

Elections

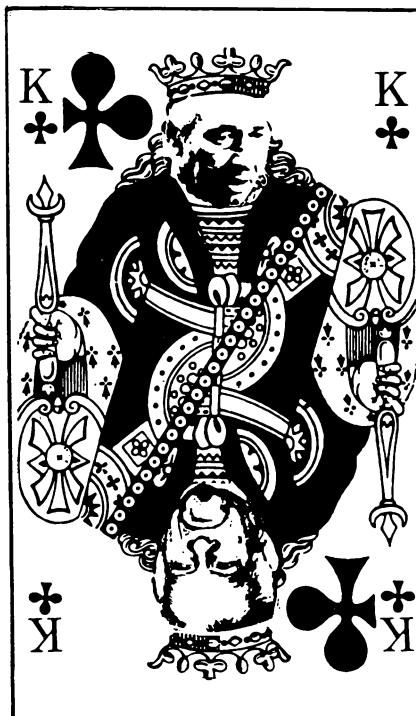
New proof of Zionism's ability to contain social discontent, and possibly the prelude to new aggression

The outcome of the July 23rd elections ruffled the consolidation of the right which has been the dominant trend in Israeli society in recent years. Yet it did not reverse or seriously disrupt this trend. Despite Likud's disastrous economic policy and the unprecedented dissent raised by the war in Lebanon, the Labor Alignment did not obtain a clear electoral mandate for an alternative course.

Given the underlying sameness of Likud and Labor concerning expansion and colonialization - the hallmarks of Zionism, there was no rational reason to expect meaningful change in Israeli policy towards the Palestinian question, withdrawal from Lebanon, etc. There were, however, widespread predictions that Labor would get sufficient votes to form a government in view of the economic situation. On the contrary, the elections affirmed that social discontent in 'Israel' is still easily absorbed. Despite Likud's having presided over the steady worsening of the crisis, social discontent did not merge into a massive shift away from the extreme right.

Discontent was instead reflected in a relative fragmentation of votes as compared with the 1981 elections, when Likud and Labor together accounted for 80% of the votes. This time the figure was 70%, giving Labor 44 Knesset seats and Likud 42. Fifteen lists gained representation as opposed to ten in 1981. With few exceptions, this spreading of voting was between lists whose political differences are so small as to be almost irrelevant if one is not a Zionist. Yet the added leverage of the small parties make the formation of a new government even more difficult than in 1981 when this process took over a month. This is especially true because the gains of the smaller parties were roughly divided between the far left and right. (Except for the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, whose main component Rakah is a genuine left force, our use of the terms *left* and *right* are relative to the spectrum of Zionist politics.)

To the left of Labor, the new Arab-Jewish Progressive List for Peace



acquired two Knesset seats without this reducing the representation of the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality which retained its four seats. The Citizens' Rights Movement, which advocates immediate withdrawal from Lebanon and some vague form of Palestinian self-determination (without the PLO of course), rose from one seat to three, having formed a common list with Baron of Peace Now and Ran Cohen of Sheli. Shinui, also considered dovish, gained three seats as opposed to two last time.

To the right of Likud, Tehiya, which opposed returning the Sinai, got five seats as compared to three in 1981, having consolidated itself by joining forces with Tzomet of General Eitan, the butcher of Lebanon. The blatantly fascist tendency within Zionism gained an official place and thus added immunity in the Israeli system, as Rabbi Kahane's KACH list gained a seat for the first time. Kahane celebrated by leading his gang on a rampage through Arab East Jerusalem. KACH now plans to escalate its presence in the Galilee and Triangle and has vowed to stage a similar «march» through Um al Fahm, known as

a center for Palestinian social and cultural activities.

In view of the lack of clear-cut plurality for either Labor or Likud, the religious parties, whose composite weight remained the same, and the three seats gained by former Defense Minister Weizman are pivotal in forming a new government.

This is the background for the current negotiations where Likud and Labor are both scrambling to form their own government or at least preempt the other from doing so. The complexity of this process and its possible failure have raised the prospect of national unity government. There are also speculations about holding new elections after three months. Whatever the final results in terms of a government, the election results made a mockery of the illusions of Arab and Palestinian right-wingers who banked on Labor's return to edge their way into the imperialist settlement. In addition to the ultimate fallacy of expecting real concessions from Labor, the election results rule out the possibility of a strong Labor government which could implement its own policy unilaterally. Yet one should not be deceived by the seeming fragmentation on the Israeli political scene. In reality it masks a deeper unity between Zionism's main currents and the consistent rightwards march of Israeli politics, accentuated in times of crisis.

The campaign

The campaign itself reflected the higher unity in Zionism and the continued strength of the right. There was a kind of non-aggression pact between the Likud and the Labor to avoid the violence that plagued the 1981 campaign. Both were aware of the disastrous consequences of real division in the colonial-settler state. Labor in particular is afraid of the extreme right which has demonstrated its capacity for using violence even against fellow Jews. Labor's campaign was not a frontal attack on the Likud; the latter's policies were not emphasized as being wrong but as not having worked. Labor's most publicized