



Winston Churchill and the Conservatives

A reader in the U.S.A. wrote to ask how Winston Churchill came to leave the Liberal Party (where he made his famous statements on the land monopoly) and to join the Conservatives. Dr. ROY DOUGLAS explains as follows:

WHEN the Liberal Party split, at the end of the first world war, into Asquithian ("official" Liberal) and Lloyd Georgeite (National Liberal*) wings, Churchill adhered to the National Liberals. Many of these latter showed strong leanings to the Tories during the 1918-22 government. Churchill was defeated in Dundee in the 1922 election.

When Baldwin (the Conservative leader) declared for protection in 1923, the two wings of the Liberal Party reunited, and Churchill contested West Leicester in the "Free Trade" election of the same year, in the Liberal interest. But he was defeated.

After the election, no one party had an overall majority, but the Conservatives were the largest single party (with about 258 seats), Labour next (191) and the Liberals a close third (158).

Asquith, as leader of the Liberals, soon indicated that he was prepared to set a Labour government in office and to give it a very qualified degree of support. (At that time, the Labour Party was almost united in support of free trade, and there were many members who had views almost indistinguishable from those of the Liberals.) Thus in January, 1924, when a vote of censure was moved by Labour on Baldwin's Government, the Liberals (with about a dozen exceptions) voted with Labour.

Churchill urged that there should be another motion also, on Baldwin's King's Speech—repudiating socialism. This suggestion was not followed, and when Baldwin resigned, Macdonald, leader of the Labour Party, became Prime Minister. Presumably, if Churchill's suggestion *had* been followed, this could not have happened.

Very soon afterwards, Churchill showed clear signs of defecting from the Liberals. On February 24, 1924, he wrote a letter of support to the Conservative candidate in the Burnley by-election (where no Liberal was standing). In the course of that letter he said: "Now that the fiscal

question (i.e. free trade v. protection) has been decided by the late election, there is no difference of principle which separates Liberals and Conservatives . . ."

In the Westminster (Abbey) by-election of March 19, Churchill stood as an "Independent Anti-Socialist." He was attacking a Conservative seat, but received strong support from some individual Conservatives, especially some elements of the Press. The official Conservative triumphed by a hair's breadth, with Churchill second, Labour third and the Liberal a derisory fourth.

In the General Election of 1924, Churchill was adopted as candidate by the Epping Conservatives, but he stood, not under the label Conservative, but as "Constitutional and Anti-Socialist" candidate. He was elected, and the Conservatives secured a comfortable overall majority in the country as a whole—with disastrous results for the Liberals (only 42 seats!). Baldwin again took office, and offered Churchill the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer, which he accepted with alacrity—and with unpleasant consequences both for the country and for his own reputation. From then on he was never regarded as other than a Conservative—although always a somewhat unorthodox one, and often with striking Liberal elements.

* These National Liberals have nothing to do with the Liberal Nationals (later known as National Liberals) associated with Sir John Simon in 1931 and after.