The election to the first Bundestag (lower house of parliament) of the Federal Republic of Germany on Aug. 14 resulted in a clear-cut victory for the parties of the right.

In the first free election to a German parliament since early 1933, the Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union block, championing the policy of free economy, obtained the plurality. It polled 7,357,579 votes and led the Socialists, advocates of a planned economy, by 425,307 votes.

The largest gain in the election, however, was made by the Free Democrats, the party of economic liberalism. FDP’s poll went up from 9.5 percent of the total vote in the state legislative elections of 1946/7 to 11.5 percent in the Bundestag election.

Big gains were also registered by the right-wing German Party and the German Right Party, which are sternly opposed to state interference in business.

These results indicate that the majority of the voters of western Germany, satisfied with the encouraging economic recovery of the past year, endorse the policy of a free economy carried out by Prof. Ludwig Erhard, director of economics in the Bizonal Economic Administration.

The CDU/CSU, on whose ticket Erhard ran for the Bundestag, received the plurality, and the FDP, his warm supporters, came in a good third, but the Social Democrats, who spearheaded the opposition to his policies in the election campaign as they did in the Economic Council in Frankfurt during 1948 and 1949, polled less than one-third of the entire vote.

As a result of the vindication of the Erhard policies at the polls, it is to be expected that the conservative elements will rule western Germany the next few years. Not only will the policy of a free economy presumably be maintained, but the socialization of the heavy industry of the Ruhr, which has been much discussed since the war, apparently will be laid away for several years to come.

A notable feature of the election was the high size of the poll—78.5 percent. It will be noted that only 662,942 of the 24,387,051 votes cast were invalid. This figure of electoral participation is itself an eloquent testimony to the interest that the German citizens have in their newly-regained democratic institutions. The campaign of certain circles to persuade the voters to keep away from the polls or to cast invalid ballots was signal unsuccessful.

The election was also a decisive victory supporting the Bonn Basic Law. The SPD, the CDU and the FDP, all of which supported the new charter of German democracy, led the field. Also, support of the Basic Law, now that it is in effect, can be expected from some of the parties that had opposed the constitutional draft on the night of May 8 when it was finally adopted at Bonn, such as the CSU (although two of its eight delegates voted for it in the Parliamentary Council), the Center Party and probably even the German Party.

Except for a few deviations, the election of Aug. 14 followed the pattern established by the state legislative elections of 1946-47. Both the CDU/CSU and the SPD lost ground, but they maintained their relative positions with the former dropping from 37.6 percent to 31 percent of the poll and the SPD falling from 35 percent to 29.2 percent.

The SPD, which suffered its most severe losses in Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony and Hesse, attributed part of its decline to the fact that the British Labor Government is standing adamant on the question of dismantling of German factories. Dr. Kurt Schumacher, the SPD leader, was cautious in his comments on the attitude of the British Socialists on this issue, but the German voters evidently held his party responsible for the failure to make the Labor Government relent.

Probably a stronger factor for the relative failure of the SPD was the attitude of the women voters. This inference is drawn from the poll in Cologne where a separate count was made of men’s and women’s votes. This showed that the two major parties were approximately equal on the basis of the men’s vote and in one district in the city the SPD candidate would have won, if the men alone had voted.

SPD supporters claim that the heavy women’s vote for the CDU was due to the intervention of the Catholic Church on behalf of that party.

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claim was posed on statements that in many parishes in North Rhine-Westphalia, for example, the Catholic Church formed so-called “emergency associations for freedom of conscience and human rights” which urged parishioners to vote either for the CDU or the Center Party.

But while the loss of the SPD was relative, the defeat of the Communists was complete and absolute. Although the total Bundestag vote was 6,000,000 higher than in the legislative elections, the Communists were the only party whose vote decreased. The KPD poll dropped from 9.5 percent in 1946-47 to 5.7 percent and the party sent only 15 deputies to the Bundestag.

In consequence of this electoral debacle, the KPD on the basis of seats obtained has ceased for the time being to be one of the “Big Four” political organizations of Western Germany and has been relegated to a standing similar to that of a splinter party. Thus in the Bundestag the KPD will have fewer seats than either the Bavaria Party and the German Party which are little more than regional organizations.

THE CAUSES for the heavy Communist defeat are not far to seek. The ill-fated blockade of Berlin by the Soviet Military Administration, the reign of oppression carried on in the Soviet Zone, and the tales of ill-treatment in Russia brought home by returning prisoners of war all recoiled on the head of the KPD.

Even more fatal, perhaps, was the fact that West Germany is now flooded with some 9,000,000 refugees from what was Eastern Germany, who have brutally been told by Walter Ulbricht, the master-mind of the Soviet-sponsored Socialist Unity Party in the eastern zone, that they must abandon all hope of ever returning to their old homes because the Oder/Neisse line is definitive as the “frontier of peace.”

Even Max Reimann, released from prison by the British authorities several weeks before the election, could not retrieve the fortunes of his party by his eloquence. The Communist leader himself went down to defeat in his own electoral district of Dortmund, but managed to get a seat on his party’s share under proportional representation.

While the democratic forces can find legitimate cause for rejoicing in the big vote cast, the substantial majority given to the parties supporting the Bonn constitution, and the rout of the Communists, it cannot be ignored that the growth of the German parties of the Right is bound to cause a certain amount of uneasiness to those who recall how the Nazi Party developed from a cell of seven men to a giant mass movement numbering millions of followers.

Thus the nationalist German Party polled 940,088 votes and elected 17 deputies to the Bundestag in the British Zone. Standing even further to the right, the German Right Party, also operating in the British Zone, obtained 429,949 votes and obtained five mandates in the Parliament.

Even more spectacular was the success of Alfred Loritz in Bavaria. In that state the Economic Reconstruction Party polled 681,981 votes or 14.4 percent of the total compared with the 7.4 percent it won in the legislative election of Dec. 1, 1946. In getting 12 of his followers elected to the Bundestag, Loritz was undoubtedly aided by his electoral alliance with the powerful refugee organization known as the Neubergerbund.

The Free Democratic Party, also won a notable success. It increased its poll to 11.9 percent compared with 9.5 percent in the legislative elections of 1946-47. In sending 52 deputies to the Bonn Parliament, the Liberals are now one of the “big three” in the Bundestag and for the first time since the early days of the Weimar Republic are a force to be reckoned with in German politics.

The victory of the FDP would ordinarily be regarded as strengthening the democratic forces. Unfortunately, however, the party owes its greatest success, which was achieved in Hesse, to its alliance with a reactionary organization. In that state the FDP, in polling 596,399 votes, passed the CDU to become the second largest party. But this triumph was made possible because August Martin Euler, the leader of the party in Hesse, concluded an election deal with the ultra-conservative National Democratic Party. Its leader, Dr. Heinrich Leuchtmans, had attempted to obtain a license for his party from US Military Government and, when he failed to do so, he made an election fusion between his party and the FDP.

PERHAPS even more disturbing than the electoral gains of the Right parties was the tenor of the speeches delivered by some of their leaders. In an address at a German Party meeting in Oldenburg on Aug. 11, Ernst Remer, former German major general who as a major put down the anti-Hitler uprising in Berlin on July 20, 1944, declared, “I do not conceal the fact that we are making an appeal especially to the former Nazis. We want them; we need them, and we know that they were not always such bad fellows.” In a talk punctuated frequently by enthusiastic applause, Remer promised his hearers that in two years his party would take over the reins of government.

The sinister note of this speech was quite overlooked in the excitement caused by the so-called “nationalist” addresses of more eminent politicians, such as Dr. Schumacher and Dr. Konrad Adenauer, the leader of the CDU. Most of the foreign critics of this “nationalism” forgot that in an election campaign heated denunciations and diatribes are the order of the day. One has only to recall the violent speeches commonly heard in an American presidential campaign to appreciate the truth of this observation. Violent language in an election is the price one has to pay for democracy. The “peace of the cemetery” is reserved to Nazi and Fascist regimes.

PASSING from the admittedly often deplorable tone of the speeches delivered during the recent Bundestag campaign to the substance of the talks, what does one find? Dr. Schumacher, to take the case of the most criticized offender, denounced dismantling, the Oder-Neisse line, and the possible political alienation of the Saar from Germany.

However, these demands were voiced by leaders of all parties (save that the KPD leaders indorsed the Oder-Neisse line) and the outcome of the election certainly cannot be interpreted as a repudiation of them. On this score there is not much to choose between Schumacher and Adenauer. If the SPD leader declared on one occasion that the “relations between Germany and (Continued on page 28)