

Significance of the 1924 British Elections

By J. T. MURPHY.

WHILE the election campaign is concentrating upon the Campbell prosecution and the Russian Treaty and developing into a frenzied fight against Communism, there cannot be the slightest doubt that the fury of the onslaught means more than the imminence of the revolution in Britain.

As a matter of fact that latter is so near or so far, that we need waste any time discussing it at this juncture and concern ourselves with the other reasons governing the anti-bolshevik campaign.

When the conservative party leaders decided on a general election in 1923, two outstanding problems faced them. First, to secure unanimity in the acceptance of the Dawes' plan then in process of completion and second, the consolidation of the forces of capitalism against the rising class feeling amongst the workers due to the prolonged unemployed crisis. The capitalist leaders knew quite well that if they came forward with the Dawes' report as the basis for a "European settlement" that the labor party leaders would pounce upon it and make the utmost political capital from its proposals as a means of advancing the labor party.

Labor Party Got Job.

They knew that the only party that could get this plan accepted in Britain was the labor party. Without the Dawes' report they also knew things were going from bad to worse for they had no plan apart from it. Looking back over the last twelve months, I think we are driven to the conclusion that all other explanations for the surrender of an overwhelming party majority in the parliament have to take second place to this determination to secure the acceptance of the Dawes' plan, the nature of which they alone knew at that time. By the time MacDonald was safely installed the plan was practically ready for him to operate.

The manner in which the conservative leaders carried out their strategic retreat is worthy of study. Choosing the most imperialist of programs arising from the imperial conference—tariff war against foreign competition, empire development, colonial preference, etc., Baldwin cut free from the limitations and commitments of his predecessor, Bonar Law, and at once took a bold stride forward towards the solution of the second outstanding problem—the consolidation of the forces of capitalism against the rising tide of working class discontent.

Immediately he succeeded in bringing back into the fold of the conservative party leadership those who had been cold shouldered because of their coalition leadership viz: Birkenhead, Chamberlain and Co. He drove the liberal sections together on the basis of free trade, and once having done that used the results of the election as an opportunity to modify the party position on the question of tariff war as a means of easing the relations between the conservatives and the liberals ready for the next step when the united forces of the two parties would be required to dispense with the services of the labor party.

Between Two Parties.

In this task he was aided by the attitude of Churchill who, standing first in between the two parties as the rallying force against the labor party, developing the cry which both Baldwin and Asquith echoed at the proper moment for a united front against the labor party. It was easy for him to do this as a free lance and to take the right step on to the conservative platform at the proper moment.

The moment of the election in 1924 completes the process. The conservative party was never more united. The whole of the conservative press is unanimous in the application of the united front policy against labor while the pact for the elimination of three cornered contests where these are deemed to endanger either liberal or conservative seats is a consummation which it would have been risky to prophesy to happen nine months after the 1923 election.

But these developments do not constitute the limits of the strategy. Besides committing the labor party to the Dawes' plan and involving it in every phase of imperial responsibility the aim thruout has been to split the labor party. This the conservative party in particular has had in view all the time, taunting MacDonald and his right wing colleagues on their association with Communism and those who sympathize with it. How could all their denials be accepted so long as they did not prove their words by dissociating themselves from these people. The more the labor party leadership developed along the lines of liberalism and imperialism, in their efforts to gather elements from the liberal party and to capture liberal votes at the coming election, the more they were urged to cut the painter. But the time was too short altho MacDonald led the way with the attack first upon the Communists in spite of the incidents of the Campbell prosecution and the signing of the Russian Treaty.

Conservative Strategy.

In this part of the capitalist strategy the conservative and liberal leaders have not been successful altho MacDonald was willing. In fact, the haste to dispense with the labor government over-reached itself, for instead of splitting the labor party and weakening the development of class war politics within it, the pushing of the labor party into the position of opposition party will strengthen this devo-

lopment as the only means of developing the labor party.

But why the haste? Here I think we come to the crux of the new situation. The crisis came not on the Campbell case. Had the labor government not made an ass of itself on this question the crisis would still have been upon them. This crisis depended on the Anglo-Russian Treaty. Yet to still narrower limits must we draw it. This hung upon the question of a guaranteed loan and debt recognition.

Raised Great Howl.

On the lines of approach to the Bolshevik delegates, MacDonald received the plaudits of every capitalist paper in the country. But when it came to the loan question especially, there was an almost universal howl. But for this feature, it is probable that there would have been an accommodation with the liberals. This gave the conservatives their chance to develop their campaign against the treaty as a whole and with the help of Lloyd George, the liberal party was swung into line.

Why this complete change in the attitude of the liberals who previously were in favor of developing the relations between Britain and Soviet Russia? None of the liberal leaders have given coherent reasons for the change but have simply echoed the tirades of the conservative party against helping the Bolsheviks. The echo is so complete that we are driven to the conclusion that the conservatives hold the key to the riddle.

Turning to the conservatives for an explanation, we find the following interesting theory propounded by Baldwin on the eve of the election. "Russia never has been, and I do not believe ever will be, one of our principal markets. Geographically and linguistically, conditions are against it, just as those conditions are against us in our trade on the lower waters of the Danube. Our natural markets are the Dominions, South America, and the East. There we have a better chance of competing with the world.

Baldwin's Views.

"Whether we like it or not, the natural exploiter of Russian trade is Germany. They have always done the largest trade in Russia because, geographically, they are the most favorably situated and they study the Russian language and understand Russian methods of business. In my view the thing for world trade, of which we should get our share, would be the development of Russian trade by us and when it becomes possible by Germany that she should turn into that market, which some day, but not yet, will be a great market—that she should turn into that country the surplus of exports which is to provide for the payment of reparations and incidentally of some of our interest to America—that she should do that rather than the bulk of that surplus should be turned either into this country, or into our own special markets which I have described."

In addition therefore, to the hatred of the Bolshevik government of Russia there is also a very definite fear of the increased competition that the rehabilitation of Germany is bound to bring. As a matter of fact, in the same speech Baldwin states: "It is perfectly true that the increased trade that will come from the rehabilitation of Germany, that is to say the increased world trade, must be coupled at the same time with an increased competitive power in Germany, and you have to weigh the balance of advantage. The probability in my view is that the balance on the whole is to our advantage, too, subject to one or two observations I shall have to make." These observations I have already quoted.

On Dawes' Plan.

The position therefore, becomes clear. The opposition to the Russian

Treaty is based upon the acceptance of the Dawes' plan by the British imperialists. To carry out the Dawes' plan and secure reparations it is obvious that they are anxious to be able to compete effectively and at the same time to be safeguarded against the competition. The latter part of the scheme won't stand a great deal of examination but the question of competition and the relation of the Russian Treaty thereto is all important for different reasons to those put forward by Baldwin.

For example, we should require to be credulous to think that British capitalists are prepared to hand over any market to a competitor. Even Baldwin's Limited are not so generous if their recent completion of a £70,000 order from Russia is anything to go by. The argument that the geographical and linguistic factor is against Britain is too funny for words. If the Russian market is to be handed to Germany because they are neighbors, why not China to the Japs and South America to the United States. As for language, is Chinese easier for the poor Britisher to learn than Russian?

The Russian Market.

I think we must go a little deeper than these specious reasons. When all allowance is made for the hatred of the Bolsheviks there is not the least shadow of a doubt that when the British capitalists see their competitors rushing into the Russian market, they will not be far behind. A comparison of the trade they have already made with Russia and the trade made by their competitors with Russia since the revolution will prove that. But the fact of the matter is, both British and foreign capitalists do not want to aid the Bolsheviks of Russia at all and will only develop in that direction accordingly to the pressure of circumstances. A further factor must be taken into account and that is, the British capitalists have got first offers and hold a favorable position in relation to their competitors for the Russian market.

But these offers are not altogether timely when placed in relation to the competitive factors operating in the world market especially with the Dawes' plan holding premier position in the capitalist plan of campaign. They know as well as we that the placing of orders to the tune of thirty million pounds would have a decided effect upon unemployment and upon the workers generally. They know that immediately there is the slightest sign of revival of trade it is the signal for the workers to make demands for a recovery of their losses, for wage improvements, etc. To get such demands at the time when all the other conditions of the market arising from the application of the Dawes' report are insisting upon reductions of wages and the lengthening of the working day and week would be fatal to their policy of the conquest of the world market.

Behind The Screen.

The opposition to the Russian Treaty is therefore, more than an anti-Bolshevik campaign and is based upon a planned offensive against the workers of Britain to bring their conditions down to competitive levels established in Germany. Until that has been accomplished there will be no means enabling the placing of large orders from Russia.

This conclusion is forced upon us by the general preparation going on thruout industry for this offensive. Hichens, a chairman of Cammell Lairds, stated frankly to the I. L. P. summer school that "The main cause of the present trade depression lay in conditions outside the control of Britain—in European unrest, in the poverty of other nations due to the war, in foreign rivalries and competition. . . . As a temporary measure to meet this situation, I believe it is inevitable that real wages in this coun-

try must fall. I say real wages because it is possible that nominal wages reckoned in money will rise. They tend to rise, in fact, at the present moment."

The industrial correspondent of the "Morning Post" writing on September 22, of the iron and steel position, says, "A reduction in production costs would appear to be the only way in which to get the industry back onto a sound basis, and prevent the blowing out of further furnaces in the near future."

Demand Wage Cut.

The "Financial Times" of the same date declares in reviewing the coal situation created by German competition, "There is only one way left to combat German competition and that is to get the costs of production in this country down to the German level. Under the seven-hour working day and the new wage agreement that may be regarded as a sheer impossibility, for the miners will sacrifice neither one nor the other of these conditions." Sir George Hunter, a prominent shipbuilder, declared also "Improvement in the shipbuilding industry would not come unless the shipbuilders could induce the leaders of trade unions to help them reduce their costs and to co-operate with them." These quotations could be multiplied ad lib, but there is here sufficient to reveal the fact most clearly that the defeat of the Russian Treaty at this juncture is part of the general economic offensive against the working class of Britain bound up with the operation of the Dawes' report. The coincidence of the two features accounts for the ferocity of the anti-Bolshevik campaign far more than the growing importance of Communism in Britain. While the fact that the labor party is bound to the Russian Treaty more positively and wholeheartedly than to the Dawes' plan made it imperative that the labor government should be immediately displaced altho the conservative party tactics had not come to full fruition.

Served The Purpose.

The calling into being of the labor government was therefore, determined primarily by the need to secure the acceptance of the Dawes' report by the working class movement. The end of the labor government was caused by the historic association of the British working class movement with the Workers' Republic of Russia and these associations cutting clean across the fulfillment of the plans of the imperialists in spite of the willingness of the labor leaders to serve. The treaty of negotiations were conducted on approved bourgeois lines. The compromises forced upon the Russian workers were bourgeois compromises. But the objective situation ruled that the operation of the treaty interfered with the major plans of imperialism involving the intensification of imperialist competition thruout the world and the deeper enslavement of the workers. Hence the defeat of the labor government. Hence the new coalition of conservatives and liberals.

But the plans are not complete and the sequel is destined to prove as interesting and important as the incident of the labor government. The defeat of the Russian Treaty is bound to make it the first plank of all labor agitation dealing with unemployment and whether MacDonald and his friends like it or not, draw the working class of Britain closer to the workers and peasants of Russia. The failure of the capitalist plan to split the labor party before driving it out of office is destined to deepen the working class development within it; to strengthen the class conscious forces and give a leftward impetus to the whole movement. The speeding up of the forces of competitive struggle of imperialism has thus destroyed the labor government, but how deeply the country is being ploughed for Bolshevism!

MUSIC - LITERATURE - DRAMA

By ALFRED V. FRANKENSTEIN.

Jacques Gidon, concertmaster of the Chicago Symphony orchestra, was soloist with the organization at the regular concert given in Orchestra Hall last Friday and Saturday. Gordon played, for the first time in America, the Gregorian concerto for violin and orchestra, by Ottorino Respighi. Respighi has busied himself greatly in the last few years studying medieval Italian music and this concerto is one of the fruits of his labor.

Thruout the three movements there is a sombre, mysterious atmosphere, reminiscent of the old illuminated manuscript music that is still sung in Italian cathedrals. The work must be ferociously difficult to play, and Gordon did it perfectly. To us there seems a great improvement in the concertmaster's work. The tension in his style, so annoying heretofore, was entirely gone.

Liquid What?

Contrasting with modern composition, Gordon played the eight concerto by Spohr. This concerto is a work of simple, almost ingenuous liquid melody thruout, tho there are passages of virtuosity which is not music that is the fault of the concerto form.

Following this was an English horn solo with orchestra. The symphonic poem "The Swan of Tuonela" by Jean Sibelius. Tuonela is the Hades of Finnish mythology, and in this weird and gripping movement the composer de-

scribes the swan that swims on the river surrounding Tuonela. The use of the English horn produces just the effect the subject needs. And if there is anything connected with the playing of the instrument that Mr. Napollini does not know, it is not worth knowing.

The Less the Better.

To open the concert Mr. Stock chose that bit of musical laughter the overture to "The Bartered Bride" by Smetana. He followed this up with

a work by Smetana's greatest musical compatriot, the twenty seven variations for orchestra by Dvorak. I some twenty of these were excised from the score, one might listen to the composition in a better frame of mind.

The rhapsody "Finlandia," also by Sibelius, closed the program. This is the composer's best known effort. It starts out with a cold, gloomy section and winds up fast and furiously with an infectious dance rhythm.

TOO LATE!



The foreign diplomats didn't get the Chinese-Eastern railroad. The Soviets have it now.