from 39 to 33. The gravity of the situation for Mapai becomes still clearer when we consider that Mapai ran under its own party name in the Knesset election, while on November 14th it covered itself with the cloak of Histadrut, thus receiving some votes from the "religious workers."

The elections exposed the worthlessness of the empty phrases of Mapai leaders about their "stable strength," which wilted at the first breeze of the bourgeoisie. While in power the Mapai leadership betrayed the interests of the working class and fought against the left wing workers, who defended those interests. Mapai leaders split the labor front in the hope of strengthening their own positions at the expense of the left forces. As it turned out, the Mapai leaders decided their own fate and the fate of their party by sharpening the axe which has now fallen on them.

The Mapai leadership alienated the petty bourgeoisie, as well as certain labor circles. The Mapai leadership also supplied the reactionary front with demagogic arguments in the fight against socialist ideas. In contradiction to the indisputable facts about the lands of socialism and people's democracy, namely that *socialism leads to the liquidation of the exploiting classes and to abundance for all the people*, the Mapai leadership attempted to spread the idea that socialism means scarcity of goods for the worker and profit for the manufacturers. The Mapai leaders thereby made it easy for the bourgeoisie to win over certain labor circles, artisans and small producers with promises of prosperity and guarantees against shortages.

The loss of Mapai strength to the big bourgeoisie is typical of the development of right wing social democratic parties in the Marshallized countries, thus paving the way for the forces of reaction and fascism. For the Mapai leadership has throughout its period of dominance pursued domestic and foreign policies conforming with the interests and desires of the big bourgeoisie. Together with the big bourgeoisie the Mapai leadership is responsible for acquiescence to the enslaving conditions of the American loan. When this question was discussed in the Knesset, Mapai Finance Minister Eliezer Kaplan and the big bourgeois leader Israel Rokeach alike defended the conditions of the American loan.

Decline in Herut Vote

The lowering of wages and restriction of production, on the one hand, and support for the American aggressors in Korea, on the other, were also approved, thanks to agreement between the Mapai and bourgeois leaders. Is it then any wonder that the big bourgeoisie has succeeded in receiving support from the petty bourgeoisie and manages to deceive the middle class groups?

Another result of the municipal elections is the strengthening of those sections of the big bourgeoisie which cloaked themselves in the mantle of opposition to the government.

On the other hand, other sections of the bourgeoisie, which collaborated with the government coalition, were considerably weakened. The religious parties made no effort to continue the unnatural alliance of the "religious front." They appeared split before the voters and were unable to obtain the same percentage of the vote as before. The Sephardin lost over half their previous vote and the "Progressives" [so-called left wing of the General Zionists] also lost considerably.

One heartening result of the election is that the Herut, which goes in for the utmost theatricality and demagoguery, not only failed to hold its own but even lost some strength. But this does not mean that the danger of fascism has lessened, nor that it is no longer a threat to the community in the future. The American circles, who pulled the strings so as to change the situation in our community, learned from the fact of the "Altalena" uprising in 1948 (when the Irgun, predecessor of the Herut party, briefly precipitated a civil war) that fascism cannot triumph in our country by a mere wave of the hand. These circles know that our community has strong forces, based on the democratic tradition, which hate fascism. That is why these circles chose the method of strengthening "the center party," the General Zionists, and thereby made the position of the Herut secure in certain cities. The basis was thus laid for the creation of bourgeois blocs that will bring the General Zionist and Herut leaderships to the fore as a unified whole.

Mapam Right Wing and Workers Front

Many workers were lulled into the illusion that in the state of Israel the Mapai majority would reign forever. But on November 14, 1950, it became clear that the lack of working class unity, the lack of a strong political force of workers and other democrats, has inflicted a serious blow upon the working class. If splitting tactics within the ranks of the working class are persisted in, not only will the workers' parties be weakened. This might also result in a serious catastrophe to Israeli democracy and the coming to power of Jewish fascism. We warn our Mapai friends that they dare not be indifferent to these possibilities. They should not permit their leaders the opportunity of continuing splitting policies. They must prevent reaction from becoming stronger or else it will dig a grave for the masses in our country.

Before the election the right wing of Mapam circulated the legend that it alone was able to change the relationship of forces in the cities. This was said in opposition to the urging of many Mapam friends for cooperation of the left wing forces in order to erect a barrier to the bourgeois forces straining for power. The right wing of Mapam rejected a common slate for the elections and is therefore responsible for the fact that increasing penetration of our country by American influences occurs while the left wing parties are disunited and have thus far failed to mobilize the masses to the workers' banner. This could have been achieved if the left wing working class front were united.

The Mapam right wing is responsible for the fact that the left-over votes (which did not count under our proportional representation system) of the two slates were not utilized to increase the representation of the working class forces in the municipal councils. Thus, lack of an agreement in Rishon Le-Zion between the Communists and Mapam on uniting their left-over votes prevented the securing of a working class majority in the council there.

The realities of the post-election situation have shown many sincere Mapam friends that Mapam alone cannot combat the reactionary majorities in the cities or rally a larger vote than Mapam obtained in the Knesset elections in 1948. In some places Mapam increased its vote because the central committee of the Communist Party called upon their comrades and friends to vote for the Mapam candidates where the party did not offer an independent slate. This happened in Ramath Gan, Nathanya, Khoulloun and B'nai Brak, and in such settlements as Givatayim, Kfar Sava and a number of others. These facts should make our right wing Mapam friends a little cautious about the "up-surge of their forces" and to evaluate their allies and working class cooperation more responsibly.

Yet, *instead of reaching an agreement on the left-over votes and maximum utilization of all votes of both parties*, right wing Mapam leaders carried on anti-communist propaganda and thus helped fragmentation of the working class vote. Not only Mapai leaders, but also those Mapam activists who hate the communists more than reaction and the bourgeoisie, will have to answer to history for the failure of cooperation in the workers' movement. One narrow-minded writer of *Al Hamishmar*, for instance, was content to console himself with the fact that the Communist Party lost several tenths of one per cent of their previous vote, instead of going in for a little self-criticism, analyzing working class potentialities and the effect of splitting tactics. Thus the lack of political maturity of right wing Mapam leaders before the elections persists in spite of the results. We believe that the masses of ordinary people in Mapam will not allow their party to descend into anti-communist and splitting ways.

Communist Party Holds Its Own

The Communist Party put forward an independent slate in only 16 places. Thus the assessment of the vote on the Communist ticket cannot be a general one but can apply only to certain regions. One of the main planks of our platform is the struggle for the unity of the working class. We fought with all the resources at our command for a left wing united front with Mapam. We are confident that the light which we shed in the course of this election campaign will yield results in the future.

An important feature of our campaign was the fact that we showed that the sectarian approach is in all respects alien to us. Wherever we had no opportunity to put forward our own ticket, we openly called for support of the Mapam slate so as to strengthen the left wing forces.

- At the same time we demanded that Mapam councilmen should consistently protect the interests of the working class and of the masses.

In many places our slate showed both an absolute and a relative gain in the percentage of votes in the municipal elections as compared with the Knesset election. For instance: in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, the percentage of the vote for our slate increased from 2.6 per cent in the Knesset vote to three per cent in the municipal elections; in Ramleh, from 4.5 per cent to nine per cent; in Jerusalem, from 1.1 per cent to 1.7 per cent; in Kharderah, from 2.7 to three per cent; in Tiberia, from 1.6 to two per cent; in Lydda and Judea the vote grew to seven per cent. In Jaffa alone the Communists received eight per cent of the vote. In other places we held our positions and in still other places we must note some losses. Yet, despite the heavy economic pressure on our comrades and friends, despite continuous brutal threats of job dismissals, we maintained our position and even broadened them in some places.

The political significance of the vote for the Communist slate consists in the fact, that the voters cast their ballots

for workers' unity, consistent protection of the workers' interests and for genuine independence and peace.

The lesson of the strengthening of the right wing in the municipal elections is the necessity of building a united front of the working class and middle class groups in order to retard the growth of the reactionary and fascist forces and to change the political relationships in favor of the forces of progress for protection of democratic freedoms and of independence. United action of left wing workers and unity of the entire working class can only be created by fighting for the interests of the workers on their jobs, in their guilds and crafts and in the municipalities; by a struggle against reaction, against fascism, against the Israeli agents of the war incendiaries and for peace. Working class unity can and must be brought into being by tearing away the mask of the splitters and mouthpieces of the bourgeoisie among the leadership of the working class. Regardless of their political affiliations the Israeli working masses must unite to resist the attack of reaction and to forward the interests of the masses, for the future of the people and the country.