

# Parliament Stands Prorogued

By J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD, M.P.

**P**ARLIAMENT has been prorogued—in other words the first session of the fourth Parliament of His Most Gracious Majesty George the Fifth has been dismissed, and its members, having been commanded again to wait upon His Majesty on the thirteenth day of February next ensuing, have parted each to his own way.

## Precedents

The champion of the unemployed, Geo. Lansbury, ever on the look out for original forms of procedure, by means of which to call attention to the condition of the unemployed, had been rammaging in the ancient law books and in the journals of the House. Having gathered much information, he besought Mr. Speaker for further instruction by raising a question of "the Privilege of this House."

The honourable (we can, in his case, spell it out as follows: honour-able) Member for Bow and Bromley, sought to know whether or not he would be in order, having regard to an incident in 1629, when the Speaker was forcibly restrained from leaving the Chair, to move that "this House do not adjourn" when Black Rod should come to summon us "to another place" to be prorogued.

Kirkwood and his colleagues having departed, the Speaker could afford to regard this matter of precedent with complacency and proceeded to give us some most useful, because most authoritative, rulings on the limitations of the privileges of the House of Commons.

Mr. Lansbury, Mr. MacDonald and Captain Wedgwood Benn, each in turn had his objections over-ruled or his queries answered in the negative. The Labour Party learned from the infallible oracle of Mr. Speaker (Mr. Whitley of the Joint Industrial Councils), what the Communist Party could have told them (but they would not have credited them) that "the summoning of Parliament and the proroguing of Parliament is a matter for the Crown," and that "not only when the House shall rise and when its debates cease, but also when it shall meet again" are matters which "rest with His Majesty."

Mr. Speaker might have added—but he, probably, did not wish to shock the poor dears all at once, and especially on the eve of their holidays—that the constitutional authorities are agreed that the King is not required by the law to act even upon the advice of his Ministers. Probably, had he done so, that perfect parliamentarian—now, praise be to Providence, restored to his native element, where he swims about happily and contented as some smooth silky seal—Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, would have had to be carried out in a faint, and Mr. Thomas have given up the ghost and gone "to another place" where there are no law lords and no libel laws.

Needless to say, when Lansbury so far let his emotions get the better of him as to stray from the question of "privilege" to that of the unemployed, he was promptly called to order. But Lansbury had kept his faith with the men outside, the men who were forbidden the presence of the Premier, the men whose petition to appear at the Bar of the House—a perfectly constitutional method of procedure—had been ignored. He had, moreover, demonstrated most effectively the futility of parliamentary institutions.

## The Mantle of Hardie

The ceaseless vigilance, the tireless vigour, the burning sincerity of Lansbury in his voicing of the grievances of the unemployed, that is what, to my mind, has been the outstanding achievement of the Session so far as the Labour Party has been concerned.

The leadership of Mr. Macdonald has been—and could I pay him a tribute for which he would be more grateful—characteristic, alike in the circumstances of his election and the discharging of his

functions. Maintaining ever "the best traditions of this House," he has spoken with a dignity and an eloquence that, had it not been for the Celtic resonance of his voice, one might have deemed to have been that of Gladstone, Burke, Walpole or his own paragon, Bolinbroke. His periods, his perorations, his sonorous platitudes—they have rung through the rafters of the House like an echo from the age of Cicero or the yet more remote generation of Demosthenes.

His Party has been vigorous and vocal. His bodyguard from Cranston's Cafe and the Metropole, has acquitted itself with credit—but, sometimes, in a manner little calculated to strike the chords of sympathy in the bosom of this Admirable Crichton of constitutionalism.

## The "Soudan" Exposure

Some of them have been, to put the best face upon it, thoughtless and tactless, as when, for instance, they set a snare for Asquith in such a manner that the other candidate for the Chairmanship of their Party, Clynes, was promptly pushed into it by the watchful corner-boys on the Wee-Free Benches. Mr. MacDonald, it is true, was not there at the time—though it was known to me the night before that the trap was to be set—and extricated himself with extraordinary dexterity from the counter-trap in which Sir John Simon so nearly caught him.

Mr. Clynes, as well as Mr. Asquith, was a spokesman at the meeting with the late Premier, at which the cotton-growers and consumers pressed for Government assistance in the development of the Soudan. It is my opinion, however, that Mr. Clynes had no knowledge of the interests that were making use of him to further their private advantage.

This seems the more probable when one knows that even Mr. Johnston himself, when he made his first exposure, had not searched the share-list of the Soudan Company and, quite evidently, had no real understanding of what gigantic interests he had netted.

The chairman of the Labour Party has, very likely, interviewed his supporters since this adventure and, with an indulgence born of discretion rather than of a just regard for Party discipline, has bidden them to be careful in future not to attempt to "jug" too many hares at a time.

A manœuvre intended for the discomfiture of Kenworthy and Pringle should have been more expertly handled.

## Keep the United Front

Kirkwood and the rest of the Scottish I.L.P. Members have also to learn that it is not in the interests of Party discipline, much less of working class solidarity and dignity, to have acrimonious passages-at-arms and to hold angry disputation with their deputy-leaders in the House and in face of the Capitalists.

We do not see eye to eye with one another, all of us who are working class representatives on the Benches of the House of Commons, but it is our duty, as I see it, to present a common front to the enemy.

Also, it is desirable that there shall be as little hob-knobbing as possible with the Liberals and the Tories, less of this smiling and interchange of compliments between the two front benches and, what is imperatively necessary, no melting to the saucy blandishments of that accomplished little trickster, Lady Astor, who has, quite obviously, set her cap at the Labour M.P.'s from Glasgow.

She has begun to display an inordinate interest in housing reform. She has begun to exhibit her "heart" bleeding with sympathy for the poor. She is going to do her utmost, by direct and by indirect approach, to get David Kirkwood's measure.

## Ware, Davy!

Kirkwood is transparently honest, but his heart is just a little too trustful. May we advise him to walk warily amongst lionising ladies and the fulsome admiration of the "stunt" journalists.