

## BRITISH LABOR'S GREAT CHANCE

By **CLAUD COCKBURN**

London (by cable).

THEY'RE saying it's a swing of the pendulum, but it isn't that at all. They're saying it's "a temporary popular reaction to wartime difficulties," and it isn't that at all either. They'll say like Lord Camrose's *Daily Telegraph* that people voted Labor without knowing what they were doing. They'll say like other sections of the Tory press that it was all the fault of Lord Beaverbrook and his inept conduct of the Tory campaign. Clubs, newspaper offices and political morgues now piled high with Tory candidates are full of angry, amazed and disappointed gentlemen seeking a clue to what they regard as a vast "whodunit" with a particularly tricky ending. Most of them are looking for the wrong thing in the wrong place. And they are wrong for the same reason that they are so amazed.

You begin to get on the right track as soon as you talk to the working people and professional people of every grade and wage level, for among them you find no amazement at Labor's magnificent victory, only here and there a little surprise at its extent. For these people it's the other thing that would have been amazing. Amazing it would have been if after the ten years spanning the invasion of Abyssinia to the fall of Berlin this country and this people had not at long last shaken off Tory domination and put Labor not only into office but into power. When you talk to an Englishman in the street today it is as though he and his wife were saying to you, "But didn't they know what we were thinking all this time? Didn't they know we were learning things in this war? Didn't they believe that we believed and still believe it was a people's war?"

On the morning of the day on which the election results were announced I saw a Tory gentleman stopping in front of a newspaper office from which returns were being made public. He cried out loud, "My God, Dover has gone Labor!" The man beside him said, "What did you think Dover was going to do after what it has been through. Dover was on the frontline, wasn't it?" For some reason the Tories thought the White Cliffs and all that they imply were theirs. It was not the least of their misconceptions. The true question during the election was always not whether the country—opinion in the country—had "gone left" but simply whether under our electoral system that trend would be able fully to express itself in the composition of the new House of Commons. There isn't any mystery about what has happened except in the sense that all great, simple, epoch-marking events are mysterious. Equally, it would be hard to overestimate the greatness of the change which now, by the outward and visible sign of the election results, is seen to have come over the whole British political scene in the course of first, the long bitter and temporarily lost fight against Chamberlainism; second, the disasters, blazing disillusionments, and devastating exposures of 1940; third, the trials and glories and examples of the people's war in alliance with the Soviet Union; and finally, the period just before and just after victory over Hitler when "the old

guard," with Churchill now publicly reenlisted in its ranks, coolly and arrogantly proposed to resume power for the visible purpose of defrauding the peoples of Britain and the world of the fruits of victory which the peoples had won.

There is a sense wherein, domestically speaking, this election marks the end of a period of British political life which in many essentials had not basically changed since before the first World War, and certainly not since the first emergence of the Labor Party as a serious political force. This change, of course, is marked in the most obvious form by the virtual elimination of the Liberal Party.

BUT the outstanding immediate fact within this picture is that the country has given Labor power pressed down, so to speak, and running over. True, no one expects the new government to perform miracles in dealing with the immensely grave and immensely complex problems facing it. Equally, however, the size of the majority, and perhaps still more, the size of the aggregate vote offer no excuse for the timidities of any weaker brethren there may be.

It is, of course, a natural consequence of the swing towards Labor in the country, together with the great main body of vigorous numbers elected, that there should be some who on past form at least may be regarded as "doubtful" when it comes to the rapid and wholehearted carrying out of the popular mandate domestically and internationally. To that extent the vote was in a sense "indiscriminate." I mean by that that in the immense enthusiasm for Labor certain seats were capable of being won by candidates whose record as Labor fighters was something less than brilliant. This applies, of course, only to a minority of cases. The same "indiscriminate" swing towards Labor partially accounts for the relatively small Communist vote. There were many places in which the soldiers' vote was cast almost exclusively for Labor in constituencies where the Labor and Communist candidates were running approximately level in so far as the civilian vote was concerned. The reason was that the service men were cut off from normal campaign activities and were particularly cut off from reading of Communist candidatures in the press.

Nevertheless, as against the "weaker brethren" there has come into the House of Commons this time a strong nucleus of level headed, genuine, radical leftwingers. I am not referring to some of those who in the past Parliament set themselves up as "ultralefts." Apart from them there were in the last House, say, a half dozen members on the Labor benches who could be relied upon as the fighting vanguard of every progressive policy whether on the home or foreign front. At a rough estimate I would say that the number has certainly increased to at least twenty-five in the new House and will very likely develop and expand rapidly in the course of the great and testing struggles to come.

In this connection, a highly important feature of the

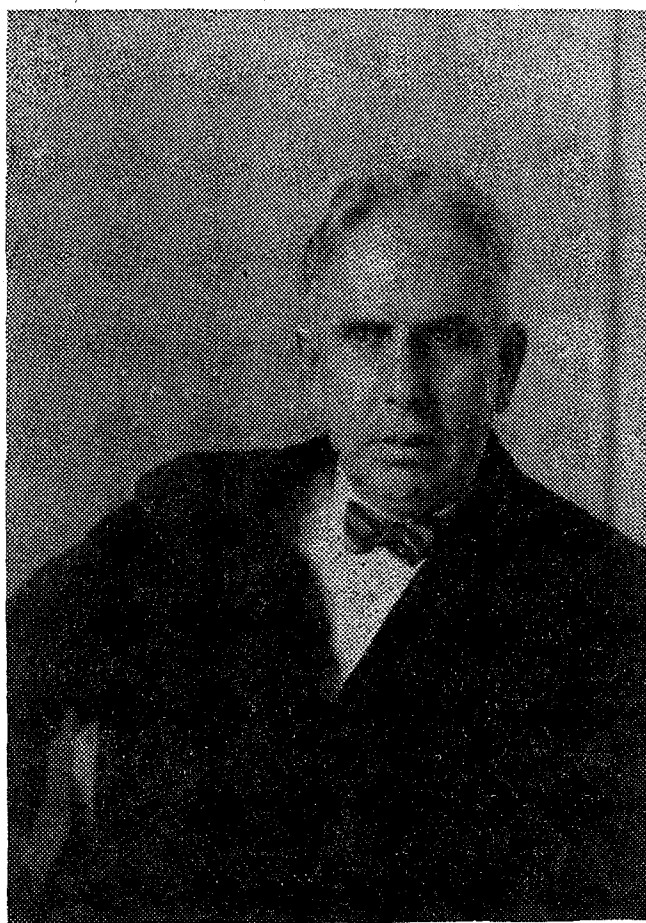
election was the widespread and quite open cooperation and unity in action between the Labor and Communist workers despite certain efforts to prevent it by some remaining reactionaries at Transport House—headquarters of the Trades Union Congress. It is striking how many newly elected members of Parliament have gone on record with public declarations of their debt to the Communist Party and the Communist press for their work during the campaign. It is no exaggeration to say that this work and the resulting unity in action has profoundly changed the whole aspect and the potentialities of local labor movements.

**T**HE swing towards Labor not only produced a huge aggregate majority of Labor over Conservatives but broke into quite new ground. This, if you look at local voting, was hardly less striking in rural areas wherein the Conservative majority often was only reduced, than in the

great cities such as Birmingham and Manchester and Liverpool where the Conservatives were defeated altogether. Indeed the rural constituencies in general offered the most convincing proof of the fact that this victory registers a great, general rise in the political consciousness and political clear-sightedness of the British people. It is one more proof that this really is a step forward into a new political era.

The nature of Tory policies before the election and of their program as they presented it during the election is a sufficient summary of what it is that the British people have decisively rejected. But the vote was not merely a rejection of those policies. It was a demand for a change and rapid strides forward both at home and abroad. The demand has been made, the powers have been given, and throughout Britain there is a vast expectant confidence that the men are there with the will to use the power as the people meant them to do when they went to the polls.

## DREISER JOINS THE VANGUARD



*Theodore Dreiser, one of America's greatest novelists, has joined the Communist Party. His letter to William Z. Foster, the Party's new chairman, requesting membership, was presented to the Communist national convention last weekend, which voted unanimously to admit him. Part of his letter follows:*

**"M**ORE and more it is becoming recognized in our country that the Communists are a vital and constructive part of our nation, and that a nation's unity and a nation's democracy is dangerously weakened if it excludes the Communists. Symbolic of this recognition was the action of the War Department in renouncing discrimination against Communists in granting commissions. . . .

"It seems to me that this ought to discredit completely one of the ideological weapons from the arsenal of fascism that disorients the country's political life and disgraces its intellectual life—Red-baiting. Irrational prejudice against anything that is truly or falsely labeled 'Communism' is absurd and dangerous in politics. Concessions to Red-baiting are even more demoralizing in the field of science, art and culture. If our thinkers and creators are to fulfill their responsibilities to a democratic culture, they must free themselves from the petty fears and illusions that prevent the open discussion of ideas on an adult level. The necessities of our time demand that we explore and use the whole realm of human knowledge.

"I therefore greet with particular satisfaction the information that such leading scientists as the French physicist, Joliot-Curie, and the French mathematician, Langevin, have found in the Communist movement, as did the British scientist Haldane, some years ago, not only the unselfishness and devotion characteristic of the pursuit of science, but also the integration of the scientific approach to their own field of work with the scientific approach to the problems of society.

"I am also deeply stirred to hear that such artists and writers, devoted to the cause of the people, as Pablo Picasso of Spain and Louis Aragon of France, have joined the Communist movement, which also counts among its leading cultural figures the great Danish novelist, Martin Andersen Nexø, and the Irish playwright, Sean O'Casey.

"These historic years have deepened my conviction that widespread membership in the Communist movement will greatly strengthen the American people, together with the anti-fascist forces throughout the world, in completely stamping out fascism and achieving new heights of world democracy, economic progress and free culture. Belief in the greatness and dignity of man has been the guiding principle of my life and work. The logic of my life and work leads me therefore to apply for membership in the Communist Party."