

sions, based on the percentage of eastern Jews in the total population. In reality, this is the political expression of a class question; it is not related to the number of eastern Jews, but to the emergence and growth of a class force in the society.

The Tami party, claiming to represent the eastern Jews, obtained only 2.3% of the 1981 vote. This is one indication that the immigrants' origin does not necessarily dictate their political choice. Other, more decisive forces govern Israeli voting patterns. Moreover, the Jewish population of 'Israel' is not only composed of immigrants from east or west. By 1981, 58% were born in 'Israel' as opposed to 26.3% in 1950. Of the remainder in 1981, 19.1% had immigrated from Asia or Africa, and 23.9% from Europe or America. This means that the majority are more a product of the new society than of the one from which they came.

Without denying that there is an ethnic problem in 'Israel', one must determine its true extent and whether it is growing or receding. Given that there is material discrimination against eastern Jews, there can be two alternatives: (1) joining a political institution with an ethnic character, or (2) joining an institution that rejects the basis of this discrimination. The first alternative is represented by the Tami, whose limited size we have noted. The second is represented by the Israeli Communist Party, today Rakah. Without going into the details of this party's development, it is known that its main base of support is among Palestinian Arabs, and that it has proved difficult to expand its base among the Jewish population despite various efforts.

In summary, the great majority of eastern Jews opted for neither of these alternatives. The size of the ethnic and class problem was so small as to keep the door open for a political alternative based on the programs of the major parties which deal with the major problems of the society as a whole.

### **Political division or active political life?**

'Israel' has an active political life, facilitated by an electoral system of proportional representation whereby a party needs only one percent of the vote to gain Knesset representation. This gives the appearance of political division: many election lists, splits and shifting alliances. We must go behind these surface phenomena to discover the logic

which guides Israeli political life. This can be summarized as follows:

1. Divisions and shifts in Israeli parties to the right...This is an experience shared by the Marxist left as well as the Zionist left and the right. For example, Mapam, the Labor Party's partner in the Alignment coalition, presented itself as Marxist for many years until eventually denying this identity. When the Israeli Communist Party split in 1965, the Jewish majority separated in an attempt to create a synthesis between Zionism and Marxism, then departed from Marxism altogether and eventually disappeared. Mapai, the Labor Party, experienced a division led by Ben Gurion who participated in the 1965 elections as Rafi, along with Peres, Horowitz, Dayan, etc. Later some of Rafi's figures returned to Labor, while others joined other parties to the right. Mapai also experienced the advance of its hawkish wing at the expense of doves.

On the Zionist right, there was growing inclination towards unity. This resulted in the formation of the Gahal coalition and later the Likud, which came to power in 1977. Similar to the development in Mapai, the hawkish wing gained strength. Those to the right of Begin in terms of rejecting Camp David, gained the initiative: Shamir, Arens, Orgad. New rightist formations gained Knesset representation: Tehiya.

2. The gravitation of Israeli voters towards the big coalitions...Despite the many electoral lists and the emergence of new ones, the proportion of votes to these lists decreased in favor of the two main coalitions. Lists based on individuals gained little weight even when headed by prominent figures. Also, the traditional religious parties gravitated towards the Likud which attracted an increasing number of their voters.

3. The basis for polarization is political as opposed to ethnic or social factors.

### **The material base for the right's entrenchment**

The general direction of political development in 'Israel' is to the right. We do not expect dramatic results in this election that will reverse this trend, for it has deep material causes. The shift to the right can be traced to political and social conditions in 'Israel'; especially since 1970, there has been a qualitative shift that has moved increasing strata of the population to new class positions. The era is past when the state and Histadrut controlled everything through the

Labor Party and the economic, social and political absorption of new immigrants. The Israeli economy has been transformed in a way that the industrial sector gained dominance; within it, modern technological industry became the base.

The Israeli economy absorbs over 200,000 Arab workers in a total labor force of 1.5 million. This allows a sizeable portion of the Jewish labor force to leave its former position in production for 'superior' work. This is not primarily a question of moving to the service sector, but of rising to the position of professionals and experts. This has augmented the labor aristocracy and given the right a new reserve force.

As an example of this trend: In 1960 there were 98,800 Israeli Jews working in agriculture, among them 36,100 wage laborers. By 1981, despite the Jewish population's increase from 1.9 million to 3.2 million, the number of Jewish agricultural workers was only 61,200, among them 15,700 wage laborers.

The economic transformation of the Jewish labor force has had its social consequences. Statistics on private car ownership and housing provide indications of this. Of wage laborers (heads of families), 3.6% owned a car in 1962. By 1981, this figure was 38.5%. This is not far from the 45.7% of self-employed who owned a car in the same year. The above figures also include Palestinian Arabs, of whom in 1981, 13.3% owned a car. Taking their percentage into account and also accounting for recent developments, we can project that approximately one-half of Jewish wage laborers own a car today.

Concerning housing: In 1967, 41.4% of families resided in houses with an average of one per room. In 1981, the figure was 54.6%. In the same period, the number of families with two or more per room fell from 31.3% to 11.9%; those with three or more per room fell from 10.2% to 1.4%.

In this context, it is important to point out that: (1) Social comfort did not begin with the Likud; and (2) There is a deep link between the socio-economic development and the 1967 war which gave 'Israel' and its economy a vital opportunity for expansion. The occupied territories are not only a religious or political affair but have become a direct interest for an increasing number of Jewish citizens. This is among the basic material causes of the transition to the right, which began almost two decades ago. ●