

TOPICS OF THE DAY

RAMSAY MACDONALD: "SUPPING WITH THE DEVIL": THE
TRIUMVIRATE: PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION: THE
UNITED STATES ELECTIONS: EGYPT AND INDIA.

THREE months ago Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was Prime Minister of Great Britain. He and his Socialistic and Communistic followers were apparently entrenched in office, and a certain degree of power, for an indefinite term. "What are they now? A name." And the name is not too benedictive. Seldom has a public man had a finer opportunity for winning distinction for himself than was afforded Mr. MacDonald. Every courtesy and consideration was shown him and his party by the king and the two senior parties. High hopes of his leadership were sincerely entertained, not only by impartial observers, but by political opponents. He was given even exaggerated credit for his earlier actions. A generous veil was drawn over his previous record. The Liberal party was in sympathy with his sound legislative propositions, and would have helped him to enact them. The Conservative party reserved its opposition for Socialism, not for Socialists. Mr. MacDonald and his party might have remained in office, although not in plenary power, indefinitely, and might have made a great name for themselves had they been willing to co-operate with their natural political allies, to whom they owed their position in parliament. Social legislation of an admittedly desirable kind, which must now be long delayed, might have been passed, and domestic as well as foreign interests advanced. It is not denied or even disputed that Mr. MacDonald achieved some apparent success in foreign affairs. But the harvest was ripe, and he had but to stretch forth a reaping hand. Applause awaited his every effort. His work, such as it was, is still awaiting the test of time. Of his domestic proceedings little can be said, for he did next to nothing. He could not advance, for he would not co-operate with the Liberals. The senior parties combined in a solid wall to prevent his doing harm by even attempting to carry out the Socialistic programme to which he and his party were pledged and on which they were elected.

Mr. MacDonald proved unequal to the requirements of the high position to which he was accidentally elevated. In the

end, he fell a victim to the vulgar pride which so often goes before a fall. He vainly imagined he could not only flout but destroy the historic party which had given him his great chance. He thought he could challenge to mortal combat, at the polls, the equally historic and more firmly entrenched party which only the temporary assistance of its hereditary opponents had enabled him to oust from power. It was apparently his idea that he could accomplish this by yielding to the dictation of the Communist wing of his followers. Whatever may be thought of his latest activities at Geneva, whatever time may have to disclose of the ultimate success or failure of his attempts at western European settlement, there can be but one verdict with regard to his Russian policy, in all its aspects. His recognition of the blood-stained and anti-Christian Commune of Moscow as a legitimate and civilized government must for ever blacken his name and that of his Administration. The unlawful compromise with domestic sedition in the Campbell case—the immediate cause of his downfall—was but a minor part of the sinister relations between his party and the Third International, which he tolerated, and before which he yielded. Never has there been a more glaring political illustration of the old figure, of going up like a rocket and coming down like a stick, than that given to the world by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald.

IF national "self-determination", inopportunately proclaimed by the late President Wilson, is a sound international principle, self-preservation by internal means should be equally sacred. If a people have a right to constitute themselves an independent country, with a government of their own, they have an equally incontestable right to determine the form of their government, and to change the form at will. Hence the indefensibility of the action of the British and other Powers which had accepted the Wilson dogma, in attempting armed interference with the internal direction of Russian affairs after the Armistice. That interference was what has been cynically called worse than a crime—a blunder, and a blunder of exceeding great magnitude. The memory of the consequences of similar interference with revolutionary France was still fresh, and should have served as a deterrent to all but the most reckless. But while forcible intervention in France wrought nothing but disaster for those who intervened, and served only to consolidate the Revolution, what would history have said of contemporary nations had they shaken the bloody hands of the Jacobins, made peace—for prospective material gain—with Marat and Robespierre, and acknowledged

their government as a civilized institution? The French Revolution, with all its "horrors," was, relatively, a mere bagatelle compared with that which has drenched Russia in streams instead of mere dribbles of blood, which has overturned Russian civilization, and brought utter misery to untold millions instead of to a few thousands. The French Revolution did not cause famine. It may have been, in part, caused by famine. The Russian revolutionaries, by their boasted policy, have deliberately caused the death of enormous numbers for lack of food.

Interference in the internal affairs of Russia was unwarrantable in itself, against the plain teachings of history, and against the obvious corollary from that right of national "self-determination" which the civilized nations of Europe had accepted. Yet having blundered so, these nations, including Great Britain under Mr. Ramsay MacDonald and his late semi-Communist government, have formally recognized the Communist régime in that unhappy country, and fraternally embraced the leaders of a gang of cut-throats whose fingers are literally dripping blood, and who have been guilty of every imaginable personal, social, national and international crime. Worst of all their crimes, in a country such as theirs, is the warfare which they have waged, are waging, and proclaim their intention of continuing to wage on Christianity, the religion and foundation of western civilization. Among "great nations" virtually only the United States stands aloof from Russia on the firm ground that the American government cannot even think of contaminating itself by entering into diplomatic relations with the combination of human degenerates which calls itself the government of Russia although it represents, at the most, only two or three hundred thousand out of one hundred and fifty million Russians. The American people, although they include more "proletarians" than any equal number of people elsewhere in the world, stand firmly by civilization, Christianity and decency, while Great Britain, at the behest of a minority Administration, directed by its ignorance, its cranks and its dangerous revolutionaries, has meekly consented to shake hands and make friends with official murder, rapine and atrocious blasphemy, for no other conceivable reason than that some of her shop-keepers want to trade with the Bolsheviks! Even the hoped-for trade is as illusory as would be the repayment of the loan by which it was fondly hoped to purchase it. The cry of the advocates of the MacDonald "bargain" was that "most of the money" to be lent to the Soviets would be spent in England; that is, England was to supply the Soviets with a huge loan on the chance that part of it would be used to purchase English

goods, which the Soviets would hold in addition to as much of the loan as they chose to reserve for their own purposes, including the expenses of their propaganda for the overthrow of British institutions. And England was to have no other or better security for the repayment of her loan than the Bolshevik "word."

But it is the anti-Christian side of Bolshevism which demands most serious consideration. There is no room for doubt or mistake as to that. Bolshevism implies gross infidelity, outrageous blasphemy and reckless iconoclasm. There should be no Christian dealings or compromise with it. Burke declared he had thought "ten thousand swords would have leapt from their scabbards" in defence of the frail and far from sacred person of Marie Antoinette. One might have supposed that hundreds of millions of Christian hearts would have arisen in militant revolt and protest against even outward terms of friendship being established between their rulers and the Soviet Antichrist. The days of crusades for the spread of our religion are happily past. Never was there greater need than at present of a general rally for its defence, in its own national citadels.

THE exact result of the British elections could not have been foreseen by many, if by any. It was merely hoped for by most. There was no reason to fear that Socialism, thinly disguised as Labour, would score a triumph. There was some, though little, cause for apprehension that neither of the two senior parties would obtain an independent majority. If either was to do so, the strong probabilities of success lay with the Conservatives, who were outwardly united, and against the Liberals, who were openly divided. Fate as well as the electors favoured the Conservatives, who were as much surprised as others by the extent of their own success. There is no cause for regret. Public interest required that the Socialists should be not only defeated but thoroughly discomfited. It was much better that their overthrow should be accomplished at the polls instead of in parliament; that it should be effected by one of the other existing parties rather than by a combination of both, either at the polls or in the House. The Conservative majority may be too large. It would be, were it not for the fact that it expresses the depth and extent of the popular distaste for what has been seen of Socialism in office, and in even limited power.

The people owe almost equal, but undesired gratitude to Mr. Lloyd George, to Mr. Stanley Baldwin and to Mr. Ramsay Mac-

Donald for what has come to pass. Mr. Lloyd George made the continuance of his coalition government quite impossible by his post-war political meanderings, and so brought the Conservative party back to power. Mr. Baldwin, when he succeeded to the premiership, was not content to let well alone, and permit the nation to enjoy the benefits of the "tranquillity" which they had been promised by Mr. Bonar Law and for which they had expressly voted. With a four-years parliamentary term before him, with an adequate majority for the execution of the Bonar Law programme, and in spite of the Bonar Law pledge that there would be no important fiscal legislation until the electors had again been expressly consulted, he, without even submitting the question directly to his own party, came to the sudden and unaccountable determination to disregard the spirit if not the letter of that pledge, and appeal to a notably, if not notoriously, free trade people on a protective policy. He was ignominiously beaten, as was to have been expected. But he gave the Labour-Socialists their chance, and aroused the deep suspicion and enmity of the Liberals. He caused the election of a three-party parliament in which no party had a working majority. The downfall of his government, although it had the largest parliamentary following, was inevitable. For the Liberals to have given him support would have been to accept his protective policy. They had no alternative but to place the Socialists in temporary and restricted power. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald by his personal arrogance, by his manifest hostility to the Liberals and constant refusal to co-operate with them, by his neglect to make even an attempt to carry out the Labour programme, and by his panderings to Communism at home and Bolshevism abroad, finished the work begun by Mr. Lloyd George. The joint efforts of the three caused three General Elections in much less than as many years, which, in the end, would appear to have been overruled by Providence for the ultimate good of the nation. Mr. Baldwin was the chief blunderer of the piece. He was the prime cause of the coming in of the Socialists. Had he carried on for his full term, as he should have done, conditions might so have changed in that time as to have kept them for ever in the background to which they properly belong. Mr. Asquith had the course which he pursued virtually forced upon him. Had Mr. Ramsay MacDonald been other than he proved himself, or his party less heterogeneous and unmanageable, the consequences might have been disastrous instead of simply educative. As it is, Mr. Baldwin is reaping where he did not sow, and gathering where he never strawed.

THE vote in the British elections has had the effect of raising the expected outcry concerning Proportional Representation, or "P. R." as it is often called. P. R. is a modern notion, unheard of until a few years ago when defeated politicians, in search of excuses for their lack of success, began to dig up election returns and count over ballots, in hopes of finding comfort in the discovery that although in a minority in parliament they were in a majority, or near majority, in the country. If and when such a discovery was made, they of course proceeded to denounce its possibility as a political abuse; and Proportional Representation was brought to birth by some fertile imagination. It now appears that merely some eight million or more votes were cast for the Conservative party in the recent elections; that about five and a half millions voted for so-called Labour, and over three millions for the Liberals. By duly adding and subtracting these figures it is found that the new government is in a popular minority of half a million, while it has a very considerable majority over both other parties in parliament. This is being loudly proclaimed as a wrong demanding immediate redress by legislation. The theory of our Constitution counts for nothing when the supposed interests of partisans are concerned.

The basic principles of the British Constitution are responsible, representative government and majority rule. In the days of primitive and more or less isolated British communities, the men of each community actually gathered in public meeting, decided their issues and chose officials by counting heads, or "polls" as they were called, for and against a proposition or a person. That was the origin of our political words "polls" and "polling", and their earliest illustration. When the nation developed into a homogeneous unit, and parliamentary institutions were established, such proceedings became impossible. The fundamental theory of government by elective representation of the people and of rule by parliamentary majority persisted. Representatives have been continuously elected, in the first place as representing the nation at large, and only in the second place as the special representatives of particular constituencies. Manifestly the whole country could not be assembled for "polling". It had to be subdivided into convenient electoral districts, and ultimately into small polling sections. Owing to the natural, unequal distribution of population, it was quite impossible to make electoral divisions of uniform size in territory or population. The divisions had to be arranged to suit the people, and not the people to suit the divisions. In practice, the diversities in size of electoral divisions have worked satisfactorily and without

substantial injustice because of the general as well as the special representative character of the persons elected. A large, segregated population has not necessarily any legitimate claim to larger representation than a smaller one, simply on account of size. The chosen representative of each speaks not only for each but for all.

Our Constitution neither requires nor expects a majority of all the people on any particular occasion. It is intended merely to get together, in parliament, a body of representatives among whom there is sufficient unanimity of opinion and purpose to make possible the regular administering of the affairs of the nation. A large democracy can be administered only by representation and the rule of a majority of the chosen representatives. It would be practically impossible to be assured at all times, or at any time, of a majority of all the people. The rational aim of any democracy must, at all times and in all places, be to secure a majority of its representatives capable of co-operating in the interests of the public. Anything which tends to thwart that aim is to be regarded with extreme suspicion, if not with actual fear.

The proposal of the advocates of P. R. is that special representation should be given to minorities. On its very face this would be subversive of the distinguishing feature of our Constitution, and could not but result in confusion and legislative impotence if pushed to its logical end. It is perfectly obvious that the larger number of parties or groups there may be making appeal to a nation or country, the greater is likely to be the discrepancy between electoral and parliamentary majorities. Every additional party or group attracts to itself electors who would otherwise swell the votes of the older parties. When there were only two parties in the British parliament, it was due solely to the inequality of constituencies occasioned by the natural but irregular distribution of population, and it was very rarely that majority in parliament did not correspond with a majority at the polls. If one of the present British parties were to disappear, similar consequences would recur. The more than three million Liberal votes or the five and a half million Labour votes would simply be distributed as of old between the two remaining parties. If a fourth group or party were to arise, it would become so much the more unlikely that any one party at an election would secure a majority, over all, of the electors.

P. R. is apparently conceived and intended to increase the number of parties or groups or persons appealing to the electors. Under it, not even the candidate receiving the largest number of first choice votes would be certain of election. Second and third

or fourth choice votes might be so concentrated as to place another candidate finally at the head of the poll. There would be endless difficulty and confusion in the voting; and many, if not most, electors find the casting of their votes a trying enough task even now. In constituencies entitled to elect two representatives it would be not only possible but quite probable that one of the elected might be, say, a Conservative, and the other a Socialist or a Communist. They would simply neutralize each other in parliament, and, instead of helping, would tend to hinder the conduct of public affairs, by lessening the probability of securing the necessary parliamentary majority for any party. In nearly every election there is one special issue before the country, such as whether a particular government shall be retained in office or turned out, or whether some outstanding question of policy shall be approved or condemned by the people. In the late British elections the main and almost the only issue was between Conservatism, in one form or another, and Socialism. Would the decision have been more definite and convincing had electoral machinery been provided whereby the Socialists, while polling no greater number of votes, had been able to secure a far larger representation in parliament?

It is not for a moment to be overlooked or forgotten that every vote cast for Liberalism was as definitely a vote against Socialism as if it had been recorded for the Conservatives. Thus Conservatism, instead of being in a popular minority, really has the support of over eleven million electors as compared with five and a half million who voted, not nearly all, for Socialism, but only some for that and probably far more for class interests as represented by legitimate Trades Unionism. If a popular majority of considerably more than two to one in favour of Constitutional rule, and a parliamentary majority in proportion, do not constitute a right to govern under our Constitution, what could?

There is neither need nor justification at present for Proportional Representation, under British institutions which contemplate only a two-party system although not absolutely necessitating it. There are really only two sides to any important public question. Ordinary persons should be able to align themselves accordingly. It is by no means certain or even probable that a third effective party has come to stay in Great Britain. Labour has made most of its valuable political gains by dividing itself pretty evenly between the two old parties. At present it is quite evident that a much larger proportion of it is attached to Conservatism than to Socialism. Without Labour, Socialism would sink into speedy insignificance, and Communism would be obliterated.

ated. The Liberal party is under temporary eclipse. But it has too great a history, too much ability in its leadership and ranks, too deep a hold on public respect, to disappear as a great and living political force. Never was its moderating influence more urgently needed than now. If and when it revives, there will be a practical return to the two-party system. Should it not revive, a return to a two-party system, in another way, would be no less inevitable; only the parties would consist of modified Conservatives, in effect Liberals, and modified Radicals, at least no longer half Communistic in theory or practice. In the meantime, no subversive change in the Constitution, such as that proposed under P. R., is necessary or desirable. Rule by a majority—a majority of representatives in parliament—has served Britons well, the world over. Not only can they afford to stand firmly by it, but they cannot afford to weaken in its support, or allow it to be undermined by specious innovations of any sort.

THE elections in the United States were run on lines somewhat similar to those in Great Britain, and there was a good deal of correspondence in results. The Republicans are the Conservatives of the United States. The Democrats bear about the same relationship to them that Liberals do to Conservatives in Great Britain. La Follette headed a Radical insurrection not materially different from that of the Labour-Socialists led by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. The generally expected happened in the return of Mr. Calvin Coolidge by a large Electoral College majority, although his party scarcely deserved any such success. But his party did not fare nearly as well as he, either in the popular voting or in their Congressional representation. They will have an unpleasantly narrow majority in the Senate, and no more than a necessary working one in the House of Representatives. La Follette gave both the older parties more or less of a fright in the contest, but came out at the small end of the horn in the voting. His attempt to drive a wedge between the existing parties and to break them up proved a total failure. Americans appear to be even more conservative than Britons in their politics. They will have nothing to do with unconstitutional methods or aims, and have little use for radicalism or classism in any form.

At least one of La Follette's propositions was more than radical—it was revolutionary. The chief cornerstone of the Federal Union is the Supreme Court of the United States. On it devolves the duty of interpreting and enforcing the Constitution. La

Follette proposed that the Supreme Court should be so emasculated as to make it practically useless for the purpose for which it was established. He promised, if given power, to subordinate the Court to Congress, that is, to a majority in Congress. In other and plainer words, he would have placed the Constitution, and in consequence the rights of individual States, practically at the mercy of a partisan majority in Congress. This is, in effect, what the British Constitution does with reference to parliament. But the British Constitution differs widely from the American in other respects, and has substantial safeguards unknown to that of the United States. Unlike the president, the king is not a partisan; and he reigns, but does not rule. Unlike the American Congress, the British parliament is not elected for any certain length of time, and may be dissolved almost at an hour's notice, through an adverse vote of the representatives of the people in the House of Commons, which is strictly under the influence of precedent and of immemorial usage. Congress, like the president, is elected for a definite period of years, and cannot be got rid of or changed during that period. Great Britain is a homogeneous country. The United States is a congeries of semi-independent States, each with its own Constitution and reserve of political power. Hence the necessity for the Supreme Court, and the dangerously revolutionary character of the La Follette proposition. But it was most decisively negatived by the electors, and is unlikely to be brought forward again in the near future, if ever.

In many respects the election was unfairly indecisive. The people were deprived of the opportunity of pronouncing judgment on the record in office of the Republican party. The Tea Pot Dome oil scandal was enough, ordinarily, to have sealed the doom of any administering party; but death removed the Chief Executive politically responsible for it. Nothing in President Harding's political life can have become him like his opportune leaving of it—in the eyes of his party. Even the exhibition given by the Democratic Convention in New York would scarcely have saved him, had he lived and been nominated for a second term. Mr. Coolidge succeeded, in time to help in cleaning up the mess left by Harding and his associates. All his efforts at new and important work were burked in Congress, mainly in the Senate, by rebellious Republicans co-operating with his Democratic opponents. Of these La Follette was one of the chief. In consequence, La Follette's open defection from Republicanism in the elections and his attempt to set up a third party, and that a heterogeneous and incongruous one, must on the whole have tended to help Mr. Coolidge, who it must be

acknowledged proved, in many respects, a highly judicious and effective candidate. His opponent, Mr. Davis, was in some respects the better and more acceptable man of the two, although probably he would not have made a more successful or capable president. But he was hopelessly out of the running from the first, owing to party divisions and the display of party incapacity given at New York.

So far as their formal platforms were concerned, there was little to choose between the two parties, and quite as little to distinguish them—the one from the other. The defeat of Mr. Davis, although it appears large in Electoral College figures, was by no means overwhelming or crushing, like that of La Follette. The Democrats retained most of their old strongholds. They will have large contingents in both Houses of Congress, and will be able to offer strong and vigorous opposition to the Coolidge Administration. In the Senate, the Republicans will have a majority of only four or five. The Democrats, therefore, should be in as good fighting trim as ever at the next election, if only they can bridge their divisions and once more present a united front to their opponents. In the meantime, President Coolidge is likely to give good domestic government to his country, and to steer a judicious course on the sea of foreign affairs.

THERE is reason for thankfulness that a Conservative government had replaced Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's Socialistic Administration before an acute crisis arose in Egyptian affairs. That such a crisis was coming has long been obvious, although the mode of its arrival could not be foreseen. Mr. MacDonald, it is true, had apparently taken a firm stand with regard to the Soudan. But would his Communistic, and the more extreme of his Socialist, followers have allowed him to maintain it? Their utterances concerning the action taken by the present government do not lend much encouragement to belief that they would have done so. And yet there is a great deal to indicate that nothing short of the drastic procedure of the Baldwin government would have served the purpose or been effective. Mr. Lloyd George is very severe, now, in his denunciation of former Egyptian misrule, and of the incapacity of the people of Egypt for self-government. Yet it was he who gave them the practical independence which they have abused. Like all such peoples, they accept favours, not with gratitude, but as indications of weakness. It is proverbial that to make one of our native Indians a present is to invite him to ask

immediately for more; and the more he is given, the more he demands and the less grateful he becomes. There is evidently close kinship of spirit between the North American Indian and the Egyptian, as well as with his original namesake in the Deccan. No sooner was Egypt granted independent Home Rule than she demanded sway in the Soudan, over which she had not only never had control, but by which she had been seriously menaced until Britain intervened, subdued, partially civilized and greatly improved that barbarian wilderness. The large measure of self-government and the abundant help accorded the people of India have had similar consequences there, in a violent and seditious agitation for practical independence, with Britain still to pay the bills for maintaining domestic order and providing foreign protection. The simple truth is, and it must be known to all but interested agitators and empty-headed sentimentalists, that neither country is even measurably fitted for self-rule, and that what both need, and will long need, is firm and just government by one able and willing to provide it, which Great Britain alone can do, as proved by the length of time and the success in and with which she has been doing it. There are supposed to be fewer sentimentalists in the Conservative party than in the other British parties, and not so many individuals willing and eager to give ear to the pratings of sentimentalists. If this be true, the Empire is to be felicitated on the fact that Conservatives are now in power in Great Britain, and with such strong parliamentary support.

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