

THE NEW HOUSE OF COMMONS.

London, Feb. 1, 1910.

When the King's speech is read from the throne three weeks hence, the Parliamentary significance of the elections just closing may become apparent, but in all probability not before.

The King's speech is not his own speech. It is the speech of Ministers who write it for him. If it were his own speech, he would be personally involved in politics and become a football of parties. Being their speech, though in his name and with his formal sanction, they and not he are held responsible for its tenor.

It is for this reason that the fact that a day has been fixed for the speech is significant. It implies that the Asquith Ministry have reached an understanding of some kind with the King. If they had not, there would be no responsible source for his speech to come from unless the speech announced the resignation of the Ministry, which no one expects. What the understanding is, if there be one, will not be known until the King's speech appears. Even then it may only be inferred.

That the King would appoint enough new peers to "swamp" the Tory majority in the House of Lords if the Liberals had swept the country, or what would have had the same effect, would have withheld his summonses to Parliament from enough Tory Lords to leave the Liberal Lords in a majority, was believed prior to the elections. But the Liberals have not swept the country. They are about equal in the Commons now to the Tories. To give them a substantial plurality over the Lords, they must have the Labor vote. Even the Liberals and Labor together do not make a majority. The Irish vote could transfer power from one side to the other at will.

In those circumstances it is feared that the King may not give Asquith his way. While it is true that the Irish, the Liberals and Labor would be as one on the question of the Lords' veto, thereby making an anti-Tory majority of 106 according to Tory estimates, and 122 according to Liberal estimates, and also that on a vote the Irish members must be counted, yet it is argued that inasmuch as the Irish members are elected only on the question of Irish nationalism, they may not count in the King's mind when he decides whether or not to yield to Mr. Asquith's demands. The King may consider that his Constitutional duty to adopt the advice of his Ministry stops short of abrogating the veto power of the House of Lords by any such drastic process as creating an anti-veto majority in its membership, or by excluding pro-veto peers from the summonses to Parliament, in a situation in which the Ministry depends for its majority, as the Liberal Ministry would in the new Parliament, upon the Irish vote. Gladstone, it is true, did govern from 1892 to 1894 in dependence upon the Irish members for his scant majority of 40; but Gladstone did not then ask the Sovereign to "swamp" the House of Lords with wholesale appointment of peers. So it may well be that the King will refuse to co-operate with Mr. Asquith in this particular, taking the Tory view that the Irish party is peculiar—to be considered to the extent that it votes Tory, but disregarded to the extent that it votes Liberal. And yet

King Edward is widely regarded, even by radicals, as so democratic in sentiment and so keen in long distance political foresight that few will be surprised if he falls in readily with Mr. Asquith's plans.

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If, however, the King should refuse to Mr. Asquith assurances of co-operation in curbing the Lords, it is difficult to see how Mr. Asquith could consent to head a Ministry.

He has distinctly and emphatically declared that the only legislation in behalf of which he has pledged himself to take the initiative is a measure to put an end once and for all to the absolute veto of the House of Lords; and Lloyd George has proclaimed broadly, with the apparent concurrence of Mr. Asquith, that no Liberal Ministry will either take office or continue in office, with the arbitrary veto power of the House of Lords hanging over them. For these men to continue in office without assurances of the King's co-operation on this point, would therefore be stultification. Yet Asquith's refusal to continue in office at this juncture might imperil for a time the whole progressive movement in Great Britain.

Should he refuse the responsibilities of office in case the King withholds assurances regarding the Lords, the King might promptly offer the government to the Tory leader, Mr. Balfour. That Mr. Balfour would accept with any view to remaining long in power is almost unthinkable; but he might accept with a view to "riding for a fall"—of being voted down in the House, and thereby bringing about an early dissolution and the election of a new Parliament.

For the latter reason the offer of premiership might be a tempting one to Mr. Balfour; for protectionism, it must be confessed—"tariff reform" as they call it here—has taken a strong hold upon masses of voters who are Liberal when times are good. Its especial attraction to them is the offer it holds out of plenty of work at better wages, and the consequent relief of unemployment, which is still painfully felt.

If the Liberals were to content themselves with meeting this issue negatively at another series of elections in present circumstances, as for the most part they did in the recent campaign, Mr. Balfour's expectations of coming back from another appeal to the people with a Tory majority, might not be disappointed. But if the Liberals were to make the next fight throughout Great Britain as the recent one was made in Scotland, by showing to the voters not only that protection would not relieve unemployment, but that free trade supplemented with land value taxation would, an early return to the country by dissolution of the incoming Parliament might soon give to Mr. Asquith the sweeping Liberal victory which, partly from an over-prudent leadership, partly from triangular contests, partly from the intense activity of the liquor interests, partly from landlord coercion, and partly from plural voting, failed him at the recent elections.

But, as I have stated above, the signs point to an understanding between Mr. Asquith and the King. If no understanding had been arrived at, it is unlikely that the present Ministry would, un-

less to announce their resignation, undertake to write the King's speech from the throne; and if that had not been done it is unlikely that the delivery of the King's speech would be officially announced for the 21st.

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Upon the assumption that the present Ministry has consented, or will consent, to remain in office, its probable course will be to pass the Lloyd George Budget under closure at once, and send it to the Lords for their approval.

That the Lords will promptly approve this Budget is universally conceded. They will do so upon the ground that they have submitted it to referendum and that the referendum, "though by a narrow margin," has sustained it.

So far, then, as the Budget is concerned, the radicals have won their fight.

It will impose an annual tax of one cent in five dollars annually upon the capital value of undeveloped urban and suburban land, and an occasional tax of 20 cents on the dollar of increases in the value of such land. Small as these exactions are, they will have a far greater effect in this country than they would have in the United States, in forcing building land upon the market at reduced prices and thereby stimulating building operations and lessening unemployment. But the most important result will be the immediate valuation of all the lands of the Kingdom, and their revaluation hereafter periodically. This is the revolutionary feature of the Budget. With the lands of Great Britain once valued (as they have not been for over 200 years) the spirit now pervading public opinion and stimulating recognition of the fact that land is a common inheritance and its value a social fund, cannot but lead on to higher and higher taxation of monopolized land values, and lower and lower taxation of unmonopolized industrial values.

Another effect of the passage of the Budget will be the imposition of deservedly heavy taxation upon the liquor interests, and possibly the silencing of this sinister voice in elections. The great brewing and distilling interests either own or hold mortgages upon an enormous number of the public drinking houses. Something like 80,000 are said to be kept by mere hirelings, abject dependents, of the wealthy brewing and distilling businesses. This is due to the fact that liquor licenses, granted by local magistrates, are not only personal to the licensee but are locational. The pecuniary advantage of a license goes, therefore, not to the licensee, but to the owner of the licensed site. It is in this way that the saloon question here is a land question. The brewers and distillers acquire control of the licensed sites, directly or indirectly, and with this leverage they turn the public house keeper into a hired dependent. In the recent campaign all public house keepers and touters were Tory, for the Lloyd George Budget imposes license fees which the distilling and brewing interests denounce as confiscatory and destructive to the liquor trade. And, indeed—thank God and Lloyd George—that is what they are. They confiscate back from the liquor interests some of the site values which those interests have appropriated. With the Budget adopted the owners of licensed liquor selling sites

would lose their hold, in great degree at least, upon the vilest kind save one of unearned increment of land, and in like degree upon the men they exploit. Their political influence, also, would be correspondingly diminished.

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After the Budget, which must be got through by the last of March—for it is this year's budget and the government is without revenues—a new budget, providing for next year's revenues and expenditures, must be brought in. This is not likely to do more in a radical way than build upon and along the lines of the Budget now in question.

But come what may, no Liberal Ministry can afford to ignore the question of the House of Lords' veto. Not only have the Liberal leaders promised to "pull the teeth" of the House of Lords, but the adoption of the Budget without anti-veto legislation would confirm the House of Lords in their autocratic position. They did not formally reject the Budget last fall. They merely referred it to the people. So they said. What they virtually did was to arrogate to themselves the right to stop the voting of supplies by the Commons until it had returned to the people for a further lease of power. Now that the people give it a further lease of power, the Lords may acquiesce and pass the Budget; but this course would constitute a constitutional precedent under which the Lords could in the future dissolve Parliament at will on pretense of "referring" the annual financial bill to the people. It is evident then, that the establishment of that power in the Lords would abrogate the exclusive constitutional power of the Commons over the purse strings of the nation. No Liberal ministry, therefore, can go beyond providing for financial needs, if even so far, without first putting an end, by specific legislation, to all basis for the assumption by the Lords of power over national finances.

This much it must be presumed the Asquith ministry will insist upon. This much, also, it is not unreasonable to infer, from the announcement of the King's speech, the King has assented to.

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But if the progressives—whether radical Liberal, Labor, or Irish,—are ever to legislate at all along their own lines, a further curb must be put upon the House of Lords. If this is done, it will probably be done by the passage through the Commons, of restrictive legislation.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's resolution might form the foundation for that action. His resolution provided for a conference between the two Houses when they disagree upon a bill passed by the Commons. If the conference disagrees, and the Commons again passes the bill, another conference is in order. Should this second conference fail to reach an agreement, the Commons may consider the bill again, and if it passes there the third time it is a law.

This resolution is regarded as cumbrous, but it would doubtless afford the outline for any legislation in restraint of the Lords' general veto that Mr. Asquith might undertake. The essence of the question, as often stated in these columns, is

whether the Lords' veto shall be absolute as heretofore, or in some form suspensory.

The important consideration, however, just now, is not what the restraint upon the Lords' general veto shall be, but whether any restraint at all will be attempted. This consideration brings us back again to the King.

If the King yields to Mr. Asquith, the absolute veto will doubtless be abolished. If he does not yield, Mr. Asquith will face the trying alternative of taking office and making the best headway he can, step by step—trusting to the Irish party, the Labor party and the radical Liberals, to follow him along a thorny and not very clearly defined path—or of resigning office when the crisis of a conflict with the King comes, and thereby plunging the country into another contest at the polls at an inopportune time and under discouraging circumstances.



By discouraging circumstances, I allude to the "tariff reform" issue, which the Chamberlainites have been working up for years, and which appeals to men out of work or in fear of unemployment as a mirage appeals to a famishing wanderer in the desert. It was not as effective in the recent campaign as the Tories had hoped it would be. In the industrial regions it failed to change many seats; but it did reduce majorities even there, and the virus is working still.

No American can travel in England without recognizing the same signs which in the United States at the beginning of the protection craze portended the protection era that came upon us and from which we seem now to be emerging. In the face of the "dinner pail" argument, such relatively abstract considerations as the Lords' veto fall upon deaf ears, or unto muddled brains.

Added to the protection bunco was the influence of landlord coercion. The landlords of Great Britain appreciate the land clauses of the Lloyd George Budget even if the working masses and the competitive business classes do not. In this country coercion is manifest in the agricultural regions rather than in the cities. The squires, the landlords' agents, the public house hirelings of brewers and distillers, most of the conformist clergy and some of the non-conformist, with their wives, sisters, cousins and aunts, were all engaged in the delectable occupation of cozening and coercing tenants and laborers. Henry George, Jr., who campaigned for W. R. Lester, a single tax Liberal, in one of these constituencies, came into direct contact with the coercive influences of rural landlordism. His testimony confirms that of the Liberal newspapers, which is to the effect that the reaction in the agricultural districts was due to landlord, saloon and clerical intimidation.

This district was carried by the Liberals in the landslide year of 1906, by 27 in a total vote of 8,367. Mr. Lester loses it by 459 in a total vote of 8,989. His own aggregate vote is 68 larger than that of the Liberal candidate of 1906. Why he lost it is evident enough from the fact that the opposition crowded his meetings to break them up, and at many of his meetings he was denied a hearing. The marvel is that he got any votes at all; and

Fred Skirrow, of Keighley, who campaigned for him from start to finish, is grateful that he got through with his life. "He was mercilessly beaten by the mob of landlords' hangers on when his defeat was declared," says Mr. Skirrow; "and if it had been his election, I verily believe he would have been killed."

Mr. Lester has been invited urgently by local Liberals to contest this constituency again; and the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, with headquarters at 20 Tothill street, London, contemplate extending their systematic land reform campaign into that and other rural districts and keeping up the work until new elections occur.

In addition to the subtle influence of "tariff reform," and the coercive influence of landlords' intimidation, the working majority of the progressives in the Commons was cut down by Socialists of the "impossibilist" type, who, in the name of the Labor party, brought on triangular contests, in which both Socialist and radical Liberal candidates were defeated by Tories in Liberal districts. Although these triangular contests in Liberal districts were not encouraged by the Labor party leaders, and were avoided by the Liberals in Labor constituencies, and although they failed in several districts to elect the Tory—especially where land-value taxers were the Liberal candidates, and notably at Leigh, in Lancashire, where the Liberal candidate, Wilson Raffan, made a straight out single tax campaign,—they did threaten progressive ascendancy during the campaign, and have to some extent weakened the progressive majority in the new House of Commons.

Another factor which told heavily against the progressives was the "outvoter." Many seats were carried for the Tories by this antique anomaly. He is a voter who lives outside of the district in which he votes, but votes there in virtue of his local property interests. Some "outvoters" have voting rights in a score or more of constituencies. Two are reported to have fifty votes in England. At the recent elections these privileged fellows were hurried from district to district, so as to make the most of their privilege for the benefit of the privileged interests. One instance among thousands is of a plural voter who motored from Glasgow where he lived and had voted, to Hull, where he did not live but could vote. The residential voters in some 60 Liberal or Labor constituencies were "swamped" by these Tory "outvoters."

Complexity of issues had something to do with reducing the anti-Tory majority. The dominant issue in the political sense was the House of Lords' veto and the independence of the Commons. Underlying that issue, and the dominant one in the economic sense, was the Lloyd George Budget with reference especially to its measures for land value taxation. Land reform and political reform, therefore, the latter necessary to the progressive realization of the former, were the questions upon which the House of Lords forced the House of Commons into a general election three years before its term would expire. In doing this, the Lords laid all stress on the Budget, but when they got into the campaign they ignored the Budget and drew Chamberlain's "tariff reform" policy as a red herring across

the trail. This was done with much vigor and little conscience. The old American protection "gags" about the foreigner paying the tax, about keeping foreign workmen away from home jobs, and the virtues of protection as a cure for unemployment, were worked over artistically, and lying reports of high wages and plenty of work in the United States were fascinatingly distributed.

The Liberals were caught unawares. Instead of fighting aggressively for the Commons and the Budget against the House of Lords and land monopoly, as they had expected, they found their flank turned and themselves in a defensive struggle in behalf of free trade. Lloyd George and Churchill, with many minor campaigners, fought protection with land reform; but the Liberal campaign as a whole turned into a mere defense of commercial free trade.

Even where the land question was put forward—and everywhere that it was put forward it met a hearty response—it was usually treated independently of the question of free trade. "Tariff reformers" pictured protection as a cure for unemployment; the Liberals might have replied aggressively with a demand for an extension of free trade to its legitimate conclusion in free land, as the only remedy for unemployment, which some of them did but the lot did not. Failure to do this generally was a weakness that might have proved fatal.

I doubt, however, if the "tariff reform" herring had any effect beyond increasing somewhat the majorities of successful Tories and decreasing somewhat those of successful Liberals. It is not what this issue did in the recent elections that counts, but what it may do should future elections come on at an early day. The only effective answer in this country to protection appeals to workmen who fear unemployment, is the unlimited employment which the destruction of land monopoly would assure.



In fact, although the Liberals are dependent upon Labor and the Irish for a working majority, the result would be regarded as a great victory but for their overwhelming landslide majority in 1906, which turned over to them many a Tory stronghold that has returned now to its Toryism. Without the Labor seats—and few if any of these were contested by Liberals, as but few if any Liberal seats were contested by Labor candidates—the Liberals will have 274 seats, to 273 for the Tories plus the speaker (a Tory) who can vote only to break a tie. Consequently the Liberal plurality over the Tories is 1. Add the Labor vote, which is in harmony with the Liberals on progressive legislation, and the Liberal-Labor plurality over the Tories is 41. To this plurality add the Irish, and the majority runs up to 123 exclusive of the speaker, or 122 with the speaker included on the Tory side.

Comparing this result with the last House, there is a great falling off in the progressive seats. But when it is considered that the last Parliament was phenomenal in its progressive majority, and that the present one was elected under circumstances unusually advantageous to the Tories—so advantageous that the Tories would have swept the country but for the steady effect of the land clauses

in the Lloyd George Budget—the decline of Liberal and Labor seats is very far from a defeat. The net result is indeed a victory, and one which need only be utilized in such manner as to inspire confidence in the progressive purpose of the Liberals in order to make it a glorious one.

For comparison the following figures may be useful in showing the distribution of parties in the new Parliament in contrast with that of 1906, when the Liberals had a landslide, and those of 1895 and 1900, when the Tories were in power:

	1895.	1900.	1906.	1910.
Tories	411	402	157	274
Liberals	177	186	376	274
Irish	82	82	83	82
Labor	54	40

At the present date, with only four districts and four Universities yet to be heard from, the popular vote at the recent elections, inclusive of plural voting, which goes almost solidly Tory, was as follows:

Anti-Tory	3,493,727
Pro-Tory	3,094,354

Anti-Tory majority 399,373



In this campaign the followers of Henry George in the Liberal party have been remarkably successful in retaining old seats and securing new ones. Among the men elected to the new Parliament who may be counted as unequivocally in that category are Josiah C. Wedgwood, Wilson Raffan, Francis Neilson, Henry George Chancellor, E. G. Hemmerde, Dundas White, J. H. Whitley, Charles Trevelyan, Arthur Dewar (Solicitor General for Scotland), Harold Elverston and William Barton.

For all practical purposes, I am informed, the following may be included as men who boldly advocate the taxation of land values as the alternative to protection and as the only solution of the social problem, namely: W. R. Pringle, T. F. Wilson, G. P. Collins, Edward Shortt, C. E. Price, Max Muspratt, John McCallum, McKinnon Wood (under secretary for foreign affairs), W. S. Chapple, William Hunter, W. P. Byles, Dr. Addison and Sir Albert Spicer. Alexander Ure (Lord Advocate) occupies an especially prominent position in the movement for land value taxation for his brilliant services in Parliament and the country during the past three years. He stands, to use his own words, for "the complete blotting out of buildings and improvements" from the assessment roll, the value of land to be substituted for local taxation. The membership books of the English and the Scottish Leagues for the Taxation of Land Values, contain some four score more who are members of the incoming Parliament. In addition the Labor party to a man will contribute its strength to the support of all primary stages in the Parliamentary movement for land values taxation.

L. F. P.



It was an old colored woman who remarked that she trusted the Lord, but never fooled with him.—Philadelphia Enquirer.