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EDITORIAL

BERMONDSEY.

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OWING to the demise of the Liberal incumbent in Parliament for the seat from Bermondsey, a suburb of London, a by-election was held on the 28th of last month. The result was 4,278 votes for the Unionist, or Conservative candidate; 3,291 votes for the Liberal candidate; and 1,435 votes for the Socialist-Laborite ticket.

The issue of the Bermondsey by-election has been extensively trumpeted as a Conservative victory of wide-reaching import. It is claimed that the Conservative victory will stiffen the Lords' back; that it will induce the Lords to reject the budget, and thereby force an appeal to the electorate under auspices that are most promising for a Liberal rout, and most promising for greater Conservative firmness in the saddle.

Part of these prognostics may be true: It may be true that what happened at Bermondsey is symptomatic of the situation all over the land: It may be true, consequently, that an appeal to the electorate would result in the overthrow of the present Liberal Government and the return of a reactionary Parliament. It does not follow, however, that the result would re-seat Reaction all the more firmly in the saddle. On the contrary. No statistical figures demand such careful scrutiny as election returns. This or that total; this or that plurality conveys only imperfect, often misleading information, unless weighed by the light of accompanying circumstances.

What is it that actually did happen at Bermondsey?

At the previous, the 1906 election, only two tickets confronted each other—that of the Conservatives and that of the Liberals. Last October there were three tickets. There was the old Conservative; there was the old Liberal; and there was a third, the Socialist-Laborite ticket. Going still deeper below the surface, it appears that

the Socialist-Laborite ticket is not entirely a new formation. At the 1906 election the Socialist-Laborite forces made common cause with the Liberals: together they had one ticket: the two plumped their votes for one candidate, and elected him. Last October, the two forces parted company. In the aggregate, they preserved the strength to worst the Conservatives. They split: separately, the poll of neither could overtop the Conservative. In other words, in 1906 the Socialist-Laborite forces of Bermondsey looked at the Conservatives as the “common enemy” of themselves and the Liberals; last October, the Socialist-Laborite forces concluded that the Liberals have stronger affinity with the Conservatives than with the Labor, and they split off.

This act and fact—the perception by the Socialist-Laborite element that the “common enemy” is not the Conservative party only, but the Liberal, as well as the Conservative; the perception that Labor only fights the battles of avowed Reaction by enlisting in the ranks of “Liberalism”; the perception that Labor’s emancipation can be fruit only of the blow that shatters at once both avowed (Conservative) and veiled (Liberal) Capitalism—this act and fact is the leading feature in the Bermondsey by-election, nor was ever yet a longer step taken on the British political field towards clarifying the ground and the minds, and, as a consequence, towards unhorsing Reaction.

The Lords may or may not force an appeal to the electorate; a Reactionary Parliament may or may not be returned; one thing, however, is certain: in the measure that the Bermondsey performance is repeated throughout the United Kingdom, in the measure that the Socialist-Laborite forces cut the navel-string of the hoary-headed superstition that fettered them to Reaction, disguised in the phrases of Liberalism, in that measure the hold of Reaction on the horseback of Power is loosened, in that measure is the rider brought nearer to his fall. The unity of Labor’s forces on the political field, distinct from all other political forces, will exercise its clarifying influence upon the economic field as well. When the two revolutionary forces, the political and the economic, shall march in equal tempo, then the historic Humpty Dumpty will have a great fall, and all the King’s horses and all the King’s men will not put Humpty Dumpty together again.

There is cold comfort for British Reaction in the Bermondsey by-election.

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