

# The Labor Government

By R. W. Postgate

**M**R. MACDONALD'S Labor government—the first ever in Great Britain—is now in office, but not in power. It is not even in possession of a parliamentary majority. It has no chance of carrying through even its more moderate proposals—such as a capital levy—much less of tackling the financial and imperialist interests which really control the government of England. All that it can do is to make attempts to pass some at least of a state socialist program, and it could make radical changes in the **administration** of certain services—in pensions, and relief to the unemployed, for example. It must then seize the opportunity to quit office upon the rejection of some measure of importance—nationalization of the mines has been suggested—and trust to its record to return it in due course later as a fully responsible government with a parliamentary majority.

Consequently, nearly everything depends upon the character of the ministers. Here it is important to notice that the cabinet is overwhelmingly right wing in character. MacDonald is a very able politician and he has saved the Labor Party from that dead level of utter mediocrity that would have resulted if a trade union leader like Clynes or Henderson had been premier. Nevertheless, although he has appointed the first woman minister in all English history, he has played for safety—which means capitalist safety; and in two cases his hands have been forced. The Lord Advocateship for Scotland he has been forced to hand to a Tory, by a threat of action by the Scottish bar, and the important cabinet post of First Lord of the Admiralty has been given to Lord Chelmsford, not a member of the party, by the threat of an admirals' strike, headed by Beatty. He has also, of his own volition, offered to the two most important left wing leaders, Robert Smillie and George Lansbury, posts of so mean a quality that they had to be refused. There is only one left wing leader in the cabinet, Wheatley from Glasgow (Health Minister) and the press is already howling after him.

An analysis of the cabinet shows the lack of striking personalities, with the exception of certain right wing heads. Let us take the list.

**Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary:** J. R. MacDonald. MacDonald himself is better known abroad than at home. In 1914, conscientiousness—his main characteristic, next to parliamentary acuteness—forced him to give a certain wavering opposition to the war. His essential timidity has been masked in England by the stand he made then. For many reactionaries he is a fierce revolutionary; to many Labor men he is the unfearing left wing leader. Indeed, in certain London circles he is the object of fulsome flattery and absurd hero worship. He is, all the same, though, the enemy of all radicalism, one of the big forces in the cabinet. One may class with him his follower Colonel Wedgwood, in the sinecure Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster.

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer**, who controls the treasury, is Philip Snowden, who for many years worked

together with MacDonald and faithfully reflects his political views. Stronger in his pacifism than MacDonald, he is still a man to whom the "class struggle" is not true even as a description of an economic fact, much less a basis for policy. His influence is less than it was, maybe partly because of his physical disabilities (he is a cripple). Add to this group E. W. Jowett (**First Commissioner of Works**). We come next to a surprising group of importations from the older parties—transferred Liberals who carry on the traditions of the governing classes. Lord Chelmsford (**First Lord of the Admiralty**) is an old gentleman who has been governor of black natives in various parts of the world, including India, and had slept for years in the House of Lords without disturbance. The reason for his sudden revival has already been given. Lord Haldane (**Lord Chancellor**), the chief law officer, served in Asquith's government in 1914. General (now Lord) C. B. Thomson (**Air Minister**) is another recent convert, but perhaps the most interesting is Mr. C. P. Trevelyan (**Education**). Mr. Trevelyan is a genuine pacifist: a man unquestionably honest, honorable and firm. He belongs to an old Whig family, and is the grandson of Lord Macaulay. He left the Liberal party because it did not hold to its professed principles. He hopes to find in the Labor party people who will revive these principles. Speak to him of the class struggle or of any question involving opposition on principle to the employers and you will meet, not opposition, but a blank—a complete lack of comprehension. It is impossible to view him without great respect and great disquiet. Something similar is true also of Baxton (**Agriculture**). Lord Parmoor (**Lord President of the Council**, an unimportant office) another old Liberal, owes his inclusion in the Cabinet to the need to have a certain number of members of the House of Lords there. Mr. MacDonald has had to create three "Labor peers" for this reason, and it is important to notice that no leader of working class origin would accept these "honors". All three are of bourgeois origin.

Next comes the inevitable rush of mostly mediocre trade union officials. The **Home Secretary**, Arthur Henderson, who controls the police and prisons and other means of repression, has more administrative experience than most. He served in Lloyd George's War Cabinet as a Labor representative and was forced out for his support of the Russian plan for a Stockholm conference in 1917. He is of course a right wing man—no class-conscious socialist. The **Minister of Labor** (Tom Shaw) used to be secretary of the Second International: he is even more reactionary. All the others—Stephen Walsh (**War Office**), William Adamson, (**Scottish Office**), Vernon Hartshorn (**Post Office**)—are miners' representatives of no particular interest or personality. So far as they are politically conscious they are right wing. They cannot adorn the cabinet; it may reasonably be hoped that they will not disgrace it.



Maurice Becker

### The German Worker and His New Masters, the American Bankers.

Two more are members of the old Fabian society—Sir Sidney (now Lord) Olivier (*India*) and Sidney Webb (*Board of Trade*). Webb is unquestionably the man with the best brain in the Cabinet. Personally, he is not very popular. But he has a far clearer head than most of his colleagues, and is unquestionably competent. He is nearly as fierce an anti-Communist as Ramsay MacDonald himself.

And that leaves two Cabinet Ministers, of very different characters: John Wheatley (*Health*, which includes housing) and J. H. Thomas (*Colonies*). Wheatley is the only "red" in the Cabinet. (Of course there are no Communists). He belongs to the Clyde group which in last session marked its contempt for Parliament and its revolutionary aims, both in its speeches and actions. At the time that this is written he has not had time to do anything, but the press is already singling him out for special abuse. As for J. H. Thomas, of him it would be difficult to write mildly. He is the extreme and rotten right winger, the hero of Black Friday. His first action on assuming office was to abuse the official and legal strike by the railway enginemen, and to act as strikebreaker and attempt to wreck the strike by describing it (falsely) as a "fiasco." He has made incredibly imperialist speeches since his taking office—speeches reeking of servility to the royal family. And so on.

Here is Labor's first ministry. What will it do? No one knows, not even Ramsay MacDonald.

### Gas City

**S**PRAWLED on the sunny prairie, gorgeous in golden bloom,

The city of great beginnings stolidly waits its doom:

Faded its one-time glory, forgotten its vaunting dreams,

Pleased with a placid present, like a shiftless man it seems.

'Twas that strange fuel that flows unseen from out the heart of earth

That fed the flames of industry, and gave the city birth,

And many mills and smelters, with chimneys wide and high,

Sent up into the noisy night their glare against the sky;

The sound of hasty hammers was heard on every side,

And the city of the prairies took a swinging, mighty stride.

. . . Time passed. The magic fuel ran low. The mills were moved away,

And many a quiet year has ebbd since that eventful day,

Yet . . . sometimes . . . when the sunset winds swing through the waving grass

They bare the old foundation-stones . . . a moment . . . as they pass . . .

Nora B. Cunningham.