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many other improvements in working conditions and wages, and the inauguration of the system of guaranteed prices for exported dairy products were among the notable early achievements.

Social Security

The Social Security scheme, an immense ambition for which Mr. Savage had more enthusiasm than any other item on the Government's programme, proved too formidable an achievement to be worked out in practical detail in a hurry. The preparations took two years of investigation and planning, anxious overhaul of facts and figures, before the scheme took workable shape. All this time the anxiety of the Prime Minister over the problem was obvious to all who were in personal touch with him. They began to see that his whole heart was bound up in the realisation of this greatest objective in Labour's first practical programme. They saw that the slow progress towards this ideal was worrying their leader, and undermining his health. It was at this stage that a trouble previously evident made a re-appearance. He fought it off, to push on the preparations to give economic security to the aged, the widows, the orphans, the permanently invalided, to help mothers in their critical time, and to relieve all classes of the community of the dread of debt when medical assistance had to be sought.

In the final session of Labour's first Parliament the Social Security Act was passed, and all the planks of the first programme had been put into legislative enactments. This was the time when the Prime Minister ought to have taken a rest, and deal with the physical trouble which had been recurring. He was advised by his friends to enter hospital so that the surgeons could give him permanent relief. The general election was coming, and the Prime Minister declared that he was not going to take any risk of being a mere inactive spectator. He put aside considerations of health, and undertook a campaign which would have tried even the most robust. Coming back to his office after every tour, he seemed no more fatigued than any average healthy man, for he declared that the crowds of loyal friends he had met all over New Zealand were an inspiration, and a far better stimulus to action than gallons of doctor's tonic.

Qualities as a Speaker

Mr. Savage was a convincing though not a showy speaker. His points, whether in Parliament or on the public platform were rammed home by sheer earnestness of manner and simplicity of phrase.

Debating points are effectively made by means of contrast, and Mr. Savage could do this well. To use the word "adept" in this connection does not fit with his complete simplicity of manner and of phrase—but he hit the mark by showing so plainly that he meant and felt what he said to be true.

The friendliest of men to meet, he was "Joe" or "Mick" to his associates, and smilingly answered to either name. In private life, as in the public gaze, he maintained perfectly the dignity of his high office, though not inclined to dress for the part. Those who had expected a Labour Prime Minister to defy the conventions were, however, pleasantly disappointed.

He Could Be Firm

One should not take from all that has been said about his gentle and unassuming nature that Mr. Savage lacked firmness. That very necessary quality in a successful leader was shown, when needed, both in the rough and tumble of parliamentary life and within his own party. There was one notable occasion in recent months. The issue was the right of the Prime Minister to select his own Cabinet. This did not arise after the first Labour victory, because the members of the party at their first caucus following the election thrust aside the elective executive principle, with an enthusiastic declaration "Leave it to Joe."

But it was revived after Labour's second victory. Then Mr. Savage firmly asserted the constitutional right of the Prime Minister to select his own colleagues. He said plainly that he would resign from the position unless he could exercise this time-honoured privilege, and he won. To an interviewer he explained that no doubt it would be a lot easier to say to caucus "This is your responsibility, let's take a vote on it," but he had to be sure that he did not come into conflict with the people, who had heard him from the platform making definite promises which they understood. "They look to me to carry them out if returned to power, and I have to be sure that I do not betray them."

An Unworldly Man

Jealous of the constitutional privileges of his office, Mr. Savage troubled not at all about material advantages. Money made no appeal to him, except as the medium through which economic independence and a high standard of living could be distributed to all the people. He was a plain-living man, his greatest luxury, books and the radio. The unique system of pooling the salaries of Ministers with those of the rank and file of the Labour members so that all could share in the higher emoluments granted by the Civil List to members of the Executive, had its inspiration in the leader.

Illness

Finally we come to the drama behind the presentation of the last Budget. Mr. Savage had at last made his decision to submit to a surgical operation, for he had been obliged to absent himself too often from the sittings of the House, where he was accustomed to stay in his place from prayers to adjournment, attentively following the remarks of friend and foe alike.

He was away from the House for a week before the date fixed for presentation of the Budget, and only came back half an hour before he was required to read the long and important Financial Statement. This took an hour and a-quarter, and the only sign of the strain of this ordeal was a lessening of the usual vigour of his voice. He went away when the task was over. Said his right-hand colleague, Mr. Fraser, next day: "With the full knowledge of the circumstances, I can only express my sincere admiration for the man who, from a high sense of the duty which he owed to the country at such a critical period, set aside his own personal convenience and safety."

The Prime Minister read that Budget knowing that it might be his last task in the place where he had fought so many battles for his ideals, but he must have felt content with the measure of his great achievement.

Heartened by the great flood of sympathetic messages which poured in during his stay in hospital, Mr. Savage declared that these expressions of kindness from all sections of the community, including little children, "built a new world for me." His recovery from the operation appeared to be remarkable. Within a few weeks he was taking an active interest in public affairs, and soon made appearances at Parliament Building for a few hours daily. Towards the end of the year, however, it became evident that long absences from his office were unfortunately



"... his greatest luxury, books and the radio"

due to something more than accepting medical advice. Though it was a physical ordeal, the Prime Minister spoke cheerfully and vigorously to the men of the Expeditionary Force when they paraded at Parliament Building for the official farewell at the end of December. It was his last public appearance, though he briefly looked in a little later to a parliamentary function in honour of the Apostolic Delegate to the Eucharistic Congress.

Last Talk To The Nation

Fighting a magnificent battle against declining physical vigour, Mr. Savage early this year entered on a long series of Sunday night radio talks on "New Zealand's Problems as I See Them," and these talks ended on Sunday, March 3, with a splendid tribute to the young manhood of the Dominion enlisting for service in the Expeditionary Force. He talked of "The Soldier—Public Friend No. 1." His voice was vigorous and his words inspiring as he paid tribute to our fighting services, and reminded those who stay at home of their part in the general sacrifice for high ideals.

"We have not sent—we shall not be sending—our boys overseas by way merely of a gesture, however splendid," said the Prime Minister. "We are not engaged in theatricals that happen to be dangerous. Nothing less than stark necessity would induce us to send the flower of our manhood to the battlefield. Our men go to take their place in the armies of freedom because, without them, those armies would be incomplete." And his final exhortation was: "Let all of us who do not go to the war be thinking even now how best we can make it up to the fighting man for what he will have given up and done for us."

If the hour of his passing is dark, it has been lit up by the fire of his faith in the cause for which this country is fighting, and his determination that New Zealand shall quit itself with courage, endurance and honour.