

# New Political Situation Is Full Of Menace To The British Empire

## Breakdown of Party Government Has Paralyzed Domestic and Foreign Policy at Time of Grave Crisis in European and World Affairs and Many Englishmen Say Their Country Is Now Only Second or Third Rate Power.

By FRANK H. SIMONDS  
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Washington, Dec. 15.—Looking to the future there are two phases of the recent British general election which must command widespread interest. For Britain itself, this test opens new and disturbing horizons which can hardly be measured in advance.

The theory of parliamentary government, as Britain has practiced and taught it, has broken down, the two party system has either temporarily or permanently disappeared to give place to the bloc form. Again, almost as significant as the domestic may be the foreign consequences of this amazing election.

For Americans the rise of a third party in Great Britain must have the gravest sort of significance. We have been many times threatened with such an unwelcome condition in the past, but always we have managed to escape it. Nevertheless there are signs to be discovered at this present moment which suggest that what has arrived in England may before long come to us also. With the farm bloc showing its strength and its determination to control by paralysis if by no other method, with the more than vague hint of a third party revolt in the forthcoming presidential election, British experience must command American attention.

Now, as far as the domestic phase of the British situation is concerned, it must be recognized at once that the presence of three parties, not to be sure, of equal strength, but each constituting a hopeless minority by itself, promises to be no passing phase. In a word, as the last test showed, the three parties seem all of them to have taken root, the Tory and the Liberal resting on ancient and historic foundations, the Labor party giving every indication of having come to stay.

**A Difficult Mess**  
If, for example, to get out of the present mess, the British should undertake a new election, hoping that this trial of strength one of the three parties would get a clear majority, there is nothing anywhere discoverable which would suggest that the election results would be materially different. Authority would no more be cut in three parts and executive action would thus remain completely paralyzed.

Looking backward over the last three elections, it is clear to see that Labor is on the gain, Lloyd George's "Khaki Election" of 1918 disclosed it at dead low water. His leader, Ramsay MacDonald was defeated and the still vital emotions of the war served to win for the Premier of that hour a huge and even unwieldy majority of extreme Tories and unliberal Liberals. In a House of Commons containing slightly more than 700 members Labor counted only 62 members, not only fewer than the Tories and the Liberals but less than Sinn Fein, which presently emigrated to Ireland.

A year ago, at the general election following the overthrow of Lloyd George, Labor obtained 142 seats in a house of just over 600. By contrast the Tories had 214, counting the Irish Unionists from Ulster, while the two factions of the Liberal party together mustered 117 seats. The bitter fight between Lloyd George and Asquith, however, might have been assumed to explain the paucity of Liberal members. Nevertheless the election of 1922 gave to the Labor party a membership which not only made it the second party in the House of Commons but also disclosed it as a strong party itself.

**Labor Gaining Strength**  
Finally in the last election Labor carried more than 190 seats, as against 260 for the Tories and 150 for the reunited Liberals, and by virtue of this election demonstrated its right to be regarded henceforth as the official opposition, the second party in Great Britain. In five years it had exactly trebled its membership. The reconciliation of Lloyd George and Asquith, the possession by the Liberals of very large campaign funds, the desperate battle they made under very effective leadership to regain their lost position, all came to nothing, a paltry gain of seats, but an inability to prevent Labor from obtaining many more seats and a much larger popular vote.

To make a government in England today, as recent conferences and press discussions have disclosed, it is necessary to effect some sort of coalition between parties. But in the larger sense there can be no coalition. The Tories have the largest

block of seats, the Liberals have far and away the largest group of leaders. But the majority of Tories will hardly be, as with some authority the supporters of the latter or their leadership by the younger Liberal membership, will when all is said and done there remain many points of absolute divergence between Conservatives and Liberals.

As for Labor it is not less hostile to the Liberals than to the Tories and second much doubt looks with more than upon Lloyd George. It is not a partial power. It is not content with a fractional control of government. It cannot impose its principles and its programme upon Great Britain until it has a clear majority and it has every reason for rejecting any limited power coupled with almost unlimited responsibility. It gained 80 seats between 1918 and 1922. It gained 50 more between 1922 and 1923. At this rate of progress it can expect to come to its own before too long and it can afford to wait.

**Why No Derby Ministry**  
The press for days has been filled with discussions of possible combinations. A Derby Ministry drawn chiefly from Tories and Liberals, a compromise which would be necessarily colourless and in all human probability doomed to but a brief tenure of office. But Lord Derby is the most conspicuous Francophile in England and a clear majority of the Liberal Party is hostile not alone to the friendly policy advocated by Derby, but even to the more critical and unsympathetic policy of Stanley Baldwin.

You have there, then, the revelation of one of the great difficulties of the situation. Liberals and Tories are close together in their opposition to the Labor policies of which capital levy is the most notorious, but Liberals and Labor members are just as close together in the opposition to anything but open and determined resistance to the Poincare policy on the Continent. Since, moreover, foreign policy is one of the most important of present problems, it is terribly hard to see how a Derby Ministry could hold on for long.

The whole theory of the British Parliamentary system, like our theory of government rests upon the assumption of two parties, which together express the complete political convictions of the population. As long as Englishmen are either Tories or Liberals the thing works perfectly, just as it works with us when there are only Democrats and Republicans. When the Irish question was unsettled, Ireland sent a third party to Westminster, but it was a third party only upon a single issue and, in the main, could work with the Liberals.

**Groups Seem Irreconcilable**  
Today, however, Labor is not to be reconciled either with the Liberals or the Tories because it represents a clear and definite program. And it is just as hard to see any real basis of permanent co-operation between the Tories and the Liberals. What is most baffling and at the same time most dangerous in the British situation is the fact that the present state of public opinion in Great Britain is divided not into two camps but into three, that the three groups are utterly distinct, and seek, as to major objectives, three mutually exclusive ends.

Now, if this be true, it is going to be impossible for a long time at least to get any really representative ministry. You can patch together temporary coalitions to "carry on" as the British say, to keep the machinery of government running so far as

the routine is concerned and not even Labor has any desire to prevent this. But you cannot arrive at any permanent legislative or international program have stability of performance. Two groups which share on foreign policy are at complete variance in all important domestic matters, while other groups which could not together at all are divided on foreign policy.

What this means for Great Britain at this hour must be fully appreciated. It does not mean that the crisis of the British situation at the present time is a "curable" one, appreciated by the United States. Without exaggeration, the domestic crisis is the gravest in a century. The economic situation is not only bad, but it has been bad for a long time and no one can see any real hope for hoping that it will be greatly improved in the immediate future. Unemployment, overtaxation, real and very general suffering, these are the manifest circumstances of British life.

**Readjustment Impracticable**  
At home it has been found impossible to readjust national life despite heroic and even desperate efforts. Abroad it has been equally impossible to contribute materially to the restoration of economic prosperity on which in the last analysis British domestic prosperity depends. In the past two years British prestige and British influence in the world have sunk to an almost unbelievably low level. Englishmen of my acquaintance, with clear exaggeration perhaps, speak of their country as having become a second and even a third-rate power.

Now it is axiomatic that the present economic and political position of Great Britain cannot be improved until there are both efficient leadership and substantial unity in British political life. The supreme advantage that Poincare has had in the past two years in an ever increasing measure has grown out of the fact that he represented an indestructible majority in the Chamber of Deputies and was himself capable of following a definite line with utmost consistency and very great firmness. He has known what he wanted, he has wanted what he knew his countrymen desired and he has been able to resist all exterior pressure.

This was the advantage which be-

hanced to Lloyd George. For the first time we have had a man who has been able to do this. Lloyd George who found himself in the hands of the Tories. Then it at last and by a division of the seats... (Continued on page 3)



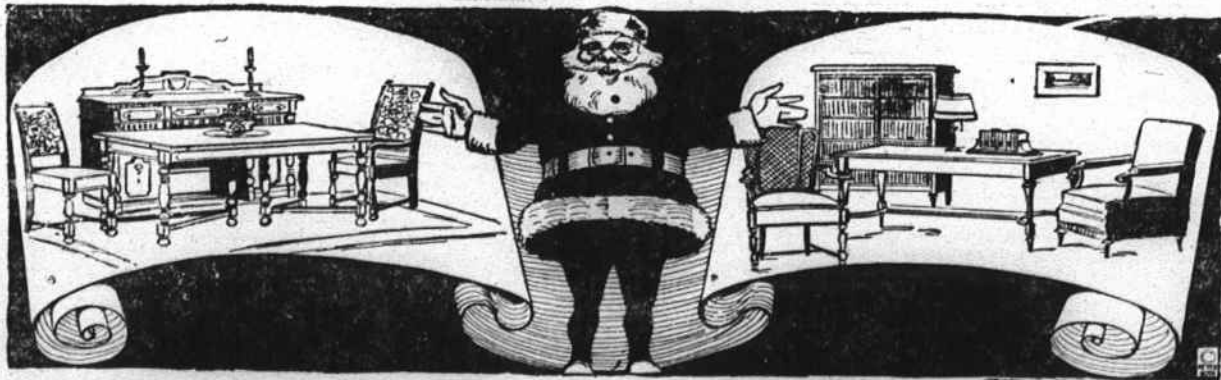
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