

World Socialism

THE BRITISH ELECTION RESULTS

By HERBERT ZAM

As a result of their victory in the general election held November 14, the Tories in England will control the government for five more years with a majority in the neighborhood of 250. The majority is large

enough to provide for all eventualities, so that Baldwin will have to depend neither on the Simon Liberals nor on the arch-reactionaries in his own party for support. In other words, the present ruling group of the capitalist class is firmly in the parliamentary saddle.

The British ruling class, with its traditional astuteness, has once more outmaneuvered and outgeneraled all its opponents, including the Labor Party, and has emerged with flying colors out of a situation which only a few months previously had spelled certain defeat for them.

The Tory victory lies not so much in the size of its vote, which is not at all impressive, as in the fact that through clever use of a carefully worked up international situation, it was able to maneuver the Labor Party into a prepared trap and deprive it of the power of its opposition. The Tory rulers knew how to utilize the peace sentiments of the bulk of the population expressed in the famous "peace referendum" for its own imperialist war plane.

Labor was defeated because it did not know how to differentiate its own peace policy from the war policy of the Tory government cloaked in a peaceful garb. The Labor Party tried to bridge the gap between its support of economic, financial and military sanctions and its opposition to expansion of the navy and air forces.

Charles A. Seldon, the New York Times London correspondent, in his comments on the election, also referred to this as one of the major reasons for Labor's defeat:

"Labor's attempt in the campaign to fight the naval increase as a means of backing League obligations, after the party had endorsed sanctions, did not appeal to the voters as consistent."

All of the by-elections which preceded the general election indicated a victory for Labor. Had the Labor Party found a way of sharply distinguishing its own policy from that of the government's, there is no doubt that it would have secured a majority in the general election. As it is, the million or so voters whom the government was able to swing changed the situation.

HOW "PURE DEMOCRACY" WORKS

A glance at the results disclose a number of interesting highlights of the election. The Tories received roughly 10,200,000 votes. The Labor Party obtained roughly 8,300,000. A swing of a million votes would have given Labor the majority. The total pro- and anti-government vote disclosed this even more sharply. The total vote of the pro-government parties was 11,500,000. The vote of the anti-government parties was 10,000,000. A swing of three quarters of a million votes would have given a majority against the government.

These figures indicate how narrow a squeak the government had, and how avidly (and with what good reason) they took advantage of the Ethiopian situation. Under any other circumstances the government would have suffered a smashing defeat.

The results of the election also show how a "pure democ-

racy" works. The Tories, with only 47 per cent of the popular vote, managed to obtain 63 per cent of the parliamentary seats. Labor, with close to 40 per cent of the popular vote, secured only 25 per cent of the seats. The relation of these figures to those of 1931 shows that this is no accidental occurrence. In 1931 the Tories secured 55 per cent of the popular vote and 75 per cent of the seats in Parliament, while Labor, with 31 per cent of the popular vote, secured only 10 per cent of the seats.

These figures tend to show that the cards are stacked against the Labor Party. It may be that in order to secure an absolute majority in Parliament a popular majority will not be sufficient. Labor may have to secure up to two-thirds of the total vote in order to have control of the majority in Parliament, and this may be somewhat more difficult than our optimistic democracy lovers think.

One of the welcome results of the election is the practical elimination of the "national" laborites, headed by MacDonald. This group always had a largely mythical existence, as its members could be elected only with Tory votes, but in the last election not even the Tory votes were ample. MacDonald has outlived his usefulness to the British capitalists. Now they will thankfully let him end his days in Britain's political graveyard—the House of Lords.

SANCTIONS AND THE ELECTION

The argument that Labor would have fared even worse had it come out against sanctions is refuted by the votes for Cripps and Lansbury, who were both re-elected with tremendously increased majorities. It seems logical to believe that if there had been any genuine resentment against those who were the outstanding opponents of the sanctions policy it would have found expression in their vote. And when we find their vote running way ahead of the normal vote, may we not conclude that this was a sort of indication that the workers were more in agreement with their policy than with the official Labor policy?

This same conclusion must also be drawn from the creditable showing made by the Independent Labor Party, which ran upon a policy of clear-cut opposition to war and sanctions, and which defended the revolutionary position that the British working class can under no circumstances support any war the ruling class might undertake, but must strive to overthrow the government. The ILP increased its vote considerably, and succeeded in electing four members to Parliament, against the opposition of both Labor and the Tories.

It is also interesting to note that Labor made the best showing in Scotland, where its position on the international situation was to the left of the official position of the Labor Party (for economic and financial sanctions but against military sanctions).

All these incidents should spur the Labor Party on to a thorough overhauling of its policy and its methods to put it in a better position for an effective fight against Toryism.