

Socialist International Bureau Meeting

a severe set-back in elections on March 23 in the nine provincial councils of the Netherlands. The set-back had been pre-figured in the results of a local election in Spijkenisse the previous week at which the Labour Party had lost 5 per cent of its votes. In the provincial council elections, at which over seven million people voted, the Labour Party's share of the poll fell by 6.5 to 23.4 per cent, compared with 29.9 per cent in the 1962 provincial council elections. Compared with general elections of 1963 the drop in the Party's share of the poll was 4.6 per cent. Its total vote dropped from 1,805,808 in 1962 to 1,580,655. It now has 170 seats out of 673 in the provincial councils, compared with 207 out of 665 in 1962.

The election was regarded as an interim verdict on the national Coalition Government, which is composed of the Labour Party, the Catholic Party and the Protestant Party. Viewed in this light, the Labour Party's decision last April to join the government has turned sour in electoral terms. Its two coalition partners also lost support but not as markedly as the Labour Party. The Catholics, who previously had 32.4 per cent of the votes, lost 2.3 per cent, and the Protestants, who had 8.8 per cent, lost 0.5 per cent.

The main victors in the elections, as in the Belgian general election last year, were the extremist parties of the Right and Left. The Right-wing Boer (Farmers') Party increased its share of the vote from 0.2 per cent in 1962 to 6.7 per cent. It even won four seats in urban Amsterdam. The Left-wing Pacifist Socialist Party increased its share of the poll from 3.0 in 1962 to 5.0 per cent. Of the two parties which the Labour Party replaced in government last year, the Christian Historical Union's share of the poll rose from 8.4 per cent in 1962 to 9.33 per cent, while the Liberals retained their 10 per cent of the poll. The other parties, including the Communists with 2.7 per cent, all held their share of the poll.

Commenting in the election results, the Chairman of the Labour Party, J. G. H. Tans, said: "During our country-wide campaign we became aware of a general feeling of malaise. People felt their existence threatened, particularly where structural changes were occurring—the miners, the middle class, the peasants. It represents a warning for all the big democratic parties. Right-wing extremism demands our very close attention. We must think a good deal more seriously about the basis of party formation in our country."

A regular meeting of the Bureau of the Socialist International was held at St. Ermine's Hotel, London, on April 3, under the Chairmanship of Bruno Pittermann (Austria). It was attended by: Karl Czernetz, Robert Rauscher (Austria), Victor Larock (Belgium), Pauli Burman, Undo Niemi (Finland), Pierre Herbaut, Robert Pontillon (France), Hans-Eberhard Dingels (Germany), Anthony Greenwood, A. L. Williams, Gwyn Morgan (Great Britain), S. Levenberg (Israel), Antonio Cariglia (Italy), Pieter Dankert (Netherlands), Anders Thunborg (Sweden), Pamela Peachey (Women's Secretary), Albert Carthy (Secretary), Günther Hotzan (Assistant).

The Bureau sent its warmest congratulations to the British Labour Party on its overwhelming victory in the general elections. The delegates from the Labour Party pointed out that the Labour Party had achieved in 18 months the majority which it had taken the Conservative Party nine years to attain.

The Bureau also congratulated the Finnish Social Democratic Party on its resounding general election victory. A report on the general elections held in Austria on March 6 stressed the dangers of a resurgence of extreme Right-wing tendencies in Austria as a result of the election. The Austrian delegate also stated that the Socialist Party's set-back was a relatively small price to pay compared with the very real danger of a split in the Socialist movement.

The Bureau heard a report from the delegate from the Democratic Socialist Party of Italy (P.S.D.I.) on the progress towards Socialist unification in Italy. It decided, on the proposition of the P.S.D.I., that the (Nenni) Socialist Party should for the first time be invited to attend the Congress as a fraternal guest.

The Bureau expressed its grave concern at the recent imprisonment of the veteran Iranian Socialist, Khalil Maleki, and decided to make an appeal to the Shah of Iran for clemency. The Bureau sent a message to the United Socialist Party of Korea wishing it well on its resumption of activities. The Bureau recommended that the Febrerist Revolutionary Party of Paraguay be accepted by Congress to observer membership of the International. Parties from NATO countries expressed their understanding and support for the French Socialist Party's attitude to de Gaulle's NATO policy [see page 99].

The Bureau made final arrangements for the Congress of the Socialist International to be held in Stockholm on May 5-8 and for the Special Conference to be held in Uppsala, April 27-29. The theme of the Special Conference will be "Democratic Socialism in the New Countries" and invitations have been extended to a number of leading Socialists from Africa, Asia and Latin America. At Stockholm the following debates will be held in public: "The International Situation", to be introduced by Tage Erlander, Harold Wilson and Willy Brandt; "The European Problem in the World Context", introduced by Guy Mollet, George Brown and Bruno Kreisky; "Democratic Socialism in the New Countries", introduced by Lee Kuan Yew; "Disarmament", introduced by Lord Chalfont and Alva Myrdal. Congress will meet in closed session to discuss the following subjects: "Problems of Liaison in Africa", "Liaison Machinery for Asia-Oceania" and "Liaison in Latin America".

The Congress will be preceded by the Conference of the International Council of Social Democratic Women, and meetings of a number of committees of the Socialist International, including the Study Group on Eastern European Questions, the Spain Committee, the Standing Joint Committee on Developing Areas, the Contact Committee on European Integration and the Bureau. The Executive Committee of the Socialist Union of Central Eastern Europe will hold a meeting, in place of a full Congress, on May 2. The Council of the Socialist International will meet on May 5 immediately prior to the opening of the Congress.

Among those expected to attend, who are not mentioned above in connexion with the agenda, are: Bruno Pittermann (Austria), Paul-Henri Spaak (Belgium), Jose Figueres (Costa Rica), Jens-Otto Krag (Denmark), Rafael Paasio (Finland), Golda Meir (Israel), Seichi Katsumata (Japan), Laurent Bototeky (Malagasy Republic), Dom Mintoff (Malta), Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam (Mauritius), Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre (Peru) and Humberto Maiztegui (Latin American Secretary of the Socialist International). As well as representatives of established parties, parties still struggling for liberty will attend, including ZANU and ZAPU of Southern Rhodesia, FRELIMO of Mozambique and A.S.P. of Portugal.