

Parliament or Cabinet— Which?

EDITOR'S NOTE:—The following replies by comrades Harrington and "R" conclude the discussion with comrade J. A. McDonald under this heading. The course of the discussion may be followed by reference to Western Clarion issues of Sept. 1st and 16th and Oct. 16th.

REPLY BY "R."

IN my last attempt at this question, I conceded Comrade McDonald that in theory Parliament was the will of the people, but maintained that the concession was barren. For in practice, Parliament never effects what the people really want and what they really vote for—the amelioration of their social conditions. Com. McDonald admits that, I think. I said further, that I was writing apropos of a pending election, the object being to show that the elective machinery was in fact not the expression of the social will, as popularly understood, but as an apparatus to safeguard the property right of the capitalist class through the illusion of electoral freedom. Our comrade will admit that too, I think. Com. Mc. avers, as we do, that Parliament is a class institution, and parliamentary procedure the prerogative of class privilege; and he implies through quotations that the capitalist class has little to fear from the election of a Labor Government. Clearly, therefore, in practical effect—the objective we had in view—Parliament is not the reflex of the will of the people.

Com. Mc. says I regard Parliament as without eyes and teeth, etc. Pardon me, I do not. But its eyes are fixed exclusively on class interests, and its teeth are invariably used to bite the workers, who vote for it. And because it does so it delimits its functions—not in theory but in practice—as the rendition of Caesar's things to Caesar.

Let me try to explain again the contention that it has lost its ancient powers and privileges. Genetically—not politically—considered, Parliament is the modified descendant of the tribal assemblies and communal moots of people in the completely different association of Gentile society and primitive feudalism. Those assemblies gathered together to consider the customs and duties, the common rights and privileges of the social organisation, and for all practical purposes they really represented the total community. With the advent of political concepts, engendered through the slowly changing years, the ancient customs and traditions changed form and hue through the pressure of immediate condition, and those free assemblies gradually acquired definite complexions of class law. The definite advent of capitalist condition entailed a new rendering of class law, and the old idea of compounded custom and law was modified by the new need, in the new form of political practice. Political change and industrial revolution have hidden both changing form, varying concept, and transitional stage; while the general hardening of economic conditions very naturally drapes and colors the socially misapprehended past. It is the confused traditions of the past, intermingling with the misunderstood present, that induces the empty concepts of present thought. And from that thought, laden with prejudice and preconception, results the chaotic volitions and meaningless terms of the present reality. Hence, in this transmitted light of social ideology Parliament is stripped of its ancient privileges and lives in traditional prestige.

Strictly speaking in the terms of political Parliament, although the theory remains unaltered its character has changed with changing times, and its application with changing conditions. Does the present not afford bounteous proof of that? Fifty years ago parliament certainly represented a wider body of interests and was more strictly sensitive to peculiarly parliamentary principles. Today the corruption of parliament is a byword, its legislation the scorn even of its administrators. And if, by the

book, the cabinet is the creation of parliament, by the book parliament is the registrar of a multitude of D.O.R.A.'s, emergency acts, radical jockeyism and general Imperialist legislation. *And as business has developed from the individual interest to the vertical trust and international combine, so representation has passed dominantly from the national trader and liberal manufacturer, to the purse-holder of foreign securities and international banking. And as foreign affairs are not in the nature and beyond the scope of the national parliament, so its oldtime prerogatives are changed with its new personnel; the superior departments which it theoretically creates and governs become its dictators, leaving it the "privilege" of blindly—and faithfully—endorsing the policies of foreign continuity and Imperialist accumulation. It is social ignorance, of course, that returns the representatives who support the system; but it is the underlying economic development that energises the changed method and decreasing social right.

If the idea behind parliamentary representation is the emancipation of the wage worker, it is doomed already. Class consciousness is far superior in political domination than in proletarian organisation; industrial condition far ahead of social understanding. And through the irresistible necessities of its gathering, yet restrained forces, it will probably impel an issue by other means than the ballot. Circumstances, by the colossal impounding of political reconstructions may drive the workers in general, in the unity of social need, to seize the powers of government. But in seizing them the class nature of parliament will be abolished, and the new state will have as its foundation, not the privilege of class, but the administration of social necessity. That is to say the state will be seized only to abrogate the exploitation of the state. And in doing so the will of the people, consciously, will find its real expression, and its social administration resume, in a higher form, its lost traditions and long extinguished privileges.

REPLY BY J. HARRINGTON.

SO far as I can see, no fundamental difference has been raised in this discussion, and I have neither time nor inclination to enter into a 'tis and 'tish't argument. I too have an alarm-clock. If comrade McDonald can see no difference between Wilson and his second election promises and performances and a horse and its stable, then I'll let it go at that.

Concerning the matters of detail I touched on, the facts are articulate enough and can speak for themselves.

The President of the United States is elected by the Electoral College, the seven million votes notwithstanding. The constitution provides for that, and twice in actual practice the College vote has killed the popular vote: In 1876 Hayes beat Tilden on it, and again, in 1888 Harrison beat Cleveland.

The Prime Minister of Britain takes precedence next to the Archbishop of York thanks to King Edward who "is not" in matters of legislature; not by act of parliament. He is not selected by the victorious Party. Parliament cannot dismiss him or his Cabinet. There is no law on this matter, only precedence, and as one sapient historian has it: by accident.

A group of a little over a hundred aristocrats meet in the Carlton Club and take a vote; Lloyd George, without a word from Parliament or a word to Parliament resigns. The King, without a word to Parliament asks Bonar Law to form a Cabinet; the latter, without a word to Parliament says he will await a vote taken in the Hotel Cecil, where 400 autocrats select him and he is Prime Minister. He, in selecting his Cabinet, out of the eleven so far chosen of the nineteen required, includes two

who are neither members of the Commons nor the Lords.

Touching the Labor Party voting against their own measure and the comments thereon, I am sure that "gulling" the workers as an explanation is not going into the matter much below the surface. And whatever relation a Bach fugue or Handel sonata may bear to the result, the fact remains that had the Labor members voted for their amendment Parliament would have been dismissed, not by law but by precedent or, as our aforesaid Sapience says, by accident.

FROM RUSSIA'S STANDPOINT.

The Conference at Chang-Chun, between the Japanese Government, the Far Eastern Republic, and Soviet Russia, opened with favourable prospects of success. The Japanese Government appeared to have realised that the continued occupation of the territory of the Far Eastern Republic could lead to no permanent advantage, political or economic, in the face of determined opposition from the great bulk of the population. From the very opening of the conference, however, the attitude of the Japanese representatives showed clearly that the Japanese Government was actuated merely by a desire to cut its losses, and not by any motive of principle. The Japanese delegation at first attempted to prevent the participation of the representatives of Soviet Russia. They then reverted to the terms of a Japanese ultimatum which resulted in the breaking off of the Dairen negotiations five months ago. Finally, the Japanese delegation refused to give any definite undertaking to evacuate the northern half of Saghalin Island, which is as indisputably part of the territory of the Far Eastern Republic as are the Maritime provinces, which the Japanese are prepared to evacuate:

The conference has therefore broken down, as the essential basis for any possible agreement must be the evacuation by Japan of all territory now wrongfully occupied. It appears clear that the Japanese were only willing to evacuate those portions of the mainland which they had found untenable, but hoped to retain their dominion over the northern half of Saghalin, with its immense mineral and timber resources. The position at Vladivostok is not clear, but on September 22 the Japanese command at Nikolaevsk formally transferred authority to the provincial assembly of citizens, pending the arrival of the Far Eastern Republic forces.

—Russian Information and Review. (London)

The conflict in the Near East places Soviet Russia in a peculiar situation. The Soviet Republic cannot help rejoicing in the lowering of the prestige of British imperialism which with the help of Greek cannon fodder was going to convert the entire Near East into an English colony. But it is also far from full and unrestrained enthusiasm for the other tending party. The object of the struggle is not only the question whether the Straits should be controlled by the Black Sea nations or by Great Britain. Neither is it exclusively the struggle of a down-trodden Oriental nation against enslavement by European imperialism. In either of these cases Russia's sympathies would be entirely with the enemy of England. But the problem is complicated by the fact that the main backer of Turkey is France whose intentions are just as honourable as those of its "perfidious" rival. The Russian oil fields of the Caucasus are in close proximity to Turkey's North-Eastern frontier, and they have been for years the object of unexpressed desires of German and Turkish, as well as French and English imperialists. A successful Franco-Turkish collaboration against the British might possibly have as its sequel a similar collaboration against Soviet Russia "for the liberation of the Moslem peoples from the Russian yoke" and for implanting of French capitalist rule in the Caucasus, on the Russian Black Sea shore and in Turkestan.

This is the reason why Soviet Russia, while viewing with sympathy the justified demands of Turkey, has nevertheless decided to adopt an attitude of "watchful waiting."—"Soviet Russia" (N. Y.)