

A POLITICAL CHAOS CREATED BY PEEL.

(Published long before Sir R. Peel's death.)

MINISTERIAL ALTERNATIVE—A PROVISIONAL MINISTRY. A PARTY OF LABOUR OR SOCIAL ECONOMISTS LOUDLY CALLED FOR. THE POLITICAL FRANCHISE PROPOSED TO BE BASED ON AN ASSESSMENT FOR EDUCATION, OR A REINSTITUTION UNDER A SYSTEM OF UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE, THE AMOUNT (ABOUT ONE AND A HALF MILLION POUNDS PER ANNUM), TO BE AN ENDOWMENT FOR COMMON SCHOOLS. THE HOUSE OF LORDS TO BE ELECTED BY THE SAME CONSTITUENCY FROM AMONG THE ENDOBED CLASS. THE PRESENT UNIVERSAL LOYALTY OUR ONLY CONSOLATION OR SAFETY. AND WE CAN ONLY SAVE THE MONARCHY BY ADOPTING DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATION IN TIME.

"If you wish to see a perfect state of higgledy-piggledy, you have only to look at the present state of parties in this country. Why, there is no man, however full of talent, however high in station—there is no public man—no great leader, or combination of great leaders, who can secure a majority of the House of Commons from day to day, because the old relations of party are broken up and unrecognised. (Cheers.) The old party is scattered to the winds, and you could no more form the old parties anew than you could collect the dust of the Great North of England Road, and put it into the shape of its original axle. (Loud cheers.) That is not a state of things in which the Government of this country can be carried on for any time. (Hear, hear.) If no public man or combination of public men can carry on the Government of this country, then I say it is necessary that there should be some change. BUT YOU CANNOT HAVE ANY CHANGE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS EXCEPT FOR CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION OF THAT BODY. Parties are now in about a similar condition to what they were in after the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act, with this difference, that there is a greater break up now, for even was a greater blow to them than Catholics. (Cheers and long etc.) As it is impossible for the Government of the country to be carried on without leadership and without purpose, for it is the very absence of purpose which makes parties in the House of Commons so unmanageable and anarchical, so it is impossible that the Government and Parliament can continue long in this position, and therefore the leaders of parties and political men are looking round for the reconstruction of parties."—From Mr Cobden's Speech at the Meeting of the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association at London, 24th April, 1850.*

In fact, at this moment, such a thing as "party," based upon a principle distinct from its opponents, has ceased to exist; and in the future it will be told to the everlasting credit of the spirit of British party that it refused to live when principle was lawfully laid aside by our politicians. The consequence of the two great parties repudiating principle is, that the best feature of the British government, a constitutional opposition in the Legislature, continually acting under the responsibility of having the Executive handed over to it, has not existed since Lord John Russell assumed the reins in 1846. We are laughed at when we talk of the breaking of the constitution, but if Peel, in bringing about this state of things, has not broken the terms of the constitution, it is self-evident he has broken its spirit. What, a few years ago, would have been said if we had been told of the possibility of this country being entirely left to the tender mercies of any one set of men? (but especially to those of the Whigs!) and the more general loyalty to the Monarchy than ever before existed, is our only consolation and safety. We shall have no "provisional Government," or provisional supreme power in this country. But I have never doubted, since 1846, when such political tyros as the Bishop of Oxford insisted on a divorce of the Church party from the party of home and colonial industry, that Parliament would have to appoint "a provisional Ministry," composed probably of Prince Albert and the Duke of Wellington, with power to add to their number—empowered by law to call a Parliament under universal suffrage, which would be done when it is seen that there is no alternative. I use the term Universal Suffrage, to indicate a great extension of the franchise, but my plan would be to restrict the voters for members of the Lower House to those who have paid three years, 6s per annum, of educational assessment (the first election requiring an advance of 18s); I would let the Upper House be elected by the same constituency, no one, however, but peers, sons of peers, and baronets being eligible as candidates. My plan is one which will of course be objected to by many as too great an extension of the franchise, and by others as savouring of a compromise of a great right; it is a trial when they reflect how little progress has been made in favor of undefined views of Universal Suffrage. I would not reject any man over 21 years of age and of sound mind, who has not been made a criminal by the decision of a court of law, but I think WE SHOULD REQUIRE A REGISTRATION FEE OF SIX SHILLINGS PER ANNUM, the amount to be applied to a great common school system, but this payment by each registered elector being liable to be deducted from the small School fees that may be payable by his children, if he has a family, and in case this small sum is an object in his

circumstances, I see that by no other machinery than Universal Suffrage can everything be cleared out of the way of "LEGISLATION FOR THE INDUSTRY OF THE COUNTRY,"—and without this immediately we must have social confusion, involving evils far more permanent than those which flow from a revolution, such as has occurred in France. The question of the employment of the masses can never take a place quite first, with the Church and everything else as secondary, in the Parliament as now constituted; I shall never spend another penny in any other political object till that Radical Reform of the legislature is attained which seems to me to be so imperatively demanded not less by the safety of the throne, than the employment of the masses. We shall not probably get the great authorities in Political Economy to favour my idea of thoroughly popularising Parliament, for they have always seen that democratic legislation is sure to be protective legislation as in America.

It seems obvious to me, however, that we are threatened with social confusion if the vital question of labour, or of the employment of our own people, is much longer prevented from being settled on its own merits, through the friends of the working classes being kept asunder by the distinctions of CHURCHMEN and DISSENTERS, or, to speak more plainly, through the Church question being allowed to usurp the chief place in our politics instead of the industrial question.

At our first meeting I pointed out to Lord George Bentinck that Peel's assertion of the omnipotence of Parliament, in the room of the omnipotence of Principle, moral and constitutional, must (if we would prevent unfortunate legislation becoming a cause of revolution) lead to the responsibility of our Legislative Acts being transferred to the entire people, because omnipotence may become tyranny, which could only safely be exercised by principals. And I expressed to his Lordship my opinion that Peel's unprincipled course would be fatal to (cause the deterioration of) every institution in the country, except the Crown, distinctions hitherto valuable, because regulated by principle, being now a nuisance—my words were nearly these:—"The Premier has left us in a condition worse than political chaos, as having robbed us of our principles. Even the principle that self-preservation is the first law of nature has been repudiated; and British politics have been reduced into the two original elements of all national politics—the Labour-power and the Money-power. The Labour-power must come to be represented by Social Economists, or practical men, or Farmers, the character of whose legislation will be that it takes the circumstances of our society into account; the Money-power being represented by Political Economists or cosmopolitan Theorists, who would have this country legislate for the world, while they view Political Science as a system of pure mathematics, or, at best, one for the creation of wealth, without any regard to its distribution."

Indeed, to my mind it has never appeared that the permanent important question was as to whether it was right or a wrong thing, *per se*, that Peel did in 1846. His impolicy, however great, appears to me to stand, in relation to his repudiation of moral and constitutional principle, just as a misfortune does to a crime. I myself, for instance, am opposed to Established or exclusive Churches, even if these were the best churches possible, viewing partiality to any class of her Majesty's subjects as an impediment to general confidence in the Crown and law of the land; but give me the power to injure the Church, or any other vital interest, by a side wind, would I as a minister, or even as a legislator, do it? If the constituencies don't wish the Church demolished, dere I, their servant, put it down? And if the constituencies do wish it put down, what need is there for me to interfere? induly? It has always seemed to me to be the duty of a minister rather to try to find evidence in favour of a respectable constitutional or of moral, unless it is one in which a Great Interest can repose with even more safety in the hands of its avowed enemy, seeing that he, as an honourable man, would require the greater evidence for its overthrow, to leave no shadow of a suspicion, even in his own mind, that his personal predilections had influenced his conduct as a public man.

The reverse of the picture is a very humbling one. Behold the constituencies of the empire standing in the position of trustees of the entire people, employing, as agent under the Trust, the man of Tamworth, who immediately turns round and repudiates all obligation to abide by the terms of the trust deed, or even to act on any principle whatever! And what are we to think of our contemptible trustees in submitting thus to be lulled and gilded by their *ex post facto* assent to Peel's conduct, an omniscient or arbitrary power to Parliament which they had not to give. My own view has always been that we have in this transaction (whatever may have been Peel's intention at the time, to a virtual abdication by the present constituencies. But the immediate importance of this unprincipled proceeding is what we have chiefly at present to do with, and that arises from the act

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