

# HOW ISRAEL VOTED

By A. B. Magil

**E**XIT the provisional, enter the elected government of Israel!

Even Ernest Bevin could no longer pretend that the Jewish state was not a fact. Yes, a tiny state, but a massive, irreversible historic fact. And Bevin's senior partner in Washington hastened six days before the balloting to grant a loan that was intended to pay political dividends in the election and after.

This flagrant American intervention had been foreshadowed and its political meaning underlined by one of the leading newspapers in Israel, the right-wing *Haboker*, a General Zionist daily which is the spokesman for the industrialists and landlords. In an editorial last December 26 it wrote: "The fact that Canada's recognition—granted, no doubt under the influence of Washington rather than at the behest of London—has come before the elections in Israel goes to show a significant trend in the Western camp. Should the American loan also come before February—as is quite likely—it will show that the Western pow-

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ers are interested in bringing Israel into their camp. The time has come, they have apparently realized, to prove wrong those who pointed to the Soviet Union and the East European countries as the only friends of Israel. But if the Western powers want to impress their friendliness on us, they had better do so without waiting for the results of the elections in Israel, for otherwise they will only strengthen the hand of those among us who favor an Eastern rather than a Western orientation for Israel."

And after the loan was announced, *Haboker* chortled happily (January 21): "And even if the assumptions of those who declare that the American loan was granted on the eve of the elections in order to prejudice them prove true, we now have concrete evidence that America is at least interested in achieving some influence over us and in gaining our friendship."

Thus the obedient servant welcomes the would-be master. However, the capitalists propose, but the people will have something to say about disposing. The issue of relations with foreign imperialism (chiefly the United States), which is essentially the issue of completing or compromising the struggle for independence, is the central one before the

country. It cannot be said that the first election resolved this issue in the clearcut fashion desired by *Haboker*. Nor can it be said that the election resolved it in an unequivocal anti-imperialist way. The results were mixed, expressing both the aspirations and confusions of a nation in swift transition, preoccupied with the military phase of the independence battle and with the prospects for peace.

### Few Surprises

The election results contained few surprises. It was a foregone conclusion that the Labor Party (Mapai), which held the key positions in the provisional government and controls the powerful trade union federation, Histadrut, would continue to be the country's largest party. At the time I left Israel in October, it was also the consensus among discerning progressives that the United Workers Party (Mapam), a left Zionist group which is the second largest party, would lose ground proportionately, while the Communists would gain. Though American newspaper reports have referred to the "surprising" strength of the United Religious Front, its vote actually represents a slight percentage decline (see table below). The nearest thing to a surprise—a decidedly welcome surprise—was the relatively poor showing of the Irgun *Zvai Leumi*, now masquerading as the Freedom Movement.

Of outstanding significance is the fact that the three workers' parties together won an absolute majority.

Since this is the first election in Israel, there is no accurate past standard for measuring proportionate gain or loss for the various parties. However, there are two rough standards: the elections in 1944 to the *Assefat Haniivcharim*, the Jewish assembly created under the mandate with jurisdiction in communal and religious affairs; and the elections in 1946 to the World Zionist Congress. Such comparisons must of course be approached with considerable reservations. This is so not only because of the special character of the institutions for which the previous elections were held, but even more because of the deep-going changes that have taken place in the *Yishuv* and the much higher level of the political struggle today. It should be remembered that in 1944 and even in 1946 one could not yet speak of a mass Jewish independence movement in Palestine. The Zionist leaders were still able to limit the scope and aim of the popular struggle while they negotiated for concessions that did not alter Palestine's colonial status.

A total of 199,867 valid ballots were cast in the 1944 election, and 196,189 in 1946—in each case less than half of the 427,027 who voted this year. In neither of the past elections did the Arabs participate; in the present balloting the Arabs constituted nearly 10 per cent of the voters.

A further difficulty in making comparisons with the past is that new parties and electoral slates appeared in this election. However, we can get an approximate picture if we compare them with their equivalents in the past. In the case of the United Workers Party we can combine the votes previously received by its three constituent groups: Hashomer

Hatzair, Achdut Haavodah, and Left Poale Zion. The Progressive Party, a liberal middle-class party formed only a few months ago, is likewise a merger of three groups: Aliya Chadasha, the left wing of the General Zionists, and Haoved Hatzioni, a General Zionist workers' party. The United Religious Front, which is an electoral coalition rather than a single party, comprises Mizrachi, Mizrachi Workers (the largest of the groups), Agudat Israel, and Agudat Israel Workers. The latter two did not participate in either of the two past elections, but it is estimated that in 1944 they represented between 6,000 and 7,000 voters, or about 3.4 per cent of those that cast ballots.

As for the Irgun, it did not participate as such in previous elections. However, it can be assumed that in the past the Irgunists voted for the extreme right-wing Revisionist Party, which created the Irgun and was until recently closely associated with it. Most of the former Revisionist voters backed the Irgun in the present election. In fact, one of the significant results was the virtual disappearance of the Revisionists, who received only 2,844 votes, insufficient to elect a single candidate.

Bearing in mind these reservations, we get the following picture for the parties and tickets that elected at least one candidate:

Party	Per cent of Total Vote		
	1944	1946	1949
Labor Party (Mapai).....	36.8	35.1	35.8
United Workers Party (Mapam).....	21.5	24.5	14.8
United Religious Front.....	17.0 <sup>1</sup>	15.5 <sup>1</sup>	12.4
Freedom Movement (Irgun).....		13.7 <sup>2</sup>	11.5 <sup>3</sup>
General Zionists .....	4	4	5.3
Progressive Party .....	14.9 <sup>5</sup>	7.8 <sup>6</sup>	4.1
Sephardim .....	7	7	3.5 <sup>7</sup>
Communist Party .....	2.0	7	3.5 <sup>0</sup>
Arab Democrats of Nazareth.....	7	7	1.7
The Fighters (Stern group) .....	7	7	1.2
Yemenite ticket .....	2.5	7	1.0
WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization) .....	2.2	7	0.9

From this tabulation it is evident that, despite the large influx of new immigrants and the more than twofold increase in the number of voters, no spectacular changes in political alignments have taken place. Concerning Mapai, a traditional social democratic party, what is notable is that its percentage of the vote is virtually unchanged despite the fact that, besides controlling the trade unions, it now has a

<sup>1</sup>Includes an estimated 3.4 per cent for Agudat Israel and Agudat Israel Workers in 1944, and an estimated 3 per cent for them in 1946. They did not participate in either year.

<sup>2</sup>This is the Revisionist Party vote. The Revisionists boycotted the 1944 election.

<sup>3</sup>If we add the small Revisionist vote, the percentage for this trend is 12.2.

<sup>4</sup>The General Zionists formerly consisted of two parties, Groups A and B. In 1944 only Group A participated in the election, receiving 2.4 per cent of the vote. In 1946 the General Zionist Party, after the fusion of the two groups, received 3.9 per cent of the vote. In 1949 the General Zionists, split once more, consisted substantially of the right-wing Group B, while most of Group A had become part of the Progressive Party.

<sup>5</sup>Includes the vote of the General Zionists, Group A.

<sup>6</sup>To this figure there would have to be added a small percentage for General Zionists, Group A, which it is difficult to estimate.

<sup>7</sup>Did not participate.

vast state and military apparatus at its command. Moreover, as the chief governmental party, it is able to take credit for the creation of the Jewish state and the remarkable military victories—trusting that the voters' memories will not extend to the time when Mapai was one of the most pro-British parties in the *Yishuv*, or to the more recent period when Prime Minister Ben Gurion was in sharp conflict with those dynamic Left forces in the army that were largely responsible for routing the invaders.

One of the positive results of the election is the setback for the Irgun. This party of nascent Jewish fascism spent thousands of American dollars in a lavish campaign pitched on a note of extreme chauvinist demagoguery. Its vote exposes the hollow claims made for it by its American press agents.

What about the progressive forces? Here the results are mixed. The decline in the vote percentage of the United Workers Party can be largely attributed to its wavering policy and failure to give fighting leadership to the working people of city and countryside. Its public declarations are usually excellent: it is against the government's appeasement of American and British imperialism; it demands cooperation with Israel's real friends, the Soviet Union and the new people's democracies; it criticizes the failure to control prices and the soak-the-poor tax system; it attacks official efforts to undermine the democratic character of the army. All this would have won wider support for Mapam were it not for the fact that too often this party has contented itself with words, while in practice dragging after the Labor Party. Moreover, many workers were unable to understand why a party, which talks so militantly and describes itself as Marxist, refused to join with the Communists in a united front for the elections.

The Communist Party, while still a small organization, almost doubled its proportionate vote as compared with 1944. Moreover, it was the only party that put up both Jewish and Arab candidates, expressing the unity of the



**Elected: Samuel Mikunis**

eral secretary, Samuel Mikunis. Of the 129 Communist candidates 26 were Arabs. Most of these were veterans of

the former League of National Liberation, a communist-led organization whose struggles against the Arab reactionaries and for peace and friendship with the Jews won it considerable influence among the Arab population.

But one must look beneath the surface of the vote to find the deeper currents flowing in the *Yishuv*. Though foreign policy was the central issue, Mapai and the capitalist parties did everything to obscure it. Only Mapam and the Communists called for opposition to Anglo-American imperialism and cooperation with the progressive forces of the world, headed by the USSR and the peoples' democracies. Their combined vote, constituting nearly one-fifth of the total (and in the case of Mapam especially strong in the armed forces) therefore represents the clearest expression of the anti-imperialist course essential for genuine independence.

But it would be a mistake to conclude that anti-imperialist sentiment is limited to the supporters of these two parties. During six months in Israel I was struck by two prevalent attitudes: a deep desire for freedom from all foreign domination, and a warmth of feeling for the Soviet Union and its allies as a result of the great help they have given Israel. Because of this popular mood no party dared openly to advocate a pro-imperialist policy, as most of them did under the mandate. The Mapai leaders, by professing to steer a neutral course "between East and West," attempted to conceal the fact that they are steering more and more by the Washington compass.

At the same time it needs to be recognized that the anti-imperialist attitudes of the majority of the people are still largely inchoate and entangled in nationalist and chauvinist confusions. This is exploited by the Mapai leadership and the capitalist parties with whom they collaborate so intimately. Undoubtedly the Labor Party chiefs and the new government they head regard the election results as a mandate to press forward with a policy which, if not reversed, will eventually convert Israel into a semi-colony and war base of American imperialism. Whether a formidable opposition to this policy develops within the country largely depends on how quickly the members of the United Workers Party, learning from their leaders' mistakes in the elections, join hands with their Communist comrades in forging a broad, democratic, anti-imperialist alignment that can also involve large sections of Mapai rank and file.

But a big job must be done in America by Americans, Jews and non-Jews alike. The American loan is evidently a token of the kindness that kills. *Davar*, Israel's leading newspaper and the one closest to the government, writes in its issue of January 21 that "it is reported" that the \$35,000,000 of the Export-Import Bank credit which has already been granted—about one-third of the eventual total—cannot be used for the development of the Negev. Clearly a crass example of economic pressure to achieve the political aim of forcing Israel to give up all or part of the Negev and in general to "play ball." Isn't it time for progressive public opinion in America to renew the fight against the carrot-and-club policy by which the bi-partisan cabal is betraying not only Israel, but the best interests of our own country?