

Situation In France Is Extremely Critical Now

Decision of President Millerand to Call Upon Herriot to Form a New Ministry Likely Mark Beginning of Era of Stress, Chaos and Uncertainty in That Country

By FRANK H. SIMONDS
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Washington, May 29.—The decision of President Millerand to call upon Herriot to form a new ministry, a decision forecast by the results of the recent election and disclosed at the conference still more recently held at the Elysee Palace, on the surface at least holds out the promise of new and disturbing chaos in French domestic politics.

At best Herriot's reign must be short and, just as the present change has retarded the application of the Dawes program, later changes must have similarly disturbing effects.

On the surface Herriot will have behind him approximately half of the French chamber of deputies, some 292 members, but this strength rests upon the combination of three quite diverse elements, the Socialists, the Radicals and a small group of radical socialists or socialist radicals, who follow Painleve. All three of these parties were united in the common desire to overturn Poincare, but between the out-and-out Socialists, who count an even hundred members and the balance of the coalition there is little or nothing in common now that Poincare is beaten. Moreover there are always the Communists to reckon with.

By contrast the Bloc National, the old Poincare combination, counts 253 members and can rely upon some 11 more votes from the Royalists. To enlist the necessary support of the Socialists Herriot must consent to accept certain legislative projects which will certainly be opposed by the whole of the Bloc National and the Royalists. If by any chance, Painleve's group should presently break with Herriot's combination would come crashing down in a moment.

Actually Herriot's ministry is going to have something of the same position now occupied by the Labor government in England. Herriot's own party counts but 153 in a house of 584, as contrasted with 191 Laborites in a house of 615 members. Like Ramsay MacDonald, Herriot must then find large support outside his party in order to stay in power a single day. But unlike MacDonald, who can ordinarily count on the solid support of Liberals, Herriot must get support not from one but two parties. And, whereas the overthrow of MacDonald would precipitate a new election in England which all Liberals justly fear, the fall of Herriot could be accomplished without any election aftermath.

Briand's refusal to enter a Herriot cabinet, if persisted in, certainly dooms the cabinet, for it means that Briand and his friends are planning to make a combination against Herriot and with the former supporters of Poincare in the Bloc National. Herriot, then, forced to make large concessions to the Socialists is almost certain to find himself in a short time with only the support of his own Radicals and the Socialists, which would leave him in a hopeless minority and he may even find himself deserted by the Socialists because he refuses to follow their desires sufficiently.

Despite its outward appearance, the recent election result was on the whole a far more complete repudiation of Poincare than of his policies, and far less a revelation of radicalism in France than of a desire to get rid of a leader who had come to stand in the popular mind for reactionary ideas. But with Poincare removed, there are already many signs that the new chamber is vastly more conservative in temper than the man who will be asked to form the new cabinet can possibly be, given his associates and particularly in view of his dependence upon the Socialists.

Ramsay MacDonald went to Downing Street with something like a free hand, because he could not be evicted without the arrival of a new election and both the old parties feared that a new election would lessen their own strength and perhaps give Labor a free majority of its own. This situation remains unchanged and MacDonald continues in power as a result. Moreover, there was very clear evidence in Britain at the moment and since that the British people were not disturbed by Labor's accession and were insistent that Labor should have a fair chance to show what it could do.

In France, on the other hand, it is not clear yet that there is any large desire to see what Herriot might do with a Socialist backing. The country as well as the majority of the new chamber of deputies is far more conservative than Herriot, whereas in Britain the ministry which is a minority in the house of commons has a popular strength which sustains it in spite of this fact. And the Tories and the Liberals permit the Labor ministry to remain

because they are afraid of the country.

It is even conceivable, in view of recent happenings, that Herriot may fall outright in his attempt to form a ministry, although this is unlikely. In that event Briand might come at once and then the dangers of new delay in dealing with the Dawes report would be obliterated. Once Briand did come it is pretty certain that he could create a new bloc, drawing alike from the Bloc National which supported Poincare and the Bloc of the Left which oppose him, for Briand would be at one time more moderate in method and word than Poincare and more conservative in principle and in action than Herriot.

For the present, however, there is uncertainty and this uncertainty seems destined to endure even if Herriot is able to patch together a temporary cabinet. This uncertainty will hamper international negotiations and may postpone the application of the Dawes report program. Of course if Herriot should achieve some sudden and unexpected success in foreign relations he might hold on, but at best his task will be frightfully difficult and his prospects are hardly alluring.

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