

# 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 been 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 precise moment which suggest that what has arrived in England may before long come to us. 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 once 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. Its 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 un-Liberal Liberals. In a House of Commons containing slightly more than 700 members Labor counted only 63 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 334, 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 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

the routine is concerned and not even Labor has any desire to precipitate chaos. But you cannot arrive at any program either legislative or international, you cannot have stability or permanence. Two groups which agree on foreign policy are at complete variance in all important domestic matters, while other groups which could get together at once are divided on foreign policy.

What this means for Great Britain at this hour must be fully appreciated. It does not seem to us that the crisis of the British situation at the present time is less serious than it was appreciated in the United States. Without question, the domestic crisis is the greatest 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 light for hoping that it will be greatly improved in the immediate future. Unemployment, over-taxation, 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 Poincaré 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-

longed to Lloyd George, for the first who were handicapped by weakness, the second by avarice. Then it at least had the advantage of being well informed and wise in sentiment. But with a Parliament like the one passed recently, it was

Lloyd George who found himself compelled to make a speech of 10 hours and to a division of 700 votes, in which he was beaten.

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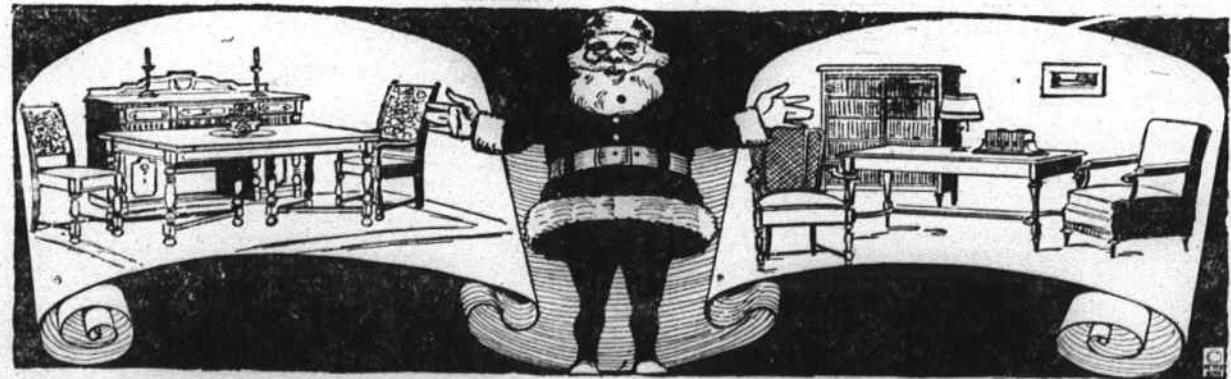
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