

that Shas, Agudat and the National Religious Party finally backed Shamir.

The upsurge of the religious parties in the elections has different reasons:

- Labor and Likud's failure to give a clear answer to the problems facing 'Israel', which provoked a protest vote in favor of the religious parties.

- A return to traditional (fundamentalist) religion similar to the one observed in the western world, resulting from the alienation and hopelessness generated by capitalist societies.

- The crisis in Zionism and the fall of its democratic facade in the last years, which pushed many secular people to return to religion in order to legitimate their presence in Palestine.

- The increase of the religious sector due to the immense development of the religious establishment and the fact that immigration since 1967 has been increasingly based on religious motivations, as well as a high birth rate in the ultra-Orthodox population.

The reactions to the religious parties' demands were generally negative. The majority of Israelis are not particularly religious and are disturbed by seeing their life directed even more by religious law. The Orthodox rabbis already control the registration of births, deaths, marriages, the granting of divorce, along with the regulation of hotels, restaurants and places of entertainment. Besides, many Israelis are angry to see a minority which enjoys privileges, such as not having to serve in the army, trying to impose its will.

The proposed amendment of the Law of Return has provoked an outcry from Jewish communities everywhere. Jews identifying themselves with the Conservative or Reform trends have been sending one delegation after the other to 'Israel' in order to convince the political leaders to block the demands of the religious parties. American Jewish organizations and rabbis, who have always avoided public criticism of Israeli policies, and conveyed an image of unconditional support, have now signalled that the alienation resulting from a change in the Law of Return might affect that support which has always been essential to 'Israel' and is especially so now, because of growing Israeli isolation in the face of the PLO's peace offensive.

## LABOR DIVIDED

The big loser of this election is Shimon Peres who is now facing the consequences of declaring that he wants peace on the one hand, meanwhile having Rabin practice the iron fist policy against the Palestinian people on the other. With King Hussein's decision to sever ties with the West Bank, Peres' Jordanian option was dealt a deadly blow. Labor lost one-half of its Palestinian vote as a result of its policy against the uprising, and the majority of the Israeli electorate still decided that other forces were more able either to achieve peace or to suppress the uprising. But the worst problem Labor is facing now is internal divisions. Rabin and the hawks within Labor worked to strengthen their position in the party; they favored a coalition with Likud and a continuation of the current policy of brutally suppressing the uprising. On the other hand, leading figures, like Uzi Baram and Ezer Weizmann, and a large number of the party's young cadre and rank-and-file think that going into opposition is the best thing to do, in order for Labor to clarify its positions. They want a change in Labor and are open to taking the uprising and the decisions of the PNC in Algiers into consideration. There was talk that Rabin and his supporters might leave Labor and join Likud. On the other hand, a coalition government, in which Labor plays the role of a junior partner, might increase the dissatisfaction within the party and eventually lead to a split to the left. Peres remains in a personal dilemma: He knows very well that one of the first steps Labor would undertake if it goes into opposition would be a critical reassessment of his policy, which would probably cost him his position. By allying with Likud, he may retain his seat as a minister, but with a divided party behind him.

## POLITICAL BANKRUPTCY

Likud, though also affected by internal rivalries, appeared much stronger in terms of internal unity and firm positions. The problem it faced was how to set up a government. A coalition with the extreme right parties, Tzomet (two seats), Tehiya (three seats) and Moledet (two seats), and the religious parties, was problematic not so much because Likud disagreed with

them on political issues, but because it might have created problems with support to 'Israel' from abroad, and deepened the split between the secular majority and the religious minority. On the other hand, a coalition with Labor on the same basis as the previous one had proven to be unviable. So Likud worked to pressure Labor into a coalition in which Labor would be forced to give up its plan for establishing 'peace', namely its project for a ceremonial international conference.

Another option was to form a coalition government on the basis of changing the electoral law, in order to raise the percentage of votes needed by parties to enter the parliament. This would lead to more clear-cut results and majorities; still it doesn't absolve the Israelis of having to face their crisis and to realize that there is only one solution to it: breaking with Zionist tenets and recognizing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Though mentioned as an aim of the newly formed government, electoral reform is not its central issue.

The election results showed that whatever government was set up, no real qualitative change is to be expected in Israeli policy in the near future. One indicator of this is Peres' and Shamir's identical rejection of the decisions taken by the PLO in the 19th session of the PNC.

The deadlock in the Israeli political life was dramatically expressed in the petty bargaining which took place to form a government and the failure of the big parties to see the main contradiction, the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinian people, as the first to be solved. This will lead to further isolation of 'Israel' and increase its dependency on political and financial support from the US. With the cease-fire in the Gulf war, and first and foremost the uprising of the Palestinian people and the facts it has created, much of the world's attention is now focusing on this conflict. In the new atmosphere of detente and widespread understanding that regional conflicts need a political solution, it is clear, more than ever before, that 'Israel' is an anomaly in the modern world, and that Zionism, like apartheid, cannot be reformed.