

After the General Election

By J. T. Murphy

THE Baldwin Government is no more. The defeat of the Baldwin Government is not only the outstanding result of the election; it was the supreme issue in the minds of the workers during the election. Those who do not recognise this fact will fail entirely to understand both the manœuvres of the bourgeoisie and the comparative smallness of the vote given to the Communist Party by the workers.

The Baldwin Government had proved itself to the great mass of workers to be an anti-working class government through and through. It had defeated the workers in the General Strike. The rôle of the Labour Party as an ally of the Baldwin Government in defeating the General Strike has not been made as clear to the workers as the enmity of Baldwin. The direct blows of the Baldwin Government were more obvious than the betrayals of so-called friends. But the Baldwin Government did more. It persecuted the miners for seven long months. It put through the Trade Union Bill which fettered the unions. It passed the Miners' Eight-Hour Act. It pushed through the Blanesburgh legislation against the unemployed workers. It broke diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. It became hated as no other British Government had been hated for generations.

As the Baldwin term of office began to draw to a close the workers began to recover from the blows of 1926. New mass activities began to appear. Unemployed miners marched from Wales to London and aroused public attention. Women in thousands demonstrated on International Women's Day. The anniversary of the outbreak of war saw bigger demon-

strations than ever. May Day, under Communist leadership, outstripped the sabotage of the Labour Party. The bye-elections told heavily against Tories and Liberals in favour of the Labour Party. Strikes made their appearance in spite of the Labour Party and trade union bureaucracy opposition. The masses were on the move. Especially was this manifest early in 1929, when the Unemployed Marchers tramped from one end of the country to the other in face of the opposition of the Government, the trade union bureaucracy and the Labour Party.

It was this mass movement which set the bourgeoisie thinking furiously. It was this which made them consider how to circumvent its expression in the field of Parliamentaryism. The Tory leaders realised that a new situation had to be faced. They knew that their tremendous majority would decrease, but estimated that they would keep a working majority over the other parties. This, however, they did not consider possible without a strategic manœuvre calculated to weaken the concentration of the masses behind the Labour Party. Of the Labour Party leaders the bourgeoisie have no fear—indeed have no reason for fear. But the mass awakening of the working class to political consciousness they do fear.

The problem before the bourgeoisie was, therefore, a threefold problem. First, to prevent the direction of the class movement towards the Communist Party; second, to secure the return of the Tory Party by dividing the opposition to itself between the Liberal and Labour parties; third, to guarantee that in the event of defeat the succeeding govern-

ment could only work on the basis of a coalition policy. The Tories, therefore, conducted a campaign of "Safety First," describing the Labour Party and its programme as revolutionary Socialist, Communistic, etc. This had the effect of strengthening the illusion of the workers, that the Labour Party is a workers' party, and increased the difficulties of the Communist Party, which conducted its campaign as a class party, showing the Labour Party as the third capitalist party. At the same time the Liberal Party, under the leadership of Lloyd George, seized upon the unemployment question as the central question in the minds of the masses and put forward a programme so much like that of the Labour Party that both Liberals and Labour leaders claimed parentage of it. Then leading Conservative papers like the *Daily Express* and *Evening Standard* openly fostered Lloyd George's campaign and directed a critical fire against the Government.

In the bye-elections held two months before the General Election the Liberals swept forward and it became obvious that they would queer the pitch in the General Election and prevent a decisive majority of any one Party over the other two. The line of the Labour Party in the face of this strategy of the other parties is equally significant. MacDonald and his colleagues were also aware of the mass hatred of the Baldwin Government amongst the workers. It was on this they built their campaign. They did not bring their programme, *Labour and the Nation*, into the foreground. Their election addresses and speeches were all directed against the record of Baldwin, whilst their promises were couched in exceedingly "moderate" terms. They did not discuss specific plans, but fanned the hatred of the Baldwin Government and pleaded, "Give Labour a chance." In constituencies where they were sure that the appearance of Communist candidates did not jeopardise their chance of election, they ignored the Communist campaign, calculating that the anti-capitalist character of our message would increase the hatred of Baldwin without deflecting many votes from the Labour Party. But in constituencies where we had a mass following there was a united front of press and platform against the "real danger"

—the party of revolution. Here the Labour Party mobilised the press, religion, constitutionalism, intimidation against local trade union officials, etc., etc., and made it perfectly clear that so far as future elections are concerned the Communist Party will have very few victories on a "minority vote." Tories, Liberals and Labour will vote as one against the Communists and not divide their ranks when the Communists look like winning.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ELECTION FIGURES

Now let us examine the results:

	Votes.	Seats.
Conservative ...	8,600,000	259
Labour ...	8,300,000	289
Liberal ...	5,200,000	59
Independent ...	350,000	8
Communist ...	50,618	0

It is clear from these figures that had there been proportional representation the distribution of seats would have been much different and the full effect of the Liberal campaign would have been more manifest. The Liberal Party is now paying the penalty for the electoral system it has helped to maintain for generations. It is squealing hard about it now and preparing to make "electoral reform" one of its principal planks during the present Parliament if it manages to prevent a distribution of its parliamentary forces between the Labour Party and the Tory Party.

But the most important feature of the situation is the voting in the industrial and urban districts. The Labour Party increased its vote by 3,000,000. In Lancashire it increased its representation from 19 to 36. In Yorkshire from 24 to 46, securing a majority in all the big towns of the West Riding District, which is industrial. In Wales its number of representatives rose from 16 to 25, and in Scotland from 26 to 37. It also swept the industrial belt of the Midlands and the North-East Coast. This is overwhelming evidence of the nature of the Labour Party vote. It was based upon the industrial workers.

This fact is made still clearer by an examination of the rural voting. The Labour Party captured no seats in the rural districts. It captured seats in country towns, it is true, but even with the Greater London constitu-

encies thrown in it obtained five seats as against 51 Conservatives and one Liberal in Southern England, while in West England it obtained 9 seats, as against 30 Conservatives, 9 Liberals and 1 Independent. In the administrative counties (excluding the boroughs) of Devon, Cornwall, Dorset, Oxford, Surrey, Bedford, Suffolk, Hereford, Berkshire and the East Riding of Yorkshire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Hampshire, Herefordshire and Gloucester the Labour candidate was at the bottom of the poll or absent altogether. This, of course, was no fault of the Labour Party, but it sets in high relief the social basis of the support of the various parties. The Labour Party's roots are still in the industrial masses. It was the proletariat who were roused by the years of struggle and their vote was not a positive vote in affirmation of the Labour Party programme, but an *anti-Baldwin vote*, in so far as the workers felt they had no other means of expressing their dissatisfaction than voting for the Labour Party, with the hope of an alternative Government.

The Labour Party had a number of strong cards in their hands and they played them most astutely. The first was undoubtedly the anti-working class record of the Baldwin Government. The second was the defeat of the General Strike. This they turned to account to discredit the weapon of direct action. Our Party had to reap the consequences of an insufficient exposure of the Labour Party as the ally of Baldwin in defeating the General Strike. The third was the slogan "Give Labour a chance," on the ground that the last Labour Government was "in office and not in power."

These factors played so great a rôle (and especially the first) that the Labour Party had no need to expound its policy and programme, but only to play up to the traditional feelings of loyalty to "their own party," "their own unions" and to hammer Baldwin and Lloyd George on their records.

Nothing revealed these things more clearly, and especially the class character of the workers' action, than the reception of our Party's campaign. Instead of a fierce antagonism there was most sympathetic reception of the Party message in every constituency we

contested. Many thousands expressed their agreement with all the criticism we levelled against the Labour Party, but refused to translate their agreement into positive support. They still felt that "it may alleviate our conditions a little. In any case a Labour Government can't be worse than Baldwin."

One can therefore sum up the significance of the voting of the workers as follows. It was essentially an anti-Baldwin vote representing an extensive awakening of the working class to political consciousness, diverted by the manoeuvres of the three capitalist parties to the support of Empire and rationalisation and war preparations under the banner of social pacifism. This is the outstanding achievement of the bourgeois forces in the election and complementary to its successful harnessing of the trade union bureaucracy to Mondism since the General Strike of 1926. What the bourgeoisie succeeded in doing during the war of 1914-18, viz., the mobilisation of the social forces and their apparatus behind a coalition policy of the capitalist parties for the prosecution of the war and its imperialist aims, they have now succeeded in doing for the next war with imperialist aims. The critical position of British imperialism in the general crisis of capitalism is the obvious foundation of this development. It needs, as never before, a social mobilisation to face what the capitalist class realises to be a life and death struggle, to save itself from social revolution and its world rival, American imperialism. The universal approbation of the capitalist press to the new "Labour Government" that proclaims itself as a "national government" and the recognition that it will not interfere with what is fundamentally agreed upon by the Tories and the Liberals is an open testimony to the rôle of the Labour Party as the rallying force for the mobilisation of the workers for the principal imperial and war tasks of British capitalism. Once these outstanding features of the situation are realised, then the significance and importance of the Communist Party's campaign in the election is enhanced enormously.

THE NEW LINE JUSTIFIED

It is questionable whether there is a single member of the Communist Party who now

doubts the correctness of the new line of the Party. Even those leaders who held out for voting Labour in the constituencies where we had not candidates now recognise that to have taken any other course than that we pursued, of complete opposition to the Labour Party on all fronts, would have been utterly fatal to the Party. The general realisation of the Party is that we ought to have adopted the new line much earlier. It is now more clear than ever that the General Strike was the decisive turning point in the history of the British working class movement, that from that time onwards our Party could no longer maintain its old policy of treating the Labour Party as a "wrong-headed fellow traveller," that it had become entirely an enemy party which we had to fight with all our might. Had this been realised by all of us earlier, and the Party been more steeled to its new tasks, we would undoubtedly have fared better in the election.

The Party's vote of 50,600 was 50 per cent. less than most of us anticipated, due to the fact that we were estimating on the basis of the sympathetic hearing and attention with which our campaign was received by the workers. We underestimated the magnitude of the task of transforming the anti-Baldwinism of the masses into a Communist appreciation of the unity of MacDonaldism with Baldwinism. Nevertheless, the Party did great work in that direction, and created a widespread scepticism in the ranks of those who voted for the Labour Party.

An analysis of the voting in the constituencies where we had candidates shows important features. In Dundee, where the Communist Party had over a period of years run an independent candidate, the Party secured 6,160 votes. In Greenock, West Fife, and Dunfermline Burghs, where there had been intense struggles of the unemployed and the Miners' Union struggle against the reformists, the votes were on a similar level. In South Wales and Battersea, where the Communist candidates were put forward by disaffiliated Trades Council and Labour Parties, the voting was—Horner, 5,789; Saklatvala, 6,554. In the constituencies where the Party fought either without the support such bodies or where they had declined considerably, the vot-

ing ranged from 300 to 1,600. In most of these latter the candidates were making their first appearance as such and the Party was making its initial effort. In many of them there was no Party organisation existing when the campaign was initiated. Under these circumstances we can draw the conclusion that the Party has gained in the areas where it has been leading mass struggles over a period, where it has appeared as an independent force the longest, and where it has succeeded in retaining organised sympathetic forces around it. These places, namely, Bethnal Green, Battersea, Rhondda and Bothwell, have not yet passed through the stage of the complete disintegration of the disaffiliated Labour organisation with the development of the new line of the Party. It may be that they will not suffer the same fate as other disaffiliated bodies. Much depends on the intensification of the struggle of the workers in these areas and the manner in which the Party now faces the task of organising sympathetic forces around the Party, which the election campaign in all constituencies revealed as a necessity. That there is a tremendous volume of sympathy for the Party has been obvious to everyone participating in the campaign. It will be transformed into membership of the Party and sympathetic organised support of the Party according to the soundness of our application of our united front policy in the struggles ahead of us. With these facts before us, we can say not only that the new line has been justified, but that it saved the Party from being buried in the swamp. It has hammered home the fact that our Party is built only through struggle and its capacity to harness and lead the forces of struggle against the workers' enemies. It has made clear that the workers' illusions are not removed easily, but by persistent daily campaigns of the Party related to their actual daily struggles.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

We are now faced with a new situation. No Party had a majority over both the other parties. MacDonald has formed a Government tied to a coalition policy. From the very outset it has proclaimed itself as a

"National Government," closed down even all references to Socialism, set its face towards Hoover and turned its back on the workers. Its first references are not to the repeal of the Miners' Eight-Hour Act, the repeal of the Trade Union Act, the prompt recognition of Soviet Russia, the quashing of the trial of the Indian workers' leaders, etc., but to "friendship with Hoover," the "League of Nations," the "improvement of trade." Its first negotiations are not with the workers' organisations, but with the railway companies. It is an openly anti-working class Government. But the eyes of the workers are upon it. They are expecting some reward for the confidence they have registered in the Labour Party. At no time in the history of the working class has our Party been more necessary. At no time has it faced a period offering greater opportunities for development and winning the confidence of the workers.

The advent of the Labour Government does not mean the cessation of struggles. Not one iota of the contradictions of capitalism has been eliminated by its advent nor can be eliminated. Indeed the development of these contradictions have been and will be accentuated thereby. It is one thing for the capitalist parties to put across an election manoeuvre. It is another thing to eradicate social struggles in a society founded upon class war and anarchic competition. Already hundreds of thousands of workers in the cotton textile industry are being reminded who are the masters of the situation by the employers' demand for a 12½ per cent. reduction in wages. The Miners' Federation has had to break the silence of the Labour Party and demand the intentions of the Labour Government towards the repeal of the Miners' Eight-Hour Act. By the end of this year nearly every coalfield is faced with the termination of the district agreements, and the miners want a national agreement and improvements of their conditions. The basis for an accentuation of the class war is deep and extensive.

Nor is this struggle limited to the slaves of Britain. At no time were the social forces of the colonies exploited by British imperialism in deeper ferment than to-day. At the moment the Labour Party forms the Government thirty-one Indian revolutionary workers'

leaders, Communists, trade unionists and nationalists, are on "trial." We say "trial" with contempt. No jury. Thousands of miles away from the scenes of their activities. Prosecutor and magistrate the violent political opponents of the accused. The Labour Party has not said one word against this farce of "trial" on charges so fantastic that to breath is to be guilty of a "conspiracy to deprive the King Emperor of his power." Will the Labour Government of 1929 add to its record in 1924 of the Cawnpore sentences of four years' penal servitude, further savage sentences for men who dared to hold Socialist views and organise the workers in trade unions and political parties? It is our opinion that they will. But millions of workers are waiting to learn this fact.

It would be easy to extend the list of issues in which the fundamental questions of the class war are being forced into the foreground of the immediate future. In the short period of Labour Government in 1924 we saw the cleavage develop between the trade unions and the Labour Party. This Labour Government starts with an advantage which it did not possess in 1924. It has got the trade union bureaucracy more effectively tied up by Mondism than it had on that occasion. But the issues remain. The expectance of the workers, stimulated by the electoral successes, is greater. The struggles cannot be avoided. Who is to lead them? This is the question which we have to answer. The State and the trade union bureaucracy are as one for "industrial peace," which means the defeat of the workers. We have therefore to answer that our Party is the only alternative leader. That is true, but in the period into which we have now entered, to become the actual leader means a much deeper appreciation of the meaning of the new line in relation to the trade unions and the mass struggle of the workers. It will be in the mass struggles that we shall get the full measure of our strength and influence among the workers, much more so than in the election. It is not appropriate here to develop a discussion on the trade union tactics, but the central task of our policy consists in the conquest of the unions, through the conquest of the masses, in getting to the masses in the factories.

This is essential from every point of view. Whether we consider the consolidation and development of the forces we have won in the elections, or the ways and means of fighting the Labour Government and the trade union bureaucracy, or combatting the sham lefts who will inevitably make their appearance once more, or the development of a real organised left movement around the Party, the direct approach of the Party to the masses is the key to sound policy. Nothing is more certain than that the Maxtons and Cooks, the Wheatleys, and the I.L.P. generally, will play the rôle of a parliamentary pseudo-left. It is possible that the Labour Government may make slight concessions to the workers, while continuing a fundamentally reactionary policy. The Labour Government and the Labour Party needs such a movement to hold to them the workers who become discontented. They need these pseudo-lefts to say to the workers, "We are with you, but you must remember how hard Mr. MacDonald works. Labour is in office and not in power; we must have patience, but we will ginger them up, etc. Join the I.L.P. and next time. . . ." These are the most dangerous elements, which foster the illusions which experience is breaking down. An incessant fight against these elements is our foremost task.

The election is over. The mass struggle goes on. The Labour Government has come. The development of the struggle for the Revolutionary Workers' Government goes on. This is not a Parliamentary objective, but a revolutionary objective. It is a product of the struggle of our class, to which election campaigns can contribute their quota, but only a quota. To think therefore that because the election campaign is ended our aim—the Revolutionary Workers' Government—drops out of the picture would be a mistake. On the contrary we must keep it well before us. Its programme remains as the only solution to the economic and social crises which dominate the period in which we live. The only class that can put the programme into life is the working class led by the Communist Party.

There is no pessimism in the ranks of the Party. There is, on the contrary, an enthusiasm generated by the conviction that the new line of the Party and the Communist International is right, and the consciousness that the Party has conducted a splendid campaign. It has come before the workers definitely as an independent force. It has got its message across better than ever before. The advent of the Labour Party to power is an extension of our opportunities. Let us quickly prepare to use them.

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