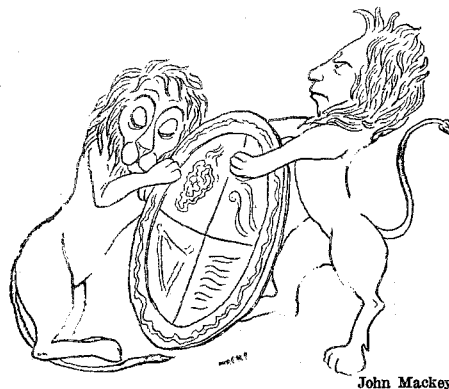


NEW MASSES

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Britain's New Prime Minister

The shift from Baldwin to Neville Chamberlain is seen as likely to unmask Tory class rule and so aid the Laborites

By Harold J. Laski

MR. BALDWIN'S resignation will alter little in British politics. Reaction will appear less kindly and less gracious, but it will still be Reaction. A middle-of-the-road conservative will give place to a diehard, but essential conservatism will still be enthroned in office. The policy will not be altered in essentials. It will merely display its lineaments more clearly.

Mr. Baldwin's disappearance is, nevertheless, a real loss to British conservatism. He has been a leader of very great gifts. He had the art of the great gesture. He never failed to rise to the big occasion. He had the skill to appear at his best when he was in the most difficult situation. He knew, as few have known, how to put policies of which the consequence was necessarily reaction, with an air that gave them the appearance of liberalism.

He spoke always with the accent of generosity. He never seemed obstinate, or hard, or unyielding. He used the pose of the simple amateur, in a game in which he was, in fact, a superb professional, with remarkable adroitness. His was the art which conceals great art.

The nation found in him a man who satisfied a mood of indecision. Yet, in his years of power, the record is, from a socialist standpoint, a grim record. In foreign policy, the defeat of disarmament; the virtual erosion of the League of Nations; the advance of Japan in the east, of Italy in Africa, of Germany in central Europe; a policy in Spain of which the effective result has been the benevolent neutrality of Great Britain to General Franco. In domestic affairs, the first legislation for over a century and a quarter against the trade unions; the incitement to disaffection act; the

militarization of the police; the means test for the unemployed; the abandonment of free trade; the advance, symbolized by the Ottawa conference, of the ideal of a closed imperialism; a general lowering of the standard of life. Great Britain, in the fifteen years since Mr. Baldwin took over the leadership of the Conservative Party, has seen, in addition, repression in India on a scale more gigantic than anything known since the Indian Mutiny. There has been a constant slowing down of social reform. There has been no attempt, in any important sphere of social life, at thorough-going reconstruction. The whole record has looked rather to the consolidation of the past than to the needs of the future. If the forms of political democracy have been preserved, it is because, under them, the victory of capitalism has been so complete.

Of that victory, Mr. Baldwin has been throughout the effective symbol. The artistry with which he has accomplished it has been shown, supremely, on three occasions. He emerged the victor in the general strike of 1926; he emerged the victor in the financial crisis of 1931; he emerged the victor in the abdication of 1936. On each occasion, the stage-management was superb. On each occasion, a party victory was made to appear as a national victory; so subtly that the vanquished themselves were not wholly unhappy in their defeat. The means has been the famous maxim, *fortiter in re, suaviter in modo*. It has been done with the accent of elegance, the tone of moderation. There has never been bitterness. There has always been the appeal for coöperation. Every step backwards has been managed with charm and dexterity; it has almost worn an air of progressive rationalism.

Mr. Baldwin has made himself a legend so widely accepted, so universally recognized, that even his opponents have fallen under its spell. Not since Disraeli have the forces of conservatism been deployed with a brilliance so remarkable. Regarded objectively, the debt of his party to Mr. Baldwin is an immeasurable one. He has kept the initiative in its hands at one of the most critical periods of English history. And he has so kept it that neither the underlying motivation nor the historic result of the policy has ever been clearly revealed to the man in the street. All the obvious rules of the game appear to have been observed. That every privilege has been strengthened, that every weakness has been covered, few even of his opponents have seen. Even where they criticize, it is upon his colleagues that the blame has rested. For foreign policy, blame Simon or Eden; for Indian policy blame Sir Samuel Hoare; for the treatment of the unemployed blame the long succession of second-rate ministers at the Department of Labor. Mr. Baldwin has always seemed at least half above the battle; his socialist opponents have mostly treated him on that assumption. But all the major Tory strategy of the last fifteen years has been his. His party has no asset even remotely comparable to the legend he has made of his part in the national life.

Whatever is to be said against Mr. Baldwin, there is nothing common-place about him; only a great artist could have painted his self-portrait of a good man battling with adversity.

Mr. Chamberlain is a very different figure. A post-war entrant into politics, he represents the city mind in all its fullness and vigor. Cold, hard, obstinate, unyielding, he wins no

affection. His approach to every problem is the business man's approach. He has precision, the office man's efficiency, a real power of mastering detail. But he has neither imagination nor generosity. He is never aware that his opponent has a case. He has all the habits of the historic bourgeois. He is unaware of the assumptions upon which he acts. He has what William James called habit without philosophy. Acutely nationalist, a realist in politics in the business sense, he approaches all its problems like an accountant with the balance sheet of a corporation. All his cast of mind is rigid mid-Victorian. He represents the Birmingham of Joseph Chamberlain at the epoch when the latter had shed his early radicalism and had become the apostle of that crude imperial idea which Kipling hymned. He lives within limited horizons; he is wholly unaware that he is imprisoned by them. He reminds me, in many ways, of Mr. Hoover. He cannot imagine that he is wrong. He is impatient of criticism. He regards opponents as inferiors. There is nothing in him of that magnanimity which gave Mr. Baldwin, as an orator, a genuinely national platform from which to speak.

Mr. Chamberlain is of the historic essence of Toryism in England. For him, the bargain with fate has been made; it is no longer open to revision. His party is identical with England; its welfare is the common welfare. He has no grasp of the newer internationalism. The principles of socialism have no meaning for him. He is prepared, within the limits of capitalist society, to allow social reforms so long as their price does not threaten profit.

He is the voice of the banker and the manufacturer: grim, harsh, set. He has not had to accept their standards; he has never known that there were any others. His lack of imagination imprisons him in his postulates; and this leads him to a self-complacency about his own outlook which makes an alternative faith unthinkable to him. He is, no doubt, an honest reactionary. He is immensely hard-working; no minister in this government, it is said, has the same relentless zeal in mastering his papers. But the tragedy of his accession to power is partly his ignorance that a new world is struggling to be born, and partly his complete satisfaction with the contours of the old.

Mr. Baldwin, whatever his faults, had certain of the best qualities of the aristocrat. He was the English gentleman in power; in the eighteenth century, he might easily have been another Walpole with all of Walpole's great qualities. Mr. Chamberlain is, as it were, the direct descendant of the Gradgrinds and the Bounderbys of Dickens's Coketown—he governs to win for his side. There is no grace about him. He has one set of standards for his class, a different set for those who do not belong to it. For him there are no essential questions to be reopened. All that he does is right in his own eyes. The reader of Carlyle and Matthew Arnold will recognize in him the type they depicted: the man who mistakes bigness for grandeur, who thinks that material success is the same as spiritual achievement, who believes himself to be "practical," who is impatient with those who insist that the time has come to reëxamine foundations. He

would be understood by every chamber of commerce in the United States. Mr. Matthew Woll would regard him as a thoroughly sound man—I do not doubt that Mr. Mellon would regard him as an admirable prime minister of Great Britain.

But he will introduce a note of exacerbation into British politics which has been absent under Mr. Baldwin. The essential policy is unlikely to change; its power to get itself accepted will inevitably shrink. His premiership will provide socialists with a great opportunity if they know how to seize it. For the people are aware of the need for change; Mr. Baldwin persuaded them to postpone its coming by the skill with which he preserved the old world by speaking of it in the accents of the new. Mr. Chamberlain has no such skill. Under him the class issues will be nakedly defined; there will be no blurring of their contours. He will fight rather than give way. He will go halfway to meet the Labor challenge, doubly armed with his consciousness of rectitude. If the Labor Party unites the working-class forces under its leadership, it will quickly win a response both wider and more profound than any it has known in the post-war years. The haze in which Mr. Baldwin enveloped the battle is about to disappear; Mr. Chamberlain will make plain the effective disposition of forces. Great leadership in these next twelve months will be a turning-point in British history. It is a supreme opportunity to oppose the new world to the old; and in clarifying its frontiers, the British Labor Party might well be able to save what is left of European civilization.



*"Why did they have to pick an unknown soldier?
For all we know he may be somebody else."*

The Coming Struggle in Steel

The "unholy alliance" of the big independents seems likely to result in an historic showdown in American labor history

By Adam Lapin

UNFORTUNATELY, the members of the Republic Steel gas-pipe gang did not hear chairman H. E. Lewis of Jones & Laughlin enunciate the new labor policies of his company the other day. Neither did the heads of Republic's police force. They were all busy in Aliquippa at the time, unaware that the strike had just been settled.

Too bad they missed the little lecture by J. & L.'s Mr. Lewis. They did not hear him explain to the gentlemen of the press with his usual quiet dignity that he and his associates had tried to deal with the strike in the spirit of the times. They did not hear him affirm his conviction that collective bargaining was necessary and inevitable. They did not hear him go so far as to state, off the record of course, that he saw no good reason why the other independent steel companies should not sign written contracts with the union.

Since much of what was said that day was not for publication, the thirty members of the gas-pipe gang and the seven heads of Republic Steel's police force may never have gotten the gist of Mr. Horace Edgar Lewis's conversation. They may have only remembered their instructions to try to break the strike and after that to force workers to vote against the union, and forgotten that in reality they were envoys of the new day to the benighted hordes of J. & L. workers.

Republic Steel later admitted that "a few trained observers" had been sent into Aliquippa, but scoffed at the thought that they could have been there to interfere with the election. With the same quiet dignity that is so characteristic of him, Mr. H. E. Lewis denied everything.

These emissaries of good will from Republic mills in Cleveland, Youngstown, Buffalo, and Canton were living proof, in many pounds of beef and muscle, of what chairman Philip Murray of the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee has called the unholy alliance of the independent steel producers. It may not be the whole truth to call the gas-pipe gang trained observers, but undoubtedly they were looking over the situation to learn what lessons they could for the strikes that are still ahead in steel.

J. & L. took a licking from the union first in the splendid thirty-six-hour strike that shut down the mills both in Pittsburgh and in Aliquippa, and later in the Labor Board election. But the unholy alliance still exists. It has lost a battle, not the war. The surrender of J. & L. was clearly a case of sheer necessity rather than of desertion of the cause. Heavy mortgages had been taken out on the

corporation's properties in order to permit the construction of new continuous strip mills. Its financial situation was weak, and a long strike was out of the question. And after all, thousands of ready orders meant so much cash on hand.

The alliance of the independents remains a dangerous fighting force. Four of the so-called "big five" independents are still holding out in their refusal to sign a contract with the union. There is Bethlehem Steel with 82,000 workers, and then Republic Steel with some 53,000 workers—both with plants in widely scattered towns and cities so that complete tie-up is by no means simple. Youngstown Sheet & Tube employs 27,000 workers in Youngstown and Chicago, and E. T. Weir's National Steel empire is concentrated in Weirton and Detroit. The smaller companies, the American Rolling Mills, with about 15,000 employees, and Inland Steel with about 11,000 workers, are also part of the alliance. Crucible was, but has already knuckled under.

Together these companies employ close to 200,000 workers and produce almost 40 percent of the steel in the United States. Under the leadership of two extremely rugged individualists, Ernest T. Weir of National and Tom Girdler of Republic, they are a formidable combination. That they intend to fight is a foregone conclusion. This is the purpose of their alliance. Youngstown Sheet & Tube and Republic Steel have already announced that they will shut down their mills before recognizing the S.W.O.C. Tom Girdler has said that he will go back to hoeing potatoes rather than deal with the union.

IN ELEVEN MONTHS, the C.I.O. has made tremendous progress in steel. Some five hundred thousand workers have been signed up in the union. Some 750 union lodges have been formed. About 125 companies, employing approximately 310,000 workers, have already signed union contracts, including Carnegie-Illinois and four other U.S. Steel subsidiaries.

More than that, the union has changed life in the steel towns of Western Pennsylvania and of West Virginia and Ohio beyond recognition. During their recent strike, the workers in Aliquippa displayed a huge sign reading "WE ARE NOW FREE MEN." On May Day there were large victory celebrations in New Castle, Farrel, and other towns. Everywhere union men are talking about putting up their own candidates in the coming elections.

In short, the steel drive has been a success.

Once the independents sign up with the union, the C.I.O. has practically completed its work in steel.

The alliance of the independents represents the last stand of the diehards in the industry against the union. The leaders of the group are Tories in an industry never noted for liberalism. Their connections with Reaction are legion. Weir has been the most articulate of the group. Last October he described himself in *Fortune* as what President Roosevelt called an economic royalist. He was chairman of the finance committee of the Republican Party in the Pittsburgh district in the last election, and has contributed liberally to the Crusaders, notorious fascist outfit. Frank Purnell of Youngstown Sheet & Tube has also contributed to the Crusaders. Charley Schwab and Eugene Grace of Bethlehem rank with Weir as Liberty Leaguers and intransigent opponents of even the palest of progressive measures. These men have united in a determination not to recognize the union, pledging their resources and their industrial empires to this effort.

The success of the union's work has driven a wedge into the united front of the steel barons of the country. The American Iron & Steel Institute is badly split by the rift between those who deal with the union and those who refuse to.

At the bottom of the split is, of course, the action of U.S. Steel in signing union contracts way back in March. Usually U.S. Steel informs the other members of the Institute of its action in advance. A raise in wages is ordinarily announced at the same time by all the companies. So is any kind of important decision. In this case, Carnegie-Illinois, U.S. Steel subsidiary, acted alone.

The moguls of U.S. Steel bowed to the strength of the union. They took cognizance of the victorious strike of the automobile workers in Flint. They were aware that the political climate of the country was not what it used to be, and the administration might not encourage the more brutal forms of terror and coercion. In addition there were the profits. U.S. Steel's 1936 net was \$55,501,787 as against \$6,106,488 in 1935. The first quarter of 1937 showed \$28,561,533.

And then, of course, U.S. Steel realized that it was dealing with a different type of adversary in the C.I.O., that it was confronted with a powerfully knit industrial-union movement, and not with the twenty-four craft unions, separated by jurisdictional jealousies, as in the past. These considerations brought the biggest steel producer of