

POLITICAL LAWLESSNESS

A CONSERVATIVE OBJECTS TO TORY TACTICS

Mr. Nicholas Cockshutt, until recently Conservative candidate for Rochdale, has announced that he can no longer remain a member of the Conservative Party. In a statement to the Manchester correspondent of the Press Association, he said Mr. Bonar Law claimed that all his party were with him in promising support to the men of Ulster who resorted to rebellion in order to resist Home Rule. This support of political lawlessness (Mr. Cockshutt said) he could not be a party to, and must protest against. He had joined no other party, and was now a free man.

Interviewed by a *Daily News* representative as to the reasons which have caused him to sever his connection with the Tory Party, Mr. Cockshutt said:—

Nothing but the strongest convictions would have induced me to take the course I have taken, which is obviously is against self-interest, but I do not fear in the least stating the reasons which influenced me. It is, of course, well known that certain men of Ulster have decided to resort to violence, force of arms, and rebellion, in order to resist Home Rule in case the Government passes the present Home Rule Bill, and we are told that to this end drilling and arming are going on at this moment. With the merits or demerits of that decision I do not at this moment deal. What I desire to deal with is the fact that Mr. Bonar Law, the Leader of the Conservative Party, has definitely, deliberately, and intentionally promised to those men of Ulster his support in their purpose, and, what is still more to the point, in doing so he has claimed, and still claims, to possess the endorsement of every member of his party to that promise. This was done last July at Blenheim in the presence of an immense gathering of Unionists in words thought out and written down beforehand, and emphasised in the House of Commons and elsewhere. The gravity and solemnity of this declaration leave no room for doubt as to its portent and meaning, so that every Conservative, unless he speaks to the contrary, is pledge-bound to it.

Political Lawlessness.

Convinced as I was then—and each day I am more and more convinced—of the dangers and evils of this promise, not only inherent in itself but in the example it sets to others, and in its enabling every member of the Conservative Party to be pointed at in justification of political lawlessness resorted to by others, I expressed, respectfully, I hope, first to Mr. Bonar Law, and later to the public, my inability to support it. For many years I have been attached to the Conservative Party, and if there has been one political feature which has long influenced my political views, it has been the safety and security to be found in Conservatism, its stability, caution, avoidance of extremes, and sound reliability of purpose. The traditions of this great party—respect for law and order, one of its greatest treasures, obedience to our laws, and opposition to anything in the way of anarchy, rebellion, and sedition have justified me in upholding and submitting Conservatism for adoption. Moonlighters or cattle drivers, militant suffragists or passive resisters, who have suffered fines and imprisonment for their cause, have been condemned by Conservatives, and any inciting of class against class has in a special way been held up to the country as abhorrent by members of this great party. The endangering of life and property by the use of fire, corrosive fluid, the dog whip, the hatchet, a boot at the head of a magistrate, or a book thrown at one of his Majesty's Ministers in the House of Commons, a threat to break every law that is possible, or boast of the knowledge that one's conduct leads to anarchy are all contrary, I think, to true Conservative conceptions.

But can Conservatives who are now committed to support violence if resorted to by their own friends for their own purpose condemn others who resort to violence also? If Conservatives are justified in supporting armed resistance to a law they don't like, may not

others do the same? If men in the North of Ireland may shoot in order to gain their desires, may not men in the South shoot also to gain their purpose? Are Conservatives alone to have the monopoly of these methods of political warfare, or to be the only ones to say when violence is or is not to be used.

These are questions which agitated my mind when I refused to support the Blenheim programme. I wondered where this sort of thing, which is nothing else but picking and choosing which law is to be obeyed or disobeyed, was to begin or end. Only one answer could I find, and that is the answer every Conservative in the land, guiltless himself, would have found had the Liberal, Labor, Nationalist, or other party dared to rebel or support armed resistance against a law passed by a Conservative Government. For myself I prefer the stronger weapons of public opinion and the sense of justice in an intelligent electorate as a more powerful and certain means of preventing or remedying injustice than the use of armed force, and to these will appeal be made by all to whom trust in the people is a reality and not a sham.

Armed Resistance to Law

I cannot support, and when it comes to pledging myself or allowing myself to be pledged by any person to support any aggrieved section of the community to open violence against a law passed by Parliament and the King, then at all costs I must, and do, refuse. My King and Parliament are more to me than party, and although I have been so called, it is not I who am a Tory rebel.

It is said that the Constitution has been suspended by Parliament, and therefore rebellion in Ulster is justifiable. I don't believe it or a word of it. If the Constitution is suspended, then it is suspended for all things, and not for Home Rule alone. If it is suspended, why do the Conservatives attend Parliament at all, much less welcome Government measures as they did the Insurance Act, and still less draw their salaries? The Parliament Act has passed the Commons and the Lords. The Conservative peers did not vote against it, and it bears the Royal assent. It is the law of the land to-day, and I am content to be bound by it while it stands.

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