

MR. CHAIRMAN,—

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—

I am glad to have the opportunity of again meeting the Electors of Grey Lynn in public meeting assembled. A good many important events have happened since last we met. Perhaps the most important political event affecting our relationship has been my resignation from the Ministry. I know from my friends that they approve my action with practical unanimity. My opponents would like to see me not only out of the Ministry, but out of Parliament, so I expect that for once my action has met with their approval also. I have already, both in the House and through the Press, given my reasons pretty fully for the course I took. I have very little that I want to add to what I have already stated. In many of the great crises of life it is difficult to ascribe to any one incident the reason for our actions. To some extent, that was my position. It is useless to expect that eight men can be got together to form a Government who will be able to see eye to eye on every subject, and I did not make that mistake. During my tenure of office, the Government did many things of which I did not wholly approve, and omitted to do many things which I think they ought to have done. But not one of these acts of omission or commission was of itself sufficient in my judgment to warrant my leaving the Government. I say this because I know that some of my friends think that I ought to have left earlier than I did. You must judge Governments as you should judge individuals, by taking a general average of their actions. If you take an individual and judge him on a single action, whether it be his best or his worst, your judgment will be an entirely erroneous one. It is the same with Governments.

I was perfectly sincere when I stated in Parliament that I believed the legislation passed by the Ward Government would be accorded an honoured place by the future historian of New Zealand. I can also say with perfect sincerity that the administration of the Government has been, on the whole, both efficient and honest. At the same time, I think that the Government has failed to grasp the spirit of the times in which we live. It has failed to take account of the economic factors which have been at work making the conditions of life for the mass of the people, even in years of prosperity, more precarious than it used to be. He would be a foolish person, or a wicked person, who would contend, considering the higher cost of living, that the wages of the wage-earners generally was higher to-day than it was ten or fifteen years ago.

You will have noticed that the Government proposes to set up a commission to inquire into the high cost of living, and I suppose to suggest means of meeting the difficulty. It amazes me to find a government, or even a man, seeking Parliamentary honours, confessing or professing that he does not know the causes of this evil, and is unable to suggest cures that would help towards removing it. I hope during my speech to-night to lay bare some of the causes and suggest cures, and I shall be very much surprised if I am unable to convince the most of you that the causes are evident, and the remedy lying to our hand. It was mainly for the purpose of having a freer hand to deal with such subjects, and thereby giving a filip to the reform forces of the Dominion, that I resigned from the Ministry. Some of my friends have asked me why I did not at once start a campaign throughout the country for the purpose of promulgating my

views, and rallying supporters to my ideals in view of the approaching General Election. My reasons for not doing so were of a twofold nature. In the first place, there was insufficient time to make a really effective campaign. If I had started such a movement and had gained only meagre results, the movement would have been discredited. No allowance would have been made for the shortness of time which was available. At the same time, I want to say that even now my resignation has not been barren of results. I am of opinion that the last Budget presented to Parliament was a more progressive document than it would have been had I not resigned. I am further of opinion that a goodly number of the members who will be elected to the new Parliament will be more progressive than would have been the case had I continued to be a member of the Government.

But my second reason is even more important. I resigned for the purpose of giving help to the reform spirit of the country, and not for the purpose of helping the Tory-Reactionaries arrayed under Mr. Massey's Banner.

If I had started off on a tearing, raging campaign throughout the country, with only a few weeks at my disposal, my action would, to some extent, have reflected on the Government, and might, by dividing the progressive elements, have helped to return a few more supporters of the Tory Leader. As it is, I expect Mr. Massey to have fewer followers in the next Parliament than he has had in the Parliament which has just expired. If that is not the result of the election, the reason will be found in the faulty and absurd Electoral system under which the Elections are being held. I am quite certain that if the true voice of the people is reflected in the Elections, his supporters will be fewer. One member of the House during the last Session, told the Leader of the Opposition, rather unkindly, perhaps, but with a great deal of truth, that he had road board brains. He and his lieutenants are mighty critics of petty cash, and past-masters of the art of pin-pricking, but for anything approaching constructive statesmanship, or a wide outlook on National questions, we have never had in this country such an utterly bankrupt Opposition. If I had for one moment believed that my resignation could by any possibility have resulted in the return of a majority of members willing to follow Mr. Massey, I should have felt it my duty to remain where I was. I believe such a result to be an impossibility. What this country wants and must have is a more progressive Government than the present one, not a more reactionary one. I believe my resignation will help and not hinder the evolution of a more progressive Government. Some of my critics have cavilled at my use of the term "New Evangel" when announcing my resignation to the House, while the Tory Press and politicians think that they have disposed of me for good by shouting "Single Tax!" Suppose, then, for the present, we lay aside both of these terms, "The New Evangel" and "The Single Tax."

I want to lay before you what I think ought to be the practical platform of the Liberal party for the next three years. I want to make it as short and as simple as possible, so that no one can misunderstand it. Let me put it briefly, as follows:—

#### ECONOMIC REFORM.

- Increase the Land Tax by 1d. in the £.
- Remit Customs taxation on necessaries of life to the extent of half the revenue so raised.
- Reduce Railway freights to the extent of half the revenue so raised.

#### SOCIAL REFORM.

- Majority, not minority, rule on the liquor question.
- Effective Town-planning powers to local bodies.