

Elections Show Protest Vote Against Government Parties

By AL FINDLEY

Israel's first, country-wide municipal elections, held on November 14, produced a marked victory for the conservative General Zionists, who campaigned on a platform of free trade in economic policy and for alignment with the United States in foreign affairs.

While it had been expected that the General Zionists would make gains, the extent of their victory was a surprise to everyone. They are now in a position to take the lead in an attempt to build a bourgeois coalition with the possibility of capturing governmental power for the Israeli bourgeoisie.

The General Zionist victory may have far-reaching consequences, but the election did not indicate a marked swing to the right, as the bourgeois press (both Jewish and non-Jewish) have tried to make out.

The election did reveal a protest vote against all the governmental parties. The greatest losers were the other bourgeois parties and the religious bloc. The General Zionists and Mapam, both opposition parties, gained—the first greatly, the second slightly. It is also significant that the extreme right, the Heiruth party, lost heavily, dropping almost one third of its voting strength.

WHICH VOTES SHIFTED?

The result is as follows:
Mapai (Labor Party, the present leading government party): 92,000 votes (28 per cent)—loss of 6.7 per cent from 1949.

General Zionists: 80,000 votes (25 per cent)—gain of 18 per cent.

Mapam (pro-Stalinist labor party): 37,300 votes (11.28 per cent)—gain of one third of 1 per cent.

Communist Party: 7,385 (2.23 per cent)—loss of one third of 1 per cent.

Heiruth: fell from 15.4 per cent of the vote to 10.4 per cent.

Religious bloc: fell from 15.4 per cent to 12.8.

Progressives: dropped from 5 per cent to 3.

Thus it is seen that the greatest part of the General Zionists' gains came not from the labor parties but from the other bourgeois parties. Mapai, however, seems to have lost some of its middle-class support, at least temporarily.

In evaluating the results of the election, we must remember that it took place in the cities and towns of Israel where the population is engaged to a great extent in trade and commerce rather than in manufacturing. The government's economic controls irk these sections much more than others. It is significant that in Haifa, which is more of an industrial city than Tel-Aviv, Mapai lost only 4 per cent, while in Tel-Aviv it lost more than 10 per cent.

A national election, however would also include the colonies and kibbutzim (collective settlements) where Mapai and Mapam have an overwhelming majority, and would therefore give an entirely different picture. Only half the citizens entitled to vote in national elections voted in these municipal elections.

The abandoned Arab towns of Romleh and Lydda, now inhabited by new immigrants, gave the labor parties heavy majorities. This seems to indicate a trend among the new immigrants.

RELIGIOUS ISSUE PALED

The other surprise of the election was the defeat of the religious bloc. All sections of this bloc, which was splintered in this election, lost heavily. While they are still a powerful factor in Israeli political life, they have lost their power of "blackmail" backed up by the votes of the Oriental Jews who are extremely religious. Political and class questions achieved supremacy over religious issues.

The result of the municipal election, of course, increased the clamor for a new national election. The parties of the cabinet coalition had cold water dashed on their electoral hopes and are in no hurry for a new vote. The present coalition is likely to limp along for a while. The cabinet has brought in a bill to fix the term of the present parliament as extending till 1953.

The Mapam, unlike Mapai, did not drop but rather made a slight gain. This was primarily a result of the protest vote against the government coalition, but it points a lesson: the road to victory lies not in the direction of appeasing the bourgeoisie. The victory of the General Zionists will make that party more attractive to the middle-class elements. If Mapai is to maintain its position, it will be forced to make more of a turn toward its working-class following.