

# THE FUTURE BRITAIN FACES

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London (by cable).

JULY 5, 1945, will rank with V-E Day for the people of this country as the sign of a great liberation. V-E Day was the day of military victory over fascism. July 5 was the day of electoral victory over Tory reaction, the half-brother of fascism. The verdict of the people has swept aside all the predictions of the prophets and the calculations of the reactionary intriguers. With singular thoroughness the electors have made short work of the Tory caretaker of the national government, inflicted defeat at the polls on thirteen ministers of cabinet rank and sixteen other ministers (including Amery, Grigg, and Bracken—Simon, Halifax and Hoare not being available) and purged Parliament of 187 of the 251 Tory MP's who voted for Munich, removing such notorious figures as Lord Dunglass, Major Petherick, Sir Herbert Williams, Captain MacEwen, Wardlaw-Mikne and Erskine Hill.

A grand clearing-out operation has taken place. At last the turn of the Labor Party has come, for which generations of the labor movement have worked and waited, to form a Labor government with a parliamentary majority. A new political situation opens.

This glorious political leap forward in Britain is the sequel of military victory in the people's war of the United Nations against fascism. The contrast between 1918 and 1945 is inescapable. In 1918 the snap election following on victory in a reactionary imperialist war produced the Parliament of "hardfaced men," of Tory profiteers, whose ascendancy was to continue almost unbroken for twenty-seven years. In 1945, the snap election following on victory in a progressive war of liberation against fascism destroyed that Tory majority after twenty-seven years of domination and produced the first Labor majority.

For fascism and the friends of fascism in Germany and all over the world this popular election victory in Britain comes as a blow to all their hopes. The Nazis whisper into the willing ears of the *Daily Mail* that the electoral verdict of the British people is an "awful mistake." The Germans are just dumbfounded that Britain should have deserted Mr. Churchill. "To me it sounds like awful ingratitude and a mistake," a retired Wehrmacht officer said to me. "We Germans think now that Mr.

Churchill is one of the greatest men in the world and if he had been our leader we certainly should not have turned him out after what he has done. It's really most puzzling." The ingratitude of the British people to Mr. Churchill is the theme of every fascist journal. Similar lamentations echo from the press of Franco and Salazar and the Greek royalists and quislings.

The Tory fiasco is that no greater blunder was made by the entire inept Tory election campaign than the attempt to imitate the tactics which Lloyd George had used with masterly, if unscrupulous and ultimately suicidal cunning, in 1918. Thereby Toryism revealed how completely it had failed to understand either the character of the war or the temper of the people. With slavish plagiarism, the would-be smart boys of the Tory machine, the Brackens and Beaverbrooks, sought to imitate all the outward trappings of the Lloyd George success—the snap election called within a few days of the victory celebrations, the coupon letter, the "national" appeal, the noisy parade of "the man who won the—" etc.

The Beaverbrook, Bracken, Churchill election technique, despite use of the most modern machinery and technical methods—especially broadcasting—was oddly antiquated in political content. They solemnly sought to exhume all the exploded stunts and scares which had done good service in previous elections but had now become comic-opera jokes and were genuinely surprised when their most hair-raising efforts were received with ribald laughter. They sought to stage a grand constitutional crisis about the constitution of the Labor Party which might have aroused the mild interest of Mr. Gladstone or Lord Palmerston, but stirred not a ripple in an electorate grimly intent on houses and postwar employment. The more they paraded the methods of the circus and the stunt the more they repelled the electors. They really appeared to believe that the millions of men and women who had been through the fires of war against fascism were the same as the holiday crowd which had cheered Munich and could be as cheaply fooled. July 26 undecieved them.

The electors did well to reject decisively not only the Munichites and Tory diehards but equally the irrespon-

sible adventurism of the Beaverbrook, Bracken, Churchill trio, which appeared to treat politics as a succession of stunts, showed no grasp of or concern for the serious problems of British reconstruction and could coolly proclaim, as in Bracken's speeches, that the basic industries of Britain did not matter and that all that was necessary was a few luxury industries and ever extending service occupations—in short to complete the transformation of Britain into a pleasure park for the international rentier and the American tourist. From this characteristic final policy of Tory degeneracy with its accompanying riot of political adventurism and gambling with the future of the people, the healthy sense of the electors has saved Britain.

DOES this clumsy electoral technique of the Tory machine in the present election or the undoubtedly powerful advance of public opinion from the shame and bankruptcy of a quarter of a century of Toryism mean that Toryism is finished as a political force? It would be obviously premature to draw any such conclusions. Toryism still mustered 10,000,000 votes or two-fifths of those voting. The deceptive electoral system, operating this time in favor of the Labor Party, exaggerates the reduction of Tory strength in terms of parliamentary seats, but the same fickle electoral system could with the relatively small turnover of 1,000,000 votes reverse the position. The political machine of Toryism is bound to be renewed and reorganized in the light of the lessons of the Beaverbrook bungle. The great propertied interests behind Toryism remain powerful and will use their power to weaken and hinder the execution of the Labor program and to exploit every difficulty with view to throwing discredit on the Labor government and the Labor majority. A very great consolidation of Labor and progressive forces is thus essential to safeguard and make lasting the victory over fascism.

Liberalism also suffered in this election a defeat of its plans to achieve a great revival and become the balancing force in politics. Out of 307 candidates only eleven were returned, halving its already low representation in the last Parliament. The fate of this party which, less than forty years ago, won 380 seats or very nearly the equivalent

of the present party votes and now has sunk to eleven seats, is a lesson to all those who seek to bridge the gulf of the class struggle with empty conciliatory phrases. The final battle is between Toryism and Marxism. The Liberal Party under Sinclair and Beveridge aspired to an independent role, dreamed pipedreams of becoming the balancing party and offered the electorate an unsustaining diet of neither capitalism nor socialism—neither private enterprise nor nationalization, etc. The electorate rejected this nauseous concoction of emptiness with alacrity.

Nevertheless, this catastrophic defeat of Liberal aspirations to an independent political role should not give rise to illusions that Liberalism is yet finished in the political life of this country. Once again the weighted electoral system gives fantastically unjust representation to Liberalism in Parliament so that it takes 207,000 Liberal voters to have one MP as against 30,000 Labor voters and 46,000 Tory voters. The Liberal vote of two and a quarter millions represented an increase of three-quarters of a million over the last election, and if this were extended from the 300 constituencies contested to the full 600 and over it might possibly represent 4,000,000 Liberal voters in the country. Such an element, which still has its social basis for existence, has the right to play its part in the political life of the country, but only within a wider popular combination in which the leadership must necessarily lie with the organized workingclass. Similarly, a wise Labor leadership will recognize that even in this election the combined Tory and Liberal vote still exceeds the Labor vote and that for the future it will not be enough to trust to the hazards of a precarious and undemocratic electoral system, but it will be desirable to build a broader alliance around the leadership of the Labor movement.

In the final aggregate vote for the 627 seats announced on July 26, Labor obtained 11.9 million votes out of the total 24.9 million votes cast, or 48.5 percent, the Tories including Conservatives, Nationals or Liberal Nationals, 9.9 millions or forty percent, and Liberals 2.2 millions or nine percent. On this basis Labor has received 390 of the 627 seats or sixty-two percent, the Tories 210 seats or thirty-three percent, and the Liberals eleven or under two percent. And Labor has an effective parliamentary majority of over 140 over all others. On the face of it, the tactics of the electoral isolation of the Labor Party and the refusal of any progressive



"You can look me in the eye, Higbee, and tell me you voted Labor Party?"

alliance have at the present stage been crowned with success in winning the absolute Labor majority desired, possibly to the surprise of some of its authors, and will therefore, for the moment, have all the prestige of success. The fact, however, that a Labor vote of just under half the total could secure three-fifths of the seats does not prove that a Labor and progressive unity could not have inflicted a still more overwhelming and decisive rout of Toryism.

**P**UBLIC opinion tests immediately preceding the election indicated that the biggest popular support would have been for a popular front against Toryism. Thus the Gallup poll in May 1945, found that a popular front of Labor, Liberals, Communists and Common Wealth would have immediately won fifty-five percent of the population, while in the event of parties contesting separately, the Gallup poll in June 1945, found forty-five percent for Labor and thirty-seven percent for the Tories. The decision of the Labor Party conference in May, narrowly rejecting the consideration of unity by 95,000 votes and indicating an overwhelming rank and file support for unity where organizations had taken the opinions of their membership, cast the die and determined the character of the election. This de-

cision meant that the effective choice of the election would be between Toryism and Labor with virtual elimination of other parties, and that if the electorate wished to clear out the Tories they would have to vote Labor or run the risk of losing their votes by division. The Communist and Common Wealth parties recognized the position by withdrawing the majority of their candidates, contesting mainly in constituencies difficult for themselves and supporting Labor elsewhere. The electorate recognized the position by voting overwhelmingly for Labor and, with rare exceptions, ignoring other parties or reducing them to a low vote.

Under these conditions the Labor vote rose from the forty-five percent available in early June to 48.5 percent, though not to the fifty-five percent or over available for the popular front. It was a close gamble, but under the conditions of the electoral system it came off.

Before assuming that this success has settled the issue for all time, disproved the demand for Labor and progressive unity in the recent election as misplaced or superfluous or has disposed of the case for democratic electoral reform, Labor supporters will do well to consider more fully the conditions of the problem and the possibilities of future

political developments. Tory opinion, especially moderate Tory opinion like the *Times*, has hailed with especial emphasis the reestablishment of the two-party system as the main gain of the election and heaved an obvious sigh of relief. The grounds for their satisfaction are transparent. They assume with confidence as the necessary concomitant of the two-party system the swing of the pendulum and therefore the automatic future return of Toryism. They assume a long period of peaceful alternation of Toryism and Labor, preventing the execution of any long-term Labor program and guaranteeing the status quo. This is obviously not the outlook of Labor supporters. We desire the permanent ascendancy of Labor, the labor movement leading the majority of the nation in the basic social reconstruction and the reducing to impotence and final disappearance of Toryism.

This will require a broader basis of support than 48.5 percent. Full workingclass unity in the political field will be more than ever essential, and it may also be necessary to consider in the future new forms of broader unity or association with the labor movement. It is in the light of this general political situation that the role of the Communist Party in the election must be seen.

THE main task of the Communist Party was to rally unity behind Labor for the defeat of Toryism while at the same time striving in a limited field for increased Communist representation. In the conditions of the election, the effective choice before the mass of the electorate was between Toryism and Labor. Hence the visible direct electoral results won by Communism were small and not a measure of its real political strength. The foremost campaigning work of the Communist Party during the ten years between the elections, as well as during the election, in exposing Munichism and Toryism and rallying unity for the defeat of Toryism bore fruit in helping build up the Labor majority, but the same conditions restricted a direct Communist vote. Nevertheless two seats were won, 102,000 votes recorded for twenty-one candidates and a strong basis for unity established in many areas in the common campaign for a Labor majority.

For the first time a Labor government with a parliamentary majority has now been established in Britain. Generations of Socialists and pioneers of workingclass representation have striven to achieve this aim. Marxism has always recognized this as an indispensable

stage in the advance of the workingclass movement and the political experience of the masses of the people. The two previous Labor governments were visibly limited by the absence of a parliamentary majority. This limitation is now removed. Now a new political situation opens, severe in its testing of every program and leadership of strength and unity and self-discipline of the workingclass movement, but rich in its possibilities and opportunities for the entire workingclass movement for democratic advance for measures of economic and social reconstruction and for world progress and cooperation.

The new Labor government has been elected on the basis of a positive program of concrete measures. These measures have the united support of the entire workingclass movement and of the widest sections of democratic opinion. The overcoming of the obstacles to their fulfillment will require the utmost united effort. The neglect and delays of preceding Tory governments have left no easy inheritance. The urgent needs of the housing situation, decisions on control and use of the land and planning the coordination of the necessary measures for speeding victory in the Far East, with demobilization, the switch-over from war to peace in industry and an increase in the supply of consumption goods, the maintenance and improvement of wage levels and the standards of the people, the pressing problems of coal, textiles and other basic industries and the fulfillment of agreed plans on health, education and social security—all clamor for attention. Abroad, the tasks of the war against Japan, fulfillment of the decisions of the Potsdam and San Francisco conferences, completion of the destruction of fascism and the strengthening of democratic anti-fascist cooperation in Europe, India and parts of the Far East, Bretton Woods and international economic cooperation, all equally press for attention. The situation confronting the new Labor government is crowded with problems which will require all the understanding, the united endeavor and the cooperation of the entire labor movement and the whole nation.

Nor will Toryism and the great propertied and financial interests it represents, the landlords and monopolies and vested interests, the Munichites and friends of fascism, who have suffered a defeat they did not expect at the polls, take their defeat easily or abandon the struggle because the parliamentary majority is no longer in the hands of their

chosen representatives. On the contrary, they will do all in their power to discredit the new government and new majority, to weaken its action, to exploit every difficulty in the situation, to alternate praise for every sign of weakness and threats for every sign of strength, and to use their economic, administrative and publicity power in order to sabotage effective action and spread division. Any illusions that winning of a parliamentary majority is the end of the problems before the Labor movement will soon be dispelled. Vigilance against political and economic sabotage by the big capitalists, bankers and landlords will be more than ever necessary. Attempts at fascist revival must be expected. But a firm policy of unity and strength of the movement and effective political leadership will be able to defeat these maneuvers and carry the people forward to new victories.

After the election victory we are entering no easy period of smooth progressive advance, but of harsh and formidable problems and stormy struggles. That is why the unity and cooperation of all sections of the workingclass movement is so essential and all distracting divisions in the face of the common enemy need to be overcome. The first necessity for the labor movement is to follow up the election victory by consolidating its ranks and strengthening its leadership of the people. For the first time in this election all the big towns have been won. In the coming municipal elections it will be essential to follow this up and establish local administration in the hands of Labor majorities together with an increase of Communist representation. Trade union organization needs now to be strengthened in the critical transition period in industry, both to defend wartime gains in the face of already developing attacks of the employers and to cooperate with the Labor government in new tasks of reconstruction. Socialist propaganda needs to be extended on the widest scale to win the masses of young people, returning soldiers and all those millions of electors who have for the first time voted Labor. In all these tasks, no less than in grappling with the political and economic problems of the coming period, the Communist Party will be able to prove its worth and service in the movement and will at the same time do all in its power to hasten the solution of the problems of workingclass unity, with Communism able to play its part in a united labor movement which is essential for the full strength of the movement and for future victory.