'There was a widespread conviction that a Labour government would indulge not only in wholesale confiscation and subversion of the Armed Forces and the Civil Service, but would even go so far as to abolish marriage itself'

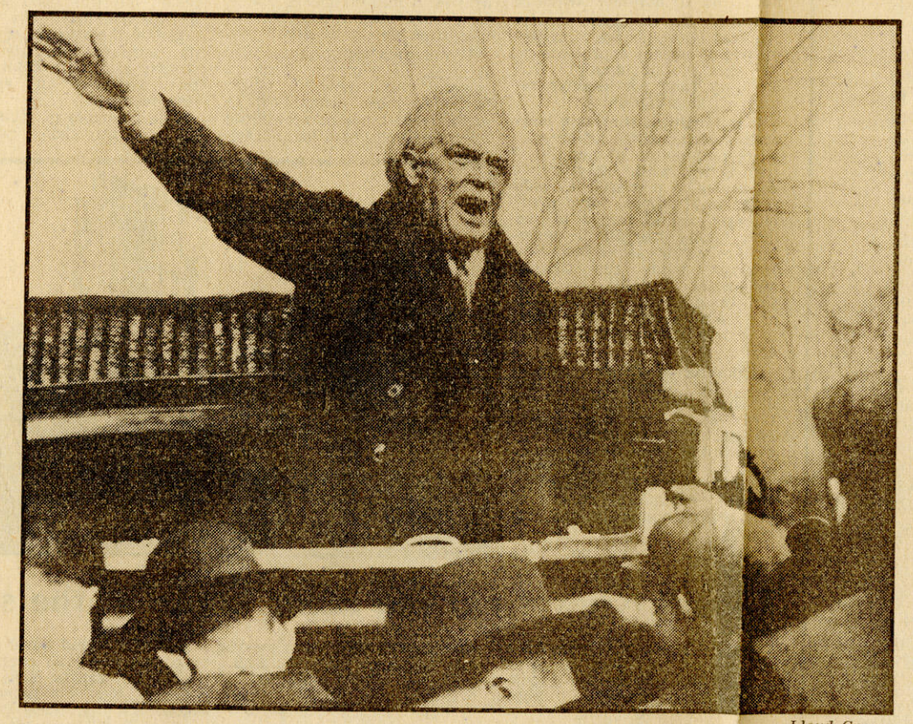
Christopher Farman on the fiftieth anniversary of the first Labour Government

JANUARY, 1924, was a singularly stressful month for the British Establishment. Their apprehensions had been smouldering since early December, when Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin sought an electoral mandate for Protection as a cure for unemployment—and lost the Tories their overall parliamentary majority of 88 seats. The Tories, with 258 seats in the new Parliament, were still the largest single party. But Labour now had 191 seats, and the Liberals 159. Since the Liberals, newly reunited by the rallying cry of Free Trade, would be unable to throw their support behind a Prime Minister dedicated to Protection, Baldwin faced certain defeat when Parliament divided over the Royal Address during the third week of January. But who was to take his place?

For the first time since being ousted from the premiership by Lloyd George and his Coalition supporters in 1916, Herbert Asquith, the Liberal leader, was the pivotal figure in British politics. Just as surely as he would secure Baldwin's defeat, so he would also determine Baldwin's successor. Asquith's first inclination was to make his own play for the premiership, for although he led the smallest party in the House, many Tories would have supported a Liberal administration rather than see the Liberals supporting a Socialist one.

Each day's post brought him "appeals, threats, prayers from all parts and from all sorts of conditions of men, women, and lunatics, to step in and save the country from the horrors of Socialism and Confiscation." From the City of London Conservatives he received a heart-felt plea to form a government and an assurance that "all the **solid** people in the country would support it through thick and thin." It took Asquith no more than a few days, however, to see through the dangers of such an entanglement. The Tories had had no scruples about dumping Lloyd George when it suited them in 1922, and Asquith was not anxious to suffer the same fate. By accepting the Tory embrace he would also allow the Liberal Party's claim to be a radical non-Socialist alternative to Labour to go by default.

Much more attractive to Asquith was the prospect of allowing Labour to take office and giving it enough rein to demonstrate its incompetence. At a suitable moment the Liberals could then withdraw their support and offer themselves as the only viable alternative to the Tories. Lloyd George was also prepared to back Labour—though for rather different reasons. Having lost the leadership of a Tory-dominated Coalition in 1922, he had no desire to see Asquith installed as the leader of another in 1924. Instead, he envisaged a close working relation-



Lloyd George



Stanley Baldwin



Ramsay MacDonald



King George V



Asquith

freedom and our unconditional independence."

apprehensions with typical fervour:

during these weeks, cajoled, wheedled,

extremists, and I think he wondered to

this taking place: they had got into the way of singing this song and it will be by degrees that he hopes to break down this habit."

The King accepted both MacDonald's difficulties and his sincerity. "He impressed me very much," the King wrote in his diary, "he wishes to do the right thing. Today 23 years ago dear Grandmama died. I wonder what she would have thought of a Labour Government!"

There was some mutual embarrassment when MacDonald took his senior Ministers to kiss hands on January 24. Two of them—John Wheatley, Minister of Health, and Frank Jowett, First Commissioner of Works—refused to wear court dress for the occasion. If this marred the ceremony for King George and MacDonald, it enhanced the proceedings for others who were present, including Sidney Webb, new President of the Board of Trade. Several of the new Ministers joined Webb and his wife for lunch afterwards. "They were all laughing over Wheatley—the revolutionary—going down on both knees," wrote Mrs Webb in her diary, "and actually kissing the King's hand; and C. P. Trevelyan was remarking that the King seemed quite incapable of saying two words to his new Ministers; 'he went through the ceremony like an automaton!' Altogether we were a jolly party — all laughing at the joke of Labour in Office!"

For the Liberals, the joke quickly wore thin. Far from seeking their cooperation for its unspectacular policies, the Labour Party lost no opportunity to abuse, ridicule or simply ignore them. To the great bulk of the Labour Party, the Liberals were "a corpse encumbering the ground" and MacDonald's own sensitive ego was bruised by the knowledge that he held office with Liberal support. To C. P. Scott, editor of the Manchester Guardian and an enthusiast of Lib-Lab accord, the Prime Minister "reverted again and again to this dislike and distrust of the Liberals. He could get on with the Tories. They differed at times openly and then forgot all about it and shook hands. They were gentlemen, but the Liberals were cads . . . their object being to assert their own importance and belittle their opponents."

Too late, Lloyd George realised the trap into which the Liberals had walked. "If Labour succeeds," he told Scott, "they get all the credit; if it fails we get the blame for putting them in power." In the autumn of 1924 the Liberals as well as the Tories were incensed by Labour's decision to drop proceedings under the Incitement to Mutiny Act against J. R. Campbell, the editor of the Communist Workers' Weekly. MacDonald, it appeared, had succumbed to pressure from his own left-wing.

The Tories, who had originally intended to put down a vote of censure,

Fondazione Adriano Olivetti

Having lost the leadership of a Tory-dominated Coalition in 1922, he had no desire to see Asquith installed as the leader of another in 1924. Instead, he envisaged a close working relationship with Labour which might lead eventually to a radical block in which he could play a dominant role.

Both wings of the Liberal Party, therefore, endorsed Asquith's eagerly anticipated speech at the National Liberal Club on December 18. "The days of the present government are, of course, numbered. It seems to be generally assumed that as the second largest party in the House of Commons, the Labour Party will be allowed to assume the responsibility of government. Well, this may reassure some trembling minds outside: If a Labour Government is ever to be tried in this country, as it will sooner or later, it could hardly be tried under safer conditions. We are not going to become a wing or adjunct of any other party. As the first condition of our usefulness we shall, I hope, cherish our unfettered



Ramsay MacDonald



King George V



Asquith

freedom and our unconditional independence."

With Liberal backing for a Labour Government now assured, the Establishment was unable to contain its rage and fear. In the previous Parliament Labour members, noisy but impotent, had been regarded as sources of fashionable entertainment for the leisured classes. Society hostesses prided themselves on the number of Labour MPs who attended their functions. As one of those MPs subsequently wrote: "In 1923 Labour MPs were the craze and had definitely ousted Russian boots and ping pong." But in 1924 Labour was no longer a craze: it was a menace. There was a widespread conviction that a Labour Government would indulge not only in wholesale confiscation and subversion of the Armed Forces and the Civil Service, but would even go so far as to abolish marriage itself.

The English Review expressed these apprehensions with typical fervour: "We stand now at a moment when the sun of England seems menaced with final eclipse. For the first time in her history the party of revolution approach their hands to the helm of the State, not only, as in the seventeenth century, for the purpose of overthrowing the Crown, or of altering the Constitution, but with the design of destroying the very basis of civilised life."

Desperate last-minute attempts were made to get Asquith to change his mind and when the House debated a Labour motion on the Address on January 17, the Liberal leader declared: "I have never come across more virulent manifestations of an epidemic of political hysteria. Notwithstanding my own compromising past—I am supposed to have been the associate of rebels, and worse than rebels, in days gone by—I have been in turn, during these weeks, cajoled, wheedled, brow-beaten, and all but blackmailed to step in as the 'Saviour of Society'."

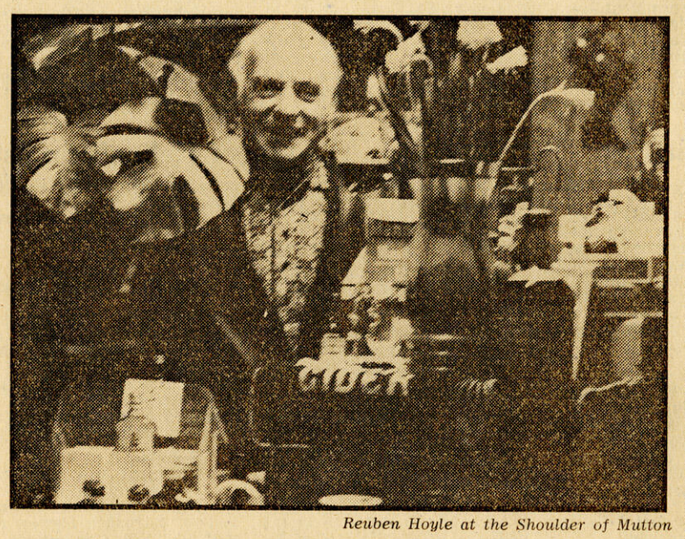
When the vote on Labour's no confidence motion was taken on January 21, 138 Liberals followed Labour into the lobby, five were "absent unaccounted for," and only ten supported the government. The following day Baldwin resigned and James Ramsay MacDonald was summoned to Buckingham Palace, made a Privy Councillor and invited to form a Ministry.

Among the Labour leaders who accompanied MacDonald to the Palace was J. R. Clynes. "We were, perhaps, somewhat embarrassed," he wrote later, "but the little, quiet man whom we addressed as 'Your Majesty' swiftly put us at our ease. He was himself rather anxious; his was a great responsibility, and I have no doubt he had read the wild statements of our extremists, and I think he wondered to what he was committing his people." The King's anxiety stemmed from a Labour "Victory" rally held two weeks before at the Albert Hall which had broken into the Marseillaise and the Red Flag. His new Prime Minister was quick to reassure him. "Mr Ramsay MacDonald spoke very openly," noted Lord Stamfordham, the King's private secretary, "and said he was sure the King would be generous to him and understand the very difficult position he was in vis-à-vis his own extremists; and he could assure His Majesty that, had he attempted to prevent the Red Flag being sung on that occasion, a riot would inevitably have ensued. Moreover there was a very serious possibility on Monday night of the Red Flag being sung in the House of Commons and it had required all his influence and that of his moderate and immediate friends to prevent

succumbed to pressure from his own left-wing.

The Tories, who had originally intended to put down a vote of censure, decided to support a Liberal demand for a Select Committee of Inquiry. Angered that his integrity had been called into question, MacDonald chose to treat this as a matter of confidence and his Government came to an end when Liberals and Tories voted together on October 8.

The results of the election fought on October 29, 1924, confirmed Liberal fears. The Tories won 415 seats and Labour 152. The Liberals managed to retain no more than 42 seats, and Asquith himself was defeated by his Labour opponent in Paisley. No doubt the Liberal leader recalled the prophecy made by Austen Chamberlain, during the debate on January 21. By supporting Labour, said Chamberlain, Asquith had "sung the swan song of the Liberal party" and would go down in history as the last Prime Minister of a Liberal administration.



Reuben Hoyle at the Shoulder of Mutton

Mutton dressed as lamb

Richard Boston's beer column

"DO YOU KNOW Mellor church?" someone asked the other night in the tap-room of the Shoulder of Mutton, Chapel-en-le-Frith. "Know Mellor church?" came a deep-voiced reply. "I was bloody married in Mellor church." He shook his head ruefully. "Eighteen years of holy padlock."

Chapel-en-le-Frith is a town of grey limestone and millstone grit houses on the edge of the Peak District. The population is about 6,500 (some 3,000 work for Ferodo brake linings) and their requirements are seen to by five off-licences, the licensed working men's Memorial Club and nine pubs. Four of these are in sight of one another round the market place—the King's Arms Hotel (Greenall Whitley), the Dog Inn (Bass Charrington), the Royal Oak (Ansells), and the Roebuck (Tetleys). In addition, there are the pubs of Frederic Robinson, of Stockport—the New Inn, the Packhorse, the Jolly Carter, the Crown and Mitre, and the Shoulder of Mutton.

By brewers' design standards the Shoulder of Mutton is terrible and what higher praise is there than that? Reuben Hoyle and his wife Blanche run a pub that is as friendly as any I know, mercifully free from tarted-up elegance and abundantly rich in that indefinable thing called atmosphere.

In the tap-room are dominoes and darts, and round the bar are cups and trophies won by the pub's teams, and a large collection of Toby jugs. The regulars in the tap-room are mostly working men, mostly in their working clothes. On the night I was there they included quarrymen, shepherds, road-menders, agricultural workers and a man who makes his living by swinging a 28lb. hammer (try it some time).

The beer is outstanding. Robinson's bitter is good anyway, and here it is particularly well-kept, served at a pleasant temperature straight from the wood. Furthermore I encountered for the first time a most impressive Old which is in effect a draught barley wine. There's a bottled version called Old Tom (with a delightful label of a ginger tom-cat) but it's worth going to Chapel-en-le-Frith just to get it straight from the wood from Reuben Hoyle—it's as good a beer as I know. It costs 30p a pint—not that it's sold by the pint; the normal measure is a third of a pint for 10p, though the hammer-swinger was drinking it in halves.

The beer was good, the fire was warm, the darts flew, the dominoes clicked, the stories were funny, the laughter was loud, the snuff went round, the sneezes rang out, and on a cold winter's evening it would be hard to find a pleasanter spot.

Next door stands a larger building which is almost completed. This is the new Shoulder of Mutton, and when it is ready the old pub will come down to make a car park. What will happen then? Will Reuben and Blanche Hoyle carry on? Will there still be a tap-room? Will there be somewhere to play darts and dominoes? Will the regulars be welcome in their dirty working-clothes? Will there be wall-to-wall carpets and keg music? Will the new pub go after a new kind of customer, not locals but passing car-drivers dropping in for a gin-and-tonic and fried scampi?

These were the kind of questions that a couple of weeks ago were thrown at Mr Peter Robinson, a director of the brewery, and that he can be seen fielding on the Granada TV On the Spot programme at 1.40 tomorrow. I haven't yet seen it, but I took a small part in it and got the impression that it had the usual faults of programmes in which a score of people are sat down and encouraged to express that many opinions in that many minutes. Still, it usefully highlighted the relationship between a particular brewer and a particular pub.

Mr Robinson stayed cool under attack. He gave away a little, but not much. He would not say (why not?) whether after 20 years at the old Shoulder of Mutton Reuben and Blanche Hoyle would be going to the new one. On the other hand he repeated that people in working clothes would be welcomed, and that what on the plans was shown as a single drinking area would in fact be divided up. One end would "not be wholly carpeted like the buffet and the lounge" (loathesome words), and they would be able to have their equivalent of a tap-room.

To Jack Harrison, known as "Shep" after his occupation and a regular customer for 27 years, Mr Robinson replied with an air of condescension I have rarely heard used by one adult to another, that Shep would be able to have "your own little corner where you can play darts and dominoes to your heart's content."

A question that was not properly answered was why Robinson's had not merely restored the old building. An independent chartered surveyor who had made a full inspection said this could be done even now for £15,000. If, instead of allowing the pub to dilapidate for ten years, the work had been done when plans were first made for a new pub, then the cost would have been much less. Mr Robinson disputed these figures.

Time will tell, and I hope that, say, six months after the new Shoulder of Mutton has opened I will have the opportunity to visit it and see whether any of the old regulars are still using it. I very much hope I'm wrong, but I doubt if they'll be there. The change from one pub to the other must altogether cost the brewery something getting on for £100,000. Obviously they are going to want to see something for their money. At the same time the very existence of a car park and carpeted buffets and lounges is going to attract a different kind of customer. It is they who will establish the character of the pub, and it is the character of the pub that will decide whether it is used by men in overalls, not the wishes of some brewery director who never goes near the place.

I complimented Mr Robinson on the Old and asked him how strong it was. Oh dear me, he said, he'd tell me if he knew but he didn't, there were so many facts and figures around nowadays that one couldn't keep them all in one's head, could one? I would have to ask his brother, who deals with the brewing side of things. Of course, if I'd asked him the price of something he'd have been able to tell me straightaway, because that was his side of things. What, I asked mischievously, is the price of the Old? Oh dear, I'd got him there, it was so difficult carrying all these millions of things in one's head, wasn't it?

What was clear was that he was not familiar with the Shoulder of Mutton, or the tenant, or the customers, or their wishes or requirements. Nor had he made any attempt to explain his actions to them until a television programme put him on the spot.

Wouldn't it have been better, years ago when they first thought something needed doing to the pub, if someone from the brewery had gone along there one evening and said: Look, lads, this pub's falling down and we'd like to give you a better one next door. How about it? What kind of pub would you like? Think the customers might even be enthusiastic instead of apprehensive. But the high-handed style is what comes more naturally to brewers.

IN THE BAR of Crystal Palace's Glaziers' Club the beer used to be Young's, the nearby independent Wandsworth brewery. On becoming chairman of Crystal Palace last year Mr Ray Bloye hired Malcolm Allison as manager, and replaced the Young's beer with the product of Watney's. Since then Crystal Palace have hardly won a match, and people who follow these things tell me that the team is heading for the Third Division with the speed of a runaway lift.

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To Dept Z/G1 French Government Tourist Office, 178 Piccadilly, London W1V 0AL.
Please send me full details of holidays in Burgundy and the French Railways.

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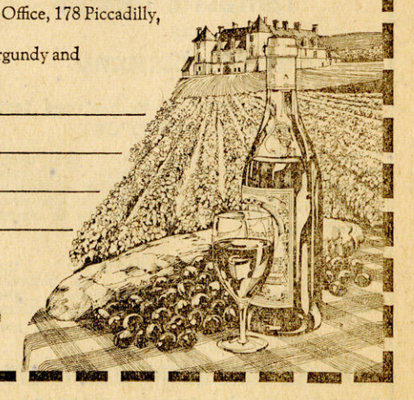

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