

British Labor Advances

By R. W. Postgate

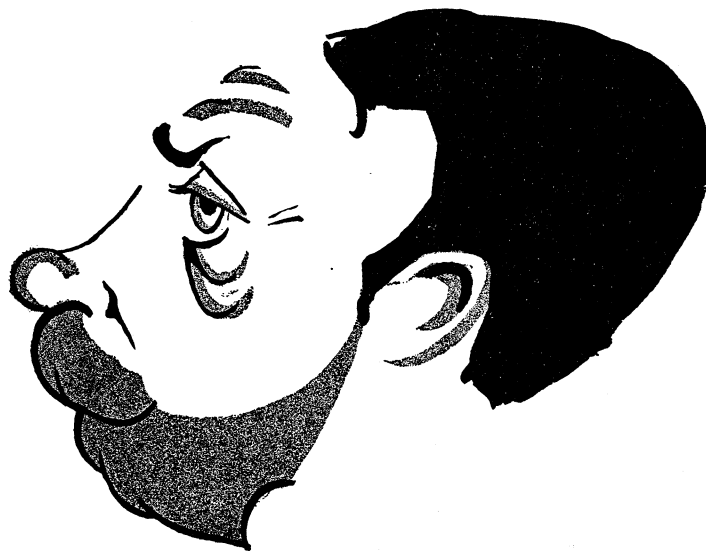
TWO months ago the British Labor movement was dead-alive. At the time of the Trades Union Congress there was absolutely no sign of movement whatever. The elections now just over are the first signs of a recovery. They are not merely the signs of a victory of the political side of Labor at the expense of the Trade Union side; they are an indication of a positive growth.

First of all, of course, is the obvious fact that the Parliamentary Labor Party is now double its previous size—from over seventy members it has now over 140. One of the aims of Bonar Law in going to the country was to prevent this. "It would be a disaster", he told the Carlton Club, "if the country were faced with but one party, the Coalition, and no alternative but the Labor-Socialists." The clear cut division, Coalition versus Labor, was dangerous and resembled too much the real facts of the class war; it was hoped that Lloyd George's Liberals or Asquith's Liberals, or both together, would form an opposition to the old Conservatives—and the pre-war game of Conservative against Liberal, which has lasted for a hundred years, would be resumed in safety. The effect of the election has been precisely to defeat that intention. Both groups of Liberals, who were supposed to act as the opposition, have been badly defeated. Asquith's group, already tiny, became smaller, and Lloyd George's was nearly wiped out. It is the smallest in the House of Commons.

The elections, of course, make very little difference to the actual government of Great Britain. But they are of value as an index to the mind of the electors. It is, therefore, interesting to note that there are surprising evidences of intelligence, and indeed of something approaching to a conscious choice. This applies only to industrial districts; in rural districts, of course, the Conservative is returned automatically.

But in those districts in which there is a large working class element there are clear signs of exercise of discrimination by the electors, and the quality of that choice has been very gratifying. The first thing we notice is the disappearance of the "stool pigeon" element. There was a group calling itself the National Democratic Labor Party, or something of the sort, that had six or seven M. P.'s, and consisted entirely of the worst type of renegade labor leader. They were nearly all connected with organizations like the "British Empire Union", and sometimes even with hooligan organizations. The libel law prevents me characterizing them more exactly: they were few but filthy. Now this group has absolutely disappeared: not one has retained his seat, and in nearly every case they were right at the foot of the poll. One got less than one-sixteenth of the votes in the seat he had held before. Among this group I count Havelock Wilson, the sailor's corrupt secretary, who lost his seat and was in addition far below a man who was a prominent organizer of the Red International of Labor Unions.

Secondly, the Lloyd George Imperialists are obviously now seen through. Probably not such a slaughter of big heads has been seen for many years. Nobody was so surprised as



JOHN DECKER

'Is Majesty

themselves when ex-minister after ex-minister lost his seat. Lesser jackals like McQuister and MacCallum Scott were followed by the abominable Hamar Greenwood to oblivion.

A Joke on Churchill

THE rejection of the most famous of these reactionaries, Winston Churchill, did not merely show that the electors were exercising discrimination; it showed they had actually a sense of humor. It is on record that the burgesses of a town in Touraine in the Middle Ages marked their annoyance with the King of France by sending to the Estates not the grave statesman recommended to them, but the village idiot. Something of the same type of joke was played by the electors of Dundee. Mr. Winston Churchill had sat in Parliament, and been in and out office for some thirty years. He was regarded by everybody, including himself, as indispensable and he announced the fact from his election platform. It was inconceivable he should lose his seat. The Labor Party had attacked him as a brilliant amateur, as hard, reckless and cruel. It had taken him at his own value as a sort of Nero. Nobody, until Dundee tried it, had thought of taking him as a butt and playing a humiliating joke on him.

They looked around among their large choice for the most ridiculous candidate, whose victory over Churchill would most humiliate him, and they picked a certain Mr. Scrymgeour. Scrymgeour ran as a "Prohibitionist" (which still excites laughter over here) and would have had no chance normally. He had fought every election for the last twenty years in vain, and had become the local joke. In addition,

he was personally a candidate who would—well, seem a little unexpected at Westminster. He gravely told his electorate that he knew "God had chosen" him to represent Dundee, because when he was at a memorial service a ray of light came through the stained glass window, avoided Mr. Churchill's head and settled "with a soft warm light" on his own.

That statement seems to have decided the Dundee workers, and on election day thirty thousand practical jokers voted Churchill out and Scrymgeour in. The insult was so obvious that Mrs. Churchill wept and Churchill broke down and could not address the electors after the poll, so the only speech was that of Mr. Scrymgeour, who fulfilled the anticipation of his delighted audience by asking them seriously to turn to prayer and give thanks for this great victory to the Almighty, his election agent.

More interesting than all the jokes in Scotland is the way in which the workers "picked over" and chose the Labor candidates. They voted Labor to a much greater degree than ever before, but they voted a particular kind of labor. They voted for the left wing, or what they believed was the left wing. There were some notable exceptions of the Labor victories, and in each case the victims were those who had been closely connected with the recent "sane Labor policy" in the House of Commons and outside.

The little group of trade union leaders, headed by Clynes, Thomas and Henderson, who have played Gompers' part over here, but in politics, suffered badly. Henderson, the actual leader, lost his seat. Clynes very nearly lost his, which the Conservatives had not even fought before. Thomas' majority was reduced by 8,000. Another of the same kidney, Ben Tillett, only held Balford by 19 votes. Moreover, if anyone who knows goes through the list of those who lost their seats or who failed hopelessly to gain one, he will be astonished at the preponderance of sound constitutional, moderate reformers who have been left in the gutter with Sir Hamar Greenwood.

On the other hand, the left wing, the revolutionaries gained heavily. In Glasgow and Scotland generally they carried seat after seat. All the extremist members of the I. L. P.—in some cases indistinguishable from Communists—got in. More than that, in one purely industrial constituency, Motherwell (outside Glasgow—ironworks) a Communist, Walton Newbold, got in purely on the Communist Party ticket, and in Greenock, in the west of Glasgow, another Communist very nearly took a Liberal seat. Further south the left wing victory is less marked, but in London another Communist (Saklatvala captured John Burns' old seat, railway shops—Battersea) on a Labor Party ticket, though he was handicapped by being an Indian.

The Menshevik MacDonald

ANOTHER group of the Labor Party has benefited very greatly by the elections, and now has control largely because of its presumed "Leftism." This group is the intellectuals, mostly of the English I. L. P. who were elected because of their record in opposing the war. In Newcastle, Trevelyan; Ponsoby, for Sheffield; Ramsay MacDonald in Wales, E. D. Morel—the most-abused pro-German—for the other seat in Dundee, and many others. Both groups coalesced

to put Clynes out of the leadership of the party in the House of Commons, and replace him by MacDonald.

But this group, though it has the reputation of being left wing, is not so in fact. Indeed, they are really more dangerous, being intellectuals, than the trade union group. Ponsoby was once page to Queen Victoria, and secretary to Asquith; Trevelyan is one of the famous Whig family of that name; MacDonald is the leader of the Second International and slanderer of Soviet Russia—and so with the rest of them.

They have an exact and thought out Liberal—capitalist programme—revision of the Versailles Treaty, cheap secondary schools, etc.,—where the old gang was vaguely floundering, and they are consciously counter-revolutionary where the old crowd were ambitious and stupid. Of MacDonald, a warm if discredited admirer, Mrs. Philip Snowden, writes in her usual medium, a coalition newspaper:

"He will uphold a constitutional government as rigorously as any Conservative, and one can imagine him seconding the suspension of a Labour member from the Clyde with a dignity and a reverence for the House of Commons which even Mr. Asquith could not surpass."

This is perfectly true: he is bitterly anti-revolutionary, and he is also a born intriguer. But his appointment is a fine thing for the capitalist press. Their open praise has killed the old leaders, but MacDonald's war record enables them while praising his "great gifts" to express horror at his "extremism." The *Morning Post*, a simple minded organ of extreme reaction, has indeed been taken in by this and really believes that the Labor Party is led by an embryo Trotsky: its editor howls and writhes in unfeigned anguish every morning in the leader columns. This, of course, makes it all the easier for MacDonald to make his party believe him a left winger: and he is now pretty securely seated in the leadership.

Nevertheless, the victory of the Labor Party and of its left wing is a fine sign. It may not be much in itself, but in the previous disastrous gloom it is the first sign of hope. Previously everything seemed dead and there was neither movement nor hope, now at least something has stirred. A candle in utter darkness gives a lot of light.

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