

Parliamentary Situation In Great Britain

BEFORE these lines appear in print Great Britain will have witnessed the advent of her first Labor Government—a Government in office but not in power. The new House consists of 258 Conservatives, 191 Labor members, 158 Liberals and 8 Independents. The rush election, by which Mr. Baldwin sought to obtain a mandate for some sort of Protectionist nostrum, has brought about a curious and unprecedented situation, no one of the three Parties having a clear majority over the other two. If this should mean the disappearance from the House of the docile party-hack, trooping through the division lobbies to vote, not in accordance with conscience or judgment, but as directed by the Whip, then it will make for the independence of the individual member and the added dignity and usefulness of Parliament.

In the present circumstances any Government that is formed will be able to hold its position only so long as it can command for its proposals the support of one of the other parties. This being so, the fears of the nervous amongst us that great changes will follow Mr. MacDonald's removal to Downing St. are seen to be groundless. Mr. Sidney Webb, himself destined for high office in the Labor Cabinet, points out "the plain impossibility of passing into law in this Parliament any large and contentious measure." It is obvious that no proposal that does not secure Liberal support can be carried by Mr. MacDonald and, therefore, his choice will lie between inaction and proposing such tame and emasculated palliatory measures as shall commend themselves to Mr. Asquith. Whatever the outcome of the experiment, it cannot fail of being interesting, not alone to the onlookers but also to those whom the new Premier shall select as his Ministers from among the large and hungry army of job-hunters in the ranks of his followers.

No Government coming into office under such conditions can count upon a long life. Apart from the difficulties facing it inside the House there are still greater difficulties to be encountered within its own Party. What of all the hopes of a new world raised by the fiery speeches of Mr. MacDonald and other Labor leaders, made when prospect of office did not appear so imminent? Already the members of the more Radical wing of the party are noticing and commenting upon the marked alteration in the tone of recent utterances. Mr. MacDonald may well talk of "the difficult problem which we have to face now," and appeal "to our supporters in the country to help us with their trust."

He will soon learn that nothing short of a prompt delivery of the goods will appease the wrath of the disillusioned followers who, in their simplicity, had supposed that he wished to be taken literally when he wrote in 1920 that: "Our old Socialist argument that economic rent must be

taken by the State because it is created by circumstances of which the whole community is entitled to take advantage, has been enormously enforced by the results and experiences of the war. And it is fundamental."

Likewise Mr. Philip Snowden, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Labor Government, will be expected to give effect to his declaration that "Every penny of the economic rent of land, whether due to special advantage of position, or to socially-created improvement, ought to be appropriated." Such declarations do not admit of any proposals to purchase, since the economic rent of land can never be secured that way.

Apart from what we may call the domestic troubles of the new Government, the situation is one of grave danger. What, for instance if the Railway men should decide to strike? Will their leader, Mr. J. H. Thomas, who is expected to be made Secretary for War, get into Field Marshal's uniform, complete with sword, and order them back to duty? And will they obey? If they do not, will he, as head of the War Office, use troops to compel obedience? The day that a Labor Government orders out troops to suppress a strike will surely seal that Government's fate—it may even be in blood.

Readers of the REVIEW will want to learn the bearing of the election upon the cause of Land Restoration here in Britain. So far as the present House of Commons is concerned, we do not share the optimism of the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, now somewhat recovered from the fit of depression into which they fell on seeing how slight was the importance Mr. Asquith attached to them. It must not be supposed that the list of 138 Labor, and 60 Liberal M. P's, paraded in *Land and Liberty* for January is a list of so many convinced and understanding followers of Henry George. Far from it. We could wish they were, for there would then be no more scheming to present a demand which shall not too greatly alarm the vested interests in injustice. It is not too much to say that the great majority of those whose names are included do not understand the importance of the Land Question. They see it as one of many questions. Whatever else they may be, they are certainly *not* Single Taxers. Further, and we write with personal knowledge, there are those in the list who do appreciate what is meant by Single Tax and will support the taxation of land values as a means to stay its coming. No Single Taxer can logically support any scheme for Land Purchase. In the list of Labor men are the names of Philip Snowden and six of those who backed the Purchase Bill which he was induced to father, and which proposes to give the Land Lords compensation equal at least to fifty years' purchase of their rentals.

This is the same Philip Snowden who declared in the House of Commons last July that "We hold the position that the whole economic value of land belongs to the community, and that no individual has the right to appropriate and enjoy what belongs to the community as a whole.

Let there be no mistake about it. When the Labor Government does sit upon those benches it will not deserve to have a second term of office unless in the most determined manner it tries to secure social wealth for social purposes." Bold words these, and we shall await his Budget proposals with some curiosity but without serious apprehension for those who are now appropriating that to which he says they have no right. Fifty years purchase is a not ungenerous compensation for the loss of a right which is not a right?

Others who have supported this iniquitous proposal are also counted, including Ramsay MacDonald who came to the 1923 Conference of the Labor Party to prevent the delegates from endorsing a resolution calling for the collection of all rent of all the land. And this after having himself declared such collection to be "fundamental."

The inclusion of Mr. Asquith's name in such a list is—well, amusing! We recall that in 1921 he said, speaking of his Government, "Whatever the proposals of the Government may be they will not embrace what is called the policy of the Single Tax, and which in my opinion.....is consistent neither with justice nor expediency."

Let no one suppose that because these 198 M. P's. have expressed approval of the taxation of land values that they will therefore unite in voting for some measure of the same. Before Mr. Snowden will be able to get all his 137 Labor colleagues to agree, the proposal will have to be watered down to suit the palate of the weakest member of his party, by which time it may have become acceptable to the 60 Liberals, and by which time, also, it will have ceased to have any value whatever as a measure of practical politics. This is inevitable, since they will act as politicians with an eye to party interests rather than to principles. To expect otherwise is to deceive ourselves.

What of the six men, equally divided between the two parties, who are known to understand, and are regarded by many as Single Taxers? Frankly we must confess that these are party men first. They are Single Taxers—not just now—but later on. They honestly believe that they will be able to get some measure of land values taxation through the party to which they are attached, and that the people will want more of the same kind of taxation once they have seen it in operation, and so, as party men, they are not prepared to put Single Tax first. We write this with deep regret, but it would be folly to ignore patent facts.

The great danger to the movement is the adoption of the vicious policy of "tax-and-buy" which wrecked the cause in Australia and New Zealand. Such a policy would be welcomed by the Land Lords, and this fact of itself should convince the landless that they are not likely to derive any benefit from its operation. The experience of the countries mentioned is sufficient evidence of this. The *Commonweal* has frequently published reports from both Australia and New Zealand, and at the Annual Meeting of the Free Trade and Land Values League of N. S. W.

last year the following resolution was carried unanimously.

"That a penal tax such as the graduated land tax, with its big exemption and graduations, is equally a failure, the position now being worse than when it was first imposed." The able Secretary of the same League reported earlier in the year of "big estates choking" the district of Molong, also of Condobolin, where "you will see very clearly the abject failure of the Labor Party's graduated Land Tax;" and of estates, "so held that the graduated land tax is neatly evaded" with the result that "the young people drift to Sydney, not so much from choice as from necessity."

From New Zealand, after 32 years of the Taxation of Land Values, we learn that; "Despite our progress in land values taxation for national and local purposes, the rates have not been high enough to exert a sufficiently restraining influence. By private appropriation of rent the landowners have been able, therefore, to capitalise every service of a paternalistic Government and have forged fetters on the people of the Dominion of an annual charge of £15,000,000 or more, being the interest on the unimproved value of land."

The Liberal and Labor Parties showed by their Election Manifestoes that they stood for land purchase. Now, in his last King's Speech, Mr. Baldwin has committed the Tories to the same policy. The step-by-step land taxers are also prepared to tolerate, if not actually approve, this method of compounding a felony, for in a *questionnaire* issued by the United Committee candidates were asked: "Do you agree that the price of land that must be acquired for municipal improvements should not exceed the value at which it is assessed for taxation or rates levied on land values?"

It is not without significance that when the Radical members of the American delegation in concert with the Commonwealth Leaguers, sought at Oxford last August to get the International Conference to vote against Land Purchase, it was officials of the United Committee who offered open or veiled opposition, and in this they were, naturally, supported by certain "land gamblers" who were present. It was the Assistant Secretary of the Committee who secured the defeat of the motion by moving the "previous question," a well-understood method of escape from an awkward vote. True, the movers returned to the attack after lunch, and this time were successful, following the resolution being carried on the motion of Dr. S. Vere Pearson of the Commonwealth Land Party, seconded by Robert C. Macauley, of Philadelphia.

"We followers of the philosophy of Henry George in International Conference assembled are opposed to all schemes which have underlying them nationalisation of land by way of purchasing it or by the issue of bonds in compensation to landholders."

The Land Union and the Land Nationalisation Federation are also advocating purchase, and thus the issue is joined between the purchasers and those who claim the

land as the gift of Nature that cannot be bought or sold. Against all the aforementioned, the Commonwealth Land Party alone in British politics stands firmly for simple justice.

This, when it is understood, will greatly simplify the issue. In view of the hurried nature of the campaign the Commonwealth Land Party deemed it advisable not to put up candidates at the General Election, but to await the coming of the bye-elections, as these will afford better opportunities of getting publicity for our demand. At any moment now the first vacancy may arise, and the Executive will seek to take full advantage of such. It will be no half-hearted compromise with principle that the electorate will be invited to endorse, no timorous begging for a favor at the hands of Privilege, but a bold and unqualified demand for Justice through the immediate restoration of the land to its rightful owners the whole people, and that without compensation.

Whether we win seats at first is of minor importance. We shall proclaim the truth fearlessly, confident that

Never yet
Share of Truth was vainly set
In the world's wide fallow.

J. W. GRAHAM PEACE.

Overheard at the Moron Club

I AM glad that there are a few men who take a sensible view of this rent agitation stirred up by a lot of discontented tenants. That Columbia University professor had the right idea when he told the Housing Commission that just as it is necessary that there should always be a surplus of unemployed labor to keep wages down, so there ought always to be a surplus of tenants to keep rents up."

"Sure thing. Why, high rents are a sign of prosperity. If the people weren't prosperous they couldn't pay rent that would give a good return on buildings that are worth fifty per cent. more than they were a few years ago. If the legislature keeps on passing these fool laws to protect tenants nobody will put up new buildings, and rents will go higher than they are now. The only way to get lower rents is to let the landlords charge what they think the tenant can afford to pay."—W. G. in *Life*

WHY a land speculator? A manufacturer makes shoes for the money we give him. The merchant distributes them. The working man performs labor for what he receives. But what does the owner of idle land do for the riches he gets?—*Chicago Bulletin*

It takes an uncynical and pecunious person not to laugh acridly at the "City's Poor Have Happy Holiday" stories in the same issue of the paper with the "City's Housing Conditions Worst Ever" stories.—F. P. A. in *N. Y. World*.

Current Comment

HATS off to the *New York Times*! It has permitted one of its writers to say editorially in an article treating of Land Settlements in South Carolina:

This is but a beginning, as the report intimates, of a grappling with the questions which have their roots in land. Indeed, most if not all of the questions that perplex the public must eventually be traced for their answers to land economics, to the relation of man to the earth he lives on and lives from.

IN an article in the *N. Y. Tribune*, of Sunday, February 10, Mark Sullivan, its special correspondent, speaking of the Teapot Dome scandal, noting the change of public sentiment respecting our natural resources, says:

Up to somewhere between 1900 and 1910 this country had a national policy about public lands and the mineral, oil and other resources in the public lands. That policy was to get the public lands as rapidly as possible out of the hands of the government and into the hands of private owners who would develop them. It was a policy that arose when our public lands seemed illimitable and inexhaustible. It was a continuation of the spirit of the times when substantially all the settlements of the United States were east of the Allegheny Mountains and when any adventurous pioneer who cared to could go West and possess himself of a section of public land with the merest formality.

AS an illustration of the growth of public sentiment we may note an interview in the *New York World* of recent date with Carlos B. Zetina, who is called the Henry Ford of Mexico. We quote as follows:

"You admit that the peasants ought to be given land and that the land of the country has unjustly been in the hands of the few?"

"That is true. The agrarian problem will not be solved until there is a more equitable distribution of land. Reaction has had its day and the time of the feudal land baron is gone forever. What I say is that in the giving of this land to the people, there should be a definite policy, precise and unvacillating.

TO a reporter of the *American* Mr. Thomas A. Edison said in answer to an inquiry, "What is America's greatest need today," "Education of the general public in economics." To this a reverent Amen is the most appropriate comment. But who shall teach them? It does not appear that those in positions of learning and authority know any more than the public.

HEYWOOD BROWN is one of the ablest writers on the New York press. His column is an undiminished delight. But he permits himself to say of Bernard Shaw that "Long before he wrote *Saint Joan* he was a Single Taxer and a Socialist." While it is true that Mr. Shaw acknowledged his indebtedness to Henry George, he was never a Single Taxer. He could not have been that and