

The Government of the British Labour Party and Egypt.

By J. B. (Jerusalem).

The banquet given by Mr. Henderson, the chairman of the II. International and Minister for Foreign Affairs to His British Majesty, to the honorary doctor of Oxford University and dictator of Egypt by the grace of Chamberlain, **Mohammed Pacha Mahmoud**, soon after the arrival of the latter in **London**, has had the expected political results. A few days after this social event, the official announcement was made that the Labour Government has entered into formal negotiations on the future fate of Egypt with the anti-constituional and anti-democratic Mahmoud, the puppet of the Conservative government, of whom the Labour members declared only eleven months ago that without the British tanks near Cairo he would have long since floated down the Nile with his government; now these same Labour members enter into negotiations with this oppressor of the Egyptian people, on behalf of court and banking interests.

This is such a flagrant violation of every pledge given by the British Labour Party, such an open taking over of the reactionary Chamberlain traditions, that even the Wafd Party, cautious as it is, and anxious to pursue a policy of alliance with the Labour Party, has not been able to preserve silence. The organ of the Egyptian national bourgeoisie, although anything but revolutionary, has been forced by the total abandonment by the Labour Government of its own political line in the Egyptian question to make the following statement, which is extremely characteristic of the estimate formed of the policy of the social reformists by even the most Right wing national reformist elements in the colonies:

“If the English, whether Right or Left, keep Egypt under their yoke, this does not mean either great honour or great gain for them. It might, however, be expected that Mr. MacDonald, after proclaiming an era of justice and reason, of work in friendship for peace, would not, the very next day, make common cause with the imperialists against the defenceless peoples. On the part of the imperialists this is logical. From the standpoint of the workers it is betrayal. Principles and agreements alike are not scraps of paper. And the Conservatives will not fail, as soon as problems of a more European character arise, to demand from the Cabinet of the Labour Party fresh guarantees, and ever and again fresh guarantees. The path chosen by Mr. MacDonald is strewn with dangers. If he were clearer sighted he would have built up his position on a securer basis. Now he is the slave of his opponents, and it is not he who will be able to manoeuvre. They will force him, day by day and threat by threat, to lay aside his halo.

As a matter of fact the Conservatives are delighted at the Labour Party experiment, the Labour Party Cabinet being weak in its majority and through the character of its leaders. In this manner they have been able to achieve an aim of which they have never made a secret: that is, to let others carry out what they themselves consider necessary, but what they could not realise without breaking the inviolable principles of a traditional policy. It was a ticklish experiment. If it succeeded, they would have time enough to overthrow the Cabinet and prepare for their own return. If it did not succeed, the game was still theirs, and they could shatter the Labour Party.”

(“La Patrie”, Cairo. 17th July 1929.)

Thus after only a few weeks of government Henderson had gone so far that he had to listen to a lesson, from an organ of the Egyptian bourgeoisie, on the subject of adherence to principles. Therefore the greater the rejoicing on the part of the Mahmoud government, supported by the British bureaucratic apparatus in Egypt, for it has been able to see in the action of the Cabinet of the Labour Party a sanction of its dictatorship.

The Mahmoud government at once began to increase its pressure on its political opponents again, after relaxing this slightly for a few days after the victory of the Labour Party. Again newspapers were prohibited, domiciliary visits made (among these the house of Zaghlul Pasha's widow was searched), meetings dissolved. In order to prevent the possibility of a really revolutionary outbreak, although this was scarcely likely on the part the Wafd, the Ministry for Home Affairs hastened to draw up a special draft of an emergency law threatening with heavy sentences of penal servitude anyone making communist propaganda. The negotiations between Great Britain and Egypt were to be commenced on the basis of the previously rejected Chamberlain Sarwat Pasha agreement, tantamount to the complete capitulation of Egypt to British demands.

But now the pressure from the opposite side began. The Wafdists mobilised — not the masses of the people, whom they fear like the plague — but at least all available telegraph wires, in order to proclaim to the world their protest against the “treachery” of the government of the Labour Party. Besides this they uttered the warning that it would be better not to force them to extremes, since the discontent among the population had actually reached a very high pitch... In Great Britain itself Henderson's cordial welcome to Mohammed Mahmoud was too much for the adherents of the Independent

Labour Party, and even some of the Liberal papers, the "**Manchester Guardian**" for instance, commented on the Egyptian question in a manner disagreeable for Henderson. Above all, the adherents of the Labour Party find themselves obliged to ask what it may mean when an agreement is concluded with a person who is merely the tool of the **British Conservative Party**.

The result has been that in the Egyptian question, as in the question of relations with the Soviet Union, in the disarmament question, and in the mining question, certain waverings may be observed in the course of the Labour Party ship, which has hitherto been sailing consistently in the Conservative wake. A sacrifice must be made to the angry gods of public opinion. In Egyptian politics the sacrificial lamb has been **Lord Lloyd**.

It is true that the retention of Lord Lloyd as British High Commissioner in Egypt would have imposed an intolerable burden on a **MacDonald** Cabinet. Lord Lloyd of Dolobran has not pursued a moderately Conservative policy in Egypt, but an expressly Diehard policy; he is an unbridled imperialist of the old school, unable to appear as anything else either in word or deed; he has always ridden rough shod over Egyptian nationalism, and has behaved in Egypt, which is at least formally "independent", as if it were one of the crown colonies of Great Britain. Hence it would scarcely have been possible for Lord Lloyd to remain in office in any case, and Henderson seems to have considered it an effective political move to dismiss him at precisely the moment public opinion in Great Britain and Egypt was protesting indignantly against the negotiations with Mohammed Mahmoud.

It would, however, be an error to assume that this "symbolic gesture" actually signifies Henderson's intention to deviate from the imperialist line in Egypt. It can mean either a be the more safely concluded (Lloyd the man being dropped "cover" under which a pact with Mohammed Mahmoud may but his system maintained), or it can be the prelude of an alliance between the Labour government and the Waft, whose extreme nationalism and parliamentary enthusiasm are at bottom nothing more nor less than an attempt to come to a compromise with the British bourgeoisie, even at the expense of the Egyptian people.

So long as the government of the British Labour Party does not do away with the British occupation of Egypt; does not annul the capitulation privileges, and does not secure full free and legal development for the proletarian class organisations in Egypt, no "gestures" or explanations will make its policy otherwise than imperialist, a policy which is in principle a continuation of Chamberlain's policy, protecting solely the interests of British capital and betraying the interests of the working classes of Egypt and Great Britain.
