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EDITORIAL

## THE BRITISH ELECTIONS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**S**UFFICIENT facts are now in concerning this week's British elections to form an approximate estimate of what has happened. It is now clear that what happened is not what the first returns, sensational in appearance and still more sensationally reported, seemed to portend. Duly weighed, the overturn in Parliament is not a "triumph for free trade," still less is it "the quietus of protection," least of all is it "a revolution of Labor." What happened is the downfall with disgrace of the ex-Premier Balfour, the emphatic condemnation of nervelessness in policy and lack of conviction in matters of principle.

England has long been a free trade country in substance. Among the British free traders Joseph Chamberlain had been a conspicuous figure. With the close of the Boer War Chamberlain, then in the Conservative Balfour Cabinet, changed his views. Chamberlain is a capitalist with the keen instincts of one. Altered conditions in the capitalist world led him to the conclusion that the safety of the Empire of the British capitalists demanded an alteration in their tariff policy. He devised a plan of differential tariffs in favor of the Empire and its dependencies, with, if necessary, exclusive tariffs against the outer world. The merits or demerits of the Chamberlain plan need not here be considered. The conglomeration of negations, known as the Liberal party, took up the gauntlet to the cry of "Free Trade!" Balfour's weakness became apparent from that moment on. He had no views upon the burning question thus thrown up. The sails of his Cabinet ship flapped, the ship was rudderless. The Liberal outcry



JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN  
(1836-1914)

chopped up the political seas, the Balfour Cabinet resigned, and a new election was ordered.

It was under these circumstances that the election took place. Real tests of the issue centered around Balfour and Chamberlain. Balfour, the vacillator, lost his seat, together with Manchester; Chamberlain, the man of convictions and a well-defined purpose, kept his seat with an increased majority and carried the rest of Birmingham with him. The significant circumstance that both Birmingham and Manchester are workingmen centers disposes of the theory that English Labor expressed itself for either free trade or protection. The circumstance furthermore throws light on what has been termed the "Revolution of Labor," as expressed by the "Labor vote."

The term "Labor Vote" is extended to comprise a variety of heterogeneous elements. At one extreme, nearest approaching Socialism, stands Keir Hardie with his Independent Labor Party. From Keir Hardie and his party, the "Labor Vote" runs down through the gamut of Will Thorne, whose caliber may be best gauged by the circumstance of his enjoying the questionable distinction of having been the candidate of the Countess of Warwick, better known to fame or ill-fame as the "Babbling Brook," and whose hysterically sensational campaigning pulled him through, down to the Labor Representation Committee, a political expression of a "harmony between Capital and Labor" aggregation of craft Unions, which furnished the largest contingent of "Labor Representatives" in the Parliament. With this review of the general lay of the land, the figures will be better understood, also will be understood the tone of alarm that already comes from the British Liberal camp, so close upon the shouts of victory, and so very close upon the misgivings of "revolution."

So far, 430 members of Parliament have been elected. Of these, 96 only are conservatives. That would leave, so far, an apparent anti-conservative majority not less than 334 strong. The majority is, however, by no means "Liberal" or free trade. In the first place, there are 70 Irish Nationalists; these are everything but reliable allies; they will plump their votes against the Liberals any moment that their special interests dictate. The anti-conservative majority is, accordingly, reduced to 264. This majority is made up of Liberals, 224, and "Laborites," 40, altogether 264.

That these Laborites may not stick solidly to the Liberals is theoretically obvious; the theory is confirmed by the rumors that now begin to be heard to the effect that “so far as consideration of the tariff is concerned, Labor rather favors than rejects the policy Mr. Chamberlain has put before the country.” Reduced to the last analysis, the Liberal party has, so far, only a clear majority of 18.

The overturn at the polls in Great Britain is complete and crushing to Balfourism. As to the tariff issue, the fight on Chamberlainism is not ended, it is just begun. As to the “Labor Uprising” its caliber may be gauged by the caliber of its numerically strongest exponent, the Labor Representation Committee, together with the appearance of John Burns in the Cabinet—the modern Plebs Leader, promoted by the modern patriciate to the undoing of the modern plebs masses, the Working Class.

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