

Philip Snowden's Triumph

PHILIP SNOWDEN scored, according to all the dispatches, a triumphant success in presenting in the House of Commons on April 29 the first Labor budget. Newspapers of all shades of opinion admit, on both sides of the ocean, that no British chancellor ever showed greater mastery of his subject or presented it in a clearer or more interesting manner. This despised pacifist, this man who opposed his country's policy all the time that it was at war, this radical socialist without either the banking or business training usually expected of a chancellor of the exchequer, this visionary idealist who actually believes that an end can be made to the kind of acquisitive society which has made such a mess of the world, showed that he could take the cards from conservatives and beat them at their own game. For one hour and three-quarters this crippled man leaned upon his crutches to make his appeal, all but collapsing at its end. He was assisted to his seat amid the cheers of all parties and it is in keeping with the finest English parliamentary traditions that some of the first words of congratulation came from the lips of Austen Chamberlain, a former chancellor, now in opposition. That is the British sporting spirit. You differ from a man, you may even call him traitor for a time, but when he does a magnificent job you congratulate him out loud on his personal achievement before you undertake to show wherein you think he erred in his facts or his proposals. We fancy that those cheers must have paid Philip Snowden for many a slight and insult, if so brave and noble a spirit needed reward for having been true to his conscience and the right.

But there is more to this budget than a personal triumph for Snowden. It is a long step back toward the historic policy of free trade from which England departed under the pressure of the war and of her debt burden, aggravated by the mistaken economics of Lloyd George and other compromisers. With one blow the Chancellor went far toward "freeing the breakfast table." The coffee, cocoa, and chicory duties are to be heavily cut; that on tea, the greatest of English beverages, is cut in half and a reduction of three halfpence a pound is made on sugar—something to make every Britisher sit up and take notice. Every one of the war duties imposed by Reginald McKenna goes by the board on August 1. Thus the protection camel, which had got its head and neck well into the British tent and would have got half its body in had Stanley Baldwin won the last election, is ejected down to his nose. Even the high tariffs on foreign motor cars are to go; Englishmen may be allowed to buy cheaper automobiles than their fellow-countrymen can produce. That, some will say, is an outrage; anybody who would help his fellow-citizens to obtain cheaper methods of transportation must be first cousin to a Bolshevik!

There is no denying the fact that the Labor Government will have hard sledding on that issue. Already they are being charged with wishing to add to the unemployment that they went into office to reduce. Indubitably the workmen in this and other industries will protest. But that is to be expected if you cleave to free-trade principles and deal with an industry that has been created by artificial support and kept alive by artificial heat. The onus is not on the legislator who prefers the welfare of multitudes to that of groups but upon those who made the original error. We

shall doubtless hear, too, that the budget is more one of expediency than of principle and there will probably be extremists in England to declare that there is no socialism in this budget, that it is a mere compromise, a sop to all classes to prolong the life of the Government and to win Liberal support. We are not much worried by that charge. It is sound reform policy, whether you call yourself Liberal, Labor, or Tory, to set your financial house in order and undo the glaring errors of your opponents. From any point of view that must commend itself as good business. There can certainly be no such far-reaching change as taking over the English coal mines unless the possibility of adequately financing them is present.

When one reads that in addition to all the other taxes to be cut the Socialist Chancellor proposes to do away with that upon excess profits which some of our politicians are eager to reimpose in this country, we can understand that the British business man must feel after reading this budget like a child who finds his Christmas stocking filled when he had expected nothing. As for the householder, he ought to be Snowden's friend for life because of the abolition of the hoary old inhabited-house tax, which has persisted for a century and a half, perhaps because nobody thought to do away with it. Truly Mr. Snowden has a right to claim that his budget is scientific, that it is reasonable and just, that it is aimed at no classes, and that it means a sturdy return to the only honest and sound fiscal policy for any country—free trade. We venture to prophesy that it will have an immediate and stimulating effect upon England's general economic situation, that it will speed her recovery from her present depression, and that it will be recognized for years to come as a great piece of statesmanship, wisely conceived, and executed with superb ability and superlative courage.

Fooling the Farmers

THE greatest American industry is the making and selling of gold bricks. Beside it the steel industry is a child and the cotton trade a babe in the crib. The gold-brick industry is a national one whose product enters every home in good times or in bad, but its sales campaigns are concentrated especially upon farmers and its boom periods are campaign years.

Heaven knows our farmers are this year, as perhaps never before, ready to grasp at anything which glitters. They were wholly deflated after the war, while the rest of industry had only part of the air let out of it, or none at all. Farmers are selling their produce, especially great staples like wheat and live stock, at about pre-war prices, while the levels of other commodities are more than 50 per cent higher. As we noted recently in these columns, more than 8½ per cent of the owner-farmers in fifteen corn- and wheat-growing States lost their farms between January, 1920, and March, 1923, while others to the proportion of 15 per cent were insolvent but held their land through the grace of their creditors. Farmers' banks have become the great landlords in the grain belt, the foreclosure of mortgages having made them the unwilling possessors of acres of land which they cannot rent or sell. A report made to Congress last March notes that in 1920, before agricultural depression set in, eight State banks failed.

By July 1, 1921, 100 State and 21 national banks had closed their doors. By July 1, 1922, the total was increased

by 85 State- and 9 national-bank failures, and 111 State and 16 national banks were added to the list in the next twelve months. Between July 1, 1923, and February, 1924, 367 State banks and 66 national banks have failed. There were more bank failures in the past seven months than in any preceding five-year period.

Assuredly the farmers need help. Early in the present session of Congress the Norris-Sinclair bill was introduced for their relief. It provided for a federal commission to build, buy, or lease grain elevators and storage warehouses, and to purchase and sell farm produce at home or abroad. In other words, it proposed a government market system to reduce the present unreasonable middlemen's profits between producer and consumer to the benefit of both the latter. This measure stood a good chance of passage until another, the McNary-Haugen bill, was shoved in front of it. The McNary-Haugen bill has the approval of Secretary Wallace of the Department of Agriculture, but President Coolidge is believed to be against it. The Federation of Farm Bureaus and the National Grange have indorsed it, but the more democratic and near-to-the-soil Farmers' National Council is in opposition. The McNary-Haugen bill will probably fail and is doubtless intended to do so by many of its sponsors. Its only effect will be to sidetrack and defeat the Norris-Sinclair bill, and thus preserve the profits of the agricultural middlemen. The McNary-Haugen bill is a gold brick intended to attract the farmers and give the impression that the politicians are doing something for them in a campaign year. The measure will be touted in the agricultural sections, but at last will probably be quietly dropped. There will be no McNary-Haugen law, no Norris-Sinclair law, no law at all for the farmer's relief. His gold brick will turn out to be worthless stone.

Should the McNary-Haugen bill by some chance become law, it would be harder than stone on the community at large. The bill provides that artificial prices be set on certain staples so as to make them bear the same relation to other prices as the average of farm prices from 1905 to 1914, inclusive, bore to general prices during that period. A commission is authorized to buy and sell farm produce to the extent necessary to maintain these prices at home, while the President is instructed to clap on tariff rates to a point that would prevent the entrance of foreign products in competition. The commission would dump all surplus agricultural produce abroad for whatever prices it would bring. In short, the McNary-Haugen bill proposes to subsidize the farmer at the expense of the consumer—to support an expensive hothouse industry out of the pockets of the general public. Even so, the farmer is just as much entitled to this kind of coddling as are the manufacturers protected by our existing tariff, and it is hypocritical and absurd for newspapers and politicians who support the Republican protective system to object to its extension to agriculture. But *The Nation* does not believe in subsidizing either manufacturers or farmers. The McNary-Haugen bill proposes to reinflate the farmer, whereas the actual need is to deflate all industry.

The farmer ought to have a government-directed market system such as the Norris-Sinclair bill proposes, and he ought to have the benefit both in buying and selling that free trade would bring. Give him a fair field by these means, and he will be able to live without artificial respiration. Diversified farming and cooperative organization are already giving some farm regions new life; what the farmers want is not more pap but less middlemen.

What Is a Park?

WHAT is a park? New York City is having one of its periodic brain-storms in regard to the proper use of its matchless Central Park—still a bit of unsubdued nature in the midst of man-ridden Manhattan Island. The Mayor and his friends are for introducing a "civic center," a "war memorial," and the like; others are for keeping them out. Similar controversies are going on in other cities. Perhaps it would help to begin by defining a park.

A child once defined salt as something that makes food taste bad when you leave it out. Similarly one might define a park as something that a city isn't. It should be the antithesis of and the antidote for the city. Geographically it should be as close to, and in character as far from, the city as possible. The best park is that which gives one most quickly and completely the illusion of having left the city miles away. Granting this, one can put his finger at once on some things which as far as possible should be kept out of a park: noise, hurry, buildings, business, and amusements such as the city itself offers. On the positive side one wants quiet, repose, trees, grass, water, sunshine, air. Too much artifice is the ruin of many parks: too many formal "drives," too many statues, too many "lawns" with warnings to keep off the grass. The Parisians, with their fine sense for such things, are especially successful with their small parks. There are not many walks and often not much grass. Instead there are great trees, with fine sand spread over the ground; one may wander at will or sit where he pleases.

Generally speaking, New York's Central Park has been well preserved and handled. The smaller parks have not all been as fortunate. The great mistake in Central Park was to admit the automobile, with its spirit of hurry and unrest, its danger to pedestrians and its vitiation of the air along the roadways. Some day when we are better civilized, when the automobile has ceased to have the right of way over everything else, this particular evil will be banished from Central Park. Band concerts may be legitimate, for they do begin and end, they cannot be heard in the home, and are really musical; but could anything be more deadly than the proposal to introduce radio entertainment by means of loud speakers into New York's small parks? The city about them contains plenty of such entertainment and far too much loud speaking.

Loud speaking! Yes, the city roars at us on every hand, and in every way. It is relief from its merciless overtones that we most want in our parks. As Matthew Arnold put it in his *Lines Written in Kensington Gardens* (that rare survival of nature in the midst of London brick):

Calm Soul of all things! make it mine
To feel, amid the city's jar,
That there abides a peace of thine,
Man did not make, and cannot mar.

Children, lovers, and the aged—it is these that use most and most appreciate our parks. None of them belongs precisely to the city. Each one is living in his way a life apart from that of the throngs about him—the throngs preoccupied with making and spending money, mesmerized with the loud speaking (human and mechanical) of the age. Children, lovers, and the aged—all of us should belong, at least in spirit, to one of these classes. If we make and keep our parks for them we shall not go far wrong.