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Report From Britain, 19 December 1949

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REPORT FROM BRITAIN

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Aberdeen, Scotland
December 19, 1949

Supremely confident as a result of the New Zealand and Australian elections, the Conservatives are wheeling up their big guns for the climax in the battle to determine who will guide Britain's destiny in the frightening years ahead. Private enterprise, steel, sugar, cement, and insurance, feeling the hot breath of nationalization, are pouring huge sums into the campaign while most newspapers look upon Labor with the same apprehension as their American counterparts have displayed toward the New and Fair Deals. The election will probably come off in February but my guess is that Mr. Churchill's cohorts would do well to wait till the votes are in before planning to unscramble the planning of the state planners.

Last week I attended my first political rally, one addressed by Colonel Gomme-Duncan and Lady Tweedsmuir, conservative M.P.'s from Perth and South Aberdeen. I am not one to gauge the sentimental value of kilts and sporrans. But I can't deny full admiration for the courage of the colonel who dared flaunt an unaesthetic paunch where a double-breasted coat might easily have diverted attention to his fine head and lucid, at times witty, speech. Now Lady Tweedsmuir is something else again. If this tall, slim, beauteous creature with the well modulated voice isn't the most glamorous gal (she has three children) in politics, I'll eat every page of the next issue of "Tory Challenge." What's more she talked sense.

On this occasion, however, Colonel Gomme-Duncan had been slated to state the Conservative case. He did it with as much ease as if he had thoroughly digested "The Right Road For Britain." The issue, he said, was whether the United Kingdom would choose parliamentary democracy or the socialized state, "which is the nursery of communism." (At this point I was touched with a spell of homesickness.) With the strength of a Galahad, the old campaigner then bared five or six principle lies of the Socialists as well as the threat of statism to 1) trade unionism, 2) cooperatives, and 3) Christianity. He was ready to lead a revolt, constitutional of course, against crushing taxation, the cost of living, and the tyranny of the state.

According to this veteran of two wars, today's full employment is an illusion created by American dollars. The Tories, if returned, would restore freedom and liberty, provide an adequate living standard with floor but no ceiling, remove controls (but not rationing), stop further nationalization, furnish expert guidance where de-nationalizing was impossible, reduce waste, restore the value of the pound, lower taxes, and provide incentive. The present social services would be maintained.

This was a sympathetic meeting of some 400 partisans who indulged in considerable applause (the usual British stomping of the feet), and an occasional "hear, hear." Obviously, there was no need for conversion. It may be that these well dressed people came only to be informed. But there was no one in the audience under thirty-five and my estimate of the average age would be between forty-five and fifty. I walked out of the hall into a heavy snow wondering where the young voters were and whether you can win an election without them.
