

Political Changes Loom in Israel

Businessmen Press for Concessions, Split Possible in the Mapam

By AL FINDLEY

For the first time since the establishment of the state of Israel, the Jewish bourgeoisie has begun a serious political offensive with the hope of gaining governmental power.

As steppingstones on their road to power they hope to use the economic difficulties of a poor country, which was never self-sufficient even before partition and whose economy is now carrying the additional burdens of large-scale immigration, a disproportionately large burden of armaments and is hampered by the cutting of normal trade between "industrial" Israel and the surrounding Arab Palestine.

A few weeks ago the Ministry of Supply introduced rationing of clothing in line with the Mapai (Labor Party) policy of austerity. The bourgeoisie met this by declaring a nation-wide strike of shopkeepers. In the Knesset (parliament) the demand was raised by all bourgeois groups for the lifting of controls and a return to "free enterprise" by all bourgeois groups from the Heruth (Irgun) Party to the bourgeois parties which are in the government coalition with the Mapai. The impossibility of a free economy in a country where imports exceed exports by the ratio of eight to one does not bother the bourgeoisie. Free trade would enable them to raise prices and reap enormous profits.

The American Jewish bourgeoisie has joined the fight. A large minority led by Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver is pressing for a resolution by the American Zionist Organization demanding that the Israeli government change its present economic policy.

Most writers believe that if an election were held now the conservative General Zionists in Israel would come out greatly strengthened. There is, however, no evidence to support this belief. All by-elections have returned the same proportions as the previous national election.

Concessions to Capital

What seems more logical to this writer is that the religious bloc would gain, primarily as a result of the large influx of predominantly religious Jews from Asia and Africa. The question still remains whether the religious labor parties or the religious bourgeois parties would get these new votes.

The Mapai, which controls the government and which has grown substantially—it now has 70,000 members—is meeting the "threat" in a number of ways.

On the economic side it has made sizable concessions to capital. It passed a law giving many privileges to foreign capital and it has promised to modify the rationing program to meet some of the demands of the merchants. It has adopted the line of proposing plans for the increased production and productivity of labor and it lays the blame for lack of progress on "sabotage" by the manufacturers.

Politically the Mapai is hoping for two things.

It is attempting to unify the Israeli trade-union movement by detaching the religious labor groups from the bourgeoisie and getting these groups to join the Histadruth (the General Federation of Jewish Labor in Israel).

The largest single religious trade-union group and Zionist political party is the Hapoel Hamizrochi. The "Lamishneh" faction of Hapoel Hamizrochi favors entry into the Histadruth and is on the road to a majority in that organization. One union, the teachers' union of the Hapoel Hamizrochi, has already voted to unite with the Histadruth organization of teachers.

The Hapoel Hamizrochi has succeeded in forming a united organization with the non-Zionist religious labor organization, the Poale Agudath Israel. If the Hapoel Hamizrochi breaks away from its bourgeois mentors and joins the Histadruth, it will probably carry the Poale Agudath Israel with it. The success of such a unification will not only weaken the bourgeois bloc but will also proportionately reduce the specific weight of the Mapam (pro-Stalinist labor group) within the Histadruth.

Mapam Divided on Stalinism

The Mapai also hopes for the expected split in the pro-Stalinist Mapam. The Mapam—whose name means United Labor Party—was originally formed by the unification of three groups: the Hashomer Hatzair, the Left Poale Zion and the Achduth Avodah, a left-wing splitoff from the Mapai. These were later joined by a fourth group, the expelled Preminger wing of the Communist Party.

Mapam has not been experiencing the growth it expected as a result of the burdens of the austerity program and the miseries of the new immigrants. It has suffered as a result of the anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish policies of Russia and the satellite countries. Mapam seems, however, to have held its own and has even won some elections within the Histadruth.

For the past year the Mapam has been driven more and more down the road to Stalinism. The lead in this drive has been the Israeli leadership of Hashomer Hatzair, aided by

the unprincipled politician Moshe Zvev, the former head of Haganah. On all questions from Korea to Titoism and the Stockholm "peace" petition, Mapam has taken a 100 per cent Stalinist line. It has made its Stalinist foreign policy the main and decisive issue of policy. It turned down entry into either a coalition cabinet or into a Mapai-Mapam government primarily on the ground that Mapai would not go along with support of "peace moves of the Soviet Union."

The leaders of Hashomer Hatzair have been turning more and more toward Stalinism ideologically in addition to supporting Russian foreign policy. In a May Day article entitled "We and Communism," Riftin calls on the Mapam to become a "communist party." He goes the whole hog and justifies even the lack of democracy in the Stalinist parties.

Hashomer Goes Whole Hog

The rationale for Mapam's need to become a "communist party" is as follows. Stalinism is now the only force for socialism, according to Riftin. The social-democrats are excluded by their reformism and their support of the imperialist war. The Independent Labor Party of England is disintegrating. The so-called "left-wing" socialist parties like Nenni's in Italy are not independent ideological tendencies but anterooms to Stalinism. The Trotskyists hardly exist, Riftin adds. Therefore, he concludes, Mapam must become a "communist"—i.e., Stalinist—party.

While he points to the crimes of the social-democrats, he completely ignores any crimes of the Stalinists and above all completely ignores the crucial question that if there is no anti-war Third Camp now there is a need to create one. Surely a "pioneer" cannot ignore such a vital point!

The Hashomer Hatzair, with its separate organization and tight discipline, is in a position to dominate the Mapam, since it casts a solid vote despite any differences within its own ranks.

The extreme policy of extreme pro-Stalinism has caused friction with the other important section of Mapam, the Achduth Avodah. The latter's leaders include Israel Gallilee, former commander of Palmach, and Tobenkin, ideologist of the Kibbutz (collective) movement. While Achduth Avodah goes along with support of Russia, they object to the emphasis placed on foreign policy. They place their emphasis on domestic issues. They put greater emphasis on the Zionist aspect of their ideology and support entry into a Mapai-Mapam government if given concessions on internal issues.

The Jewish press has been talking about the possibilities of a split in Mapam. In the Kibbutzim (collectives), Mapai and Mapam are engaged in political discussions. Lately the component units of Mapam have been voting separately within the Histadruth, the Hashomer Hatzair supporting CP motions and the rest of Mapam abstaining. According to one report, the latter abstained even on the Stockholm "peace" petition, crucial as it is to the Stalinoids.

The "Neutrality" Question

Nobody can say whether or not the split will finally take place. If it does, there will be considerable realignment—ideological, party and governmental—in Israel. While there is no immediate hope for the emergence of a real Third Camp position, opposed both to Western capitalism and to Russian imperialism, the event would surely strengthen the advocates of "neutrality."

All parties in Israel are officially in favor of neutrality in the struggle between the Western and Russian blocs. Mapam and the Stern group have twisted neutrality to mean support of Russia and its satellites, which, they claim, is not a "bloc" but leaders of a progressive movement. The bourgeois parties do the same for the Western bloc. The government, however, on the whole, carried out a fairly strict policy of neutrality up to the Korean war.

On Korea the Israeli government—like Nehru, also an advocate of "neutrality"—supported the U. S. Like Nehru also, the Israeli government then proclaimed that its policy was not one of "neutrality" but of independence from prior commitment to either bloc. Israeli is free to act, said the government, with one bloc on one occasion and with the other bloc on the other occasion, depending on the merits of the issue.

The decision to support the U. S. in Korea was so unpopular at first with the rank and file even of Mapai that a spokesman issued the ridiculous statement that the Russians would not be offended but would understand that Israel had to act the way it did. But later the Mapai leaders came out strongly for the pro-U. S. turn and carried on a long campaign for their policy.

The fact that the Arab states did not go along with the U. S. gave their policy the aura of a "smart move" to obtain arms and economic aid from the U. S. These two factors seem to have obtained a limited if reluctant support to the government policy of supporting the U. S. on Korea.