

BRITAIN DECIDES!

In 600 years of Parliamentary history, never has there been a more dramatic election. In a day charged with tension, perhaps the most exciting moment happened in mid-afternoon, when, coinciding with the announcement of Mr. Churchill's electoral win at Woodford, came the news that Socialists and Conservatives were pegging level. The Tory leader summed up the campaign, and said of its conduct:

"It has been a model of the way things are done, irrespective of Party feelings in our island and may be an example to many countries on the Continent of Europe, where the same absolute fairness and correctness on the part of all concerned in the election is not always the most prominent and noticeable feature."

Though the pre-election period may have been demure and, by past standards, even dull, the thrilling end made it the election without precedent. With electoral expenses strictly limited by new laws, the campaign went off quietly. Redistribution cut up all but 92 constituencies and the Prime Minister was among those forced to seek a new district. The Labour leader, who together with Mrs. Attlee, also found time for a nation-wide tour, asked West Walthamstow to return him to Parliament. Half-an-hour's busride away, in Woodford, there was Mr. Churchill - likewise snapped, quizzed and filmed wherever he went and likewise seeking the votes that would enable him to return to his place in the House of Commons.

In a verbal battle mainly concerned with national problems, it was Mr. Churchill who widened its context to international problems. Up and down the land, the shadow of the hydrogen bomb hung ominously over the campaign.

Amid the hills and valleys of Wales, there was a third voice - that of Mr. Clement Davies - leading nearly 500 Liberal candidates throughout Britain. Across that landmark of Wales (the Menai Bridge) Anglesey heard another famous Liberal, and Welsh, name - Lady Megan Lloyd George. M.P. for this tiny island for more than 20 years, she - like Mr. Davies - was again returned.

In Scotland, the spotlight fell on Dundee West, where a Government seat was thought to be in danger. Conservative candidate Soryageour-Wedderburn was fighting (in this new constituency) Food Minister John Strachey - seen here campaigning outside Caladen shipyard. Mr. Strachey - with his wife acting as an additional, unpaid agent - again won the Scottish burgh. South of the border, interest centred on the West country's citadel - Devonport. There, two famous sons of famous fathers were fighting a battle, described as the "bitterest dogfight of the campaign." Conservative candidate was Randolph Churchill - Winston's only son, former M.P. for Preston and

war-time paratrooper. His opponent was Michael Foot - Socialist son of the Liberal's elder statesman, Isaac Foot.

A member of the Labour Party executive, Mr. Foot was re-elected, though there was a moment when his supporters feared that their hopes would suffer a let-down.

In London, new electoral boundaries wrought havoc among old-established loyalties. Among those affected by redistribution was Mr. Bevin, who went to East Woolwich - a constituency split by the Thames from Central Wandsworth. Elsewhere in the capital, the campaign lived up to its "demure" label - though hecklers reached a new crescendo in Hammersmith and Fulham.

SOUND

Ingenious and varied were the Party appeals to the electorate for three weeks - right up to polling day, when nearly 30 million Britons turned out to cast their verdict. Freely, and in secret (as is their cherished right) the people set out to choose the 39th Parliament of the United Kingdom. This was Democracy in action. This was government by the people, for the people, of the people.

An electorate, that some observers had written off as "couldn't-care-less," turned out in greater numbers than ever before to let the world know their decision on the problems of our time. As the ballot papers came up for counting, the record poll was confirmed. Then began the most exciting 24 hours of any election in living memory. While the checkers got down to their mammoth task, Londoners went out to make a night of it. Despite intermittent rain, Trafalgar Square looked as crowded as on Victory night. It was a friendly crowd and, as the first results flashed onto the screen, nothing fiercer than cheers and boos indicated where their sympathies lay.

To show that the nation's political sanity was sound, the cartoonist gave a hand with the results.

Walthamstow Town Hall was centre of attraction for North Londoners - awaiting the announcement of Mr. Attlee's electoral win - among the first to become known. With the early results bringing nothing sensational, no-one guessed what the next few hours would bring. In Piccadilly Circus, cheering thousands found little to do, but cheer and wait - yet each one had his own fancy.

In West End clubs and hotels (where more champagne was downed than for many a night) it was a great time for the "I-told-you-so's" as more and more results poured in.

Overnight declarations showed only a ripple of the storm that was to break next day, for the early hours brought Labour a definite, if not commanding lead.

Lord Woolton's smile was back, as the gap was almost closed, but final results confirmed that Labour had a narrow majority. At a hastily summoned Cabinet meeting, a decision on the virtual stalemate (a position without parallel for more than a century) was priority No. 1. Still full of voice despite the tension caused by the photo finish to the political Derby, a big crowd saw the Ministers arrive. Forecasters were already prophesying another election. Questioned on the Government's future plans, Mr. Morrison said:-

"The Prime Minister will be making a statement to the effect that as we have a majority of Labour members in the House of Commons the Government will fulfil its duty and carry on. The King's Government must be carried on."

Cheering crowds greeted Mr. Attlee as he left for Chequers, where he decided on the make-up of the new Government. A stormy passage was ahead of the ship of state. To the man at the helm falls the most difficult job of all.