



The Fifth Commandment

*A biography of Shapurji Saklatvala
and memoir by his daughter*

Sehri Saklatvala

The Fifth Commandment: A Biography of Shapurji Saklatvala and Memoir by his Daughter

By Sehri Saklatvala

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THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

**A BIOGRAPHY OF SHAPURJI SAKLATVALA AND MEMOIR BY HIS
DAUGHTER**

SEHRI SAKLATVALA



Photo: Saklatvala with the author as a child

Editor's Note

This edition of *The Fifth Commandment* has been newly revised, edited, annotated and illustrated for digital publication. Electronic publication affords the opportunity of a wider readership and a longer life for the book than the original printed edition could ever achieve.

Contemporary newspaper clippings have been interspersed through the text, mostly from *The Times*—although as the voice and epitome of the British establishment, that organ could never have been expected to sympathise with Saklatvala's views. Its archives were, however, the only ones available for free to the present editor, who believes all the material included to be out of copyright.

In line with the author's intentions, this digital edition is made freely available to historians, educators, scholars and activists under the Creative Commons 3.0 Licence; you can distribute, copy and reproduce any unaltered part of the text, provided that due acknowledgement of the source is given and that no profit ensues.

The editor

June 2012



Photo: Portrait of Saklatvala as part of the mural *Battersea View* by Brian Barnes and Neil Torbett, 1998

Author's Preface

Before I start this narrative, I had better explain the title of the book; I have myself often been irritated when an author chooses a periphrastic title and fails to tell the reader the significance of it until almost the last page, by which time I am usually beyond caring. The fifth commandment appears in the Bible, in Exodus, chapter 20, verse 12, wherein it is said: "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." That is exactly what I am doing in writing this story: I write a book; I carve a headstone.

The only memorial to my father is a plain and modest marble tablet at the foot of his mother's grave in the Parsi burial ground in Brookwood Cemetery in Woking, under which his ashes lie. It reads:

*Shapurji D. Saklatvala,
eldest son of Dorabji and Jerbai Saklatvala,
mourned by his sorrowing wife Sehri and their five children.*

Born Bombay 28th March 1874.

Died London 16th January 1936.

Member of Parliament 1922/23 and 1924/29.

*Nothing but death could end his courage and determination in the cause of
humanity.*

Nothing but such determination could conquer death.

His work lives on.

My mother has no memorial stone. Instead, with the help of the Derbyshire County Council, I had planted a hundred and twenty trees on the hillside beside the cottage where she was born in the village of Tansley. It seemed a more creative way of commemorating her life, for she always loved nature, and especially her Derbyshire 'heimat.' Although she left her village when she was eighteen and lived to be eighty-eight, she never wholly lost her native accent, nor the colourful and unique phrases of her corner of England.

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While this is primarily an account of Father's life, his story is inextricably entwined with the life of Sally Marsh, who became Sehri Saklatvala when she married him in the summer of 1907. They were a diverse but devoted couple, and each one fully appreciated the qualities of the other; Shapurji always said that he would not have been able to devote himself wholeheartedly to politics had he not had a sensible wife to whom he could with confidence entrust the well-being of the family. And, although Sehri survived him by more than forty-one years, she spoke of him continually in her everyday affairs, quoting his views if ever she wanted to make a point in an argument, and still following his advice, given years before, when she had to cope with illness or any crisis or dilemma.

It was probably her constant devotion and references to him that have kept him very much in the forefront of my mind; for although I was only sixteen when he died, I still use his views as my yardstick and quite consciously refer to what I think would be his opinion when making important decisions.

Sehri Saklatvala

1990



Photo: The author on the occasion of her 90th birthday, June 2009

CHAPTER 1

The Sun Rises in the East

*Saklatvala's family background and early life, 1874 -1895.
Life in Bombay with his uncle, Jamsetji Tata. Attendance at
St Xavier's Jesuit College.*

Shapur Dorab Saklatvala was born on March 28th 1874 in Navsari, Gujerat, India. Shapurji's family situation was a complicated one, which had a profound influence on his subsequent philosophies and conduct.

Shapurji's great-uncle, Nusserwanji Tata, was not born into opulence, but he was a creative man of vision and determination, and it was he who founded the great business house of Tata, one of the first multiple companies to emerge on the Indian commercial scene. He had fulfilled a childhood dream and planned and laid the foundations of a lavishly splendid dwelling, Esplanade House, completed after his death by his only son Jamsetji, who had worked closely with his father, and whose contribution had helped to insure the prosperity and growth of the family firm.

[Editor's note: the suffix '-ji' appended to Indian names indicates affection and respect].



Photo: The Tata family around 1900

L-R: Dorabji, Heerabai, Dhunbai, Jamsetji, Ratanji, Navajbai

Nusserwanji had four daughters: Ratanbai, Maneckbai, Virbai and Jerbai. It was this youngest daughter, who was affianced in childhood to Dorabji Saklatvala, the son of one of Nusserwanji's business partners, Shapurji Saklatvala the elder. Dorabji and Jerbai were my father's parents. Daddy was their second child and the eldest of four sons, and he therefore enjoyed the confidence of his father, more than his three younger brothers. They lived modestly in the Fort area of Bombay (now Mumbai).

The Saklatvala family moved to Esplanade House and all its grandeur when Shapurji was about fourteen; Jamsetji Tata was living there with his wife Heerabai and two sons, Dorabji, fifteen years older than my father, and Ratanji, some three years older than Shapur. Jamsetji made a home for all his nephews, saying that they were all grandsons of his father, Nusserwanji.



Photo: Esplanade House, Bombay

Esplanade House was large enough to accommodate this extended family; it was built round a courtyard in the classical style, and furnished in the European manner, for Jamsetji was a great traveller. He was also an avid reader and had a well-stocked and much-used library, which doubtless enriched my father's childhood.

Jamsetji (or J.N.) Tata was one of the leading lights of the Parsi community. This, of course, was when India was part of the British Empire, the 'jewel in the crown,' and the Indians were a subject people with virtually no voice in their own affairs or government. But, on the whole, the Parsis were looked upon with favour by the British rulers — they were competent entrepreneurs and traders, cultured and educated very much in the Western mould, and not averse to co-operating with the British Raj more readily than most of the Hindu and Muslim populations.

The Parsis had come to India as refugees in about 936, when the Muslim domination of Persia (now Iran) made it very dangerous for the Zoroastrians to practice their religion there. They had sought and obtained permission to settle on the west coast of India in the area of Bombay. There they have lived harmoniously with their hosts ever since, maintaining their Zoroastrian faith. Like the Jews in Europe, they have perpetuated their own religion and traditions and, though comparatively few in number, have kept themselves intact as an integral fraternity. They gained the reputation of being industrious, intelligent, courageous—and usually wealthy. They were also lavishly charitable; indeed, they are so still.

I have always described us as being zoologically Persian, but geographically and patriotically Indian; but since I have inherited from my father his belief in the universality of man and his dislike of anything that divides us into competing groups either of religion or of race, I offer the reader these tit-bits of information light-heartedly. Inasmuch as we all inherit and are shaped by

our history, a slight knowledge of our forbears might help the reader to understand and know my father better.

Shapurji wrote to a friend in the mid-1920s, describing his and his father's view of the family relationships. Whether it is a true picture of the situation as it really was, or not, it reveals his attitude and feelings about his father vis-a-vis the Tatas. All these years after the events, I am not in a position dispassionately to judge the rights and wrongs of the case; for the purpose of this book, they are not important. It is Shapurji's deeply held convictions and beliefs that are important in trying to understand his later political development. Unfortunately the first page of the letter is missing, and I am therefore unable to know the precise date or the name of the recipient, but it must have been written about 1926, because there was a court case in 1927 and this document appears to have been written a short time before that.

“...After years of injustice and suffering, my father has gone but, through him, the duty to our past ancestors still remains. I have to hand over that burden to my children and towards them it is my equally great duty to keep on trying with unceasing efforts to leave to them the heritage of duty with their rights under the existent state of social structure, while it lasts and dominates over chances of life. The Tata fortune began with Nusserwanji Tata, but in all early initiative stages and efforts there was an equally valuable partnership and substantial co-operation of Shapurji Saklatvala [my father is referring here to his grandfather, after whom he was named]. When the latter died, he left entirely to the honour and discretion of the former, the fixing and distribution of the fortune to the surviving heirs, of whom my father Dorabji was the sole male heir and a special favourite almost undesirably spoilt.

“An ordinary trustee would have safeguarded the business rights of such an heir and also created a careful trust for the future safety of such an heir who was then a helpless minor of fourteen. This was not done but the unusual course was adopted of handing over all jewellery, house property and 90,000 rupees to the widow, without trust conditions and with further assurance that the son Dorabji, being about to become the Trustee's own son-in-law, would have nothing to want.

“Well, he had to lead all his life in want and from this age he was dispossessed of all wealth as well as business rights in the firm. Further,

all throughout we, his children, were brought up positively to disrespect and even to despise him with the open doctrine that every Saklatvala influence must be wrong and every Tata quality the crystal clear virtue. The open misappropriation of the rights of our father was explained to us as a thing to be made up to us and in us. Nothing of the sort has been done. I grew old enough to discover the most cruel wrong done to my father and through him to our future stock. The abominable trait in the Tata lesson to us of despising our father I see now burning again in the heart of Sir Dorabji in the relationship between myself and my children [Sir Dorabji was J.N. Tata's elder son and my father's cousin]. Any person of honourable social instincts would be horrified by the superior Tatas in a sort of continuous action. I am taking it with a philosophic tolerance as a fatalistic hatred that sometimes exists between closely related families.

“The economic wrong stood for all these years under the excuse that Dorabji as a ward was disobedient, vicious and uncontrollable. I visualise now that he was a stripling lad of fourteen and the persons who dispossessed him were Nusserwanji, over forty years of age, a powerful, capable administrator, and Jamsetji Tata, over twenty-five years of age and possessed of remarkable tact, talent and strong will.

“Somehow an idea has always prevailed, and (been) encouraged by the latter-day Tatas, as if Jamsetji Tata had freely or even reasonably spent sums upon our living, health and education. This is absolutely untrue, and though our needs were great, with the ruination of our Father, we had to do everything in life inadequately in proportion to very slender means. When my brother Beram became of school age, the question of paying fees for the fifth child became a huge problem. There was no Tata help for him. Year after year to the very last he proved to be one of India's best brains [Beram became a successful metallurgist in Pittsburgh, USA]. I had to go periodically to the Rector of our College, explain our household poverty, and thus got Beram educated without payment, ABC class to his final BSc Degree, on the charity of the kind-hearted Jesuit Fathers. For his post-graduate work he obtained the official Tata loan which he paid back with a per cent interest... no supplementary assistance was ever extended to us. Our respect for

Jamsetji was our voluntary contribution of a moral value.”

Bearing in mind that this letter was written with such a conviction that a great wrong had been done to his father all those years before, one can imagine what an impact such a situation must have had upon Saklatvala as a young boy.

It is almost certain that both his father and his mother had related to him, as the eldest son, the story of how his father had been deprived of his due patrimony, (for, rightly or wrongly, this was their contention). Thus he was made aware that his father felt aggrieved and wronged by the Tata family. Shapurji, like the young Hamlet, was convinced that his uncle, Jamsetji Tata, had virtually destroyed his father — not that he had actually taken his life but, in Shapurji's eyes, he had totally blighted it, and robbed him of success, position and prestige. For the firm, initiated by Nusserwanji, grew and blossomed under the visionary helmsmanship of Jamsetji, but Dorabji Saklatvala had virtually no share in the prosperity, though his father had been a founding partner in the business.

There is no official record of the fact, but Father had told my mother shortly before their marriage that his parents had separated and were living apart. My mother told me of this years later. Shapurji remained devoted to both his parents and must have felt very keenly the lack of his father's presence throughout his boyhood. Again there is no record of how often Dorabji was able to see his sons, but, since Shapurji remained fondly attached to him, it would seem that they probably met quite often. Notes made from a conversation soon after my father's death, between Shapurji's life-long friend, Kaikoo Mehta, and my brother Beram, merely say that Granddad was hardly ever there in the mills in Bombay.

Another early acquaintance, Mr Spitam Cama, in a letter to my brother, writes that he first met Shapurji in 1890 and goes on to say, “...At this time, as far as I remember, his father Dorab was away in Madras. It was Jamsetji Tata who was the leading light in Esplanade House, and in the Saklatvala household.” It would appear that the separation was not so much an emotional breach between the mother and father, as a physical separation caused by the Tatas sending Dorabji Saklatvala to work in their branches away from Bombay, and at the same time, making a home for his wife and children in Bombay away from him.

This means that Shapurji as a teenager was brought up in the household and in the care of J.N. Tata, who had been described to him by his absent father as the son of the man who had wronged his father. Had Shapurji been able to dislike Jamsetji, it might perhaps have been easier for him to cope with emotionally. But Jamsetji always had been especially fond of Shapurji and saw in him from a very early age the possibilities of great potential; he gave him a lot of attention and had great faith in his abilities, both as a boy and as a man. Indeed, this deep affection between Jamsetji and the young Shapur led to Jamsetji's elder son, Dorab, being jealously resentful of this young cousin, fifteen years his junior. As boys and as men, they were always antagonistic towards each other; the breach was never healed. And while the young Shapur must have enjoyed and been flattered by the paternal attitude of his uncle, he probably felt rather guilty about it, remembering that it was that same uncle and that uncle's father who had caused such unhappiness to his parents.



Photo: St Xavier's College, Mumbai

Also, it seems from Shapurji's 1926(?) letter that Uncle Jamsetji always belittled Dorabji Saklatvala and encouraged the sons to disparage him. I can well imagine that a sensitive boy, such as my father undoubtedly was, must have been torn apart by such conflicting loyalties. Also, he definitely saw his father as an underdog and as a man not enjoying the prosperity of other members of the family. This may well account for his early sympathies with the really poor people who abounded in the city of Bombay. Indeed, Kaikoo Mehta, Spitam Cama and his own brother, Sorab, all say that at a very early age he was perplexed and concerned by the differences between the rich and the poor, between men of wealth and influence and esteem, and those who were despised and humiliated by their poverty. Much of this could have

stemmed from the differences in status he observed between his affluent and influential uncle and his much poorer and somewhat despised father.

His references to the kindness and charity of the Jesuit Fathers in educating free of charge his youngest brother Beram are also very significant. There has been speculation as to whether or not Shapurji as a young man was baptised in the Catholic faith. The question was raised legally in connection with Shapurji's rights to benefit under certain family trusts. My father contended, in a document submitted to counsel for legal opinion, that he was not baptised into the Roman Catholic Church, as alleged by the trustees and that he had at no time entered into the Roman or any other church. It was true, he explained, that

“...many years ago while in Bombay, he was a student of Religions, and for this purpose he not only studied the Zoroastrian Religion but also the Christian Religion and he had discourses with the Roman Catholic Fathers of St Xavier's College in Bombay where he was educated, and having regard to this fact it was somehow published in a Roman Catholic newspaper of Goa that he had adopted the Roman Catholic Religion, but immediately upon this being brought to his notice, he, within a very few days, published a notice in the same newspaper, denying that he had embraced that religion.”

It appears that the newspaper report came to the notice of his cousin, Dorabji, who had questioned Shapurji on the subject. Shapurji had assured him that the report was false and had shown him his own publication in the newspaper denying the unfounded allegation. I think it can safely and definitively be assumed that any dip into the baptismal waters of Catholicism was an intellectual and philosophical exercise, rather than a blinding flash of revelation and unquestioning faith.

Like most Parsi families of that time, the Tatas and Saklatvalas were devout Zoroastrians and great importance was laid on religious observance. At seven years old, Shapurji had his Navjote ceremony, formally initiating him into the Zoroastrian faith. (It is similar to the Jewish Bar-Mitzvah or the Christian confirmation ceremony). This, of course, entailed his learning the prayers and fundamental teachings of the religion, and he was invested with the sudra (a fine cotton shift or shirt) and the kusti (a holy cord of lambswool worn like a girdle round the waist). It is a solemn ceremony conducted by a priest and

witnessed by the child's family and their friends. After the ceremony, gifts are given to the child and a meal is served and there is a family party.

Later, when all four brothers were in their teens, they all attended a priestly seminary and underwent the first of the two stages for becoming a priest. This was quite usual among the families whose sons would be acceptable as members of the priesthood; it did not mean that they intended to become fully-fledged priests. The course was quite stringent and lasted for about a year. At the end of the course, the boys were presented to the head priest in the temple and conducted certain religious rites.

Having thus been imbued with the teachings of the Parsi religion, the young Shapurji was taken from the vernacular school where he had started his education, and was transferred to St Xaviers School, which was run by the Jesuit Fathers. His natural inclinations and interest in things spiritual, nurtured by the solemn teachings of Zoroastrianism, now turned themselves to the religion of his new environment to which his change of school exposed him.

His brother Sorab, writing to my brother Beram in 1937 said of him:

“As he grew up his tendency was to take things much more seriously than boys of his own age. Personally I believe he was very greatly influenced by the austere and simple life of the Jesuit Fathers of the school, more so than any of us or any of the other non-christian boys. He seldom took part in any games and did not seem to enjoy the company of rowdy boys. He had a circle of friends of his own. Though in fairly good health he was physically never very strong and that fact also accounts for his not taking part in games or not freely mixing with his school companions. All the same he was willing to be helpful to others and was fond of joining debating societies or similar organisations.

“When he entered St Xavier's College in 1893 his outlook on life became still more serious and the influence of the Jesuit Fathers still more pronounced. Philosophy and religion attracted him to such a degree that he even neglected his other studies. He failed to take his Arts degree and would have made a second attempt but illness intervened. This prolonged illness made him weaker still physically but perhaps spiritually stronger. This to a certain extent filled him with bitterness which greatly changed his outlook on life. His religious propensities

deepened and he began taking an interest in and freely mixing with the poorer classes. He seemed to be greatly perplexed by life's vagaries and became indecisive as to what profession in life to follow. He continued his touch with the Jesuit Fathers and the old school and took an interest in many Catholic institutions, at the same time maintaining contact with Parsi institutions also."

Shapurji's closest friend through school and college, and all through his life thereafter, was Kaikoo Mehta. Speaking of this period in Father's life, Kaikoo said:

"At college also we were together. During college, rumours and complaints that he was too thick with Catholics arose—all matters including religion. No doubt, he agreed. I can't really say what influence. We did not talk about these discussions. But evidently things seem to have developed, which made people say he had been influenced. But he still acted as an orthodox Parsi. But always, even in early days, he always had a feeling for the poor and the underdog. He always used to go about and see these people in their cottages, discuss matters and sympathise with them and discussed the forces which kept them poor."

Another old acquaintance of Shapurji (I would not go so far as to describe him as a friend, though they remained in touch for most of their lives) was Spitam Cama. He wrote, also to my brother in 1937:

"During 1892-1895 when Shapurji was between 18 and 21 years of age, we were together in St Xavier's College. He shone there in mathematics and English literature and was altogether a brilliant student. During these years we met almost every evening at Marker's Ground in Bombay [now Mumbai], where we played cricket or football or some other sport. With us were the Mehta boys, Patel, Petit and, sometimes, Shapurji's brothers.

"It was during this period also that Shapurji made his first attempt at any sort of public speaking. This was at the Gwalia Circle, a club of which he was one of the founders. Among his fellow members were the sons of Sir Pherozeshaw Mehta, J.R. Patel, subsequently a leading lawyer, S. Cama, young Lalkaka who became a Collector in Karachi, and J.B. Petit, who was destined to sit in the Indian Legislative Assembly. This club was a well organised affair with reading rooms and a meeting

place in the Kamballa Hill district. There the young men used to meet for debates and discussions. These were mostly of a purely literary nature, and nothing political was ever brought up. Shapurji, with considerable debating experience within the College itself and full of enthusiasm for things literary was a leading figure at these semi-public functions.

“1900-1901: Some time during this period Shapurji was quite seriously ill... He seemed to be toying rather seriously with the idea of Christianity. It should be emphasised that, although all the teachers at St Xaviers were Jesuits, he had never, apparently, been influenced at College towards their religion. [This does not tally with the views expressed by Uncle Sorab, my father’s brother, above. I think Sorab’s views were probably the more accurate and knowledgeable of the two.] It was during and particularly after this period of illness that he first showed such tendencies... Shapurji’s tendencies in the direction of Catholicism greatly displeased his family, and led to frequent quarrels. In these, Jamsetji himself never joined, but he was always very fond of Shapurji, showing him an affection and trust greater than he showed to his own boys, Dorab and Ratan.”

Certainly Father always had a certain regard for nuns and priests as teachers, contending that, because they were not encumbered with the frictions and worries of family life and other mundane matters, they were able to take a greater interest in the development of children in their care. For this reason, he sent my younger brother and myself to a convent school. But he stipulated that we should not attend services in the chapel, nor were we to be given any religious instruction.

He encouraged us always to read about and discuss religions, but he did not want us to be influenced by any one teacher in a matter so wide and so important. But he clearly thought that the simple and austere way of life of the nuns would serve as a good guide and example for us to follow. He believed that the core and the fundamental tenets of most religions led people to a good life; but the ritual of religions he thought to be divisive and the cause of much human dispute.

Clearly religion and philosophy were the predominant passions of his early life and far outweighed all other interests. The quest only ended many years later

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when he finally embraced communism as his creed.

CHAPTER 2

The Plague Years

Work in India during the bubonic plague and association with bacteriologist Professor Waldemar Haffkine, 1896 - 1902.

To add to the emotional turmoil caused by the tribal turbulence between the Tatas and the Saklatvalas, in 1896, there befell a plague on both their houses. In the late summer of that year it was officially reported that bubonic plague had assailed the city of Bombay. It was a scourge of disastrous proportions and was to rage until 1902, with periods of varying intensity. It was against this terrifying and depressing background of poverty, sickness and death that Shapurji spent the early years of manhood.

It is astonishing to me that this plague was never mentioned at home, either by my father or mother; nor was it ever spoken of by Kaikoo Mehta, who was with us all continually and who was almost like a second father to the family. Indeed, the first hint I had of it was when, after starting to delve into Shapurji's past, I began to read all his speeches in the House of Commons in Hansard. There was a debate in the House on the 25th November 1927, when it was proposed to send a Commission under the leadership of Sir John Simon to India. In the course of this debate, the Under-Secretary of State for India made a time-worn reference to the various religious factions in India, emphasising their mutual prejudices and dissensions; and to illustrate that the British in India were also showing that same prejudice, Shapurji, in the middle of a long speech, told the following anecdote:

“...There are Hindus, Mohammedans, Sikhs and Parsees. We have heard it often and often, but may I ask whether this Bill, whether the imperialist rule in India, whether this Commission, intends to give one religion to India? Is that your object? Is that what you are doing? If you are merely ‘chewing the rag’ because there are many religions in India, how does that entitle you to go as pirates into somebody's land and establish a rule? Will that make less religions? You will only make one

more. What is the meaning of talking about all these irrelevant things? If you tell me that this Commission is going out to India and the unmistakable result is going to be a unification of religions, I will be ready to support it; but merely to talk about all the differences of religion in India and then argue from that that Great Britain is entitled to rule the whole of India, is an old-time deception that an enlightened world can no longer swallow.

“If I may be permitted just to give something from my memory of a personal character in this matter. In 1902 a plague was having a devastating effect all over India. It was to be taken in hand not merely as a grave problem, but as something to save human lives. There was a Professor Haffkine in those days who was the first man who, with some measure of success, gave out an anti-plague serum for inoculation. His experiments were being conducted on a large scale. I was then associated as secretary with an important committee of welfare workers. The Governor of Bombay, who was then himself staying out of Bombay, immediately sent a telegram to Professor Haffkine to go to him with certain facts and figures because the matter was becoming of vital importance.

“Professor Haffkine asked me to go and assist him. I gave up my work in the office, and I went to the place where he was staying, and that was his European club. People talk about untouchability! Although I had facts and figures at my disposal which were the result of months of study, and the Professor had only four or five hours at his disposal, I was actually prevented from entering the white man’s club. Yet a representative of that race today talks nonsense about untouchability among the Hindus. Ultimately, when it could not be helped, the messenger of the club, after telephoning to various government officials, took me to the back yard of the club, led me through the kitchen and an underground passage to a basement room, where the Professor was asked to see me because I was not a white man. That happened 25 years ago.

“I got the Indian newspapers last Monday, and there is an example quoted of a European officer of very high position, a Britisher and his wife, who were travelling in a first class railway carriage. They had only reserved their own seats and a Mohammedan of very high rank,

occupying a very high position in the government of India, had his seat reserved in the same carriage. When he wanted to enter the carriage the British officer would not allow him to sit in another seat in the same carriage. He held the door of the railway carriage so that the railway officials were unable to open the door, and that Mohammedan official had to take his seat in another carriage. Yet a man of that British race here today stands up and pours contempt upon the Hindus for insulting Mohammedans. Talk about depressed classes and untouchable classes...”

This reference to my father’s voluntary work in connection with the plague led me to investigate further. In fact, in 1902 Bombay was witnessing the last dying swish of the tail of the dragon. This bubonic plague had made its first recognised appearance in Bombay on the 31st August 1896, by the registration of the death of an inhabitant in Broach Street from this cause. Earlier in the year, the monsoon had been unusually short and severe, and was followed by serious floods which destroyed crops and made roads and railways impassable. The torrential rainfall at one time burst the main water conduit from the storage lakes and the city was without water for eighteen days.

I have not found any contemporary descriptions of the plight of the people at that time, but perhaps an apt picture is that described in the apocryphal Book of Judith:

“And the cisterns were emptied, and they had not water to drink their fill for one day, for they gave them drink by measure. Therefore their young children were out of heart, and their women and young men fainted for thirst and fell down in the streets of the city, and by the passages of the gates, and there was no longer any strength in them.”

It was when the population was thus already debilitated that the bubonic plague struck. Food prices had soared and, as always, it was the poverty-stricken who suffered the greatest deprivation and hardship. At first, the authorities tried to play down the situation and, consequently, it was not until the 23rd September 1896 that measures for the eradication of the plague were adopted



Photo: Waldemar Haffkine

Here I must interrupt the narrative of Shapurji to introduce a new character into our story. He is Professor Waldemar Haffkine (born Vladimir Aaronovich Havkin), a Russian Jew who went to Calcutta in 1893. He was an exponent of the then comparatively new science of bacteriology. Since he was to have quite an important influence on the young and impressionable Shapurji, we must spend a little time to get to know him.

Haffkine was born in Odessa in 1860, the son of a schoolmaster of modest means. He managed with the frugal help of his elder brother to study in Odessa University, and he received twenty kopeks a day from the University for his food; so he knew what poverty was all about. He was an ardent student and worked under Professor Mechnikov. He soon saw the injustices of the Tsarist regime, which interfered constantly with the freedom of the university, and he joined the revolutionary underground movement known as the Narodnaya Volya Party, an illegal organisation set up in 1879. Some of its members resorted to acts of terrorism in their fight against the tyranny of the monarchy.

In 1882 Haffkine was expelled from the university for sending a letter to the Rector in support of Professor Mechnikov, who was in disgrace with the authorities. In 1881 he was arrested and served a jail sentence, and he was under police surveillance in Odessa for eight years, and three times endured the extremely harsh conditions of imprisonment under the Tsarist regime.

As a result of all this revolutionary activity, Professor Mechnikov escaped to Paris, where he joined Louis Pasteur in his institute. Later, Haffkine followed him and was found a minor job in the institute until, in 1890, he was

appointed as a research assistant there. Until then, the only vaccines that had been found were against anthrax and rabies. Haffkine now concentrated on finding a vaccine against cholera, which was rife in Asia and the Middle East and was threatening Europe. Indeed, before he had been successful, there were outbreaks of cholera in Paris and London and all over his beloved Russia. He worked incessantly during all his waking hours and had no other interests or distractions and, eventually, he found a safe vaccine. The first human trials were carried out on himself and three of his fellow Russian exiles and, mercifully for all of us, the inoculations proved both harmless and efficacious. Meanwhile, Russia was ravaged by the disease, and Haffkine sought permission from the authorities there to return home and help to arrest the spread of the epidemic. But, because of his political associations, he was refused admission to his homeland. It was believed that the disease had spread all over Europe from Bengal, and it was for this reason that Haffkine applied in London to go to Bengal to set up a laboratory there and to help to arrest the further dissemination of cholera. There were many delays and it is almost certain that the British government was informed by the Russian Ambassador in London of Professor Haffkine's politically stormy past; but eventually, early in 1893, Professor Haffkine set sail for Bengal to take up the post of bacteriologist with the government of India; and what a blessing his presence in India was to prove to be, not only for India but for the whole of mankind.

And incidentally to this great cause, circumstances were to bring this Russian revolutionary, this brilliant and dedicated scientist and humanitarian, into contact with Shapurji Saklatvala. Was it perhaps Haffkine who sowed the seed of revolution in the fertile garden of Shapurji's compassionate nature? It seems to me to be highly likely, for Shapurji was to work with the professor for six plague-ridden years.

When the plague struck the city of Bombay, it had a disastrous effect upon trade and upon the municipal revenue. Official reports of the period show that almost half the population fled in panic out of the city, and business of all kinds was paralysed for a time. Hoping to slay the insatiable monster that was killing the population by hundreds every week, the government sent Professor Haffkine to Bombay to combat the terrible scourge. He arrived in the city on the 7th October 1896, and the very next day set to work in a one-room

laboratory, with no scientific staff, to find a prophylactic vaccine. His quest was for a system of inoculation of the healthy to prevent them being infected by the disease, rather than to find a serum to cure the already stricken. After three or four months of ceaseless and painstaking toil, he finally produced a vaccine which, as with his cholera vaccine, he tried upon himself as the first human experiment. During this time he was joined by a few doctors and his staff was enlarged.

He had many bitter critics, not least among the medical profession, but it seems that Jamsetji Tata was one of his enthusiastic supporters. He and his family, no doubt including Shapurji, were inoculated many times in the ensuing years and none of them succumbed to the plague. Jamsetji Tata instructed one of his close colleagues, one Burjorji Padshah, to give every possible assistance to Haffkine. Padshah recruited all the young Parsi students then studying at St Xavier's College to help the Russian professor, especially in the gathering and maintenance of statistical records of his work and, subsequently, of the programme of inoculation. Shapurji Saklatvala was among these young volunteer helpers. It was his first association with a man who was not only a dedicated scientist and humanitarian, but who had been driven out of his homeland, Russia, because of his revolutionary associations and anti-Tsarist politics.

Of course, in the situation in which he was now working, Professor Haffkine had neither time nor energy for politics and devoted himself entirely to his scientific research and his unceasing efforts to inoculate as many of the population as possible. But it is surely likely that he talked to Shapurji about his experiences when the two of them met. It is, I think, safe to assume that, when Shapurji was sent to a basement room in the European club and Professor Haffkine had to join him there, that some comment of the situation must have been made. It is recorded that the Professor was very critical of the British imperialist authorities, noting as he did the abject poverty, overcrowding and insanitary housing in which the majority of the Indians lived; he saw that the victims of the plague were to be found mostly among the poor, and scarcely any in the European or wealthier quarters of the city. When Shapurji presented him with the statistics, it is inconceivable that no comments were made and that no discussions took place between the two men. Their outlooks had much in common; and no doubt this close

association between the older idealist and scientist and the young, compassionate student, must have helped to form and to crystallise the convictions of Shapurji. Haffkine's selflessness, like that of the Jesuit Fathers, must have had a profound influence on his young apostle.

It should not be imagined that all the lessons of compassion were to be found only outside his family. He was reared in an atmosphere of tenderness and benevolence, for it was said of Jamsetji Tata that success in business did not diminish his sensitive and sincere sympathy for the poor; indeed, when speaking of their problems, it is recorded that his eyes filled with tears and he was always prepared to spend money for the public good. So it is not surprising that compassion and caring for the poor were fostered in the heart and mind of Shapurji, surrounded as he was by great minds of a similar disposition.

During the Christmas holiday of 1896, the Tata family moved en masse to their family home in Navsari, an annual treat, especially for all the younger members of the clan, who were able to enjoy their freedom from studies, with picnics and all kinds of festivities. During those early weeks of the plague, when almost half the population of the city had fled, Dorabji Tata insisted on returning to his office and to the mills in Bombay as soon as the holiday period was over; it was important to encourage the workers to stay at their posts, otherwise the business could easily have failed. Many mills in the town closed down at that time, but the Tata mills kept going, though of course the general commercial depression had an adverse effect on the development of the company.

By the time this 'Christmas holiday' was over, the vaccine against the plague had been successfully developed and inoculations began. Jamsetji Tata was a zealous advocate of vaccination, and when his son Dorabji married in 1898 and the bride's family entered the Tata household for the wedding, they were made to subject themselves to inoculation as soon as they arrived! Not everyone, even among the more educated, were quite so amenable. There was great antagonism to the system, and many people were terrified that it would actually give them the disease rather than protect them from it. Professor Haffkine insisted always that vaccination should be voluntary; then, as now, the rights of the individual were sometimes protected. Perhaps, though, had it been compulsory, it might not have taken six years for the plague to be

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

brought under control.

But certain regulations had to be obeyed. All victims of the disease had to be removed from their homes and taken to hospitals and kept in isolation. Since very few of those struck down recovered, the poor and uneducated thought that the government was sending them to hospital merely to hasten their death and they resisted this enforced removal from their homes with ingenuity and defiance. Deaths also had to be reported and the bodies safely disposed of. Army and police patrols circulated in the city, seeking out the sick and the dead.

As early as October 1896, the mill-hands in several of the mills were so incensed by the laws of segregation and hospitalisation, that about a thousand of them assembled outside the Arthur Road Hospital and threatened to demolish the building and to disperse the staff. They pelted the building with stones and any missiles they could find and attacked any members of the medical staff who were intrepid enough to emerge. The police had to be called in to quell what could almost certainly be termed a riot.



Photo: Bombay around 1900

There is a touching story appearing in the official report by the Commissioner

for Bombay, which demonstrates the intensity of feeling against compulsory hospitalisation of the victims. A Parsi family had taken in a Hindu boy, thirteen years of age, an orphan of whom they became very fond. The child was infected by the plague and the doctor said he must be removed to the hospital. The ladies of the family refused to let him go. When the doctor insisted, they armed themselves with kitchen knives and surrounded the sick bed, declaring that they would all kill themselves if the child were taken from them. The police were called. But before the patient could be taken, he was carried away by death. Sad as it no doubt was, his timely demise certainly saved the police from an ugly confrontation. But if women were prepared to go to such lengths to prevent a little adopted boy of another religion from being hospitalised, to what lengths would parents go to keep their own children with them in the home?

The Commissioner for the city was wise enough to realise the extreme danger of this widespread terror inspired by the enforcement of the segregation and hospitalisation laws. He feared more than anything that the Halalkhors and Bigarries, who constituted the sanitation workforce, would panic and leave the city. Were this to happen, the disinfecting and flushing of the city's drains, water supply, roads and buildings would become impossible; if this essential service came to a standstill, the only remedy would be to remove the whole population out of the town, leaving the plague-ridden, bubonic-infested rats to take over a dead and derelict city. The threat of the withdrawal of the working people reached a climax on the 30th October and, the Municipal Commissioner issued proclamations explaining and modifying the enforcement of segregation and hospitalisation. Although it may have been, medically speaking, less safe, he thereby dispelled the almost certainty of extensive riots and wholesale abandonment of the city by the populace.

It was about this time that my father should have sat for his BA degree. Kaikoo Mehta merely says that he did not sit for his finals, giving no explanation. His brother Sorab indicated that the reason was that he became totally engrossed in things religious and philosophic to the detriment of his regular studies. But it appears that all his college cronies and himself were roped in by Burjorji Padsaw to help in the gathering and maintaining of statistics to help Professor Haffkine in his work. The information required was the precise number of individuals affected by the plague, how many were vaccinated against it and

how many of those so vaccinated were infected etc. These figures and other vital information were obtained from actual visits to the homes of potential and actual victims.

I think it is probable that Shapurji became totally engrossed in this work which he seems to have continued, alongside his work in the office for the family firm, until 1902 when, as referred to in his House of Commons speech already quoted, he says he was the Secretary of one of the Plague Relief Committees. The fact that Professor Haffkine had sent for him personally, and that Shapurji called alone on the Professor, indicates that there was quite a close association between the two men.

In a biography of Haffkine by Mark Popovski, it is said that Haffkine visited five and six storey tenement buildings, with many families living together in one room without windows or ventilation. Haffkine is reported as having said, "When they showed me a row of buildings which housed between 700 and 1000 people and told me that there had been plague cases in similar buildings throughout the district, I saw at once that there would be no point in carrying through the measures decided upon by the municipal authorities..."

No doubt, Shapurji visited similar hovels and talked to the inhabitants of them. Had it not been for his welfare work due to the sickness prevailing, it is doubtful whether anyone of his social background would have had any personal contact with those poor people. How could he see their suffering and return to the splendour of Esplanade House at the end of the day, without realising the need for a total and absolute change in the social structure of the community? Jamsetji Tata's will shows the extent of his properties: "Esplanade House my residence in Bombay, my townhouse and my country seat at Nowsari and my bungalow Castle Hill at Matheran." What feelings of guilt and injustice must have assailed the earnest young Shapurji as he toured the plague-ridden slums of the city for Professor Haffkine?

It was in about 1901, according to Spitam Cama and to Kaikoo Mehta, that, after a period of overwork, Shapurji became very seriously ill. No one has specified the illness; but he was sent to a sort of sanatorium in the hills of Panchgani, close to where Spitam Cama's family were staying. Jamsetji Tata also had a house there. Mr Cama describes Shapurji as being very depressed, spending whole days walking on his own in the hills. He wrote poetry at this time, but since none of it was preserved, we will never know its worth. His

brother wrote that the doctors at one time thought there was nothing more to be done to effect a cure and that afterwards, when he had recovered, the family doctor said it was only his supreme willpower that had pulled him through.

(Years later, we all had a holiday in the Surrey home of my sister-in-law's family. In his letter thanking them, my father said how the scenery near Dorking had reminded him of his retreats in the hills in India where they went to escape the heat of the plains. Perhaps, during that holiday, he was thinking nostalgically of those agonising days of sickness and the relief of his recovery).

I do not think it was merely the physical overwork that affected him, but the emotional stresses of those years while he was working among the impoverished masses, overtaken by sickness and deprivation. Perhaps, whatever the illness was, the other effects of those years never really left him, for he spent his whole life thereafter struggling to better the lot of those masses of people living in destitution, want and humiliation. What he saw in those years of the bubonic plague must have remained always in his mind. It was to those victims of circumstance that he dedicated his life.

The charitable and benevolent community of Parsis, to which he belonged, always sought to alleviate the distress of the poor. This was not enough for Shapurji. He sought not to alleviate but to eliminate poverty entirely; and not only in India, but all over the world. The 1917 revolution in Russia and the events following upon it led him to believe implicitly that communism could end abject poverty; it was for this reason and this reason alone, that he devoted the rest of his life to the propagation of world communism. The reader may or may not agree with him, but there can be no doubt of his dedication, sincerity and self sacrifice in what was, and remains, an unpopular cause in Britain.

CHAPTER 3

The Quest for Iron

Prospecting for minerals, 1901 - 1904, prior to the creation of the Tata Iron & Steel Company (TISCO). Resulting illness.

The next phase of Shapurji's life was his quest for iron ore and other minerals necessary for the formation of an iron and steel company. Jamsetji Tata was one of those rare men who dreamed splendid dreams and translated them into magnificent reality. Ancient India had had a thriving and skilled iron manufacture; the iron column of the Kutab Minar in Delhi bears witness to this; it weighs more than seven tons, and is thought to be three thousand years old. This indicated that not only was there the skill in ancient India, but the raw materials must have been there in some abundance.

During the nineteenth century the British rulers in India showed a considerable interest in the possibility of developing the iron and steel industry in the country. Various official reports of prospecting for the raw materials were published. Even as quite a young man, Jamsetji cherished the vision of adding this industry to his other commercial endeavours. Out of these aspirations and his hard work and tenacity, a flourishing industry was created, although Jamsetji himself did not live to see its final blossoming and fruition. But it was out of his far-sightedness, study and tireless travelling both in Europe and America that this great enterprise was achieved, bringing such benefits and wealth to India.

To get such an enterprise off the ground, dreams and visions had to be set temporarily aside, and practical difficulties had to be faced and overcome with fortitude, skill and determination. There can be no doubt that Jamsetji Tata was a supremely colourful and powerful personality who was capable of making people share his enthusiasms and to work at his side with a dedication and tirelessness almost equal to his own. He was also very adept at choosing wisely a loyal and talented group of men to assist him in his ambitious aspirations. The idea of producing iron and steel simmered for many years in his mind, during which time he studied official reports and visited districts

where it was thought that iron ore might be found. But it was not until 1899, when the rules governing the issue of prospecting licenses were amended and relaxed that he took positive steps to involve his company in this up and coming new industry.

In the summer of 1901, Jamsetji Tata travelled to London, where he met Lord George Hamilton, Secretary of State for India, whose great desire it was to see industries in India developed with Indian capital. He greeted Mr Tata's project enthusiastically and assured him that he would solicit the support of the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, in such an important venture. Fortified by such promises of official co-operation, Jamsetji returned to India where he obtained prospecting licenses for the Lohara and Peepulgaon areas in the Chanda District.

Before setting out again on his travels, he put his son Dorabji in charge of the administrative side of the business and put Shapurji in charge of the actual explorations in the arduous search for iron ore, suitable coal and limestone deposits. It was seemingly a strange choice; Shapurji's brother, Sorab, said that Father had never been very strong or robust; also, he had only fairly recently recovered from a severe illness. To lead a team of exploration in terrain that was certainly wild and rugged, if not actually hostile, called for physical stamina as well as a strong and pertinacious character. To select Shapurji for this task shows yet again Jamsetji's perspicacity and wisdom. The physical challenge was probably the best cure for the young man's ailments and, although he and his band of workers did not succeed in their quest, this preliminary expedition was helpful to the future larger one that accomplished the final breakthrough; and Shapurji was to be a member of that successful team also.

The Chanda district is situated in the southernmost area of the central provinces. Much of the land is covered with dense forest, extending over the plains and plateaux alike, surrounding small villages and covering the valley floor that is interlaced with many rivers. There were tigers and leopards in the vicinity and bears were quite frequently seen. The summer and autumn months were extremely hot and unhealthy. Transport was by bullock cart or on horse-back from the town of Nagpur in the north of the district. Nagpur was the centre and headquarters from which the expedition set forth; it was about five hundred miles from Bombay, being then the terminus of the Great

Indian Peninsula Railway. Jamsetji had had a house there ever since he set up the Empress cotton mills in the town in 1877.

During this early search, Shapurji set up camps in the various blocks which were to be examined for the desired minerals. From 1893 there had been very poor harvests of the rice, linseed, gram and wheat, which were the staple crops of the vicinity, and in 1896 and 1897 there was severe famine in the Chanda district. The sparse population had been reduced to great poverty and hardship and shortage of both food and water. It was a predominantly agricultural community, with some fishermen working in small boats along the network of rivers. Sometimes Shapurji's team slept in the open in the bullock carts in which much of their travelling was accomplished. But quite often they shared the meagre hospitality of the villagers and slept in their huts and houses. So once again, Shapurji was thrown into the company of the poverty-stricken and simple people, this time, actually sharing their humble, often squalid, shelter. Years later, as a member of the British parliament, he was to demand their freedom and to advocate communism as a means of bettering their lot and offering them education and a decent standard of living. He must have been, I suspect, the only member of that illustrious body, who had enjoyed the hospitality of these humble villagers. No wonder, therefore, that he spoke with such heartfelt and impassioned oratory on their behalf.

Once more putting Dorabji in overall charge, Jamsetji left India again in 1902 for America, where he toured extensively, discussing not only the iron and steel project but looking closely into the cotton industry as well. After much journeying and meeting numerous experts in the metallurgical field, he went to Pittsburgh. There he met Julian Kennedy, one of the world's leading metallurgical engineers, who advised him that the exploration work must be undertaken by an experienced specialist and not left to amateurs, however dedicated and persevering they might be. It was in Pittsburgh that he was finally introduced to an eminent consultant engineer, Charles Page Perin, who was destined to figure largely in the success story of the Tata Iron and Steel Company. Mr Perin in his turn, being unable to go immediately to India himself, arranged for his partner, geologist C.M. Weld, to leave for India straight away, even before Tata himself left the United States to return home.

Therefore, in April 1903, Weld, Dorabji Tata and Shapurji set out together for further rugged exploration. They endured great heat, shortage of drinkable,

clean water and suffered many privations. Villages were scattered and for the most part the team was in wild and hostile country; they only procured tents after they had been in the field for some time, and lived very primitively and underwent great physical hardship. Weld was to spend four years on the project, and he and Shapurji apparently got on well together. Talking to my brother, Beram, soon after Daddy died, Kaikoo Mehta said of this period in Father's life:

“[Shapur] went out working with Mr Weld. He was always rather a favourite with J.N. [Tata] in spite of his eccentricities; he thought him to be a talented young chap. When J.N. made use of him, he was in entire agreement with J.N.'s views regarding the Tata Iron and Steel Company, whereas Dorabji was not. Dorabji also agreed to go but did it in an orthodox manner, whereas Weld and Shapur used to rough it and prospect. [Shapur] got on well with the labouring classes, who used to be forced into service, but this he always condemned... the unofficial means of getting things done in India. Tyranny! Tyranny!... imposed by the underlings of the great Sahib. But Weld was a nice chap—they got on well.

“There was disagreement with Dorabji, who was always opposed to him. He used to put Shapur down as much as possible in negotiations. Dorabji's views were different—he wanted to back out and said his Father was on a wild goose chase. [It was a wild goose that subsequently was to lay a generous clutch of golden eggs!] He felt that European expertise was needed. But J.N. always had the idea of making these enterprises entirely Indian... Shapur agreed with him and helped him, of course, as a younger man... J.N. relied on him and gave serious consideration to his views. But Shapur never got on with Dorabji, who could not stand Shapur's unorthodox views. They always held each other in mutual contempt—more on Dorabji's side than Shapurji's.”

Kaikoo Mehta is a very reliable witness of Shapur's early days and his relationships within the family. Kaikoo's father, Sir Phirozeshah Mehta, was a close and intimate friend of Jamsetji, and the two men met regularly at least once a week when they were both in Bombay. Kaikoo also worked for the firm of Tatas and, after an initial period in Japan, worked for the firm in London all his life. He and Shapurji remained close and affectionate friends right up to

the time of Shapurji's death in 1936, and he spent most weekends with us, and was really like a second father to all of us children.

Perhaps Spitam Cama, being not quite such an intimate friend as Kaikoo Mehta, is a slightly less dependable chronicler of those early years; but his version of Shapurji's status within the family supports what Kaikoo Mehta contends. He wrote:

“...Your Father went to school when he was ten. He was always Jamsetji's favourite. J.N. would always say to Shapur and not to Dorab, 'Get this; do this,' and formed the habit of entrusting all jobs to him. So that although Dorab handled the financial side of TISCO [Tata Iron & Steel Company] foundation, it was Shapurji who was given the more difficult and responsible job of the actual prospecting. Dorab never overcame this boyish jealousy, and this, I think, was the cause of most of their later quarrels. They were always at loggerheads as children and remained so as men.”

Kaikoo Mehta said that the two brothers, Dorab and Ratan, were constantly quarrelling, so Jamsetji finally decided to let Dorabji find his own quarters in Malabar Hill. This was in 1898, the year of Dorabji's marriage to Mehrbai Bhaba; but normally he would have continued to live in his father's house. Ratan had married in 1892, and he and his wife, Nawajbai, continued to live with Jamsetji until his death in 1904. Kaikoo Mehta also said that “the Saklatvalas moved out,” and that only Shapurji and his mother remained in Esplanade House with Jamsetji, Ratan and Nawajbai. Ratan and Shapurji always remained affectionate and good friends up to the time of Ratan's early death in 1918. But of course it was Dorabji, as the elder son, who always had more power and influence in the firm.

According to Sorab Saklatvala, after working with Weld and Dorabji for a while, it was decided to give up prospecting in the Chanda district; at this point, Dorabji left this work, and Shapurji and Mr Weld went on alone to continue the search in another area called Dondi-Lohara.



Photo: The prospectors

L-R: Dorabji Tata, Shapurji Saklatvala, Ratanji Tata(?), C.M. Weld

While Shapurji and Mr Weld were on their adventurous task, the health of J.N. Tata was causing all the family great concern. He was persuaded to have a short holiday in Egypt and, from there, Dorabji, who was already in Europe, insisted on taking him to Vienna to consult an eminent doctor there. While they were passing through Naples Jamsetji learned of the death of his wife in Bombay. This shock and grief could only have made his own condition worse. He went to take treatment in a clinic in Vienna. Dorabji and Mehrbai were with him; and Shapurji's youngest brother, Beram, who was studying metallurgy in Berlin at this time, also went there.

The ailing Jamsetji went then with his family doctor to stay in Baden Nauheim, a German spa town, but his condition quickly deteriorated, and Dorabji and his wife, who had stayed on in Vienna, were sent for. There, surrounded by his son and daughter-in-law, his nephew Beram, and his cousin, R.D. Tata, Jamsetji died on 19th May 1904. They all accompanied his body to England, where he was buried in Brookwood Cemetery in Woking. His marble mausoleum, and those of his two sons, still stand in the Parsi burial ground there.

I can find no record of where Shapurji was when he learned of the death of his uncle, but it seems likely that he was still in the wilds with C.M. Weld. His brother Sorab, writing to my brother Beram after Daddy's death, said that Shapurji was very depressed by the loss of his uncle. There is no doubt that there had always been a special bond between the two of them; apart from the fact that Jamsetji thought highly of the young Shapur's capabilities, he was also the eldest son of his favourite young sister, Jerbai.

Apparently, when Jamsetji was making various dispositions on his deathbed, he particularly commended to the care of his sons, his sister and Shapurji's mother, Jerbai. Partly due to this very strong affection from Jamsetji and partly due to divergencies in character, Shapurji was disliked by Dorabji and

also by R.D. Tata, another influential cousin.

Apart from his natural grief, Shapur must also have felt personally vulnerable when the loving protection of his powerful uncle was taken away from him. His brother not only said that he was very depressed but also that he almost began to despair of his future. This blow must have been even harder to bear, coming as it probably did while Shapurji was experiencing such hardships, loneliness and toil in the distant tracts and jungles of central and eastern India. His fears for his future were certainly not unfounded, as will be explained in a later chapter.

After the death of his father, Dorabji returned to India and took charge of the firm, including, of course, the planned iron and steel project. During this time there were other prospectors in the field, and the search for minerals became highly competitive; hope of success was diminishing. But, soon after this, one P.N. Bose had retired from his post in the Geological Survey and had taken employment with the Maharajah of Mourbanj. He wrote to Tata Sons & Company (according to my father's letter quoted below, this was probably at Father's instigation) inviting them to go and inspect the iron ore in that state. After a difficult train journey, Dorabji Tata, Charles Page Perin, C.M. Weld and Shapurji were received in the capital by Bose and the Maharajah, who extended to them a most cordial welcome. Dorabji then went on to Calcutta, and the rest of the party went to investigate the Mayurbhanj territory.

The state covers more than four thousand square miles, and at its centre there lay a vast tract of densely forested hills, at that time, still largely unexplored. It was to this inhospitable land that the Maharajah of the day had invited the experts from Tata's to venture in the summer of 1904. It must have been an awe inspiring and daunting undertaking. The country was wild and it had remained virtually untouched by successive conquerors. In the jungles, elephants and other big game had had the place to themselves almost since time began. But this time, the efforts of the Tata explorers were crowned with complete success, and all they looked for was discovered in abundance.

But while enduring the perils, stresses and adversities of the jungles, Shapurji succumbed to malaria, as did also the unhappy Mr Weld who, when suffering from the disease, was forced to walk thirty miles or so to the nearest railway. To add to the distressing symptoms of the disease itself, Shapurji's servant administered too large a dose of the medicine they carried with them, which

resulted in the permanent paralysis of his toes. All his life he wore soft boots made specially for him, and during the early stages of his sickness he walked on crutches for several months.

This illness was to have a more profound effect on his life than any of his experiences hitherto. For it was as a result of his long indisposition that he visited the hydropathic spa in Matlock in Derbyshire when he came to England in 1905—and that is where he met my mother. But that story will find its romantic place in the next chapter.

Meanwhile, Dorabji worked indefatigably organising the finance, the licenses, the setting up of the company, and putting together all the knowledge and facts that so many experts in various fields had collected. The great Tata Iron and Steel Works were finally created in Jamshedpur, a city thus named to honour its great founder.

But with his uncle dead, his health failing and faced with antagonism from his cousins, Dorabji and R.D. Tata, Shapurji was gradually being pushed out of the business, and was being largely ignored while the structure of the company was taking shape. It was probably to remove him from the centre of activity that Dorabji took Shapurji to England in 1905.

In the letter from Shapurji to an unknown recipient to which I have already referred, written probably some time in 1926, he wrote the following about his contribution to the Iron and Steel project:

“Then comes the unjust financial treatment of myself in business matters. Regardless of our ability in other directions, J.N.T., with his patriarchal guardianship destined us to work in and live for the firm of the family, even in one letter describing his two sons and eight nephews as ten grand-children of his father under his equal responsibility. Our compensation for work and loyalty was fixity of tenure. Sir Dorabji’s disregard of these unwritten moral contracts is really an abuse of his legal might.

“The iron scheme was impossible without the part I played, and for which I had even asked J.N.T. to cable and cancel the Paris programme fixed for me, as the new mining department was not worked by anybody with a faith in it. It was predicted to be an exploration ending as an exploration. The Central Provinces explorations in parts defined by Jamsetji did prove a failure, and when I persevered going further

eastward Sir Dorabji wrote scolding me and said that the Tatas were nothing to the iron scheme, that the iron scheme was nothing to the Tatas beyond keeping faith with Lord George Hamilton for prospecting Lohara and adjoining areas: that J.N.T.'s health could not warrant new responsibilities and Dorab himself had no desire to assume them.

"I pacified Sir Dorabji and we reached the Dhondi ores. Then arose commercial difficulties of long distance between the three requisite minerals. Weld was instructed by Sir Dorabji to wind up and make a full report of technical data, leaving commercial propositions to the judgement of commercial experts. Weld, too, was eager to return home after a long delay. We hurriedly revisited Padampur Lime Fields and went over to the coal area and stayed with a colliery manager, Mr Sheridan. There, unwary words fell from Mrs Sheridan's mouth about Mr Maclaren's quarrel with the Bengal Iron Company and how he was about to disclose to them a new find of iron ores etc. I pricked up my ears, but Weld got angry and impatient at my suggestions of this last effort and he felt on that basis he would never be able to leave India.

"We both wrote our respective views to Bombay. Before Burjorji Padshah's reply reprimanding me arrived, Weld and I had made peace and he gave Shrinivas Rao [Weld's assistant] full technical instructions for a hasty survey, and he went away. The Mayurbhanj ores were at last located. In Nagpur I got little support to follow this up. Through parties that Shrinivas Rao had found in Cuttack, I got Mr P. Bose to write to me, inviting business terms in my capacity as holding a power of attorney for J.N. Tata. My quality of perseverance was still receiving discouragement, but at last, with a promise to Bezonji to make this my last effort, I got necessary funds and travelled up to Paripada and Mayurbhanj, stayed there four days and settled a good provisional agreement on new terms, signing same on the strength of my power of attorney for J.N. Tata.

"This was the birth of the Tata Iron Company, instead of a bunch of exploration reports; and these ores were prevented from going to the Bengal Iron Company; I was working as a member of the family in the family's firm, in hopes of permanent remunerative interest for the future. My actual salary was 50 rupees a month for the period of hardest

work and discoveries in regions which had never figured in any Tata mind or schemes...”

Jamsetji thought of Shapur as being persevering, while Dorabji saw this same quality in him as troublesome obstinacy. There seems little doubt that Shapurji’s obstinacy had extended the search for iron, limestone and coal until they were eventually found. Had he been a more obedient and docile character, it is quite possible that the Tata Iron and Steel Company would never have been formed; it certainly would have been much delayed. There is also little doubt that after the minerals had been located and the company was being structured, Shapurji received no recognition of his contribution. He was sent to England with Sir Dorabji and his wife in 1905, largely to get him away from the central organisation in Bombay and Jamshedpur.

[Editor’s note: The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography states, “A further reason for his departure was a number of clashes with the British authorities in India, first during the search for minerals, and later over the administration of the plague relief work,”—but note the error in chronology].

But it was out of this family rejection that his destiny was to be fulfilled; apart from his contribution to Indian freedom and politics in general, I am myself profoundly thankful that his European life was imposed on him—how else would I have been born? And I love life, am grateful for it, and would not have missed it for anything! So let us move on to the next chapter and see how Shapurji fared in England after his arrival there in November 1905.

[Editor’s note: TISCO issued its first shares to the public in August 1907, becoming the first corporation to be financed in this way by the people of India. The company, now the multinational Tata Steel, provides a history of its formation on the website celebrating its centenary; in that account, Saklatvala’s role is not accorded the same importance as that given by him in the letter above. Both accounts were written in retrospect and to serve a particular purpose.]

CHAPTER 4

The Sun Veers to the West

Arrival in England in 1905 for medical treatment. Early political interest in trade union and socialist meetings. Marriage to Sarah (Sehri) Marsh, 1907. Sarah's early life.

Thus it was that Shapurji first came to England in November 1905, accompanied by Dorabji and Mehrbai, Dorab's wife. He was broken in health, depressed by his uncle's death the previous year, and apprehensive about his future prospects, which were now solely in the command of his antagonistic cousin, who was, since Jamsetji's death, in full control of all the family business projects, including the development of the Iron and Steel Company to which Shapurji had contributed so much. London in a foggy November can have done little to dispel his gloom

Spitam Cama wrote that he saw Shapur on his third day in England, and described him as looking very ill and worn, and still walking on crutches.

The three of them stayed only a few days in London and then they all went to Matlock in Derbyshire, to Smedley's Hydrotherapy Institution. Around the time of their visit, the Matlock Guardian printed the following description of this beautiful part of England:

“Mr Ruskin wrote of the Matlock district in the highest terms of eulogium. The greatest of England's connoisseurs of art gave Matlock scenery precedence over all the rest of the world. He says: ‘Learned Traveller, gentle and simple... think of what this little piece of mid-England has brought into so narrow a compass of all that should be most precious to you. In its very minuteness it is the most educational of all the districts of beautiful landscapes known to me. When Nature had completed Switzerland, there was left one beautiful fragment for which she had no further use in that country; so she set it in Derbyshire, amid a framework of romantic hills, and in time it came to be called The Gem Of The Peak. That gem is Matlock.’”

The health-giving springs in the area had been commercialised and flourished

as early as the year 1698. When the British aristocracy were cut off from the continent, first by the French Revolution and then by the Napoleonic Wars, they flocked to the watering places in England, and Matlock became a fashionable resort. With the introduction of the railways and a station in Matlock, the popularity of the springs increased yet again. There were some five or six large hydros in Matlock at that time, but the most important one was undoubtedly Smedley's, built in 1853 and accommodating more than two hundred and fifty guests. A local textile manufacturer, John Smedley, had bought and developed the grand and imposing house on Matlock Bank, standing high on the rim of the valley in which the town lies; there he started his hydro. He advertised it thus:

“Winter residence, with all the advantages of English home comforts and proximity to relatives and friends, at Smedley's Institution, Matlock Bank, near Matlock Bridge Station, Derbyshire; with or without the peculiar Mild Hydropathic treatment. Conducted by W.B. Hunter MD CM Glas. Extensive saloons, lofty and well ventilated bedrooms, all kept at summer temperature night and day, without draughts. Charges moderate.”



Photo: Smedley's Hydro, Matlock

It was to this idyllic spot that our three “learned travellers, gentle and simple,” arrived. Dorabji and Mehrbai stayed only for a short while, there being

nothing specifically wrong with them; but Shapurji, still suffering from malaria and from the poisoning resulting from the wrong dosage of his medicine, stayed on until the following June. Whether it was the result of the “peculiar Mild Hydropathic treatment,” the rest after recent toil or his romance with my mother, no one can tell, but apparently all his physical ailments were cured by his stay in Smedley’s Hydro.

Here, once again, I must interrupt Shapurji’s narrative and introduce you to the girl who was to become his wife and the loving and devoted mother to us five children. For I have reached the point in my story when the two of them are about to meet.

It was such an unlikely encounter that even now, years after the courtship, the marriage, the parenthood and their death, I still hold my breath as I write about it, for fear that this strange duo might after all miss each other and negate my own life and that of my brothers and sister.

I often think how minuscule is a human creature, and how minute a portion of the surface of the universe each one of us covers; so what a miracle it was that these two tiny and insignificant specks of life should find themselves at exactly the same spot on the earth’s crust and at exactly the same moment in time. For he was born in the East, she in the West; he grew up in affluence, and she in humble poverty; he had an academic education, while she attended a one-roomed village school only until she was thirteen; it is true that he had heard all about Matlock, but I doubt if she knew very much about Bombay. (In the village school, geography was taught only to the boys, while the girls bent diligently over their needlework). But thankfully they did meet, and I and a clan spanning three more generations are here on earth to prove and celebrate the fact.

Above Matlock looms Riber Castle; it is only a mock castle, but its imitative mediaeval shape dominates the surroundings, as it stands on a height which makes it a familiar landmark in Matlock and in the little village of Tansley, two miles to the east

During my mother’s childhood Tansley boasted one shop, one church, one chapel, one school (which consisted of one classroom) and two pubs, one in the heart of the village, called the Gate, and one on the edge of the village that is called, I think, the Green Dragon. [Editor’s note: Tansley’s two pubs are currently called the Tavern and the Royal Oak. There is however, a Gate in

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Matlock]. All these amenities and some few houses are built on the slopes of the moor side, leading southward and upward off the road to the height of the moors. There at the top of the village, and a little remote from it, was a cottage called Foxholes, surrounded by moorland, with a few modest grey stone dwellings scattered around fairly close by; the fields are upholstered with cushions of grass growing above underground springs.

It was here to this cottage that a young quarryman, Harry Marsh, took his bride Annie Jane, in 1884; this was just about the time that the young Shapurji, four and a half thousand miles away, was eagerly looking forward to celebrating his tenth birthday.

Four years later, on the 10th September 1888, Harry and Annie Jane welcomed to the world their third daughter and fourth child. She was baptised Sarah Elizabeth but was always called Sally.

By 1904 the couple had twelve children, ten of them daughters. I remember my grandma as a very quiet, staid and composed character, very puritanical and correct. But she obviously had her lighter moments, for she once confided in a friend that her Harry had only to hang his trousers on the bedpost and she fell for another baby.



Photo: Foxholes, Tansley, Derbyshire

Strangely enough it was not Annie Jane who lost her health creating this minor baby-boom, but the formerly robust Harry. After only a few years of marriage he contracted rheumatic fever and was a semi-invalid for most of his life thereafter. For a few years he was able to work again in the stone quarries, spasmodically, but for many years he was unable to work at all.

Annie Jane managed to provide for the family, and all the children had to participate in running the household. Sally was baking all their bread by the time she was seven; and when the doctor came to deliver yet another baby, he was surprised to smell bread baking when he knew the lady of the house was hors de combat on her bed of labour upstairs. When he saw the scrawny little waif called Sally competently acting as the family baker, he took her in his horse and carriage back to his house, where his wife gave her a slice of cake and a glass of milk. This spontaneous kindness so impressed Sally that she talked of it to me even when she was in her eighties; and, remembering her own delight, she was always ready to give sweets or fruit or toys as unexpected gifts to children she met casually, all through her long life.

The Marsh sisters were all sent out on the moors in the autumn by four o'clock in the morning to make sure of a good harvest of the bilberries which were so abundant on the hillside. Annie Jane made jam with the free crop and walked the two miles or so into Matlock and sold it to Smedley's Hydro; in return, apart from the cash, she also received generous basins of dripping [meat fat], which was one of the mainstays of the family diet. She also sold them cakes and butter made from the milk of their one cow, and at one time took fish round to sell in a little pony and trap. They grew their own vegetables, Harry digging trenches, one child behind him scattering manure into the trench, another followed with the potatoes or the seed and a third would fill it in with the freshly dug earth.

For all their poverty and meagre way of life they were a really joyful family, the parents loving towards each other and towards the children, and the children loving their parents and each other. And although the babies arrived in quick succession, there was general rejoicing at each birth. The older children took care of the smaller ones. When Sally was ten, she was put in charge of the latest arrival when the baby was a few months old. Of course there were about four children to a bed, and one night the baby, Clara, was crying; still half asleep, Sally lay and patted the infant and sang, 'Come to the Saviour, come to the Lord,' without opening her eyes. The baby continued to howl. At last, Father Harry stood in the doorway, candle held aloft at the end of a night-shirt-clad arm. "Sally, the baby's cryin'!" Upon investigation, poor little baby Clara was found to be howling under the bed, while sleepy Sally was comforting the pillow!

Their pleasures were simple. All the brood belonged to the Band of Hope and signed the Pledge almost as soon as they could write. My mother often hummed the song “My drink is water bright, water bright, water bright, my drink is water bright from the crystal stream.” (When my eldest brother was a general practitioner he once said to one of his patients, “What you need is plenty of water bright—drink as much of it as you can.” The poor bewildered patient returned in a few days and said she had asked all the chemists in town and none of them had ever heard of water bright!) They sang and recited at Band of Hope concerts, and went on Sunday school outings.

Their sabbaths were kept intolerably holy (well, it would have been intolerable for me, but they accepted it all with joyous grace apparently). Sunday mornings were spent in chapel, singing Wesleyan hymns, and in the afternoons they all tramped off to Sunday school. In the evenings Harry would gather his brood about him and sing to them in a rich baritone; my Aunt Hannah, child number six, always said she enjoyed listening to Paul Robeson because “he sounds like my Dad.” How we daughters flatter our fathers—I dare say I am guilty of it too as I write!

In spite of all the affection, or perhaps because of it, the family was strictly brought up. Annie Jane, understandably in view of her fecundity and fiscal responsibilities, could be very sharp tongued. And while it was Harry’s pride that he had brought up twelve “childer” and never raised his hand to one of them, he certainly raised his voice from time to time. When Sally was about sixteen she went for an innocent evening stroll with a lad called Tom Twigg. She was met at home by an irate Father. He asked menacingly, “‘ast a bin aht wi’ Tom Twigg?” and when Sally acknowledged that she had, he roared between clenched teeth, his voice rising to a high-pitched crescendo, “Well, tha’s let on a bonny booger now, so ‘elp my boody liver if tha’ ‘asna!” Apparently, he and Mr Twigg, senior, had fallen out over the price of a cow. Sally crept to bed, and any romance with Tom Twigg was nipped in the bud.

More than seventy years later, when I was negotiating with the Derbyshire County Council for the planting of Mother’s memorial trees, one of the letters was signed by a Tom Twigg; I wrote and told him that had our grandfathers not fallen out over the sale of a cow, we might have been brother and sister!

At thirteen Sally left school and went to take care of a publican’s baby. She had to report at six in the morning; she washed the long hall floor and lit the fires

and then took over the baby. She did all the cleaning of the private dwelling (not the pub itself), and for this she was able to take home and give to her parents half-a-crown a week.

Sally blossomed in the unfamiliarly lavish surroundings; she was a rarely beautiful girl, hardworking and of a very gentle and graceful nature, and she soon graduated to the dining room, where she worked as a waitress. The hours were long and the work was hard, but she was used to that. She enjoyed new friendships and the companionship of a large staff, and thought herself lucky to be there. Whereas at home her diet had been mainly vegetables and bread-and-dripping or bread-and-treacle, in the hydro she was serving a profusion of delicacies, and she had her choice of the menus when the guests had finished their meals.

Sally learned a little basic French from the menus; for although she had had little formal education, Sally had a brisk and creative mind, which was to make her a supportive, congenial and adaptable partner for Shapurji later on in my story. Varied entertainments were provided for the guests and, although Sally obviously could not participate, she enjoyed seeing the dances, the balls, the concerts and tableaux-vivants as well as the sessions of cards and other games. How stimulating all this must have been after the quiet and confined life in Tansley!



Photo: Smedley's Drawing Room

The dining room was spacious, with pillared archways on either side, and it

served as a ballroom or concert hall after dinner had been served and the huge table that ran down the centre of the room had been removed. There were also small tables set in the window alcoves; and it was at one of these that Dorabji, Mehrbai and Shapurji sat down to dine. They arrived in November 1905, but it was not until March 1906 that he found the opportunity and the courage to speak to Sally at last.

When, after my father's death, my brother Beram intended writing his biography, my mother wrote the following notes which will tell the story of the courtship better than I can:

“[Shapurji] saw me first on his birthday, March 28th 1906. He asked Maria Marsh who I was. She told him I was her cousin, so he asked her to call me over to his table and introduce me to him; which she did. With his beard, I took him for an old man. He gave me flowers almost every day and asked me to go for walks. I was too frightened to do so, but I kept saying I would just to satisfy him for the time being. Whenever I went out he would walk behind me.

“One afternoon I went to Matlock Bath by bus; when I offered my fare, the conductor said a gentleman behind had paid. I gave a blind man a penny in the afternoon without knowing Daddy was following; afterwards he told me that he had given the blind man two shillings and told him what a lucky man he was as he had been given a penny by the sweetest girl in the world.

“One day I got a note from a shoe shop... would I go in and try on some shoes. There was a note inside a special pair of shoes which I was to try on from him saying that he hoped to be able to buy all my shoes from now on. I happened to say I would like a bicycle, so he bought one and pretended to give away raffle tickets to several people and I was given the ‘winning ticket.’



Photo: Shapurji Saklatvala

“The day he left the Hydro, he asked me to see him off on the 2.19 train. I said yes but had no intention of going. My friend and I went out in the afternoon. When we returned we got a phone message from Daddy to say he was on Matlock Bath station and he intended to remain there however long it was until I went to see him. I went at nine o’clock at night and said good-bye to him.

“He wrote to me twice a day after he went away. He came one Sunday for the day. I saw him for a few minutes; he tried to hold my arm when we were walking; I told him not to do that or people might think we were engaged. This was always a joke in later years. Then he came to Tansley for my eighteenth birthday. He saw Dad and Mother and he got them on his side. We all went in a charabanc to the Peveril of the Peak Hotel. After lunch Daddy [Shapurji] said, ‘Come for a walk in the garden.’ I said ‘No.’ He said, ‘It’s all right, Dad is coming too,’ We had reached the rose garden when Dad said, ‘Sally, I have a birthday present for you.’ And then Daddy said he was the present—imagine my disappointment.

“From then on he considered we were engaged, but I only accepted the engagement ring on November 6th (the date was in the ring, which I

lost). This was when I came to London to see his mother and his brother Sorab. She stayed in England until the following summer and most of the time she was at Smedley's. She then went to America, where she died on November 23rd 1907..."

Quite early in the courtship, Shapurji changed Sally's name to Sehri, a word of his own invention, conjured from Sarah and Sally; this was because 'Sally' was very similar to a swear-word in his language, Gujarati. Her parents and sisters always continued to call her Sally, but in our home, socially and officially, she went by the new name of Sehri (pronounced like 'Mary').

So it seems that Shapurji pursued the shyly elusive Sally with the same dogged persistence and imagination with which he had recently sought out the iron ore in the Indian jungles. Once again, his obstinacy paid off. They were married on August 14th 1907 in the Parish Church of St Thomas, Moorside, Oldham. The Marsh family had moved from Tansley in the hope of finding more lucrative employment in Oldham for all the sisters, now growing up and many of them now of an age to earn their own living.

Shapurji's mother was staying still in Smedley's, where she got to know Sally well, and a bond of affection was forged between these two ladies both so loved by Shapurji.

Sadly, although my mother treasured all my father's letters, when he died she placed them all in his coffin with him, together with her wedding shoes which he had sentimentally kept for all those years. In a way it is better that they have been lost to us, for they must have been intimate and personal, and no biography should provide an excuse for usurping the privacy of individuals, even after their death. But I have to confess that, were they available, I would have read them with affectionate interest.

But not all Saklatvala's time in Matlock had been spent in wilful dalliance. It seems that from almost the first day of his arrival in Matlock he involved himself in political and trade union affairs. This is recorded by one Mrs Richards, writing to my brother in 1937. She had kept a glass and china shop opposite the Hydro, and apparently Father used to go in there and talk to her. No doubt he must have found the regimen at the Hydro pretty boring, and for the first few weeks at least, being still on crutches, he probably could not move very far afield. She writes:

"[...Saklatvala] came in one day to make some small purchases. During

his conversation then and on subsequent occasions I soon discovered he was very interested in politics, at that time, socialistic. Your Father found I was interested and he would quite often come into the shop... and talk long and earnestly of the injustices meted out to the working classes... His whole thought and actions were how to get people interested in helping to bring about a better life and improved conditions for the workers. If one's thoughts were totally opposite to those of your Father, his sincerity and deep feeling for the cause he held so dear could not leave one unaffected.

“About this time... he was recovering from a severe illness and bodily he was very frail, but so great mentally. I remember on his birthday, 28th March 1906, he came into the shop and said he was going to have a birthday party! And would I prepare it? I readily consented and on my asking how many were coming, he said, much to his own amusement, ‘You and I!’ [This was the day on which he first spoke to Sally Marsh and he must have been in a happy and jocular mood!]

“I well recollect on that day he was feeling very strongly the indifference shown towards the working people and was troubled that those who held his convictions and were in power appeared to move so slowly or not at all. [At this stage, he was still a Liberal.] I was always a very ready and interested listener and after some long talk upon these subjects he would say he felt better for having got them off his chest!

“He expressed a wish to pay a visit to the potteries and I accompanied him as was his wish. Having to change trains at Derby we went to see the Crown Derby Works. He enjoyed seeing the wonderful and beautiful pottery made. On continuing our journey to Stoke-on-Trent, the train passed through a very heavy snowstorm, which, I believe, was the first snow your Father had seen... he went to London. From there I received from him long letters... still on the theme of politics and urging me to do what I could in an endeavour to bring others along and get them interested in helping to better the lives and conditions of my own class.

“The next I heard of your Father, he was in Oldham; he wrote telling me that he and your Mother were to be married and would my husband be his best man. Unfortunately my husband was away in Scotland. Your Mother and Father came to stay with us with a wee babe and if you are

their eldest son, you were that babe. The last time I saw your Father was about two years ago [1935], when he came to Nottingham to speak. I would like to say my life has been made the richer for having known so great a man and I am quite sure there are many others who can say the same. In conclusion may I quote these words which your Father wrote in a book of mine on January 20th 1906: 'Be strong! Be good! Be pure! The right only shall endure.'"

This letter definitely makes it plain that almost as soon as he had arrived in England, he was already committed to a belief in liberal politics; the politics of his family and of his social milieu had always been liberal. In London he gave the National Liberal Club as his address, but it would seem that he had already advanced far along the road of compassionate socialism as early as 1905. There is also among my brother Beram's letters, one from J.R. Clynes, MP and president of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, dated 2nd March, 1937, in which he says:

"I attended a number of meetings under the auspices of the above Union held in Matlock and one or two adjacent places during 1907. We, of course, spoke not only on Trade Union and Industrial matters, but dealt with political questions from the socialist standpoint. Your Father attended these meetings, and in due course he asked me to arrange a talk with him. We had very pleasant conversations, and, as I learned later, he gave me some credit for turning his views in the socialist direction..."

However, I think that the claim that he had turned my father's views in the socialist direction is really contradicted by Mrs Richard's letter, which makes it quite clear that Shapurji held virtually socialist views as early as 1905; in any case, he must have been moving very close to socialism to have been attending the meetings at which he met Clynes. Spitam Cama also said that Shapurji knew Keir Hardie well, "...was quite a pal of his," but there is no indication of the date of their meeting.

The Matlock newspapers of the day report frequent Liberal Party meetings which were enthusiastically attended, often to over-flowing. I feel safe in assuming that Shapurji must have attended some of these.



Photo: 730 Holloway Road, London

[Editor's note: Keir Hardie, also a former Liberal, was a founder member of the Independent Labour Party in 1893, and one of the first two Labour MPs elected to parliament in 1900].

After marrying, Shapurji and Sally came to London, where they found rooms at 730 Holloway Road. It was now that Shapurji's political involvement really began.

CHAPTER 5

The Quest for a Political Solution

Joining the Socialist Party, the Clarion Club and the Independent Labour Party. His mother's death in 1907. Association with Bipin Chandra Pal, Arthur Field, J.R. Clynes and Ramsay MacDonald. Brief return to Bombay in 1912. Support of the suffragette movement and conscientious objectors to war. Belief in communism and the influence of the 1917 revolution in Russia.

By the time he was married, Shapurji had stopped working for Tata's and was on the staff of British Westinghouse Electrical and Manufacturing Company, having, for the moment at least, given up the unequal struggle between himself and Dorabji. He also joined Lincoln's Inn and intended to become a barrister, a project that had been in his mind ever since his arrival in England. But at some point he gave up that idea, my mother said later, because he felt that with his political views he would probably never be tolerated in the legal profession.

As soon as he had arrived in England, he gave the National Liberal Club in Whitehall, London as his address, and seemed to be following in the tradition of his family in the political sphere. His Uncle Jamsetji had greatly admired John Bright, Gladstone and Lord Morley, and there is little doubt that in this, as in so many other important issues, Shapurji was profoundly influenced by the grand old man of the family. But he obviously soon became disillusioned with the Liberal Party, for they did not seem to him to be doing enough for the working people.

[Editor's note: Lord Morley, Secretary of State for India between 1905 and 1910, was a prominent Liberal. Shapurji apparently had a vigorous argument with him in the NLC on the subject of India.]

For Shapurji it was not sufficient merely to bestow benefits upon the workers, he believed that the power of government had to be transferred into their hands; so, although he did not actually resign from the Liberals until 1910, he

became involved with the socialist movement almost as soon as he arrived in England. Certainly from 1907 he took an active part in the Social Democratic Federation (which later became the British Socialist Party) in East Finchley; this was a vigorous and expanding branch and, politically, I think this was a time of great optimism for him.

Also at East Finchley there was a mock parliament, and Shapurji was a zealous frequenter of all their sessions. My mother went with him quite often; it was there that she first heard Bernard Shaw speak and, of course, made his acquaintance: she never missed a production of Shaw's plays, and my older sister was called Candida in his honour.

Shapurji gave his active support to the suffragette movement from this time, and knew Sylvia Pankhurst well; he joined in their demonstration that marched to Hyde Park in 1908. He was also active in the India Reform Group. No doubt his eloquence and sincerity were already being noticed in all these organisations.

Sometime in 1907, Shapurji's boon companion from his school and college days, Kaikoo Mehta (eldest son of Sir Phirozeshah Mehta, who had been such a friend of Jamsetji) came to work in the office of Tata in London. Kaikoo was an affectionate friend to all the family, and was invariably in the house at, or soon after, the birth of each one of us. We all loved him dearly, as he was much more lighthearted than my father. It was with him that we romped and fooled around when we were small, whereas my father was always somewhat stern and aloof; and it was Kaikoo who played tennis and cricket with us as we grew older. He was very handsome with a curling, waxed moustache and he was always jolly and laughing. He was very fond of Mother and always said that Father was lucky to have found her before he did! We always teased my mother about this later on; but of course, it always remained a very proper, decorous friendship which we all enjoyed.

Kaikoo had a period cottage in St John's Wood which to all of us was like a doll's house, and we loved to visit him there. His arrival in London was a great comfort and support to Shapurji at a time when he found himself cut off from the family for the first time.

My grandmother, Jerbai Saklatvala, sailed to America that summer to visit her sons, Phirozeshah and Beram. She died in New York on the 23rd November 1907, I think as a result of anaesthetic poisoning during a minor operation.

Perhaps because her brother Jamsetji was buried in Brookwood, or perhaps it was Shapurji's wish, her body was sent to England and she was also interred in the Parsi burial ground there, in a grave immediately in front of Jamsetji's mausoleum.

Shapurji was greatly saddened and depressed by her death, and he and Sehri took a furnished cottage in Brookwood to be near his mother's grave. My eldest brother, Dorab, was born there. It was there, too, that the doctor introduced a Scottish lady, Mrs Gray, to the household as a midwife and nurse. Mrs Gray remained a close friend to all of us, and I was with her when she died in her nineties. She attended at the birth of three of my mother's five children. (She could not be with her in Manchester because she had a husband and son of her own to look after.)

Shapurji's parents had both accepted Sehri as a welcome daughter-in-law; but when she produced a son (alas, too late to make Grandma happy), Granddad Saklatvala was overjoyed and declared of the new infant, "This is the Dorabji Saklatvala of the future!" He showered my mother with gifts and sang her praises and generally rejoiced at the birth. After this, Dorabji spent much of his time in England, mostly in Manchester, where he was in business buying and selling mill machinery; consequently, he saw a great deal of the older children. It was probably one of the happiest periods in his life, after all the dissensions within the family.

In the spring of 1909 Shapurji had to leave British Westinghouse. It seems that they had engaged him in the hope of doing business with Tata's through his personal connections, not knowing, of course, that his personal relations could well have the opposite effect! He joined a firm of consultant engineers in Manchester and the family, now three in number, moved to Ashton-upon-Mersey.

My sister Candida was born there on my mother's twenty-first birthday, 1909. Kaikoo Mehta came to stay to join in the family jollifications. In those days, a mother was not allowed any solid food for days after the birth and was kept strictly in bed for a couple of weeks. Father, terrified of anything going wrong, insisted on obeying the doctor's orders; but Kaikoo used to sneak bread and butter and cups of tea upstairs for Sehri, who was fit as a flea and ravenously hungry.

In Manchester, Shapurji joined the Clarion Club; he attended their weekly

meetings with unfailing regularity and spoke there on many occasions. Bipin Chandra Pal, a great Indian orator and fighter for Indian freedom, also addressed meetings there. He was, of course, already acquainted with my father, and in this period they saw much of one another. My parents shared their house with another Indian couple, Mr and Mrs Chaman Lal, who also had young children. This meant that Sehri was able to accompany Shapur on many of his political meetings, which she greatly enjoyed, and no doubt she learned a good deal from listening to and meeting the many political figures who participated in them. While she, like her father, was always a Liberal, she nevertheless always gave her husband her wholehearted support in all his political activities, even when his politics were moving at a swifter pace than those of the Liberal Party.

In the early nineteen hundreds there was an eccentric English socialist called Arthur Field, who devoted much of his time to matters oriental, particularly the Arab cause. He was a frequent and vociferous visitor to our house and was very much a family friend. Field said of this period:

“Having come in contact with Manchester Labour Organisations including the Clarion Movement, from 1909 we may suppose that [Saklatvala] was trying to influence them, as he had tried to influence the Liberals previously, to take up the matter of organising the workers of India and voicing their claims to justice in the English Labour Circles. In 1911, he addressed to leading men of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Representation Committee a document outlining the desired activity. He told me the response was disappointing and disillusioning.”

It seems he was not the only socialist to be critical of the labour movement. When George Bernard Shaw attended the Labour Party Conference in 1909, he disapproved of the members singing at such an event; when they burst into Auld Lang Syne at the end, he voiced his disgust thus: “When Moses received the Tablets of the Law, he did not sing ‘For he’s a jolly good fellow’ by way of acknowledgment!”

Shapurji also attended regularly the sessions of the County Forum held in Cromford Court, Manchester. There he was known as a very earnest and considerable debater with pronounced socialist ideas. One of the members wrote of this time: “I remember his opening a debate and bringing his wife with him. It created some little interest, as unusual things and persons always

do. The debate went well and everyone was congratulatory, even his opponents.”

During his period in Manchester Saklatvala joined the Independent Labour Party. He frequently saw J.R. Clynes and also met Ramsay MacDonald. While he realised that MacDonald was an astute and educated man, he never felt he was the right person for the leadership of the labour movement; this first impression was confirmed in later years when he was a member of parliament. Saklatvala favoured Clynes rather than MacDonald for the leadership of the Labour Party in 1911, but MacDonald won the day by quite a slender majority. How different might have been the history of the Labour Party had Clynes instead of MacDonald become Prime Minister.

[Editor’s note: At that the time the Independent Labour Party was the means for individuals to become members of the Labour Party, which itself was a federal organisation of trade unions and societies].

For much of his life in England, Shapurji came under Scotland Yard surveillance, but unfortunately I cannot have sight of his dossier until seventy years after his death—by which time I shall be beyond reading it. I am therefore unable to state precisely when this surveillance began. But a letter from one of the Party members, with whom my father stayed in Glasgow, said that detectives were at Shapurji’s heels within a very short time of his arrival in England; though there is no evidence of any activities in India or in the very early months in England that would warrant such suspicion by the authorities. But certainly, very early in his political involvement he was followed by a detective; in a way, it flattered him and gave him importance; he certainly never seemed to resent it.

Once, when it was pouring with rain and he went into a restaurant for lunch, he went out and invited the detective to come inside out of the rain; he said he knew he was there and that he was only doing his job, so why get wet? He seems, anyway, always to have proclaimed his political beliefs as loudly and as widely as he knew how, and there was certainly nothing clandestine about his activities; it seems, therefore, to have been something of a waste of money to have him so meticulously scrutinised. Once, when he was to address a meeting in a part of London unfamiliar to him, he had forgotten the address of the hall; he went into the local police station and asked them if they could tell him where Saklatvala was scheduled to speak that night, and they at once told him!

This no doubt appealed to his sense of humour, for he related it as a joke during the meeting when he got there.

Some time in 1911, thanks largely to the intervention of his cousin Ratanji, arrangements were being made for him to rejoin Tata's in India. But his father wrote to him and warned him that he was likely to be arrested if he returned home. So it seems that he was already regarded by the British government as a threat to their continuing dominance over India; for at that time, the thought of freeing India from the tyranny of British rule was considered to be dangerous sedition. Now, of course, no one, even to the right of the Tory Party, would consider it right or desirable to resume the roles of Empire builders and subjugate other countries. So Father's philosophy, condemned as revolutionary and a threat to peace and stability, was merely ahead of his generation. It took thirty years for British politicians to catch up with him. Like all men who promote good ideas too early, he paid the price of their backwardness and intolerance; and, alas, he did not live long enough to be able to say, "I told you so!"

However, in May 1912, when the opportunity finally came for him to go back to India, he and all the family went to Bombay, fully intending to settle there. He insisted on chancing arrest and said he would not give in to intimidation. He took no active part in politics while he was in India then, as far as I know, but at the end of about a year, he was again sent back to England, presumably by Dorabji as head of the firm. (See also Chapter 6).

By the time they got back to London from India in 1913, his cousin Ratan had purchased a palatial residence in Twickenham called York House. It is at present the town hall. It was surrounded by beautiful gardens, which are now a public park. Ratan built an indoor swimming pool and lived there in considerable style and luxury. Ratan and Shapur had always been good friends and were as affectionate as brothers, and it was to York House that the family repaired on their return to England.



Photo: York House, Twickenham

Both Ratanji and Dorabji had been knighted by this time and were in the social whirl of London life, which Shapurji watched with some amusement from the sidelines. At this time, he worked as personal assistant to Ratanji and remained in this position until Ratan's death in 1918, working mostly at York House, but also in the offices of Tata Ltd in London.

During this period, Shapurji was content to be once again within the fold of his family, and enjoyed the close links with his cousin. Ratanji had no children of his own and made a big fuss of Shapur's increasing brood. He often encouraged them to entertain him with songs and recitations, and they enjoyed playing in the spacious gardens of York House; especially the Japanese garden, with its miniature trees and slender bridge over a little stream.

Shapurji found a suitable house at 51 Lebanon Park, close to York House, and the family took up residence there late in 1913. My brother Kaikoo (named after Kaikoo Mehta, of course) and I were both born there in 1915 and 1919 respectively. Mrs Gray presided at both births. I might mention here that my father was before his time in many things, and he apparently wanted to be present when Kaikoo was born. Mrs Gray was scandalised at such a proposition and threatened to walk out and abandon her patient when the birth was imminent if Father persisted in remaining in the bedroom. This was one occasion when my father had, perforce, to yield—and to a woman, too! Nurse won the day, and he was not allowed to witness the birth as he had so wished to do.

In early 1914 my father went alone on a short visit to India, returning in April.

Mother went to Marseilles to meet him, and they had a week together in Paris. Father bought Mummy the latest thing in hobble skirts from a fashionable shop in Paris and she felt she was being outrageously daring wearing it in the demure streets of Twickenham. I have a picture of them taken on the Eiffel Tower during that visit; they obviously had enormous fun together that week, alone and far from all cares, domestic and political. Although the Great War was so near, no one seemed to be much aware of the impending sorrows.



Photo: 51 Lebanon Park, Twickenham

On his return to Twickenham, Shapurji added the conscientious objectors to his political causes, and groups of them in Twickenham used to meet in each others' houses. He continued his association with the suffragette movement, and also attended the meetings of the Independent Labour Party at this time, having joined the ILP in Manchester in 1909. He also went to Fabian Society meetings.

Herbert Bryan, a correspondent for the Daily Herald, remembered that he first saw 'Sak' at the City of London branch of the ILP in about 1915 in Prince Henry Room, Fleet Street. He recalls:

“On that occasion Sak was not one of the speakers, but he spoke in the discussion from the back of the hall. I did not know who he was then, but I remember being impressed by his striking and original way of speaking... [He] soon became active in the City branch, both in branch and public meetings. Then his reputation began to spread throughout the London movement and afterwards, throughout the country, so that he soon began to receive many requests to fulfil speaking engagements from London and provincial branches.”

Quite late in the War Shapurji did receive call-up papers, but the authorities

must have had second thoughts, suspecting that he might be more trouble than he was worth, because I think it was withdrawn. I have not verified this, but that is the impression I had from my mother; but she was talking to me some fifty years after the event. Certainly he never enlisted and, as far as I know, never appeared before any tribunal.

The 1917 Revolution in Russia had a profound effect and influence on Shapurji's political outlook. He saw the predominantly peasant population of Russia as being similar to the Indian population, and became convinced that the solution that the USSR had found to combat the poverty and illiteracy of her masses could be effective in India also. He became totally and irrevocably convinced that communism was the only system that could relieve the sufferings and injustices of the poor in all countries. It might deprive a very few of the population from expressing intellectual convictions, but at least it would ensure that the other downtrodden numberless masses would be fed, housed and educated, and would have a voice in the government of the land.

Saklatvala visited the USSR in 1923, in 1927 and again in 1934, when he toured and lectured extensively, giving his attention particularly to Samarkand and the Eastern areas that had, he felt, perhaps the greatest affinity with India, and he remained steadfast in his belief in communism. Once, when he was addressing a meeting of the International Club of Glasgow University, he thrilled his audience with an impassioned lecture on how the subjected races of Soviet Asia had freed themselves, and on the way home, he explained to his host how he had made up his mind never to admit even the tiniest criticisms of the Soviet Union because that, for him, "was like a sin against the Holy Ghost!"

Many enemies of communism are of the view that those who embrace it are necessarily unpatriotic to Great Britain. This is not so. Father was convinced that communism would lead to the happiness of all people and nations. He wished all nations well. To love one's country does not necessarily entail setting it above other countries; bringing happiness to all peoples does not diminish the well-being one brings to one's own. To love humanity in toto does not mean that one loves one country less than another.

But if the people of each land are encouraged by a false sense of patriotism to think that their particular country must be stronger and more dominant than all the others, we are left with an arms race, and often with an armed contest,

to prove the supremacy of each over the other. Sabre-rattling is really not a manifestation of love of one's country. Patriotism not only entails feeling love for members of the government and the upper crust, one has to love the workers and unemployed too, for they are all equally members of their country and society.

Shapurji Saklatvala assuredly loved and worked tirelessly for the working people of Britain as he worked strenuously and unceasingly for the good of working people everywhere. So, lest anyone should think that Father did not love England, let me say at once that they are wrong. He once said that India was his mother-country, but that England was the mother-country of his children.

Certainly he had a devotion to England, but he also loved all men and women in other lands. He firmly believed in the universality of man and that no man or groups of men should build their own happiness on the unhappiness and suffering of others. A capitalist economy that depends for its survival on having millions of unemployed could not, in his view, be considered moral or desirable. His patriotism embraced loyalty to the working men and women of Britain; indeed, he fought harder than most for the miners of Britain, and went to prison in 1926 to serve their cause. He worked all his life to better the lot of people everywhere.

After all, my Marsh grandparents loved all twelve of their children, my own parents loved all five of us; none of them would have wanted to better one child at the expense of the others. But loving many does not diminish the devotion to any one; it rather enhances and increases it. So with the love of countries. The human heart is well stocked with love and has enough to distribute to people everywhere in the world.

Saklatvala became totally absorbed in the various political movements to which he subscribed and spent hardly any weekends at home. He travelled all over Britain addressing meetings, and inspired great affection and devoted loyalty from working people all over the country. The fact that he came from India does not appear to have bothered or upset anyone. In fact there was one occasion during his second General Election campaign when the audience rallied to his defence at a public meeting.

His opponent in that election was H.C. Hogbin, a National Liberal; there were rowdy demonstrations at Hogbin's meetings by people claimed to be followers

of Comrade Saklatvala. In the end, Hogbin said he would not address any more meetings. Father published a notice for distribution calling on local people to give all politicians a fair hearing. Copies were sent to Hogbin, for distribution at his meetings.

One Captain Godfrey, representing Hogbin, addressed a public meeting, sharing the platform with Saklatvala and, after referring to 'Sak's' "splendid sportsmanship," added, "but I have an instinctive preference for an Englishman." This remark brought a torrent of abuse and indignation from the audience. A newspaper of the day reported that men and women rose to their feet and shouted protests. "You're asking for it!", "Shame!", and "How about Lady Astor?", were some of the remarks distinguishable through the din, which continued until Saklatvala himself intervened. Godfrey was forced to say that "if Mr Saklatvala thinks he has been insulted, I withdraw." It is interesting to note that the ordinary rank and file members of that audience would not stand for any derogatory allusion to the fact that Father was an Indian. How sadly different things sometimes are today.

In those days, of course, there were few Indians living here and most of them were doctors or lawyers or students or well-to-do business men. So the local United Kingdom populace did not then, as now, feel threatened by Indians; they were not then in competition for jobs and houses.

I have certainly never heard of any antagonism being expressed by working men or women due to Father being a non-European. He was an outstanding orator and always had complete control of his audiences. There were never any incidents of unruly violence or disorder in his meetings. He dealt with hecklers as he dealt with any political situation, with humour and logic. People cut his name down to more manageable and pronounceable size and he was universally and affectionately known as 'Sak.'

Shapurji was of only average height, with a neat, trim figure, vigorous in his speech and general deportment. He had dark, wavy hair, warm, shining hazel eyes that were most expressive of his earnestness, his anger or his twinkling and mischievous humour. Everyone who knew him was impressed by his kindness, his warmth, his sincerity. His compassion was personal even when he was speaking of poverty or sickness or deprivation on a wide scale, and people never became mere statistical numbers for him; he felt for the thousands as keenly as he would feel for the individual next door.

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As a speaker, he always drew the crowds, and his public meetings were usually full to overflowing. But, at the same time, no group was too small for him to address, and he would willingly go to talk informally to little groups of students or trade union members.

No one now would say Shapurji was not robust—indeed, he seemed to have limitless energy, often travelling through the night and addressing two and three meetings in the day. His stay in Matlock, one way and another, had certainly made a new man of him! He was not only a fiery advocate of socialism, he was also a walking advertisement for the healing springs of Derbyshire!

CHAPTER 6

The Mind is its Own Place

Family life. The author's childhood memories.

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Surely no braver man has ever existed than that primitive ancestor of ours who first dared to climb on to a fallen tree and drift on the waters of a flowing river. He must have been the first animal to move on anything but its own limbs; all mammals propelled on their own feet, all birds on their own wings and all fish on their own fins and tails. He alone, that courageous, pioneering man, used an outside agent, a log of wood... "One small step for a man; one giant leap for mankind." Other innovative men have followed, and will yet follow, his heroic example. The log has led to all kinds of craft, from canoes to the Queen Mary, and the giant oil tankers and submarines; man's skill at riding on horseback led him to attach a cart to the beast and later he discovered motor cars, steam trains, electric trains, aeroplanes and, most recently of all, spacecraft that have whisked men to the moon, making yet another small step, another giant leap.

But when all our wondering hero-worship and applause have died down, we have to recognise that the most magical mode of travel is still on that superlative vessel, the human mind; it travels not only in space but also in time; it cannot be high-jacked or crashed or shot down, and it knows no limits. Occasionally, it is true, a mind may go off the rails or have its big-end blow, but such catastrophes usually result in even wilder flights of fancy than before. No, as a means of happy wandering, the human mind remains supreme.

Thus it is with a great sense of liberation and relief that I attack this next chapter, for it will deal with my own memory, unfettered by research into facts and figures; for I intend now to give you some impression of Shapurji as a father and a family man. He and Sehri had five children, three sons and two daughters, of whom I am the youngest and, alas, the only lonely survivor; and,

no doubt, each of these five minds would have carried its owner on a different journey and would have shown Father in different lights. But here is my version of my father, for better or worse. I shall not only relate my direct memories, but also incidents and impressions passed on to me in later life by my mother. For Father was already in his middle forties when I was born, so that I remember him only as a comparatively older man; and I was only sixteen when he died, aged sixty-one. Whereas I shared my life with my mother until I was fifty-eight and she was eighty-eight, and I depend greatly on her recollections for my knowledge of Father.

Like his Uncle Jamsetji, Shapurji was a creative dreamer and idealist; he was not, however, endowed with the same measure of pragmatism as that industrious, industrial magnate. He shared with his uncle an unquestioning and unquestioned determination to have his own way in all matters both public and private, which was seen as strength by his admirers and as obstinacy by those less sympathetic to him.

Shapurji had an impish, ebullient yet quiet sense of fun and humour, and often used jocularly to prick the bubbles of pride or false dignity in others. Wide reading and powers of observation, together with a prodigious memory and a facility with figures bestowed upon him an encyclopaedic knowledge, which enabled him to make long political speeches, laden with accurate statistics, *ex tempore* and without reference to written notes.

He was affectionate, loving and sympathetic, with an understanding of and a deep concern for the problems and sufferings of others; and when he was dealing with human deprivation on a massive scale and talking in terms of millions, he always saw their collective misery as the plight of individuals; people remained people and were never diminished by their numbers into mere statistics.

He loved the beauties both of nature and of the arts, and was enriched by his enjoyment of both. He always stressed the need for honesty and honourable conduct in private as well as in public life. He was a deeply religious man while not subscribing to the tenets or doctrines of any one religion; but he tried always to steer a course of good against evil. His religious ardour finally found expression in communism, which became his fervent belief as a vehicle for the ultimate good of all mankind.

He believed in the universality of man, and that no one man or group of men

or a nation should seek to improve their own lot to the detriment of other men and other nations; hence his defiant and progressive fight against all forms of imperialism. This was, I think, the guiding force behind all his political thinking, and the mainspring of all his endeavours.

He does not appear to have engaged in any physically active recreations. In one edition of 'Who's Who' he gives "playing chess and silence" as his hobbies. He was a contemplative man, and certainly there was no natural physical violence in him.

He was always lucidly logical and was able to touch upon the centre and fundamentals of even the most complicated issues of any debate. His transparent sincerity and his sacrifice have never been questioned, even by those who were opposed to everything he stood for, and his unblemished integrity gained the respect and admiration of both followers and opponents.

I think the only man who could have been regarded as an enemy, and one who was always personally antagonistic towards him, was his cousin, Dorabji Tata; this feeling of animosity was engendered during their boyhood, more by jealousy due to Jamsetji's loving disposition and admiration for Shapurji, than by any particular trait in Shapurji's own character. Jealousy is such a self-destructive emotion, that, as I found out more and more of the bitter enmity that Dorabji displayed towards my father, I could not but help feeling sorry for him; for although he did much to damage my father's career as a businessman, I am convinced that he made himself more miserable than he made Father. In many ways, we are all indebted to him, for had Shapurji flourished in the family business, his political career might never have been fulfilled; and, so far as I personally am concerned, he may well never have met my mother, and where would I be then? In the void, I suppose, in the abyss, and without a mind to travel on.

Because our surname is a distinctive one, even in India, all through my life I have always been asked if I am related to Saklatvala the MP. And I have found nothing but admiration for him as a speaker and as a man, even among those who had no sympathy whatever with his political ideals. On one occasion when he was having a ding-dong with the then Home Secretary in the House of Commons, the Speaker thanked him for his unfailing courtesy in debate. While he was always emphatic and outspoken in political exchanges, he never wittingly gave anyone personal offence.

Alas, Shapurji was not always quite so delicate in his dealings within the family! He was generally somewhat stern and aloof towards his children, but we all were aware of his warmth and affection; his strictness was itself a measure of his concern. He was, in fact, very fond and proud of all of us. The baby of the family always sat next to him at meal-times, and it was he who fed us and taught us how to feed ourselves in a mannerly way. He frequently took my eldest brother Dorab to the office with him, from when he was only about eighteen months old. He often took me with him on his travels when he was addressing meetings up and down the country, from when I was only about three. He even helped Mummy to cut out the clothes she made for us all; he was, in fact, much more personally involved with our day-to-day upbringing than most men of his generation.

The first baby was born in Brookwood because Daddy's mother was buried there and he wanted to be near her grave. (This attitude towards the dead changed completely when he was an older man. Indeed, on the very day that he died, he had been arguing with an Indian friend and journalist in favour of cremation, and had said to him, "Well, I hope when I die they will put me in the dustbin along with all the other rubbish." But in 1907 and 1908 he was more sentimental on the subject).

He must have been terribly excited to have a son, and when a neighbour asked him what the baby was, he mischievously told her it was twins! And she canvassed the news up and down the whole street, so that there was a great wave of sympathy for the fragile young wife. When Daddy finally admitted that it was just one baby boy, they were all so delighted that they forgave his teasing.

When Dorab was still only an infant, the family moved to a cottage in the Vale of Health in Hampstead some time towards the end of 1908. There, their neighbours were an elderly couple, Mr and Mrs Marriott, who also hailed from the north of England. They replaced to some extent my mother's parents, whom she sorely missed, and they were a great support and guide for her as a young mother; she was always glad of the older woman's advice, and they remained life-long friends.

After about a year, when Father lost his job with British Westinghouse, the family moved to Barker's Lane in Sale, Cheshire. On the 10th of September 1909, on my mother's twenty-first birthday, their second baby was born.

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Candy became the only one of us who ever openly defied Daddy, and she was as determined as he was; she always spoke with great authority, and it never occurred to me to question her any more than I would have questioned my father. She was, of course, ten years older than I was, which helped her in the sibling hierarchy. But more than any of us she inherited Father's authority.

When Candy was a few months old, Daddy wanted to concentrate on his legal studies, and so Sehri set out to visit America without him. He also wanted his two brothers who had settled in America, Phirozeshah and Beram, to meet Sehri and the two babies; he was proud of all of them and always enjoyed showing them off. It was agreed that the naming of the new baby girl should be left to the choice of Shapurji's brothers; meanwhile they had been to see Shaw's 'Candida' and Mummy playfully called the baby Candida.



Photo: Barker's Lane, Sale

When she arrived in the US, she told the immigration officer that she had come to stay with her brother-in-law. Because he was not a blood relation she was told she would be sent to Ellis Island. She had never heard of it and did not understand what was happening. Then Phirozeshah came on board and said he was her brother—because in the family no distinction was made between brother and brother-in-law. This made the authorities even more suspicious, and it was only after a stormy altercation between Phirozeshah and the immigration authorities that Sehri and her two babies were allowed to land. The imperturbable young mum took it all calmly in her stride.

She got on well with the two brothers and also with Phirozeshah's secretary, Mae, whom he married some years later. There was a musical running in New York at the time called 'The Candy Kid,' so the name Candida was cut down to Candy and her name was formally decided upon. After a few months the family was re-united in England. It was from Kaikoo Mehta, and not from Father direct, that my mother learned that Shapurji had not taken his legal exams as planned. So far as I know, the legal career was never spoken of again. I think that it was at this juncture that they moved to 93 Great Clowes Street, Broughton, Salford, for it was there that baby number three was born; another son, named Beram after Father's youngest brother. Beram the elder was a metallurgist in the USA and was making a name for himself there; he was undoubtedly the brains of his generation. My brother, his namesake, proved to be the brains of his generation also. He became a successful writer and had pictures hung in the Institute of British Artists, as well as being a successful businessman, making his career in the family firm, chiefly in the Tata Iron and Steel Company which Father had done so much to found.



Photo: Great Clowes Street, Salford

Beram was a colourful, imaginative, tender-hearted boy and man, very family-minded and always at hand to help in any crisis or distress. He was always a great spinner of tales, and from when he was only three years old, Daddy would stand him up in the drawing-room to entertain guests with stories of his own creation. He apparently once held everyone enthralled and helpless with laughter by relating a saga about a "chocodile" that bit a lady's bottom; this was not a word currently in vogue in the drawing-rooms of the day. My mother was very pregnant at the time and her laughter led to her having to escape in

haste to the bathroom to avoid embarrassment.

Candy also did her share of entertaining, but she was content to recite verses that she had learnt, rather than to invent stories of her own. The two younger children were always close friends and allies, and rather ganged up against Dorab the oldest, who was of a much shyer and more timid disposition.

Father's great preoccupation with honesty made him seem all too often to be an intimidating parent. When Dorab was about six, he came home from school one day with a little cork from a bottle in his pocket. When Father was undressing him at night, he asked him where the cork had come from; Dorab, in all innocence, said it had come from the school laboratory. If he had stolen the crown jewels, Daddy could not have been more angry. He explained that the cork did not belong to him but to the school and that it was, therefore, stealing to remove it from the school. The next morning being Saturday, Daddy trotted the poor little shame-faced boy to the private home of the headmaster, told him that Dorab had stolen the cork, that he had become a thief and that he had come to apologise and to return the property to the owner.

Shortly afterwards, Candy came home and Daddy found a piece of chalk in her pocket. He stared at her sternly and demanded to know where the chalk had come from. "Oh," she said, with feigned surprise, "it must have fallen into my pocket by mistake!" She got away with it; she got away with most things! When she was only a toddler, she would often loiter by shop windows when my parents were taking their two small children for a walk. Daddy would say, "Just walk out of sight round the corner and she'll soon follow." But she never did follow, and it would end with Dorab in tears, wailing that they would lose Candy; the stubbornly independent little girl did not even notice that the family had disappeared.



Photo: Shapurji and Sehri Saklatvala

Once, when they were living temporarily with Ratan Tata in York House, Father found the children talking after they had been put to bed; to punish them, he took Candy on to the landing and laid her down on cushions there; as usual, he mistakenly thought that she would beg to be taken back to bed; as usual she did not. “Oh, thank you, Daddy,” she said, “I like it here because the light will be on all night, won’t it?” Defeated, Daddy went downstairs and appealed to my mother to go and put the unrepentant rebel back to bed, as though it were a conspiracy between them both against Papa. So long as she was convinced that she was putting one over her stern parent, Candy was content!

Beram was only eight months old when the family went to India in 1912, expecting to settle there. Father was a poor sailor and was not much use to Mother on the voyage. Mercifully, she always enjoyed sea travel and remained her usual robust and competent self, looking after the three small children and a sea-sick husband as to the manner born. Sehri always delighted in her brood; I used to tease her and say that motherhood was a disease with her. She certainly never felt, as many modern mothers appear to do, that to be with her children was boring. She treated them as an artist would treat his creations; they were her diversion, her delight, her life’s work. When she was in her late eighties, shortly before she died, she once said to me that her greatest happiness (among many) had been when she held her first baby in her arms; indeed, I have a photograph of her, holding her tiny prize triumphantly above her head, like a goddess of victory. So she coped with the journey, adequately and joyfully.

Before they arrived in Bombay, Father told Mother of a dream he had had. In

his dream he had warned his beloved Sehri that it was the custom among Parsis to give money as gifts; it was likely, therefore, that the family would give money to her, and he did not want her to feel either insulted or embarrassed by this. Sehri, even in Father's dreams, acted with unfailing candour. "Why should I be insulted?" she had asked, "I love people to give me anything!" Wide awake, Sehri assured him that his dream expressed her waking feelings exactly. It was true—any gift to Sehri was an act of love, and love was her favourite currency, no matter what container it arrived in. So, with the recital of a dream, Shapurji tactfully tested Sehri's reaction to any possible future present giving—I wonder if he really did dream it all? Anyway, they both enjoyed the joke, and any anxiety Father might have felt evaporated in their early morning laughter.

1912 was a year of triumph for the Tata Iron and Steel Company; in January of that year, during the visit to India of the King, Lord Crewe, then Secretary of State for India, visited the steel works at Sakchi (which was later renamed Jamshedpur, in honour of the founder) and saw part of the operation of production. But, although Father had contributed in large measure to the foundations of the company, he was not given any position in TISCO by Dorabji. Instead, he was appointed to investigate irregularities that were suspected in the running of the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, another Tata concern in Bombay.

Shapurji must have been hurt by this slight, but never complained about it to anyone; unless, perhaps, he confided in his father with whom the family was staying in Bombay. It says much for Father's family allegiance, love and loyalty that, throughout the legal battles and antagonisms with Dorabji, my father would never say a word against the family in any social context. He remained loyal, loving and proud, and would never countenance any outsider to voice any criticism of his cousins without his challenging it; of course, politically and with his solicitor and Counsel, it was a different matter.

But on the whole, despite the disappointments of his work and future prospects with the firm, this was one of the happiest periods in Shapurji's life. He had returned to his beloved India, bringing with him the most cherished prize of his life, his adored Sehri. To make his happiness complete, she was not only accepted by his family, but was welcomed affectionately as a daughter and a sister; and, most important of all from Shapurji's point of view, his wife

and his sister became close friends and always remained so.

One story that he related to Mother of his work in the hotel always amused her; he went down to the kitchens one afternoon and found one of the chefs asleep on the table with his head pillowed on a loaf of bread. One can only give the unnamed fellow the benefit of the doubt and hope it was a stale one, destined only for the birds! Another memory of which I never tired was the story of how Shapurji had presented Sehri with a peacock and its hen to adorn the garden; but the ill-fated peahen fell into a barrel of tar and died; the devoted peacock died three days later of starvation and, presumably, a broken heart. Mother seemed to enjoy telling me this sad tale; perhaps that devoted pair of splendid birds became a symbol of the devotion of the giver and receiver of this ornithological gift of love.

Father upset Granddad by telling the servants that he did not require them to take their shoes off in his or his family's presence; Granddad complained bitterly to Mummy, "He can do whatever he likes in his own house, but I will not allow him to upset the routine of mine!" But all the servants assigned to Shapurji continued to be allowed to wear shoes. Father was revolted at the thought of anyone being expected to humiliate himself before another human being in any way, however trivial. On the whole, servants were treated very harshly in those days and Granddad was no exception. He expressed the opinion that you had to hit them, kick them if need be, to get them to work properly. But both my parents treated the servants as they treated all human beings, with courtesy and respect; and they certainly responded by working happily for them. It was a subject on which father and son never saw eye to eye.

I have so far not mentioned that Shapurji also had a violent temper. This found public expression in his passionate oratory, but at home it manifested itself simply as bad temper. Very often it was matters outside the home that were upsetting him, but some minor domestic incident could trigger off a spate of shouting that frightened us all. Of course, like his Uncle Jamsetji before him (whom in many characteristics he closely resembled), he not only liked, but expected always to get, his own way; he therefore demanded absolute obedience from us children. Most of us gave it to him unquestioningly; my sister, however, shared this trait with him and always, from babyhood, defied him. My eldest brother Dorab was five when they were

in Bombay; he was always, both as man and boy, very shy. Daddy told him to thank Granddad by saying “Ha-ji,” but Dorab said his thank you in English. This blew up into a major confrontation and ended with Father hitting the little boy with a cane. My mother intervened and she became the target of his shouting.

[Editor’s note: ‘Goodbye’ in Gujerati is actually ‘Aav-jo.’]

One of the servants went to the house of Ali Fui (Daddy’s sister) and related the story to her, no doubt with dramatic embellishments. When Ali Fui saw my mother afterwards, her sympathies were all with her English sister-in-law, and she said that Shapurji should have married a Parsi girl who would not have put up with such nonsense!

My mother somehow rode these storms, but they were terrifying episodes. When Mother remonstrated with him after one of these outbursts, he said that he only bothered to lose his temper with those he loved, namely, his mother, his sister, his wife and his children; other people, he said, were not worth expending his energy and passions on. Well, this was small comfort; although I see what he meant. I myself am never very much moved by what strangers and casual acquaintances say of me—it is only those I care for who have the power to hurt me.

This bad temper was offset by an impish and ebullient sense of humour, which was often evident in Shapurji’s House of Commons speeches. He stood very much alone in that august body, being the only Indian, as well as the only representative of the Communist Party, and his humour became a keen and potent weapon of self defence when he was besieged on all sides, from right, left and centre. That was the one place in which he almost never lost his temper, but he was at all times courteous and correct, though often roguishly taking the mickey out of his political opponents.

Dorab was made much of in India as the future head of the family. Granddad had a grown-up Parsi suit made for him with the traditional hat, and he was photographed in all his adult finery. I think both the boys were very much spoilt by all of Daddy’s relations, his sister and brother and old Aunt as well as by his father. I never heard much about the reaction to the little four-year-old Candy. Perhaps the unusual surroundings finally daunted her, as nothing else had done. Baby Beram succumbed to the heat and was so desperately ill that Sehri was sent to Ootacamund by train with the three children. It was only a

long time afterwards that she was told that no one had expected the little baby to survive the journey; but mercifully, he did, and in the cooler air of the hills fully recovered.

Perhaps this near-loss of his infant son was in Shapurji's mind when, years later as an MP, he devoted much of his attention to the unacceptably high infant mortality rate in British India; he complained of it again and again; as always, while speaking of the deaths of thousands, he understood that each individual death was a grief and a loss to each of the sorrowing parents. Babies remained babies even in their thousands—they were never impersonal statistics.

Sehri was never told how Shapurji's employment with the firm in India came to an end. One day he sent a messenger to the house and told her to start preparing to return to England as they were to leave within a week. When he came home that evening, he tried to persuade his father to sail back with them. Finally, Granddad agreed. The next day, Sehri told Granddad that he had better start making preparations for the journey, but Granddad said quietly that he was not going. "But you told Shapur last night that you were coming back to England with us." "I only said that to keep Sapoo quiet—but I am staying here," the old man said. I have no knowledge of the exact date of their return, but I have a photograph of Mummy and the three children with Granddad's sister, Bachubai Fui, taken in March 1913; they were in Bombay for a year or so, and probably returned to England in May or June of 1913.

On their return to England the family moved into York House, Twickenham, with Ratanji, as ever, a kind and affectionate friend to Shapurji and his family. The Saklatvalas had a wing of the house to themselves, but Ratanji and Navajbai spent a lot of time with the children. This period up to the time of Ratan's death in 1918 was a happy time for all of them, except, of course, for Ratan's increasing ill health. They remained for a few months in York House before moving to Lebanon Park, just round the corner.

Early in 1914, Shapurji made a journey to Bombay on his own, returning in April (when, as already related, he and Sehri met in France and enjoyed a brief holiday together unencumbered by the children). This trip was probably made on behalf of Ratan; I do not think that it was yet another attempt to persuade Dorabji to take him back into the fold in India; his year in Bombay had finally dispelled all hope of reconciliation in that direction, I think.

Once back in England, Shapurji threw himself once more into the political arena. He and Sehri settled down happily to their life near the river in Twickenham, a stone's throw away from Ratan's York House.

Father had always said he wanted all his children to marry partners of different nationalities—he envisaged fathering a tribe that would be truly international and free from jingoism. Once, Mother had gone to visit her parents and sisters in Manchester, and when she returned to Lebanon Park, she found awaiting her a beautiful Chinese lacquered cabinet about six feet high, as a surprise welcome-home present. “Where has this come from?” she asked. “Oh,” said Shapur with his usual serious playfulness, “while you were away, Candy's future husband brought it as a gift from China.” This cabinet adorned our home until 1972, when Mother and myself moved into a small house; it was too big for the little rooms and, in any case, the lacquer was beginning to show signs of wear. Needless to say, no Chinese husband ever turned up for my sister, or for me either, come to that.



Photo: Saklatvala, 1922

Shapurji and Sehri went quite frequently to the Richmond Hippodrome and the Chiswick Empire, sometimes on their own and sometimes with Kaikoo Mehta and other friends. Their neighbours were a Mr and Mrs Mitchell, who had boys about the same age as Dorab and Beram; parents and children all got on well together; Sehri and Mrs Mitchell often went shopping together. Apparently when they saw well-to-do elderly matrons trying on fine clothes

and fur coats, Mrs Mitchell would say, "You and I would look a lot nicer in that than she does! The trouble is, by the time we can afford to buy things like that, we'll be as old and ugly as they are!"

When Mummy herself was elderly, she often used to quote Mrs Mitchell when she bought anything new, and she laughed and saw the funny side of growing old. Actually, she never lost her good looks, even though she lost her youth, of course, like anyone else; but she maintained her finely chiselled countenance, and perennially looked a good twenty years younger than she actually was.

Once when Mother was having tea with a somewhat elegant and conventional neighbour, Beram had a rough and tumble with other boys in the street and got a cut on his head; he was brought to the house of the spic and span neighbour, bleeding and looking like a disreputable street urchin. He was laid in the spare room bed, all frills and lace and satin cushions, in his muddy and blood-stained clothes. He was accident prone and always in trouble and disgrace as a small boy. But the incident did not sever the friendship between the refined hostess and my mother.

Father was again somewhat ahead of his time in that he did not believe either in baby-talk or in serving up fairy tales and illusions to the children. So one winter's afternoon, when Sehri and Shapurji were going up to town by train, they took their eldest-born with them. Dorab, unused to being out after dark, asked Father why there was only half a moon. Father, glad of the promising scientific curiosity displayed, went into astronomic detail and the child seemed satisfied. But when they emerged from the train at the end of their journey, Dorab looked into the sky and said, "There's the other half of the moon all the time, Daddy!" So his hopes of producing a little Galileo were dashed.

Shapurji joined the Independent Labour Party in Manchester in 1909. The following year he resigned from the National Liberal Club. Now, soon after his return from India and with Europe plunged into war, his political involvements increased and he was less and less at home at weekends; for he was already addressing and attending meetings of the various groups he supported. Even when he was at home, much of the time he was entertaining those who were sympathetic to his numerous causes.

Once when he was discussing the role of the conscientious objectors, he addressed a little group of like-minded enthusiasts gathered in the house. He

said, "And when your children ask you what you did in the Great War, you will be able to say you stood firm like men!" And the five-year-old Beram, precocious as ever, said to Mummy, "Oh, no, he didn't. He went out and bought honey and chocolate for us, didn't he?" This was because Father had indeed bought a large barrel of honey and packets of chocolate as a stand-by for the children, "Because," he had said, "you never know, the war may last for six months." It says little for his foresight that he looked upon six months as a possible long-term duration for a war that was to rage for four long years.

It seems to me in retrospect that he was surprisingly unworried by the conflict; so much so that he and Sehri planned their fourth child. Up to then, they had wanted a boy, followed by a girl, followed by a boy; and each time, their wishes had been fulfilled. They both began to take their good fortune for granted and the next baby was to be a girl and she was to be called Sehri, sentimentally, after her mother. But in 1915, after a particularly prolonged and difficult labour, they were presented with their third son; this one was called Kaikoo, after Kaikoo Mehta. Kaikoo was a somewhat skinny little fellow, never very strong, cursed with a quick-firing temper but, as time passed, with an equally quick-firing wit. By the time he came on the scene, the sibling pattern was already established—the eldest son, Dorab, told he must, as the eldest son, be responsible for the good behaviour of the others, was consequently rather cut off from their companionship; Candy and Beram were constantly together, and I fear the puny little newcomer was condemned to loneliness. He was, therefore, made a fuss of by Sehri, who always doted on him and, probably, spoiled him.

It was about this time that Father was making a name for himself as a speaker for the Independent Labour Party and was much in demand; consequently he travelled a great deal up and down the country, addressing meetings and carrying on propaganda for the party. He was less and less at home.

There were many visitors of a purely social character to the house, as well as the politically involved ones. Kaikoo Mehta was with us almost every weekend, Granddad Saklatvala was spending more and more time in England and often stayed at Lebanon Park for long periods. There were several Indian couples with children who joined in our family life, with picnics in Richmond Park and outings on the river. Mrs Gray, the Scottish nurse first recruited in 1908 in Brookwood, was much in evidence. Mother's sisters took it in turns to come

and spend holidays with her, and Grandma and Granddad Marsh also came periodically from Oldham.

There were visits to London zoo. The hard-working Sehri would be up at dawn preparing sandwiches, boiled eggs and kebabs and off they would go, a whole tribe of children and cousins and friends, for the journey across London. Grandma Marsh, for all her poverty, liked to keep in fashion and spent much time sewing and stitching to keep up with the times. Granddad would tease her and say, "Eh, aye, Annie-Jane, tha'd best be out o' this world than be out o' fashion!" And before one of the excursions to the zoo, she had busied herself for a whole afternoon, titivating and trimming a hat, which sported, amid the bows and ribbons, a sweeping ostrich feather. Alas, Grandma approached too near to the monkey's cage and a long arm stretched out through the wire netting and grabbed the feather and would not let go; but the hat was held firmly in place by a closely fitting veil. There was quite a scene until Granddad stopped laughing long enough to rescue both Grandma and the hat—but the feather fell in the battle.

In 1916, Mother's father died. He was ill for some weeks, and Mummy went up to Derbyshire where he was staying with her sister Annie. All his children were devoted to him and their grief was profound as they stood round Harry's bed and he said goodbye to them all. "Tha's all been good childer," he said. Aunty Annie, in tears, answered him, "You've been a good Dad!" "Aye," he said, thinking it over, "Aye, I think I 'ave." In less than a year, Grandma was also to lose her eldest child, Lily, who died giving birth. What sorrows people are called on to endure. The baby lived and was adopted by the childless married sister, Annie, always a close friend to Mummy, as they were next to one another in age. The baby, called Lily after her dead mother, was to be a constant visitor to our house, and she and I were as close as sisters as time went on, and I am thankful to say that we remain in sisterly friendship even now.

In 1918, death was to visit the family yet again, taking this time Father's cousin, Ratan. In Frank Harris's biography of Great-Uncle Jamsetji, it is said that the old man hastened his own death by his one indulgence, a love of good food. His son, Ratan, perhaps damaged his own health also, but by other equally compelling appetites. These are warm-hearted failings and it seems to me hard that they should be punishable by death. I look upon them as

weaknesses that go with warmth and compassion and a loving disposition; I contend that those who suffer from them are far better people than the cold or stony-hearted who are often full of puritanical righteousness. So in 1918, Daddy's closest cousin died in Cornwall, and Shapurji's links with the family became even more tenuous and even more dependent on the toleration, if not exactly the goodwill, of Dorabji.

Ratan's death was indeed a bitter blow to Shapurji; fortunately his widow, Aunty Navajbai, continued to visit us whenever she was in England, always much loved by every one of us, my mother included. Indeed, she was such a favourite that when my middle brother Beram was a boy, he always said he planned to marry her! She was daintily petite, having a pretty, small-featured face with a mischievous mouth and merry eyes. She dressed most elegantly with saris and blouses made from French fabrics; very chic, very graceful. To her, Shapurji's politics and high principles were something of a joke, and she loved to provoke and tease him, usually through us.

When I was four, Daddy sent me to join my youngest brother to a convent school. Since he had been taught by Jesuit Fathers, he had implicit faith in them as teachers, and was convinced that nuns also, being unencumbered by family and emotional entanglements, were able to give their undivided attention to the children in their care. But he did not want to be reminded of the accusation that he had once become a Catholic and he had stipulated that we children were not to receive any religious teaching at the hands of the nuns. But I loved the stories, the prayers and the hymns, and Aunty Navajbai would sit me on her knee and have me recite for her my Hail Marys and the Our Father, and she would watch my father's consequent discomfiture with obvious glee. I, of course, was too young and innocent to realise that anything was amiss and merely basked in her adoration and praise.

At last, in 1918, with the war still dragging on, it was decided that another attempt should be made to produce a baby Sehri. The still-lonely little Kaikoo was told that he could expect a baby sister in June 1919. When, in March, the clocks were put forward to summer time, he said, with a sigh that would have been more fitting in an old man, that he wished they would put the clock on to June so that he could play with the new baby. Mother was always touched by this because she felt it showed a non-jealous and loving nature. But I see it as a revelation of that poor little boy's loneliness and isolation within the family. I

think it was still quite unusual for small children to be told all that much in advance of an impending new arrival.

At last, on the 2nd of June 1919, I put in an appearance. Mummy's youngest sister Lottie was staying with us at the time and deeply offended my mother by taking one look at me and giggling, saying, "Oh, what a funny little thing! What a funny little thing!" Mummy, always convinced that the latest arrival was the acme of perfection, never fully forgave her for this lapse into tactlessness. My father spoiled me from the word go, and bored all the family by constantly talking about me. This was not due to any particular virtue in me but simply, I am sure, because I bore the same name as his beloved wife.

Granddad Saklatvala came down from Manchester to inspect me when I was six weeks old. Apparently he was convinced that I was a re-incarnation of his grandmother, whose name had been Jeevanbai; this second name was, therefore, added to my certificate of birth in accordance with his wishes. Granddad superstitiously always carried a photograph of me as an infant and never signed any important letter or document without placing my picture in front of him on his desk. Normally my father would have remonstrated with him for such superstition, but he seems to have been pleased by this particular manifestation of a credulity he would in other circumstances have condemned. It so happened that Granddad was planning to visit his two sons in America and he wrote to my parents from Manchester, asking them to have another photograph taken of me since the one he had, through constant handling, was very worn. He was told when the picture was taken and he was promised a copy as soon as it arrived from the photographer. He therefore sent the old photograph to Uncle Phirozeshah in New York. The next morning, while packing his trunk, he had a heart attack and died. Daddy said that, had any other disaster overtaken him, he would undoubtedly have ascribed it to his having parted with my photograph.

In a letter addressed to my brother in 1937, a year after Father's death, one Mr Colin Cannie wrote and described how Daddy had stayed with his family in Glasgow in 1935, and how he had been talking of matters occult and related the story of Granddad's death. Mr Cannie wrote:

"This aspect of his life you should bring out as these were genuine experiences indeed, though he, of course, couldn't or didn't endeavour to explain them. That may seem queer to those who accept the old type

of dialectic materialism, yet 'Sak' (as he insisted on our addressing him as that and really I look on it as a very dear name to me) was not prepared to scoff at it and dismiss it as baloney; I think he looked upon it as something at present he was or we are unable to explain because of certain gaps in our scientific knowledge. Anyway, his mind was not prone to superstition and his analytical power was highly developed..."

Granddad Saklatvala had always doted on the boys in the family, but had left Candy out in the cold. He would give the boys a half-crown and give nothing to my sister; and once cruelly told her she was just a stone. No wonder, then, that she disliked him. She was staying with friends in Belgium when he died and they relayed what they thought should be the sad news to her. She used to tell me years later (when we were very good friends and close companions) how she felt that her hosts expected her to show some grief; so, although she felt nothing except perhaps relief at his passing, she sat in front of a mirror, trying desperately to make the tears fall—but none came!

It is equally unsurprising that when I made my appearance in her world, fussed over by Daddy, doted on by the Grandfather who had despised her girlhood in favour of the male progeny, that she felt hurt and angry and frustrated by my arrival. She resented deeply being asked to take me out in the pram and she and her friend used to see who could make me cry first on these enforced perambulations. When we were grown up she used to relate these episodes to me and we both laughed about them; mercifully, the resentment passed with my childhood and, as adults, we were the best of friends. Thank God she was of a forgiving disposition. But I do not think she ever felt the same devoted affection for my father as I did and, indeed, still do. Perhaps she wondered, as I have often done, why she was not called after my mother, as the first-born daughter. Neither of us ever asked the question out loud and therefore neither of us ever knew the answer.

In 1921 or 1922, when I was about two, Father bought their first house. Up to then they had always lived in rented accommodation. 2 Saint Albans Villas, Highgate Road, London NW5 (always known to us all as 'Number Two') was a large Edwardian villa, having four storeys including a basement.

Because of our association with the Tatas, it was always assumed that we, too, were wealthy; in fact, we were anything but. Father was still, at this time, working in quite a modest capacity in the Tata office in London. Kaikoo Mehta

was also there and the two men remained staunch friends.

Kaikoo was unmarried but had a most elegant housekeeper called Mrs Milton; she was a very aristocratic-looking lady who had been driven to earn her living because a dissolute husband had abandoned her; her only son had been badly gassed in the war and consequently was an invalid. She was a dignified, methodical lady, with a flower-like complexion and a dignified aristocratic face, surmounted by a high edifice of white, silky hair, cascading in waves from a high crown to the nape of a long and graceful neck.

Mrs Milton always rose at about five o'clock and had most of the work finished before anyone was about; she would have felt it 'infra dig' to be witnessed performing menial household chores. More often than not she came with Kaikoo Mehta on his weekend visits to us, and she and my mother were intimate friends. From time to time, we children would spend a weekend with her, always only one at a time. Father was a great believer in sending us to stay with friends and relatives so that we learned how to conduct ourselves in the company of others, away from parental guidance.



Photo: St Albans Villas, Highgate Road, London

Father had grand plans for the house in Highgate Road, but money was scant and everything had to be done bit by bit. We were nearly five years with no floor covering on the stairs, and my mother used to sweep and scrub the bare boards of flight after flight of stairs. Indeed, she only managed to have them covered when Daddy was safely housed in Wormwood Scrubs in the 1926

General Strike; she had saved all her birthday and Christmas present money for years and drew it out of the Post Office to buy linoleum. Shapurji had walls knocked down to make rooms bigger and he had other walls built to make rooms smaller.

The garden was dug out in front of the basement so that the basement was level with the garden. The coal cellar was transformed into a large entrance hall, the steps leading up to the old front door were excavated away. What had been a rambling old kitchen became our dining room, and a new kitchen was built onto the back of the house. The old entrance hall on what had been the ground floor, with a dividing wall demolished, enlarged the front room, which housed a billiard table, bookcases full of books and Beram's 'museum' of fossils and stones that he had collected. This was always known as the Children's Room.

In the drawing room (behind the billiard room and overlooking the large back garden), above the Adam marble fireplace, Shapurji erected a life-size statue of Venus rising from sea-waves of plaster, her hair swirling in the sea breezes hiding anything that might be deemed indelicate in a drawing-room of the period. She, like many oil paintings of some beauty and worth, including a full length portrait of a statuesque lady by Burne-Jones, came from York House after Ratan's death; we also had a full-sized reclining figure of Psyche with Cupid at her feet, luxuriously bedded down amid her marble cushions on a plinth in the back garden; another York House memento.

My father haunted auction sales, which was another trait he shared with my sister. A job lot of marble bought in an auction lined what had been the basement, the floors were of white and gray marble, the walls of pink. A miniature marble Taj Mahal bought at the Wembley Empire Exhibition adorned the marble mantelpiece, and a marble table top inlaid with colourful mother-of-pearl was inset in one wall. Four oval plaques of white marble with draped and dancing figures in relief were set in the hall and dining room walls. All these alterations were done bit by bit, often standing half finished for months on end while Father managed to accumulate the money to carry on.

But one room he did immediately on arrival. For the first few weeks of our occupation of the house, the room that was to be my parent's bedroom was kept locked and Sehri was only allowed in on her birthday, when she was presented with grand French Empire furniture, heavy mahogany emblazoned

with brass ornamentation. The walls were covered in wooden panels of shaded cream, and a magnificent dressing table set of amethyst-coloured cut glass shimmered on the dressing table; a plain cut glass toilet set lay resplendent on the polished green marble of the flamboyant french empire washstand. It was not for use; forming an L-shape off the main bedroom was a dressing room housing a wash basin, a huge wardrobe for Father's things and an exquisite chest of drawers inlaid with a geometric design of different coloured woods. In the large window, there was a shell-shaped sofa in black and gold, with deep rose silk upholstery with classical designs woven in gold silk. The same fabric had been used to cover the bed quilt and the chairs.

What a birthday present! And what a far cry from Foxholes cottage where Sally had been born. Such was Sehri's welcome to their new home.

Like his Uncle Jamsetji, Shapur wanted the benefit of all the best in modern inventions. His was one of the first houses to be run entirely on electricity; our heating (which we could ill afford and only switched on for visitors—who, mercifully, were frequent!), our cooking, lighting and hot water system were all electric. In those early days there were frequent calamities; on one occasion when Mummy was entertaining a Parsi priest to dinner with other friends, the cooker was going full blast to cook a four-course dinner, the heating was on and the house was ablaze with lights, when the whole system, grossly overloaded, succumbed to a power failure. We were suddenly plunged into total darkness, with a cooker full of half-cooked food and a swiftly cooling house. But mercifully, in those days, repair men were always at the ready and were soon at hand to rescue us.

So much then for Shapurji, the doting father and husband, happily settled at last in a home of his own. Let us now take a look at 'Sak', the politician.

CHAPTER 7

Freedom for Me and Mine, Bondage for Thee and Thine

Growing reputation as an orator. The International Socialist Congress, 1912. Death of Keir Hardie, 1915. The Easter Rising in Dublin, 1916. Foundation of the Workers' Welfare League of India, 1917. Foundation of the Peoples' Russian Information Bureau, 1918. Work for Ramsay MacDonald in the 1918 election. Delegate to the ILP conferences in 1918, 1919 and 1921. Association with the work of Sylvia Pankhurst. The Second Congress of the Communist International and Saklatvala's subsequent break with the ILP.

Of all my fears
It is loneliness that wears
The worst mask, with lips bitten and bleeding,
And eyes full of tears.

Ronald Duncan, *This Way to the Tomb*

It has taken two world wars and much complicated and arduous political striving to achieve a little of what my father sought to accomplish. He was a revolutionary and was consequently looked upon by the establishment as a danger. In England, revolution has always been despised as something conducted by a disorderly mob, usually in disorderly and shabby countries; whereas war has always been considered noble and heroic and tragic-on-the-grand-scale. But counting up the dead and measuring the suffering of two world wars and the many human degradations that went on in between (many of which, alas, continue even now), I cannot help but wonder if a revolution might not perhaps have caused less agony in the long run. But we just have to accept that revolution, as such, is totally abhorrent to the English.

The one revolution that took place here and which led to the transient

Commonwealth of Cromwell has always been graced by the name of 'civil war'; this has given that particular revolutionary fracas a respectability suitable to the English temperament. Revolutions take place in Russia and South America, not in the neat suburban streets or even in the decaying inner cities of orderly and respectable England. When troops of the despotic Tzar of all the Russias fired on and killed hundreds of Russian workers in 1905 in front of the Winter Palace, he did not even have to be forgiven, for it roused no more than a flicker of anger here; but when a handful of Russian citizens killed a handful of Russian royals, it was called murder and ruthless assassination, and the Russian people, (and communism in toto) have never been, and never will be, forgiven for it by the western (self-styled) democracies. Murder is death inflicted by civilian hands, slaughter by the recognised national armies of the world is called war and is not only considered acceptable but even laudable; medals, knighthoods and Lordships are bestowed upon its more ruthless and valiant campaigners.

So my father's overt exoteric cry for the same freedom for his people that the British took for granted for theirs, was termed 'dangerous sedition' and he, who only offered friendship to all instead of merely to a few, was treated as the peoples' enemy and subjected to Scotland Yard scrutiny, to his meetings being banned, (though they had at all times been peaceful and orderly), and finally, and most cruelly, to his permanent exile from the country of his birth, without trial, indeed, even without open accusation. Such was the much acclaimed democratic freedom that was afforded to him.

I would like to explain that much of the recorded material available on Father's early life has been taken from letters written to my brother, Beram, when it was his intention to write a biography, in 1937, a year after Father's death. One has to take account of the persons who wrote those letters, how well they knew my father and whether they were friend or foe; was their memory accurate, no matter what their intentions towards Father's memorial might have been? They cannot all be taken as gospel truth; even when facts that are true are related, one has to beware of the interpretation of the intentions behind the facts. Most of the distortions are benevolent and unimportant.

As an instance of the tricks that memory plays on witnesses speaking long after the event, I will relate the trivial and harmless recollection of one Mr

Desai, a younger man who was a student when he knew our family. Now it so happens that neither of my parents ever used terms of endearment to us or to each other. One of Mummy's close friends once asked her if it did not upset her that Daddy never called her 'darling'; this same friend later said she understood why Mummy was not hurt by this because, she said, Father spoke Mummy's name caressingly which made it itself a term of endearment. Another trivial fact—Father never added condiments to his meal and was always very proud of Mummy's cooking (both English and Indian and mixtures of the two). But when I met this Mr Desai in Switzerland, twelve years after Father's death, he was affectionately reminiscing about his visits to our family home and he said, "How well I remember your father saying to your mother after a meal, 'Well, Darling, that was very nice, but it needed a little more salt.'" Now such a distortion is totally unimportant and there was certainly no harm done by it; but it serves to show that with the friendliest of intentions, memory can be unreliable.

Most of the Parsi community living in London before World War Two were successful doctors, merchants or lawyers who conformed to the well-ordered pattern of English upper-middle-class social customs. And when Father at social banquets sat down when God Save the King was sung at the end of the meal, and did not toast the Royal Family, many Parsis found him a bit of an embarrassment. Usually, they made fun of him. There was no real animosity and most of them were proud of his fame, but his left-wing notions were certainly not to their liking. Also, many people did not make allowances for Daddy's impish sense of humour and a desire to shock and take the mickey out of the ultra-respectable and rather pompous pillars of Indian society in London.

One of the letters addressed to my brother in 1937 was from one Spitam Cama, who had known Father since 1890, but whose social and political opinions were diametrically opposed to his. Beram had shown this letter, along with all the others to my mother, and she was most indignant about most of it and judged it to be "a lot of tommy-rot!" Nonetheless, it existed, and when people have asked for material on Father, I have passed it on with the rest. Spitam Cama related that, as soon as World War I broke out, a small group of Indians, including himself and Father and Sir Mancherjee Bhowndree, met regularly in a little restaurant at the corner of Dean Street and Oxford Street.

He recalls that Father said their aim should be “to kill as many Englishmen as possible” and said British troops in India could be killed by infecting the Bombay water supply with cholera. If he did use these or similar words, he certainly was not propounding practical intentions; he was probably finding an outlet for his anger against British rule in India in a semi-jocular, verbal torrent. Words and humour were his most potent weapons and refuge. Very often, a seemingly flippant verbal outburst helps us overcome our deeply-felt and passionate rages. (I remember when I was working in India House, some male chauvinist made me excessively angry, and I danced through the office brandishing a pair of scissors, threatening to operate on his spheres of virility. Actually, I am too squeamish even to cut someones’ finger nails, so his virility was quite safe from any surgical intervention from me. But people recalling the incident and reporting on it many years after, might, understandably, record me as being a violent and cruel maniac. I assure you, I have never acted violently in my life against anyone, except verbally).

And so I believe it was with Father. In fact, apart from words, he was consistently gentle and against violence. For instance, he did not like Mother to take us children into butchers’ shops or to allow us in the kitchen when she was cutting up meat or fish. I once asked if I could cut the heads and tails off the sprats Mummy had bought and he was most distressed.

So I do not think that this assertion by Spitam Cama should be taken as a serious intention of plotting any physical act of violence. For one thing he was not so stupid as to think that you could infect water with cholera and induce it only to affect British troops and not also the indigenous population. I should imagine that most of us have, at one time or another, said in anger: “Oh, I could kill that woman!” Such words do not make us all into real or potential murderers—the words suffice to soak up our emotions. So the words ascribed to Father by Spitam Cama, even if true, do not indicate that he was a violent man. Violent men do not have to resort to words, they do the deeds. I certainly do not take them at their face value as some of his biographers may do.

As I have already mentioned, he had for several years been subjected to Scotland Yard inquisitiveness. This was no hardship, for his intention was to make everyone—and that included Scotland Yard—aware of his political aspirations. He was certainly not trying to hide them. So it merely amused him to witness the waste of time, effort and money in following him around,

playing 'hunt-the-thimble' when the thimble was set in a brightly illuminated display cabinet and not hidden from view at all.

Even now, when I thought that a sight of the reports of his movements throughout those early years of his activity would save me much time in research, upon applying for sight of the papers I was informed that I am not allowed to see the dossier compiled by Scotland Yard until seventy years after his death. By that time, of course, I shall be dead too and, who knows, might be hearing from him at first hand of all his exploits. Why there should still be this cloak-and-dagger secrecy I cannot for the life of me imagine. Empires do not topple so easily—and anyway, where is the Empire to be toppled? As far as I know, it no longer exists. Or is it still lurking, extant, in one of the Secret Service files?

One great comfort arose from this constant accompaniment of Father by his doppelgänger from the Yard: surely there could be no wife in England so secure as my mother in the proof of her husband's constancy and faithfulness; for it is certain that, had the Scotland Yard spies been able to dig up anything discreditable in Father's personal life, they would have done so jubilantly.

Between his return to England in 1913 and his entry into the British Parliament as member for North Battersea in 1922, his political aims were expressed in increasing activity in the socialist movement, the Independent Labour Party (which he had joined in 1909 in Manchester), the Fabian Society, the trade union movement, the women's suffrage cause, in the conscientious objectors' movement and, of course, above all, the urgent and compelling cry for India's freedom from foreign rule as imposed by the British government; indeed, he worked to free all peoples from any form of imperialism, the peoples of Africa, China, Ireland, and all others.

He went further than that; he wanted working people all the world over who, after all, were the creators of any country's wealth, to own the means of production in which they worked, be it on the land or in a factory; in other words, he believed passionately and steadfastly in world communism, believing that nothing less could liberate the working people of the world from exploitation, tyranny, illiteracy and want.

In all these spheres he became known as an ardent and fluent orator who spoke from heartfelt and sincere convictions and an unshakable belief in the righteousness of all the causes he was serving. He also held the optimistic view

that everything he was working for would inevitably one day come to fruition. He seemed to look upon all setbacks as temporary hitches and hold-ups in the ultimate triumph of working-class people everywhere. His determination was profound and unshakeable, and, through his magnetic oratory, infectious.

He tried always to make the British working classes understand that, so long as British Imperialism created cheap labour in the Empire, the jobs of the workers in the United Kingdom were put in jeopardy. For even the most lowly paid English worker enjoyed a far higher standard of wages and living than his fellow workers in India, Africa, China, etc. Sweated labour in the Empire meant unemployment at home. He did not attempt to appeal to any altruism in the British working class, (he was too much of a realist to attempt that), but he tried to make them understand that it was in their self-interest to fight for equal wages and standards of living for the working class peoples of the Empire. The cotton weavers, the coal miners, the jute workers in the United Kingdom, were all being foisted out of work by the low wages paid to similar workers in India and Africa.

In other words, it was in the mutual self-interest of workers of the world to unite and work together for what should be recognised as a common cause. It was this international aspect of socialism that Father stressed throughout his life. As early as 1911 he had addressed a letter to the Trades Union Congress and Labour Representation Committee outlining his ideas for the English trades unions to take up the cause of working people in India but, he told his friend Arthur Field, the result was disappointing and disillusioning.

The trade union movement in 1911 was very active and powerful. In was in that year that Keir Hardie, MP published a pamphlet, 'Killing No Murder' in which he said:

“...The year 1911 will long be remembered for its strikes. Beginning with the seamen, the strike spread like an epidemic in the Middle Ages, until it seemed to affect every class of low-paid worker. As, however, my aim is to concentrate attention on matters mainly, though not exclusively, connected with the Railways dispute, I pass the others over, merely remarking that they revealed a power of cohesion and degree of class solidarity among the most sweated and helpless callings which no one suspected, and few believed possible.”

Well, Father obviously hoped that it would be possible for that class solidarity

to cross national boundaries and lead to a concerted strategy with working people on an Empire, if not upon a global, scale.

On November 24th and 25th, 1912, the International socialist Congress Against imperialist War met in Basle, called by the International socialist Bureau. It confirmed their stand taken in Stuttgart five years earlier:

“The Congress appeals to you, Proletariats and socialists of all countries, to make your voice heard in this decisive hour! Proclaim your will in every form and in all places; raise your protest in the Parliaments with all your force; unite in great mass demonstrations; use every means that the organisation and strength of the proletariat place at your disposal! See to it that the governments are constantly kept aware of the vigilance and passionate will for peace on the part of the proletariat! To the capitalist world of exploitation and mass murder, oppose in this way the proletarian world of peace and fraternity of peoples!”

This was a stirring call for international unity and action and one to which, there can be no doubt, Father wholeheartedly subscribed. A message of brotherly love, an exhortation to love thy neighbour. Had not such a request been made almost nineteen hundred years before? Well, I suppose we have progressed slightly; at least no one addressing that Congress was actually crucified.

It was in 1915 that Arthur Field took Shapurji along to the City Branch of the Independent Labour Party and he spoke from the floor of the meeting. His capacity as a speaker was noted and thereafter he lectured on behalf of the ILP all over London and, subsequently, all over the country. As usual, his meetings were always well attended and his name drew large and enthusiastic audiences wherever he was scheduled to speak.

In that same year he had reason to rejoice in the birth of his third son, but also reason to mourn for the death of Keir Hardie, with whom he had worked through the years and for whom he held an undying admiration. Keir Hardie's gentle but passionate teaching of the socialist gospel had contributed greatly to Saklatvala's unshakeable belief in the need for socialism in order to achieve the widest spread of human happiness. Keir Hardie had written in 1901 to David Lowe, “I could go on. There is so much to be said, and the desire to make socialism understood is growing into a passion. I see no other chance of redeeming the world from poverty and sin and war and lust and all manner of

uncleanness. But my solitary candle is burning low in its socket... Here there are warm hearts and peace. Where these are, Heaven is.”

In 1916, there was the Easter Rising in Dublin by Sinn Fein and Saklatvala was sympathetic to their cause, for he was an ardent upholder of the right of the Irish to freedom and independence.

In 1937, Arthur Field had written to my brother and I quote now from his letter:

“...In 1917 Mr C.F. Ryder and Arthur Field founded the Workers’ Welfare League of India. At that time there were but one or two genuine trades unions in India, and, of course, no TUC there. Within a year, Saklatvala had joined this WWLI Movement, and unitedly we agitated and organised for a trade union movement in India and its support and recognition by the TU Movement in Britain. It is claimed that without the WWLI neither trades unions nor TUC would have arrived on the scene for years. As it was, they followed our agitation, and we were recognised as the cause, and officially thanked for the work.”

Saklatvala no doubt used the Workers’ Welfare League of India to propagate the beliefs he had expressed in his letter to the TUC in 1911 and which had, apparently, fallen on deaf ears and blind eyes.

1917 proved to be surely the most momentous year of the century in Europe and Shapurji Saklatvala watched all the developments keenly. On 16th April, Lenin arrived in Petrograd. On 18th April, Lenin’s ‘April Theses’ were submitted, thought by many to be historically more important than those which Martin Luther had nailed to the Church door in Wittenberg. It was printed on 26th April 1917 for open discussion and it caused general surprise and much controversy. On 15th May 1917, the new provisional government was formed in Russia.

On 1st June of the same year a Great Socialist Conference was held in Leeds in support of the new government in Russia. The Independent Labour Party and the British Socialist Party translated and distributed Lenin’s writings. (Saklatvala was, of course, an active member of both these groups) On July 15th 1917, half a million workers formed a demonstration of protest in Senate Square, Petrograd, and the Provisional government, with Tsarist soldiers, fired on them and killed more than four hundred.

Documents were forged and issued which claimed to implicate Lenin in a

collaboration with Germany and he was forced to go into hiding for more than three months. On the 10th August 1917, Arthur Henderson called a Conference of the British Labour Party in support of the Stockholm Project and he was sacked from the War Cabinet. Labour delegates wishing to attend the Stockholm Conference were refused passports and could not, therefore, attend. (What price the human rights issue then?) During the autumn and winter of that year, Arthur Henderson and the Webbs elaborated a new socialist programme, more socialist in spirit than hitherto.

The following year, 1918, the Peoples' Russian Information Bureau was formed in Britain and Father joined it. Like many other socialists, he thought the Russian pattern was only a prelude to a radical change in the politics of the whole of Europe and this was a period of much hope and optimism.

On 20th February 1918 the Inter-Allied socialist Conference on War Aims was held in London. There was a General Election in 1918 and Father travelled frequently to Leicester to give his support to the electoral campaign of Ramsay MacDonald, and spoke at many of his meetings. Herbert Bryan, a Daily Herald correspondent, who also wrote in Indian newspapers, wrote to Arthur Field after Father's death:

“...with regard to my general impression of him, I think the points that stand out most in my memory about [Saklatvala] are (1) his grasp of British political affairs and his great command of English on the platform, and his speaking ability in general, and, (2) the fact that he was absolutely tireless and never considered sparing his physical powers in the least if he thought there was something to be done to advance the cause he had at heart. I think that there can be no doubt whatever that he wore himself out prematurely by reason of the strain of incessant propaganda work and the constant travelling involved, which brought about his premature death.

“The most striking instance I can remember at the moment of the way in which he used up his physical strength for propaganda purposes was during the General Election of 1918. For some time during the Election, Sak travelled from London to Leicester evening after evening to speak for Ramsay MacDonald, and travelled back again to London the same night...”

At that time, Father was still working in the Tata office and did a full day's

work after his nocturnal activities in Leicester.

The following year, when he was 45, I was born and he finally achieved the 'baby Sehri' he had hoped for in 1915. His adoration for the new arrival bored the rest of the family (my aunts and uncles) but he was at home so seldom, due to the load of political meetings he was addressing all over the country, that he became a stranger to me and I cried when he picked me up when I was still a baby. This caused him a good deal of anguish. But the political meetings won the day and he continued to travel tirelessly almost every weekend. As soon as I was about three, he used to take me with him on his wanderings; I still have vivid memories of his meetings, of visits to gypsy encampments, to coal mines and to mills. And, of course, the two of us got to know each other a little better!

Although Arthur Field says the Workers' Welfare League of India was founded in 1917, it was not until 1918 that the League published a 'Statement of Principles'. On the title page of the pamphlet setting out these principles the office bearers are listed as follows:

President: J.M. Parikh (a close friend of Father's);

Treasurer: K.P. Mehta, (as has already been said, he was Father's closest and oldest friend);

Secretary of the Indian Committee: S. Saklatvala;

Secretary of the English Committee: John Arnall;

General Secretary: Arthur Field.

The statement was addressed to the British Trades and Labour Bodies; it would seem to be very similar in content to Father's letter addressed in 1911 to leading men of the TUC (whose reaction to it had been so disappointing), and I feel certain that his hand is writ large on this document which I offer in full below:

"This League is not associated with any political party or religious movement. Its chief claim is that our Oriental fellow-subjects of the working orders of society have a right to identical or equivalent measures of general welfare and labour protection as have been instituted for the working class in Great Britain. Whatever views may be taken of the soundness and adequacy of the measures of social welfare granted to the workpeople of Great Britain, it cannot be denied that if

such concessions are beneficial here these or equal measures of relief are still more necessary for Indian workers.

“It is not, however, intended to adopt a doctrinaire attitude, and to propose the application to India of measures that may be even opposed by the unwilling objects of misguided philanthropy. The regulations and enactments to be proposed will be discussed point by point by Indian and English committees of this League. The essential part of the League’s propaganda is the movement to secure from the people of this country a recognition of the right of the people of India to equal consideration with themselves.

“There is a considerable mass of otherwise fair-minded men and women in this country who exhibit little or no consideration for peoples of a different colour from themselves, even when performing similar services as subjects of the same Empire. Most British citizens declare their belief in the righteousness of democracy, yet many of them see no absurdity in limiting its application by the shade of a man’s or a woman’s skin.

“It must not be presumed from our insistence on the conditions of workers in factories, mines, etc. (who, in India, form but a small part of the population), that we neglect the questions of agriculture and agricultural labour, of the Indian Lascars [that is, the maritime workers], etc.

“From England an impetus can be imparted to initiate far-reaching changes for the masses in India. It is a good and proper thing for a Home government to defer to the opinion of the Dependency, but in the course of this proper procedure the opinion that now prevails is the opinion of the merchants and of the manufacturers. The former are not favourable to any proposal that tends to alter the simple and unambitious masses. The latter, in the face of the experience of the whole world, believe that cheap labour profits them. If legislation, even the mildest, is proposed, they believe the English authorities are trying to spoil Indian industries.

“The opposition to reform is not exclusively from these directions. Opposition to the Viceroy’s Bill of 1906 for extending the Factory Act also arose from persons who advocate self-government and claim to be

democratic. There is even an element of mistaken self-interest in some English working-class circles promoting a toleration of present conditions of Indian labour. Against this pressure of interest and ignorance the best intentioned proposals in the Home Legislature can succeed only by the organised influence of the British working classes.

“Such efforts, in the opinion of the League, should be directed to improvements of as general an application as possible—industrial, agricultural and educational. British democracy might be able to secure the appointment of a Labour Minister for India in the Parliament of Great Britain, with the effect of providing a channel for Indian opinion of a different character from that which now prevails.

“The work of the League lies clear before it, but the further stages need not be more minutely defined at present. Well organised effort can undoubtedly influence British opinion to care about matters that would otherwise be neglected. Such an effort is now inaugurated on behalf of the British subjects in India. The people of Great Britain must be convinced that their own interests are in no way opposed to, and are even bound up with, a just and generous treatment of their Eastern brothers and sisters.”

After giving details of subscriptions and membership of the League, there follows a further address from ‘The TU and Labour Section of the League to the Trades and Labour Bodies of Great Britain.’ This reads:

“The Workers’ Welfare League of India feel that the democracy of Great Britain has unwisely neglected to keep touch with the working people of the Empire. By such neglect they lose in moral, national, and democratic strength. By neglecting the conditions of the industrial and agricultural workers in India they have made it possible for their employers to work industries in India against industries in England. In this case mutual safety dictates an immediate study of the problem. There is danger of a deliberate competition of Indian with English conditions, unless steps are taken to discuss and improve the conditions in India.

“It is not presumptuous or futile to attempt to undertake such a work, for the control of India lies, and will for some years continue to lie, with the Legislature in England, while the democratic elements here are gaining an increasing share in the control of affairs.

“The workers in Great Britain have been, as participators in the British Empire, discussing questions of the most far-reaching importance. At such a juncture, when every co-operation is essential, instead of a voice from India we are confronted by a dumb people, so far as Labour is concerned.

“This leaves it possible for declarations to be made, in the name of India, that this or that trifling change is not only necessary but sufficient to satisfy India’s needs. We also find this type of advocates declaring that the people of India will greatly resent an extension of Labour legislation, and that it is unnecessary; while they themselves resent suggestions of improved conditions and increased wages. We feel instinctively that this attitude is unjustified, but until we investigate we cannot say we know. We must end this practice of neglecting to secure verified British -Indian opinion and co-operation. These being available through the Workers’ Welfare League of India, we invite the help of the TU and Labour world in the circulation and utilisation of the information available.

“The Trade Unions and other organisations that consider this appeal will naturally ask, ‘What do you expect us to do?’ Our reply is, we ask you to allow one of yourselves on your Committee to devote himself to purely British-Indian Labour questions, and he might also make himself incidentally useful by a study of Labour conditions in other Oriental countries, which may equally affect Labour in Great Britain and British India. If you cannot spare a committee-man’s activities for these purposes, we suggest that you co-opt a special member for the purpose. When appointed he should be entrusted with the following duties:

- (A) To ascertain what are the conditions of Indian Labour in the corresponding industries in India.
- (B) To collect proposals for the amendment of Indian conditions.
- (C) To examine how far, if at all, the interests of English Labour are affected by inequitable conditions of Indian Labour.
- (D) To condense the data and briefly report to the Committee from time to time.

“With the special member thus appointed the TU and Labour Section of the League is prepared to keep in touch, acting gratuitously as a Bureau

of Information relative to Oriental Labour.

“As the result of continued deliberation, we hope to arrive at an organised presentation of suggestions and proposals to the Labour members in Parliament. We hope that the Trade Unions may eventually combine to send to India a Commissioner to investigate the subject on the various localities, and gather facts otherwise unobtainable. The result of a ready co-operation of the trade and Labour organisations in this effort of the WWLI might even be the appointment, by their own vote and initiative, of a permanent official on their behalf, and under their own control, to keep in constant touch with the members for Oriental Labour Questions on each of the TU Committees.” (Documents relating to the WWLI appear as [Appendix A to this chapter.](#))

In that same year (1918), Saklatvala was a delegate to the Independent Labour Party Conference, where he represented the City of London Branch. It may be of general interest, in view of the Labour Party’s subsequent repudiation of Communist sympathies and the often hysterical eschewing of any links with Marxism, that in that year, the Chairman’s address included the following exhortation:

“The first Sunday in May, which has been for so long specially dedicated by the socialist movement to Internationalism, is this year the centenary of the birth of Karl Marx. In normal times, the socialist movement would have taken advantage of this event to do honour to one of the greatest names in the history of Socialism, but, at a time like this, it is especially fitting that we should recognise the work of the man who was the pioneer of Internationalism. We desire, however, that branches of the ILP should, this year more than ever, set aside the first Sunday in May for international demonstrations, and that at such demonstrations special reference should be made to the life and labours for International Socialism of Karl Marx, and to the indebtedness of the proletariat for his great services to Socialism and Internationalism. In the name of the Party we propose to arrange for a wreath to be laid at his graveside, and to take such other steps as seem advisable to pay homage to his memory.’

“John Scurr, representing Bow and Bromley then moved:

“That the demand of the Indian people to be recognised as equal

partners within the British Commonwealth is essentially democratic and that to realise the ideal each country must have the opportunity for self determination. This Conference, therefore, demands that a measure granting self government to the Indian people be placed on the Statute Book at the earliest opportunity.’

“In moving the resolution, Mr Scurr said there was one matter to which he would like to refer. In a certain newspaper, mention has been made of the foreign accents of delegates of that Conference. The one delegate to whom that reference could refer was Shapurji Saklatvala, a native of Bombay, and, therefore, a subject of the British Empire, and in every sense of the word entitled to the same rights and privileges as themselves. He happened to be a journalist himself, but he sometimes had to admit that he belonged to the most dishonourable profession in the world; and that there should be in a so-called leading newspaper such a reference showed the reliance they could place on everything else which a paper of that kind might say. The resolution was agreed.

“Shapurji Saklatvala (City of London), then moved:

“That this Conference requests all members of the Party who take an active interest in and aid the work of the Indian National Congress, and who propose delegations from Indian bodies to British Labour Conferences, to call upon their Indian colleagues to give a place in their political programmes to Democratic measures which they so far have opposed or neglected, such as ‘no representation on Councils in India except by popular election’; immediate legislation to improve the hours, wages and general conditions of workers; and an open advocacy of the Nationalisation of Lands, Railways, Mines, and other large and important industries.’

“Mr Saklatvala said he was not there to carry on a fight for any one class in India, he was there as a socialist, a sincere, earnest, whole-hearted believer and supporter of the policy of the Independent Labour Party. He could not help it that his accent was a little foreign, but his heart was not foreign. Those of his comrades who had known him since he joined the Party in 1909 would know that he only wanted to do one thing, and that was to spread socialism from one end of the world to the other.

“The National Organiser had told them that it should be possible to

make the membership of the Independent Labour Party 100,000. It might go much further. The people of India suffered from ignorance, not ill-will. They were essentially socialist in mind, and his imagination carried him to the time when the Independent Labour Party might have ten million members.

“When Mr [Ramsey] MacDonald was proposing the resolution on the Soldiers’ Charter, he did not think that it was in the remotest part of their minds that while they were talking of 27s 6d allowance, they who were responsible for the soldiers’ pensions in India were guilty of paying a pension of 5s (5 shillings) a month and a separation allowance of 10s (10 shillings) a month. They were guilty of giving compensation of £5 to £10 to the families of those who had lost their lives. They did not realise it. They had not asked the Indian National Congress during the four years of war to move any peace resolution. They had put on their list eight million voters, yet they had not asked their Indian friends to put eight voters on the list. He therefore appealed to them to be more definite in talk of Internationalism. They should realise the duty that was before all of them of looking to themselves and the opportunities that were before them.

“The resolution was agreed to.”

During the period of the suffragette movement, certainly from as early as 1908 when he participated in a protest rally and march in Hyde Park, Saklatvala was closely associated with the movement and was a great admirer of Sylvia Pankhurst’s leadership. But from 1917 onward, Sylvia Pankhurst became a passionate devotee of communism as she felt that events in Russia presented the working classes with a completely new social structure that could alleviate the deprivations of poverty, so acutely manifesting themselves during the war. She changed the name of the newspaper of which she was editor from *The Women’s Dreadnought* to *The Workers’ Dreadnought*. Father was a regular reader of this paper. Later, she also changed the name of her organisation from *The Workers’ Suffrage Federation*, to *The Workers’ Socialist Federation*. Later still, in 1919, when the Third International was formed in Moscow, Pankhurst became a dedicated advocate of affiliation of British socialists to the Third International. She went even further than most socialists of her time and refused to participate in parliamentary activity, actually turning down the

offer of becoming a parliamentary candidate. (This attitude was not upheld by Lenin and she was much criticised within the Communist fold.) While, clearly, Saklatvala was against the boycotting of parliamentary procedures, he remained a friend and admiring political colleague of Sylvia Pankhurst, respecting her courage, dedication and sincerity.

At the ILP Conference the following year, 1919, Saklatvala was once again a delegate for the City of London Branch, and heard the following stirring address by the Chairman, Mr Philip Snowden:

“The last year has been crowded with events of tremendous importance. We have seen the beginning of the end of the old order of class domination and economic slavery. The new order is being born in blood and suffering. Slowly and painfully humanity has climbed the hard road to the summit of Calvary, but the resurrection to the new life of freedom and brotherhood is at hand. Over two thirds of Europe the Red Flag of socialism, red with the blood of our martyred dead, floats where but yesterday despotism held the people in vile subjection. The mighty reverberations of the Russian Revolution have sounded through the world,

‘And the slave, where’er he cowers,
feels the soul within him climb
To the awful verge of manhood,
as the energy sublime
Of a century bursts full-blossomed
on the thorny stem of time.’

[Quote from James Russell Lowell, *The Present Crisis*]

“With prophetic insight, the Independent Labour Party, in its manifesto issued on the outbreak of war in August 1914, said: ‘In forcing this appalling crime upon the nations, it is the rulers and diplomats, the militarists, who have sealed their doom. In tears and blood and bitterness the greater democracy will be born. With steadfast faith we greet the future; our cause is holy and imperishable, and the labour of our hands has not been in vain.’

“The state of the world today is a fulfilment of that prophesy.”

In reply to various other points raised, the chairman said that the National Administrative Council of the ILP were watching the international situation

very closely, and they hoped to put before the Conference some statement giving an outline of its suggested reconstitution. The NAC looked upon the matter with very grave concern, and, if events did develop to such an extent as in their opinion to call for a special Conference of the Party, such a Conference would be called. Saklatvala requested the NAC, when they did call this special Conference, to be prepared with a proposal by which the rank and file of the Labour Party might be induced to remove from the Labour Party those men who were the obstacles, to the spirit of socialism.

The chairman read the following resolution:

“This Conference demands the withdrawal of British troops from Ireland, and the recognition of that form of government which is desired by the Irish people. It further regards the claims of the Indian and Egyptian peoples to self-government as essentially just, and demands that they be granted at the earliest opportunity.’

“Shapurji Saklatvala, in supporting the resolution, said he had to ask them to read much more into the resolution than appeared in the wording, and also, owing to the shortness of time, he had to ask them to hear much more in his words than merely the words he spoke.

“The whole position was this—a foreign domination existed in a country which had nothing in common with them. They might wonder that from time to time people in India had acquiesced in their presence in the country. The true reason was not because they were enamoured with Lord Curzon or Lord Hardinge, but now and again they had seen on the horizon an Englishman like Keir Hardie.

“When they had seen a Ramsay MacDonald, and had pinned their faith in Philip Snowden, they had been living in hopes that England was full of Englishmen like these, and it was for this reason alone that India had acquiesced in the presence of the British. His demoralised, unarmed and tyrannised countrymen, through fear, had launched out to assist the jingoes of Great Britain in the war. They had become partners in a hideous crime. No sooner was the war over than the imperialist, militarist rulers of India gave to India Rowlatt Acts, and the very aeroplanes and armoured cars they had presented to the British government were used against an innocent and unarmed crowd. Bombs had been dropped on meetings held in the streets, and 250 casualties

were admitted. These Rowlatt Acts were given to India in the name of Great Britain. Did the British men and women identify themselves with such militarist acts?

“Speaking of the capitalist exploitation as the cause of the troubles of the Indian people, Mr Saklatvala quoted from the results of a particular enquiry into the monthly expenses of 11,000 workers; for a family of five,—father, mother and 3 children—the expenses, regulated by wages, were as follows: 12s 6d (12 shillings and sixpence) per month for rice for father, mother and 3 children, 4s 6d a month for meat, fish and mutton, 9d per month for butter, oils and sauce; 1s 7d per month for vegetables.

“They wanted the solidarity of the Labour of Great Britain with the Labour of India.

“The resolution was carried.”

In a letter addressed to my brother about a year after my father’s death, Lord Snowden wrote:

“...I first knew your father before he joined the ILP when he was connected with the India Reform Movement. Afterwards he joined the ILP. Then he was a prominent figure at the annual conferences of the ILP. Later he became a Communist and, as you know, entered Parliament as a Communist MP. He was quite a figure in the House of Commons, and made an impression by his volcanic eloquence... I had a high regard for his honesty and disinterested sincerity... His comparatively early death was a real grief to me.”

With the new international scene that was emerging after the Russian Revolution, factions arose within the ILP, some members being fiercely in favour of affiliation with the Third International and others being equally fiercely opposed to such affiliation. Saklatvala was, of course, a strenuous and vociferous advocate for affiliation. In 1920 he was not a delegate at the annual conference of the ILP and his attempt to be elected to the National Administrative Council was unsuccessful. This may well have been due to his pro-affiliation propaganda within the City of London Branch. He was one of 159 signatories to a Declaration of the Left Wing of the ILP, made in 1920 under the heading ‘The Call of the Third International.’ (The text of this document appears as [Appendix B to this chapter.](#))

[Editor’s note: Around this time, Saklatvala became acquainted with John

Archer, then Mayor of Battersea, and the first person of African descent to hold public office in Britain. According to Marc Wadsworth, Archer promoted Shapurji's 1922 candidacy for parliament within the Labour Party. See 'Comrade Sak: A Political Biography'].

At the 1921 Annual Conference of the ILP we see him appearing as a delegate for Clapham. This would seem to indicate that he had perhaps already left the City of London Branch and joined the Branch in Clapham, but there is no hard evidence for this assumption. Both Herbert Bryan and Arthur Field gave their version of events leading up to Saklatvala's resignation from the ILP but neither of them gave any precise dates. I quote them both below.

Extract from a letter from Herbert Bryan, written to Arthur Field in 1937:

"After the war, a movement arose in the ILP in favour of affiliation of the Party to the Third International. Sak took a leading part in this movement, and when the proposal to join the Third International was rejected by the ILP Annual Conference, Sak left the ILP and joined the Communist Party. Before leaving the ILP, however, he moved a resolution at the City Branch meeting to the effect that the Branch should secede from the ILP and become the City of London socialist Society. This proposal was rejected by the Branch."

Extract from a letter from Arthur Field to my brother in 1937:

"The Menshevik Revolt of Russia in 1917—and its effect in England (Council of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers)—found us forwarding it—but pressing for more radical developments. The Bolshevik victory in Russia in 1918, both of us saw, ...must mean our plunge into a red union at the earliest moment. The British Socialist Party became the British Section of the Third Communist International, and we tried to get the very advanced men of the National Administrative Council of the ILP to press the national body to affiliate. With the rejection of the proposal by the Annual Conference of the ILP, the walk-out of the reds occurred and Saklatvala joined the CP..."

"At the Annual Conference of the ILP in 1921, Saklatvala represented the Clapham Branch. Speaking in the debate on the international situation and in particular as to whether the ILP should or should not affiliate with the Third International, he said he did not intervene to urge upon one section or the other to strive to gain a sectional victory.

He asked them to bear in mind socialism. As one of those fortunate foreigners, might he put it to the Conference to imagine the effects of the decisions they might take on the outside world.

“There was not the slightest doubt that in the twenty-one conditions [of admission to the International, see below] there was some attack on their traditional emotions. Had the ILP succeeded in going to Zimmerwald [British socialists were prevented from travelling there in 1915], the history of the International might have been different, but they had also been guilty of taking up a provocative attitude at a critical juncture, and they had been responsible for a portion of the bitterness in those twenty-one points. He would apologise to Comrade MacDonald for taking him as an illustration. MacDonald stood as an avowed official secretary of the Second International. With his own characteristic temperament he would be the last person to accept an official position in the Second and in the Third. There would be, as the American Divorce Act expressed it, ‘incompatibility of temperament’, and, sooner or later, one or the other would have to apply to the Courts for divorce papers.

“The Third International did not ask them to deport him after the manner of Lloyd George. All they said was that comrades with such convictions should not hold offices, and he thought the one person in the Conference who would agree with him was Comrade MacDonald himself.

“He would say to his pacifist comrades, to his comrades to whom human life was sacred and dear, turn to Amritsar, where in half-an-hour General Dyer poured his bullets out until he had killed 1200 people for the simple reason that the whole of that unfortunate crowd was unarmed.

“There was nothing to prevent them from putting their point of view before the Third International, but when the majority of the members of the International had decided upon their policy and their constitution, it must remain binding on the minority, otherwise no organisation in the world could continue to exist.

“Capitalism was stronger than it was five years ago. Imperialism in Great Britain had not only not been destroyed, but had not even been

arrested at the point at which they found it before the war. British Imperialism, with its great idealist opponent, the ILP, had managed to get a million more square miles. British militarism today had reached the highest point of brutal bestiality, and had gone beyond all bounds of honour.

“If that was the potency of ILP idealism, why were they offended when others came and said, ‘Keep your idealism, but make it more potent’? He would, therefore, appeal to them to go to Moscow, accept the twenty-one points, and those who felt the points were too bitter, swallow them.”

The twenty-one points referred to are given as [Appendix C to this chapter](#).

This 1921 Conference of the ILP, in rejecting the proposed affiliation with the Third International, was for Father, a momentous one. Although he did not make up his mind in haste, the rejection by the ILP of affiliation left him, now a convinced Communist, little choice. His devotion up to this moment to the ILP was beyond doubt and he had served it wholeheartedly since 1909 and had many close friends within it. He had been one of their staunchest and most vigorous propagandists addressing numberless meetings up and down the country; as a speaker, he always drew big crowds and his oratory had served the party well. (At an earlier conference he had said that he envisaged a day when ten million Indian members would join the ILP.)

The conference ended on the 29th March and he returned home from Stockport a lonely and much saddened man. He had become alienated from comrades with whom he had hitherto shared his political ideals and aspirations. He had worked tirelessly to persuade them to accept affiliation and he had failed. It was, to say the least, disillusioning. Of course he was to have his communist colleagues now, but he had hoped that old friends and new friends would affiliate and remain in one body together. The schism was a painful wrench to him.

Almost exactly a year before, on the 3rd April 1920, his father had died in Manchester. They had been very close and his death had left Shapurji with none of his Indian family near him in England. And now his constant association with old political allies and friends, some of whom had known him almost from the time of his first arrival in this country, was to be severed. It was a bitter blow and he must have felt very isolated—for now he only had the loved and loving Sehri as an unquestioning and ever-present supporter of any

decisions he might feel compelled to make.

Concurrently with his work with the Independent Labour Party, he was working with equal fervour for the London Labour Party, of which he was an active member, regularly attending and participating in their meetings and conferences.

At one such meeting on 16th September 1920, applications for affiliation to the Third International were considered, together with a letter from the National Agent reporting the refusal of the Labour Party to accept. It was unanimously decided that the applications could not be acceded to, and the Secretary was instructed to send a suitable letter stating the grounds for the refusal.

Two months later, at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Party, the Secretary reported on various matters connected with the Conference and it was resolved:

- 1) That Mr Saklatvala be informed that he may run for both Executive and Auditor, but that he could only serve in one such capacity...
- 3) That the Secretary make the fullest use, in his discretion, of the extracts from the Convention at which the Communist Party was formed, in the Labour Chronicle...
- 5) That the request of the Communist Party for a representative to address the Conference on the question of their affiliation be declined on the grounds that it would be ultra vires.

On 3rd March 1921, a few days before the fateful ILP Conference, the Executive Committee of the London Labour Party decided that the Party should not be represented at the conference called by the Workers' Welfare League of India.

It was also decided that Battersea Trades Council be informed that the London Labour Party has no constitutional status in so far as the endorsement of parliamentary candidates is concerned, and that the terms of Resolution 19 regarding the Communist Party be quoted for the information of Battersea Trades Council.

Although it is not stated that this has anything to do with Father's parliamentary candidature, I think we can safely assume that it had. But, at that time, even his formal membership of the Communist Party did not debar him from standing as a parliamentary candidate for the Labour Party in the

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

General Election of the following year.

Let us, therefore, move on now to that General Election and Saklatvala's years as a member of Parliament.

Appendix A to Chapter 7: Statement of the Workers' Welfare League of India, 1919

Statement Submitted to the Joint Committee on Indian Reforms on Behalf of
The Workers' Welfare League of India.

By Shapurji Saklatvala supported by Duncan Carmichael.

Published by The Workers' Welfare League of India, 18 Featherstone
Buildings, High Holborn, London.

To The Chairman, The Joint Committee of the Houses of Parliament on
the government of India Bill, House of Commons, Westminster, dated
22nd July, 1919.

My Lord,

I am directed by the Council of the Workers' Welfare League of India, to
offer myself as a witness before your Committee, and to bring to your
Lordship's attention the peculiar claims of the League as the only body
that combines in it the actual knowledge of Indian economic conditions
with practical experience of the working of British Labour organisations
in this country.

The League devotes its attention and activities to the betterment of the
condition of workers, including peasantry in all parts of India with the
object of securing some approximation to the standards which prevail in
all civilised parts of the world. The League, as a general Labour
organisation is not unmindful of the disastrous consequences that must
ensue generally to the progress of Labour, and therefore to the material
well-being of the masses in Great Britain and the British Colonies by the
continued degraded conditions of their fellow-workers in India.

The League for the first time submits, as no other body has hitherto

done, the grave, almost catastrophic situation that is being created against a solid industrial advancement and social civic progress within the Empire by utilising millions of additional persons for production of modern requirements of life by up-to-date Western methods, without permitting these very millions to be in their turn the additional consumers of those or other similar products, or to partake of the new social and political privileges that are being evolved, as an effect of and that are intended to be maintained by these material productions.

The League is carefully constituted with two component parts standing together on one common moral and economic platform where the moral and material interests of the two groups, one Indian, and the other European, do not clash, but will harmonise together and which unitedly must essentially form one British standard in a British Empire, and the absence of which should draw away from Great Britain any excuse for direct or mandatory control over other countries. The Indian section with its Indian knowledge and Indian sentiment and the English section with its advanced experience form in equal halves our united Council. The latter section join the League on account of its existing economic relations with, knowledge of, or partiality for the Indian fellow-workers, and the former or the Indian section is formed from such Indian residents in this country who have relations with, knowledge of, or partiality for Labour organisations in this country.

My Council in directing me to submit their united British Case to you, not only bear in mind my information on Indian economic and Labour conditions but they also take in view my fairly long and active membership of the National Union of Clerks, The Independent Labour Party, the British socialist Party, the Labour Party, and similar organisations, which feature, your Lordship will perceive, is not existing in case of Indian representatives of purely Indian bodies, or other individual members offering their evidence.

In the proposed government of India Bill my League foresees a further and accelerating accentuation of the evil that the League is formed to combat against. On the one hand it ignores all rights and direct powers to peasants and workers, and on the other hand it enhances existing privileges, and creates new powers for a limited group of persons, who,

however well-intentioned and well-meaning, have throughout the world, through a false nervousness in the direction of self-preservation, and through an absorbing attention to one particular phase of limited 'progress', have created and are creating a condition 'where only wealth accumulates and men decay.'

If after more than one hundred years of settled British Rule in India need is felt to further 'reform' the government of India, all attention and energy in the main must be directed to those phases of life and government which have so far obtained the least progressive measures and democratic consideration.

We consider any measure of government Reform not only incomplete but unthinkable for a government that claims to be civilised, never mind Democratic, that does not pin its faith in the progress of the masses and by the efforts of the workers themselves in unison with all the workers within the same Empire, and even in the neighbouring states. To treat, today, in India, after all the mature experiences in Europe, suffering Labour as not worthy of self-assertive rights, and to create higher powers and privileges for the happier portion in the same society, is like transferring the sweepings of old Europe into India under disguise of giving to India a set of reforms and progressive and evolutionary measures along lines of Western culture.

If the bold and right measure of referring the whole Bill back to the government for re-construction on modern basis be not acceptable, my League would consider the following amendments as absolutely essential:

(a) Introduction of popular franchise for Indians that would include all workers and soldiers.

(b) Questions of Labour Legislation to be treated as indivisible British Empire questions, under the protection of the Imperial Parliament, similar to the questions of Army, Navy and Foreign Policy, and suspension of any transfer of power over lives of millions of Indian Workers to the control of the Indian or European non-labouring classes in India, before the workers are given full franchise rights in India.

(c) From the commencement of the new Councils there must be statutory recognition of the right of the workers to combine.

(d) All the old laws and regulations that humiliate Labour, that make Labour punishable criminally for Labour faults, or that make a person's service compulsory instead of a free-will contract, should be abolished or withdrawn forthwith, and made a matter of the barbarous and oppressive past, viz.: such legislation as the Assam Emigration Act, the Madras Planters' Labour Act, and regulations and practice of Impressment of Labour, Indentured Labour, and recruitment of Labour by Agents of private companies with direct or indirect forms of government assistance.

(e) A system of Indian Labour Ministry in Parliament, with similar Ministries in all the new Councils of India be introduced, with an understanding of such posts being given preferentially to persons that are connected with and experienced in British Labour organisations; and also the intercourse of British and Indian Labour through recognised agents of British Trade Unions for communion between Indian and British bodies, as well as for communications with the Indian Ministries be recognised and accepted, both as a material and moral support to Indian Labour, and also in view of the repercussion of Indian conditions on Labour conditions of the United Kingdom.

(f) The practice of safe-guarding Labour interests through nominees of a government, in the election of which Labour has no direct vote, should not only be condemned, but should be admitted as one stage worse for Labour interests, than leaving Labour altogether unrepresented.

(g) Some immediate reforms in the indefensible rates of wages, and hours of work for the employees of the government of India themselves, which conditions have been briefly described in the memorandum submitted by the League to Mr Secretary Montagu on 25th January last, and a copy of which is attached herewith.

My League is aware of some of the erroneous ideas that exist against the above suggestions, and I am prepared on their behalf to show by evidence, the groundlessness of fears, and interests that seek to prevent the introduction of these reforms.

Some illustrative fallacious contentions may be briefly reviewed as under:

(a) Indian workers should be denied franchise on account of their

illiteracy:

Literacy has never been made the sine qua non condition of franchise rights. The Reform Acts and other Acts from 1830 to 1870 enfranchised large numbers of illiterate persons in this country. It is the absence of the vote that is responsible for the negligence of educational rights and facilities. If society is made to suffer from illiterate voters, it will expel illiteracy, if Society is permitted to protect itself by boycotting illiterate persons, it will take up their cause in a leisurely fashion. The Indian village worker, though illiterate, is far from being uncultured. The latest revolution in Russia proves at least one thing, that an illiterate Asiatic when given a vote and voice in state affairs, is capable of appreciating and enjoying it to the extent of living up to it, fighting for it, and dying for it, as ardently as his literate European comrade.

(b) Indian Labour questions must be treated as quite separate Indian questions from the Indian point of view alone, and are not of the nature of questions of Foreign Policy, the Army and the Navy.

Our Foreign Policy, Imperialism, the Army, the Navy are all maintained to support and safeguard the material welfare of the state and to defend as well as to increase the industrial activity of the Empire. Labour, the most important factor of Industry, is therefore the life and soul of everything, and the intelligent union and undivided progress of the Empire's Labour is a question of Sovereign and Imperial importance of the first magnitude.

Conditions of modern industries within the Empire are almost uniform, the interiors of factories, mines, dockyards, etc., being almost the same with the same tax on human mind and body. The Companies' Acts that safeguard the interests of investors are uniform. The Indian managers, directors, merchants, investors and large dividend earners, large land proprietors, lawyers, doctors, engineers, etc., have all changed their lives, housing, food, clothing, etc., and brought them in close approximation to the lives of modern merchants and masters in Europe, thus proving the advantageous applicability of a uniform standard of life for Europeans and Indians engaged in the same professions or trades.

(c) The government may claim that they do not prevent any legitimate and constitutional labour activity.

The existing repressive measures are capable of destroying any activity. In the initial stages, any well-intended labour programme of a really independent character, free from master-class wire-pulling, would arouse political suspicions, and would be crushed by existing laws even before germination. It is absolutely essential to have distinct legislation framed to sanction labour activities along the lines of British standards. A statutory sanction is different from a benevolent acquiescence or of not putting into operation existing harsh measure or regulation.

(d) Excuse may be held forth, that the old laws and regulations, more worthy of a pirate chief than of a settled government within the country, are no longer put into operation with their early days' rigour, and things are different, etc., etc.

We are talking of Reforms. No reforms are British reforms that do not immediately do away with un-British principles and laws enacted under stress of war-like conditions. British Labour is British Labour, here or in India, and several of these Indian Acts are an insult to, and an outrage upon British Labour, offered by a ruling caste that did not view labour very differently from slavery. To save the British name, reform of this unspeakable condition is of primary importance.

(e) India is not ripe for Labour Ministry, etc., etc.

Any antidote is required most where the evil is the greatest and acutest. Ministries of Labour are more needful in backward countries than in forward ones. To set out today to create a new machinery of government along lines of Western culture and modern standards, and to omit a specialised and separate Ministry of Labour, independent of commercial interest, is, to say the least, a very grave omission.

(f) Labour being backward in India, the government desire to give them protection through a suitable nominee, and care will be taken to select a very disinterested gentleman, etc., etc.

Even in this country, we notice that it is not the person's previous career which makes him appear 'suitable'—but it is the medium through which he gets into a position, that moulds his political and administrative psychology in his future work. In all conscience a government cannot escape from its own view-point and the customary nervousness attached to responsibility of a small class ruling over a large mass, and the more

honest and careful the selection of a nominee the more fatal in the long run, it proves to the interest of the protected ones. A free, healthy control by electors' votes is the only known means to check political deterioration. An absence of an elected agent to protect an interest is a drawback, but the fact of such absence throws an amount of risk as well as responsibility upon the one-sided administrative force. The presence of a nominee selected by those against whom protection is to be sought becomes a positive calamity by your opponent thereby securing your so-called assent and sometimes even your thanks, for undesirable measures, through this dangerous medium.

(g) The government might argue that they based the wages on prevailing standards, and did give even a low wage to villagers who previously had none.

No government is justified in comparing a condition of bygone days with the present. Free of control from without, every country undergoes changes and evolves from one stage into another. The government of India, in perpetuating an old system, set a bad example to private traders, and then adopting the traders' standard, continues the perniciously low wage system for ever. The villagers' life conditions are changed, but his life standards are forcibly maintained unaltered. From a quiet, leisurely, uncontrolled, free-will, non-nerve-wracking cottage industry, he is moved into modern mines, factories and places of work, demanding different exactions from his mind, body and morals, and the government set no new standard of life for him, subject him to newly created miseries of poverty, filth, of ignorance, etc., which in his previous condition were absent.

Every industry in India is capable of bearing a much higher wage today. The selling price of articles produced and the commercial value of public services, such as transport, post, police, etc., are today subject to the law of world prices, and give to controlling interests almost the values in India as in Europe. A glance at the record of Indian concerns as given in the attached copy of the Capital is sufficient to convince one that Indian industrial concerns can spare a bigger margin for workers' wages. The government must first reform its own methods before legislating for others. On moral grounds the government of India should seek this

reform before any other, unless it prefers to court contempt or ridicule from the civilised world, which has not yet fully realised the very low level of Indian wages.

Here is one instance, the President of the General Electric Company of Schektady—America, in his capacity as the Chairman when, speaking at the Annual Meeting of the Institute of Electrical Engineers in 1918 held up to the contempt of the world the German government that in occupied territories in Russia, was employing Russian labour at two roubles a day for ten hours daily. Should not the government of India reform itself even to this contemptible standard? Is the world's opinion never to effect it harmfully? The Postal Rate in India should be exactly what it is in Britain, because the Investor and the Trader uses the Post Office for similar profits as here, and not the illiterate population of 300 millions out of 320 millions. Out of this excess revenue the Indian Post Office Worker must be paid at the rate of Rupees 15 a week at least. Similarly the government Railway Worker, Policemen, Soldiers, Village Teachers, Public Works Labourers could all be put on the 15 Rupees Weekly Standard, and rates and taxes on commercial communities duly increased and brought up to British Standard. The hours of work should be reduced under the Reform of government of India Bill immediately to ten from 12, and then a further annual reduction of one hour every year, till a limit of 8 is reached.

With better wages and greater leisure the wage earner will become a consumer of goods, and a caretaker of his own house and sanitary surroundings. His demand will largely increase industrial activity, industrial taxation, and public revenues, and the fictitious plea of poverty, which in a nature's rich country can only mean bad banking, of the government of India will vanish, and India will acquire a British Standard of life, which will irresistibly be followed by a British Standard of government and Politics. The present method of reforming the government of India from the top is unnatural, unhealthy, and unjust not only to India, but even to the Empire.

My League declines to accept the plea of cheap living in favour of low wages. Cheap living is a myth, and even if it were true, could only base itself in deceiving the food-grower by giving him such poor

remuneration for his toil, that he cannot maintain himself and his children in a standard of modern comfort and modern decency. But this cheap living does not exist. The law of world prices levelises selling prices. Prices of wheat, rice, oilseeds, clothing, even meat, etc., are fixed after a daily telegraphic exchange of views among all the merchants of the world. Scientific advancement that produces preserved bananas, tinned fruit and fish, powdered eggs and milk, tends towards levelising prices of what used to be perishable articles.

The Indian workers' cheap living is not based on his actually obtaining articles of lower values, but is literally based on his doing without everything that constitutes a worker's healthy and happy life. He has to go without regular meals of nutritious food, without furniture of any kind, without medicine, without books, or education, without sufficient clothing (the European worker in the hotter climate of South Africa does not go ill-clad), without soap, without cups and saucers, without umbrellas, without tram rides to and from his work, without any sanitary house, and so forth.

The Administration and the government of India have produced this condition, and then on account of this very condition the government and the interested public have kept the worker a political outcast. Then on account of this political disability his condition has to continue to be the same. No government of India Act can therefore claim to be a reform unless it first reformed the heinous condition now euphemistically called cheap living. Death rates of 60 per 1000 and infantile mortality of 500 to 675 per 1000 tell their own tale.

The following instances require careful sympathetic and also bold and unorthodox thinking, as pointing to the hopelessness of the attempt of reforming a people's life-conditions without recognising the right and voice of the very sufferers themselves.

(1) The government of India, and the non-popularly elected Councillors leave the widows of the Indian soldiers on pensions of 14 pence to 30 pence a week. That same government and Councillors make a gift of £6,000,000 yearly to Great Britain to help her pay her widows at the rate of 25 shillings to 35 shillings weekly. Had the Indian soldier and his widow a vote, such a scandal would not have existed, and had their case

been lost in an adverse Council in India, their genuine representative would have appealed to the honour and self-respect of England and English widows not to touch this Indian money, and to spurn this gift of political motive before the Indian widow herself was paid at least 20 shillings (£1) weekly.

(2) The Indian Ryot (peasant) is deep in debt, and in the hands of extortionate money-lenders, who are not disconnected with the commercial fraternity. The government of India would for years, not open land banks to advance money to them at standard interest, on the grounds of the government being no money-lender, and also of the government of India being a poor hand-to-mouth concern. The same government (see *The Mining World and Engineering Record*, published Gresham House, London, issue of Saturday November 23rd 1918—p416 & p421) now advance a loan of £200,000 at five industries to India with its freedom from Labour Troubles. One would welcome this migration of Industries if this freedom from Labour Troubles was based on an intelligent and spontaneous contentment of the worker, well-housed, fully-clad, sufficiently fed, well educated and well looked after medically. But when this migration depends entirely on the factor of the powerful and resourceful ones easily taking advantage over worse simpletons than what they find at home, the conditions become a set-back to India and to the Empire, and a government of India Bill that further favours and strengthens such conditions must in the end prove a serious set-back.

(3) In free America, the farmer grows his cotton, and before parting with the product of his toil, secures to himself sufficient remuneration that would obtain him a well-appointed sanitary house, good rich food, ample furniture, ample clothing, medicine in illness, education for his children, and occasional luxuries of life, all with a consequent low death rate.

The Indian farmer for his toil, obtains none of the above when parting with the product of his labour. Similarly the grower of wheat, oilseed; rubber, tea, coffee, coconuts, etc., etc. The government of India Bill does nothing whatever to reform this condition, but does actually greatly assist the class of Indian and English merchants who are today sitting in

concert, to devise plans to secure two million additional bales of cotton, from the Indian farmers' labour with an absolute security of not having to pay him more than his present scandalously low remuneration.

(4) The authors of the government of India Bill point to the various measures secured from time to time by the happy and privileged classes—Indian and European—in India, always building up further rights through the representation secured at each stage. Labour, having no representation at all to build upon, the following is the movement of wage progress in India from 1875. Please note wages are monthly, and one Rupee may be considered average equivalent of 18 pence.

[The wages tables are not reproduced here].

The following was the reply to the above letter:

From Committee Office, House of Lords, August 18th 1919 addressed to Shapurji Saklatvala Esq., Workers' Welfare League of India etc., etc.

Sir,

Referring to your letter of the 22nd July, I have submitted your application to the Joint Committee upon the government of India Bill.

I am directed to say that the Committee have already arranged for the attendance of a representative witness on behalf of Indian Labour.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

Edward Vigors

Appendix B to Chapter 7: ‘The Call of the Third International’

‘The Call of the Third International’

The document reproduced below is undated, but it was clearly written some time before the annual conference of the ILP held in Glasgow in the summer of 1920.

Declaration of the Left Wing of the ILP.

Comrades—

We, the signatories to this letter, are of the opinion that we should not be doing our duty either to our fellow-members of the ILP or to the cause that we have at heart if, in this crisis in the history of the Socialist Movement in Britain, we did not come forward and, through such channels as are open to us, to state our case for the adherence of the Party to the Moscow International.

We have neither the machinery of our own, nor freedom to use the machinery of the Party for the purpose of replying to those—pre-eminently the elected representatives of the membership—who oppose adherence to the International Communist Movement. We do not complain that the National Administrative Council should give its advice to those to whom it is responsible and by whom it has been placed in charge of the administration, that the ILP should not affiliate with the Third International.

We are jealous for the maintenance of that reputation which the ILP acquired during the war for its steadfast opposition to the predatory politics of capitalism and its unswerving determination to recognise no truce with the enemies of the working class. During the war the ILP had no use for the opportunist tactics of pro-war socialists of the type of Arthur Henderson, Albert Thomas, or Emile Vandervelde, any more

than it had for the shuffling tactics of which Karl Kautsky was a prominent exponent.

Though not founded on a theoretical Marxism, yet as if by instinct, the ILP as a party held aloof from, and was hostile to those influences which have made of the Second International a dishonoured corpse that now pollutes the atmosphere of working-class politics.

Though not founded on a theoretical Marxism, yet as if by accompanying Militarism ranged the ILP alongside of the Italian, Serbian and Romanian socialists, and those socialist sections then supporting Liebknecht in Germany and Lenin and Trotsky in the Russian Movement.

Comrades, we have been and continue to be proud of our war record, and we fear the associations which we are now bidden to accept and to continue.

It was not to line up with the militarist socialists, and erstwhile members of National Ministries that our men and women faced the misunderstanding of their audiences, broke the ties of friendship and old associations, and, in hundreds of instances, elected to remain in gaol for years rather than obey the behests of their class enemies and oppressors.

Comrades, the ILP refused to take the 'safe and discreet' course during the war and scorned the dangers that lay in its path. After the struggles of the war years, are we to think rather of coming successes in elections and of the chances of office that may lie before us, or are we to continue to face the blast of unpopularity and the ridicule and contempt of those who cannot or will not strive to understand the true significance of Bolshevism?

Our leaders—may we say once more those whom we have instructed to serve us—oppose the very thought of sudden revolution. They point us to the more practical course of gradual reform. They wish—in an evident ignorance of our own nation's history—to achieve the ideal of the common ownership of the means of production and distribution (an end of most revolutionary and drastic character) by the mere use of so-called constitutional means, evolved for and by the advancement of capitalism, and by landlords and plutocrats who themselves did not always adhere

to them in the fundamental crises of British history.

They speak, write and act as if the attainment of socialism was to be but an incident in the 'ins' and 'outs' of parliamentary controversy.

They who have witnessed the shameless trickery of the last six years and of the secret diplomacy which preceded these years; who have put their pathetic trust in the broken reed of American democracy and in spite of the political experience of the past generation, besought a Liberal President of the United States, and an old-fashioned British aristocrat, who had formerly been a Tory War Minister and Foreign Secretary, to rescue the world from chaos; who have seen the League of Nations change from an idealist's vision to a bondholder's nightmare of blockade and intervention; who have before their eyes the pitiless murder of Central Europe by slow starvation of its helpless women and children; advise us to act and to organise as if the capitalists, when we knock upon the door, will be off and say no more. They advise us to think and act as if the propertied classes would acquiesce in their expropriation by parliamentary enactments.

We do not doubt that the capitalists will tolerate the existence and obey the enactments of a Labour government as it leaves them secure in the possession of land and capital, but we have no use for such a government. Willing the end, we hold that the ILP must will the means.

In this country the proletariat is an overwhelming majority. A bona fide Labour government may serve industrial organisations as well as the majority of the Public by what is known as the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Such a government need make no apology for the use even of the Army in the interests of the working classes, just as under capitalist control, the whole of the armed forces of the nation have been, in the past and are still at the present time, used for the suppression of spasmodic working-class revolts. Scottish comrades, in particular, will remember the invasion of Glasgow by tanks and troops in the early part of 1910 and the elaborate preparations made for the possible crushing, by armed force, of the railway strike of 1919 will be fresh in the minds of all of us. Sir Edward Carson's threatened military operations to keep under servile bondage the whole of Ireland, have silent lessons of their own. General Dyer's rough and ready methods adopted during what is

popularly known as the ‘massacre of Amritsar’ to bring into terror-stricken subjugation 300 millions of Indians for the benefit of a few thousand Imperial capitalist exploiters, is not a bad example of the Dictatorship of the imperialist.

The Moscow International not only does not reject but it emphatically endorses participation in parliamentary elections and entry into Parliament, for the purpose of propaganda by exposure and of depriving the capitalists of whatever obstructionist power there may be in the domination of that institution. Lenin, in his reply to Kautsky’s ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat’ explicitly states his views:

“Or take bourgeois parliaments. Is it to be supposed that learned Mr Kautsky has never heard of the fact that the more democracy is developed the more do the bourgeois parliaments fall under the control of the Stock Exchange and Bankers? This, of course, does not mean that bourgeois parliamentarism ought not to be made use of; the Bolsheviks, for instance, made, perhaps, more successful use of it than any party in the world, having in 1912-14 captured the entire Labour representation in the fourth Duma.”

Or let us take yet another definite example: Madam Clara Zetkin, the leading exponent of communism in Germany, and one of the founders of the Spartacus Group, is an active participant in the Parliament of Wurttemberg.

Whilst we are in favour of exploiting to the uttermost all the opportunities of constitutional procedure, we believe the working class will have no more use for Parliament under socialism than the revolutionary plutocracy had for the supreme organ of feudalism, the Privy Council. We believe that the whole structure of the state must be dismantled and a new social organisation evolved, through which all who render or have rendered useful social service may participate in the administration of communal life. We definitely reject the principle of occupancy of landed property—the basis of the present franchise—and to require the establishment of a labour right to participate in the administration of society.

We think that the Shop Stewards’ and Workers’ Committees set up on a basis of organisation of industry, including bodies catering for

professional and home workers, constitute the beginning of the new policy and we urge that it shall be the aim of the International Labour Party, by all means in its power, to further the development of labour unions on the above lines.

Such, Comrades, are the general principles and policy which we trust will command your support and, in any case, enlist your sympathetic consideration.

We are fully aware that, in adopting the only means at our disposal for bringing our views before our fellow-members of the ILP we shall, in all probability, be subjected to the kind of criticism which is usually levelled at those who introduce disturbing elements into the realms of official somnolence and complacency. This prospect does not in the least perturb us. We do, however, ask those who, after full consideration, find themselves in agreement with us, to strengthen our hands by sending a brief note to such effect, addressed to Comrade Mrs H. Ferguson, 4 Addison Way, Golders Green, London.

Even more important, however, than indicating your individual views in this way, is to get your Branch to make your voice and influence effective in the ranks of the Party by well-directed action at the forthcoming Annual Conference at Glasgow. This can be done by voting steadily and solidly for the resolution which declares for disaffiliation from the Second International and adherence to the Third International. This is the issue. Do not allow it to be side-tracked. Vote consistently against shelving motions in whatever guise they may be presented.

Even a decision in favour of affiliation with the Third International may be largely nullified if the carrying out of it is entrusted to a National Council either luke warm or even actively hostile to Moscow. However essential it is that such a resolution passed by Conference and the personnel of the National Council should be in harmony and not in hopeless antagonism, we have to bear in mind that the elections at the Conference take place on previously fixed nominations, and also that they are based on consideration of more than one question relating to the Party. In view of this, it would be necessary to work continually through your Branches to urge upon the NAC to carry out in spirit the wishes of the Branches in regard to our hearty co-operation with the

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Third International.

We are yours fraternally,

[There follow 159 names as signatories including that of Shapurji Saklatvala].

Appendix C to Chapter 7: The Terms of Comintern Membership

The Second Congress of the Communist International resolves that the following are the terms of Comintern membership:

1. Day-by-day propaganda and agitation must be genuinely communist in character. All press organs belonging to the parties must be edited by reliable Communists who have given proof of their devotion to the cause of the proletarian revolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat should not be discussed merely as a stock phrase to be learned by rote; it should be popularised in such a way that the practical facts systematically dealt with in our press day by day will drive home to every rank-and-file working man and working woman, every soldier and peasant, that it is indispensable to them. Third International supporters should use all media to which they have access—the press, public meetings, trade unions, and co-operative societies—to expose systematically and relentlessly, not only the bourgeoisie but also its accomplices—the reformists of every shade.

2. Any organisation that wishes to join the Communist International must consistently and systematically dismiss reformists and “Centrists” from positions of any responsibility in the working-class movement (party organisations, editorial boards, trade unions, parliamentary groups, co-operative societies, municipal councils, etc.), replacing them by reliable Communists. The fact that in some cases rank-and-file workers may at first have to replace “experienced” leaders should be no deterrent.

3. In countries where a state of siege or emergency legislation makes it impossible for Communists to conduct their activities legally, it is absolutely essential that legal and illegal work should be combined. In

almost all the countries of Europe and America, the class struggle is entering the phase of civil war. In these conditions, Communists can place no trust in bourgeois legality. They must everywhere build up a parallel illegal organisation, which, at the decisive moment, will be in a position to help the Party fulfil its duty to the revolution.

4. Persistent and systematic propaganda and agitation must be conducted in the armed forces, and Communist cells formed in every military unit. In the main Communists will have to do this work illegally; failure to engage in it would be tantamount to a betrayal of their revolutionary duty and incompatible with membership in the Third International.

5. Regular and systematic agitation is indispensable in the countryside. The working class cannot consolidate its victory without support from at least a section of the farm labourers and poor peasants, and without neutralising, through its policy, part of the rest of the rural population. In the present period communist activity in the countryside is of primary importance. It should be conducted, in the main, through revolutionary worker-Communists who have contacts with the rural areas. To forgo this work or entrust it to unreliable semi-reformist elements is tantamount to renouncing the proletarian revolution.

6. It is the duty of any party wishing to belong to the Third International to expose, not only avowed social-patriotism, but also the falsehood and hypocrisy of social-pacifism. It must systematically demonstrate to the workers that, without the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, no international arbitration courts, no talk about a reduction of armaments, no "democratic" reorganisation of the League of Nations will save mankind from new imperialist wars.

7. It is the duty of parties wishing to belong to the Communist International to recognise the need for a complete and absolute break with reformism and "Centrist" policy, and to conduct propaganda among the party membership for that break. Without this, a consistent communist policy is impossible.

The Communist International demands imperatively and uncompromisingly that this break be effected at the earliest possible date. It cannot tolerate a situation in which avowed reformists, such as

Turati, Modigliani and others, are entitled to consider themselves members of the Third International. Such a state of affairs would lead to the Third International strongly resembling the defunct Second International.

8. Parties in countries whose bourgeoisie possess colonies and oppress other nations must pursue a most well-defined and clear-cut policy in respect of colonies and oppressed nations. Any party wishing to join the Third International must ruthlessly expose the colonial machinations of the imperialists of its “own” country, must support—in deed, not merely in word—every colonial liberation movement, demand the expulsion of its compatriot imperialists from the colonies, inculcate in the hearts of the workers of its own country an attitude of true brotherhood with the working population of the colonies and the oppressed nations, and conduct systematic agitation among the armed forces against all oppression of the colonial peoples.

9. It is the duty of any party wishing to join the Communist International to conduct systematic and unflagging communist work in the trade unions, co-operative societies and other mass workers’ organisations. Communist cells should be formed in the trade unions, and, by their sustained and unflagging work, win the unions over to the communist cause. In every phase of their day-by-day activity these cells must unmask the treachery of the social-patriots and the vacillation of the “Centrists.” The cells must be completely subordinate to the party as a whole.

10. It is the duty of any party belonging to the Communist International to wage a determined struggle against the Amsterdam “International” of yellow trade unions. Its indefatigable propaganda should show the organised workers the need to break with the yellow Amsterdam International. It must give every support to the emerging international federation of Red trade unions which are associated with the Communist International.

11. It is the duty of parties wishing to join the Third International to re-examine the composition of their parliamentary groups, eliminate unreliable elements and effectively subordinate these groups to the Party Central Committees. They must demand that every Communist

proletarian should subordinate all his activities to the interests of truly revolutionary propaganda and agitation.

12. The periodical and non-periodical press, and all publishing enterprises, must likewise be fully subordinate to the Party Central Committee, whether the party as a whole is legal or illegal at the time. Publishing enterprises should not be allowed to abuse their autonomy and pursue any policies that are not in full accord with that of the Party.

13. Parties belonging to the Communist International must be organised on the principle of democratic centralism. In this period of acute civil war, the Communist parties can perform their duty only if they are organised in a most centralised manner, are marked by an iron discipline bordering on military discipline, and have strong and authoritative party centres invested with wide powers and enjoying the unanimous confidence of the membership.

14. Communist parties in countries where Communists can conduct their work legally must carry out periodic membership purges (re-registrations) with the aim of systematically ridding the party of petty-bourgeois elements that inevitably percolate into them.

15. It is the duty of any party wishing to join the Communist International selflessly to help any Soviet republic in its struggle against counter-revolutionary forces. Communist parties must conduct incessant propaganda urging the workers to refuse to transport war materials destined for the enemies of the Soviet republics; they must conduct legal or illegal propaganda in the armed forces dispatched to strangle the workers' republics, etc.

16. It is the duty of parties which have still kept their old Social-Democratic programmes to revise them as speedily as possible and draw up new communist programmes in conformity with the specific conditions in their respective countries, and in the spirit of (Communist International decisions. As a rule, the programmes of all parties belonging to the Communist International must be approved by a regular Congress of the Communist International or by its Executive Committee. In the event of the Executive Committee withholding approval, the party is entitled to appeal to the Congress of the Communist International.

17. All decisions of the Communist International's congresses and of its Executive Committee are binding on all affiliated parties. Operating in conditions of acute civil war, the Communist International must be far more centralised than the Second International was. It stands to reason, however, that in every aspect of their work the Communist International and its Executive Committee must take into account the diversity of conditions in which the respective parties have to fight and work, and adopt decisions binding on all parties only on matters in which such decisions are possible.

18. In view of the foregoing, parties wishing to join the Communist International must change their name. Any party seeking affiliation must call itself the Communist Party of the country in question (Section of the Third, Communist International). The question of a party's name is not merely a formality, but a matter of major political importance. The Communist International has declared a resolute war on the bourgeois world and all yellow Social-Democratic parties. The difference between the Communist parties and the old and official "Social-Democratic", or "socialist", parties, which have betrayed the banner of the working class, must be made absolutely clear to every rank-and-file worker.

19. After the conclusion of the proceedings of the Second World Congress of the Communist International, any party wishing to join the Communist International must at the earliest date convene an extraordinary congress for official acceptance of the above obligations on behalf of the entire party.

19. All Parties belonging to the Communist International and those which have applied for admission are obliged to convene an extraordinary congress as soon as possible and in any case not later than four months after the Second Congress of the Communist International to examine all these conditions of admission. In this connection all Party centres must see that the decisions of the Second Congress of the Communist International are made known to all local organisations.

20. Those Parties which now wish to join the Communist International, but which have not radically changed their former tactics, must see to it that before entering the Communist International not less than two-

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thirds of the members of their Central Committee and of all their leading central bodies consist of comrades who publicly and unambiguously advocated the entry of their Party into the Communist International before its Second Congress. Exceptions can be made with the consent of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. The Executive also has the right to make exceptions in the case of representatives of the centrist tendency mentioned in paragraph 7.

21. Those members of the party who object in principle to the conditions and Theses put forward by the Communist International are to be expelled from the Party. The same applies in particular to the delegates to the extraordinary congress.

CHAPTER 8

A Communist in Parliament

Selection as a parliamentary candidate for the Labour Party despite membership of the Communist Party. Election to parliament, 1922. The growing gulf between the Labour and Communist Parties. First speech in the House of Commons.

When the Executive Committee of the Labour Party met in the House of Commons on 18th October 1921, they had before them a list of fourteen prospective parliamentary candidates submitted by local Labour Parties for endorsement. It was “Resolved: That the candidatures be endorsed with the exception of Mr S. Saklatvala, and that this be deferred for an interview with the Secretary and the National Agent.” Subsequently the National Agent’s Report included the following:

“Battersea North

“The Secretary and the National Agent reported upon an interview they had had with the representatives of the Battersea Labour Party and Mr S. Saklatvala, who had been selected as the Candidate for the Constituency.

“Considerable discussion ensued as to Mr Saklatvala’s association with the Communist Party, his attack upon the policy of the Independent Labour Party in continuing its association with the Labour Party, and his attempt to form a secessionist ILP Group favourable to affiliation with the Third International.

“It was reported that Mr Saklatvala, in accepting the candidature for Battersea North, has indicated his acceptance of the Labour Party Constitution, with its usual implications.

“Resolved: That the candidature of Mr S. Saklatvala for Battersea North be sanctioned on condition that he accepts the Constitution of the Party, agrees to receive the Labour Whips if returned to Parliament, and to abide by the decisions of the parliamentary Party.”

It is somewhat surprising that the Executive Committee of the Labour Party

should have endorsed Saklatvala's candidature in view of his self proclaimed and publicly acclaimed adherence to the Third International and his close links with the Communist Party of Great Britain. It is true that his selection by the Battersea Trades Council and the local Labour Party (who, at that time and until 1926, were working in unison), had been numerically overwhelming and enthusiastic, and that by this time there was no doubt as to his popularity in the working class movement and socialist circles in general. Nonetheless, their acceptance of him was surprising; especially as, so far as I can ascertain, he was the only openly avowed member of the Communist Party to be adopted as a Labour candidate at that time. This is confirmed by the extract from the Report of the Executive Committee of the Labour Party at the annual conference held in Edinburgh in June 1922, included as [Appendix A to this chapter](#).

So in this, as in so much else, Father became a 'special' or 'isolated' case; there he was, representing the Labour Party while being an openly, self-advertised member of the Communist Party; he was working for and with the working class (and enjoyed their affection and esteem) while certainly not being born into that class himself; he was working among United Kingdom political activists whereas he himself was Indian and did not come to the UK until he was thirty-one; and he fought vigorously and endlessly for India to be set free from strangling imperialism, while not following the popular Congress Party in India and the Gandhian theory of non-violence and the symbolic hand-spinning routine advocated by Gandhi. He seems never to have floated on the tide but was always swimming against the prevailing currents. Strange then that he should have been able to embrace communism almost without question. (He once said to a friend that he did not allow the least criticism of what went on in Soviet Russia, as that would be for him like a sin against the Holy Ghost!)

In order to understand why the Labour Party went to such pains in considering the candidacy of Saklatvala and other members of the Communist Party, it is necessary to understand the complicated and confusing relationship between the Labour and Communist parties.

In March 1917 the revolution in Russia was greeted with optimistic rhetoric by David Lloyd George, who set down the following Resolution in the House of Commons: "That this House sends to the Duma its fraternal greetings and

tenders to the Russian people its heartiest congratulations upon the establishment among them of free institutions in full confidence that they will lead not only to the rapid and happy progress of the Russian nation but to the prosecution with renewed steadfastness and vigour of the war against the stronghold of an autocratic militarism which threatens the liberty of Europe.”

The Observer proclaimed:

“The triumph won by the Duma and the Army together for freedom and modern government is one of the greatest and best things of time. The breath of a new morning is felt not only by Russia but by all mankind.” The Nation (a left-wing, Liberal organ edited by a one-time Fabian, H.W. Massingham) wrote; “The greatest tyranny in the world has fallen. The glorious news of the Russian revolution will send a thrill of joy through democratic Europe. Liberalism has won its first great victory on the moral battleground where all along the true conflict was going on. Association with the Tzar was a curse and an incubus. Alliance with the Russian people is a glory.” (These were strong words when one considers that the Tzar was a cousin of our own King).

The Manchester Guardian was equally enthusiastic; it wrote:

“Revolution has before now proved a great mother of efficiency, and there is no finer dynamic force than a passion for freedom. England hails the new Russia with a higher hope and a surer confidence in the future not only of this war but of the world.”

However, subsequent events in Russia dampened this first flush of euphoria, and admiration gave way to fear that the introduction of socialism and communism might be threatening to spread from Russia to Germany and other countries in Europe. press and politicians alike became more wary, if not actually apprehensive.

From its inception in 1920 the Communist Party of Great Britain had sought affiliation to the Labour Party. Their repeated applications were constantly rejected with a growing firmness, clarity and resolution.

In order to understand the gulf between the two parties, it is helpful to study the ‘Explanatory Notes on the Second International versus the Third International, the Soviets, and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat’ (published in England and, alas, undated, although the Third International was established at a conference of 33 delegates from 29 countries meeting in

Moscow on the 29th March 1919; it is reasonable to assume, therefore, that this document was produced shortly after that date). This document is included as [Appendix B to this chapter](#). I have quoted it at length (I trust not at tedious length!) because, together with the ‘Manifesto of the Moscow International,’ it forms the basis of the Communist creed which Saklatvala whole-heartedly embraced and was to follow for the rest of his life.

In a list of ‘Tentative Proposals Providing for Transformation into the Communist Party’, the twelfth proposal is that “the Provisional Executive to make immediate application for affiliation to the Third International as the Communist Party of Great Britain.” It was this affiliated party that Saklatvala ultimately joined in the spring of 1921.

Doubtless it was a great relief and excitement to have his candidature endorsed but he had to wait until November 15th 1922 for the General Election. The Coalition government, under the Premiership of Lloyd George, was to continue for a few months longer, but there were troubles brewing for them: unemployment was increasing, housing for the poor was inadequate and the ‘land fit for heroes to live in’ was falling far short of expectations. It is not easy to maintain the demeanour of a hero when you are underfed, poorly clad, are without a home and, perhaps hardest of all, without hope of getting work, discarded by the community for whom you had so lately fought during the war.

Meanwhile, Saklatvala continued to address meetings up and down the country, by now spreading the gospel of communism instead of that of the Independent Labour Party, as hitherto. In one of the letters addressed to my brother in 1937, an ILP organiser described a typical weekend of Father’s, recalling that he would address a conference of workers in the iron and steel industry, speaking for anything up to two hours, in Middlesborough on the Saturday, then on the Sunday he would address meetings in different villages in the morning and in the afternoon; he was more at home, he said, when he was speaking in a ring of people rather than from the wagon and he would often talk to them in the open air for a couple of hours. He stayed in the home of the writer of the letter, who says that on the Sunday evening he would talk to him and his family, describing the terrible conditions of the workers in India; then, in the small hours of Monday morning he would leave for the station to catch a train to London in time to go to his office that morning. (I

still recollect sharing some of those weekend jaunts with him when I was roused at what seemed to be the middle of the night to make the long train journey home.

All of us children had curly hair which solicited admiration from strangers; Father dreaded that we should become vain or conscious of our appearance, so dressing me even in the small hours of the morning he tugged and tortured my hair, scraping it into a tight pony-tail to make it unbecoming! A most painful and tear-jerking process which I remember vividly). It was a gruelling schedule and one he maintained week after week in different parts of the country, virtually throughout his life. Arthur Field, his fellow worker in the Workers' Welfare League of India, writing in 1937 of this period, says: "From 1922 Sak became an even more active and unsparing propagandist, now died deepest red, and publicly represented as ten shades deeper than that..." Herbert Bryan, writing of this period, says that the Communist Party got an active lecturer and propagandist because Sak became even more lavish of effort in that Party than in the ILP.

The few weeks immediately preceding and leading up to the General Election were politically tempestuous. The Allies, after the War, had redesigned states and frontiers and this division of the spoils of war led to international tensions. In late 1922 the situation in the Near East reached crisis point and some of the newspapers of the day, when the crisis was, up to a point, resolved, said we had been on the brink of another war. Added to the international turmoil, unemployment at home had reached 1,300,000 (little more than one third of the figure reached in the 70s and 80s by the Thatcher Tories, but considered unacceptable in 1922).

David Lloyd George was losing the adulation he had previously enjoyed. It was said that the coalition remained in little more than name and that the heart of the Unionists was no longer in it. Austen Chamberlain made a dramatic dash to Paris and hammered out an agreement with Poincarre; he had difficulty in persuading the Cabinet to accept the terms, but in the end they did and the immediacy was taken out of the Near Eastern perils.

Andrew Bonar Law, whose popularity within the Unionist Party was increasing faster than Lloyd George's was waning, had written an important letter to the Times, which was said to be 'of such a character that might well oblige him to assume a position of political leadership.'

At last, at 4.15 on 19th October 1922, Lloyd George resigned. King George asked Bonar Law to form a government; after he had been elected as Leader of the Unionist Party, he agreed and a new Cabinet was formed.

Parliament was dissolved by proclamation on 26th October 1922 and the date of the General Election was fixed for 15th November. Father's election leaflet lists the committee rooms and details of meetings to be held in the ward and shows a portrait of him with a typical good-natured hint of a smile, looking surprisingly benevolent and tranquil and serene for a reputed revolutionary!

On the opposite page, under the headline 'Labour's United Front' the following claims were made: "The only Party in Great Britain that is solid, and stands solidly by the Workers, nationally and internationally. North Battersea's Candidate has support of all sections." And under that the following legends appeared:

"Mr Saklatvala has for years worked hard in the peoples' cause, and is intensely in earnest in the service he has undertaken. In Parliament he would not only be an able and devoted servant of the workers of this country, but his special knowledge of the economic conditions of millions of our fellow subjects in India would compel attention to the neglected conditions of workers in that part of the Empire. J.R. Clynes, Chairman parliamentary Labour Party.

"Dear Comrade Saklatvala, The Executive Committee of the London Trades Council endorse your candidature for North Battersea, and hope that the Trade Unionists in North Battersea will work and vote for your return to Parliament on November 15th. Your election by Battersea workers to the House of Commons would be a message of hope and encouragement to the awakening masses of our fellow workers in the East. D. Carmichael, Secretary, London Trades Council.

"I appeal to you—to Labour, which I have always honoured, to women—women workers and mothers, who are the greatest workers of all, I appeal to my Irish fellow-countrymen and women in North Battersea—support the Party and support the man, Saklatvala, that will be on your side in the great struggle which is bound to come. Saklatvala spoke for us, as a fraternal delegate, in the last Irish Labour Congress, and his courage, wisdom and determination impressed us all. C. Despard, Battersea's late Candidate.

“Dear Saklatvala, The forces of reaction are making a strong bid for supremacy, and only the return of the boldest defenders of the working-class can prevent this. Your activities in the movement in the past should more than justify that faith in you, which will secure your return to Westminster. I see the workers in Battersea are rallying solidly to your support, and I hope you are victoriously elected as their member of Parliament. Arthur Mcmanus, Communist Party.

“Dear Mr Saklatvala, Permit me to wish you every success in your great fight on behalf of the workers. The great and supreme need of the time is a ‘Real Peace’, and I earnestly appeal to the Christian men and women of your constituency to give you their wholehearted support, and I use the word Christian in no narrow theological sense. Rev Herbert Dunnico, International Christian Peace Fellowship.

“Dear Saklatvala, Battersea must be won for Labour. I wish you all the success in the world in your fight. Clifford Allen, Treasurer ILP.

“Dear Saklatvala, I wish our other Indian friends had your foresight to see the unity of interest between Labour in India and Labour in Britain. I wish you every success in your candidature in North Battersea. K, S. Bhat, Chairman, Workers’ Welfare League of India.

“I urge the workers and the unemployed of Battersea to declare war against Poverty and Starvation in the midst of plenty by supporting Saklatvala. Wal Hannington, National Organiser, National Unemployed Workers’ Committee Movement.

“Resolution passed at the First All India Trade Union Congress, held in Bombay on October 31st, November 1st and 2nd 1920: ‘That this Congress places on record its grateful acknowledgement of the work done by the Indian Workers’ Welfare League of London, and by Mr Sh. Saklatvala on behalf of the Workers of India...’

“The Second Indian Congress passed this further Resolution: ‘That this Congress requests the Workers’ Welfare League of India to ascertain how the state of unemployment of British workers can be speedily remedied by prompt co-operation between workers in India and those of Great Britain and Ireland.’”

A friend of mine always used the expression, ‘He lies like an epitaph,’ to describe a liar and I have no doubt that there are those who may feel that

election addresses run epitaphs a close second in the area of lying flattery. But, on the whole, the claims made on Father's behalf seem to have been pretty accurate and truthful. (Appendix C to this chapter contains more of Saklatvala's election material).

There were three contestants for the North Battersea seat, H.C. Hogbin, who was standing as a National Liberal, V.C. Albu, Independent Labour, and Father, standing as the official Labour Party candidate. On November 8th, The Daily Chronicle wrote that: "Battersea, always a storm centre of politics, will be watched during the next seven days with close interest in constituencies far removed from its own borders." The paper described Mr Hogbin as a National Liberal, supported by the Conservative organisation 'North Battersea Constitutional Association'. The Chronicle went on to say:

"Mr Saklatvala is a Communist, a supporter of the Third International and a sympathiser with the Russian revolution. To do him justice, he makes no secret of these leanings, but rather glories in them. Mr Saklatvala, one would think, will prove too strong even for the Labour element in Battersea."

But this prognosis published by the Chronicle proved wrong, and, on 15th November 1922, the following results were proclaimed from the balcony of the Town Hall to the excited crowds seething in the street below, despite the raw cold of a mid-November night:

Mr Saklatvala: 11,311

Mr Hogbin: 9,290

Mr Albu: 1,756



Clipping: The Times, 16th November 1922

There was jubilation and jollification amid the throngs of people in the streets of Battersea that night. Apart from the faith in the politics that Father stood for, there was also no doubt a great personal affection for him as a man and great warmth of feeling for him.

In the light of present attitudes, it is good to recall that the fact that Father was an Indian did nothing to diminish the real love that thousands of Londoners felt for him personally. He never stressed his nationality nor did he hide it. For the most part, he ignored it, behaving, as he wished all people to behave, as a human being, a creature of the universe, without constant reference to the place where he happened to have been born. And he was accepted, respected and loved for his personal attributes.

An article in Number 19 of 'The Communist' stressed the international character of Saklatvala thus:

“Comrade Saklatvala, not only combines in his person the aspirations of Labour and communism, but by virtue of his kinship, the hopes of the toiling millions of India; Saklatvala personifies the internationalism of the great proletarian battle for emancipation.”

Indeed, it could have been embarrassing if, after all the brouhaha surrounding the endorsement of his candidature he had failed to win the seat for Labour. But he proved, after all, to be a good choice for the Labour Party. And five days later, on 20th November 1922, he was sworn in and took his seat as a member of the 32nd Parliament of the United Kingdom and Ireland. The General Election had proved a triumph for Labour, which now had 142 seats in the House, virtually doubling their representation in the new Parliament. They were a jubilant and confident opposition during those climatically and politically gray days of November. (Poor Arthur Henderson, who was instrumental in rejecting many prospective candidates who were members of the Communist Party, himself became a victim of the electorate and lost his seat).

Mr. Shapurji Saklatvala, the Indian returned as Labour member for North Battersea, is the third Indian who has entered the House of Commons. His predecessors were the late Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji, who won Central Finsbury in the Gladstonian interest at the 1892 election by a bare majority of three, and Sir M. M. Bhowagree, who won North-East Bethnal Green for the Conservatives. The only Indian who has sat in the House of Lords is Lord Sinha.

Clipping: The Times, 18th November 1922

It may be of passing interest to quote here a letter from a journalist, Mrs Margarita Barns, written to Beram in 1937:

“My first meeting with your father was during the 1922 General Election when he came over from his own constituency to assist Bertrand Russell in Chelsea. I am mentioning this because the latter may have some interesting light to throw; a greater contrast than these two speakers can hardly be imagined—Bertrand Russell, quiet and conversational; Shapurji Saklatvala, dynamic, rousing the meeting to an intense pitch of excitement. Your mother was generally present at these meetings and she will recollect them.”

It is disappointing that there is no indication that Beram acted on her suggestion of getting in touch with Bertrand Russell, so his opinion of Father, alas, goes unrecorded. But it is also clear from Mrs Barns’s letter that Mother accompanied him on his electioneering campaign.

In The Communist of 25th November, Saklatvala wrote:

“If ever an election fight was a series of pitched battles it was at North Battersea. Yet they were all bloodless battles full of good cheer, and though a serious fight, it was at the same time a sing-song fight all the way. The great plank in the opponent’s fight was to be the Labour Candidate’s membership of the Communist Party.

“But this plank never even once balanced itself on 2 firm ends. More loudly, more emphatically, and more repeatedly did the candidate himself declare and fully explain his Communism than the adversaries had the ability to do. What assisted the Labour candidate most was the very genuineness of his Communist principles; as, in a truly proletarian spirit, he got by his side members of all sections of the Labour movement in Battersea to stand solid as a rock.

“The comrades of the ILP, comrades of Battersea Labour League, comrades of Trades Unions and Labour Party wards and the Irish without one woman or one man in the active Labour ranks making an exception. All of them laughed at the scare-cry against their candidate being a Communist and all of them seemed to trust him and work more enthusiastically for him on account of the candidate’s openness in

adhering to his political principles.

“It was a substantial proof that genuine Communist candidates are bound to enthrone the Labour and working-class voters and electors in a higher degree than by any policy of timidity or half-heartedness.”

The 1922 Conservative government had as Prime Minister Andrew Bonar Law; Stanley Baldwin was Chancellor of the Exchequer, W.C. Bridgeman was Secretary of State for Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs were in the aristocratic hands of Viscount Curzon, who was also Leader of the House of Lords. The Secretary of State for India was Viscount Peel, but the man who was to loom large in Saklatvala's Indian interests was the Under-Secretary of State for India, Viscount Winterton, and there were to be many exchanges between them.

[Editor's note: The 1922 General Election was the first in which votes for, and seats won by, the Labour Party exceeded those for both Liberal parties]

There was also one Communist member, J. Walton Newbold.

On November 25th, the official newspaper of the Communist Party wrote the following, under the heading 'The Communist MPs:'

“In the name of the whole Party, the Executive Committee greets the new Communist faction in Parliament, Comrades Newbold and Saklatvala. They have a lonely fight to fight at present, but even one good fighter can be enough to expose the workings of the system and to show up the intrigues of the government...”

Clearly, the party was treating Father as another communist member and was ignoring the fact that he had been elected as a Labour candidate.

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Photo: Shapurji Saklatvala and J. Walter Newbold

Appendix A to Chapter 8: Report to the Labour Party Conference, 1922

Report of the Executive Committee of the Labour Party, Edinburgh, June 1922

...On January 15th Comrade Gallacher, of the Communist Party, addressed a meeting in Edinburgh. At that meeting, speaking in regard to the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party, he made the statement that Mr Saklatvala, a member of the Communist Party, had been endorsed as candidate for Battersea, and in reply to a question Comrade Gallacher said that he had been endorsed on the same terms as any other candidate but subject to the mandate of the Communist Party.

The local Secretary thought that was rather strange, and in view of the fact that they were likely to have a Communist member put forward as a nominee, it was determined to write to Mr Henderson setting forth the details and telling him that they were likely to be confronted in Leith with having a member of the Communist Party nominated. (Mr McQuater here read the letter which had been written to Mr Henderson and Mr Henderson's reply).

Continuing, he said that on receipt of the communication they went to a conference feeling sure that everything was perfectly in order. Then they had the bombshell thrown at them that, despite the fact that they had a statement in writing from Mr Arthur Henderson that a member of the Communist Party could be a Labour Party candidate, when they received the nomination of Mr Foulis, they were informed that Comrade Foulis could not be accepted. Mr Ben Shaw (the Scottish Secretary), speaking on behalf of Mr Wake (the National Agent of the Party) said that the nomination of Mr Foulis was not in order.

They in Leith pointed out that Mr Henderson was the National

Secretary and that they had it on his authority that a Communist could be a Labour Party candidate provided he was prepared to accept the Constitution and the principles of the Labour Party. They then wrote to Mr Henderson and pointed out that Mr Foulis, a member of the Communist Party, had been nominated. Mr Henderson, however, did not reply to this letter, but turned it over to Mr Wake, and Mr Wake said that Mr Foulis could not be accepted because he was a member of the Communist Party.

They then wrote back again to Mr Henderson and pointed out the position which they themselves had created in Battersea, and said that if it had been done in Battersea it could surely be done in Leith. They were told, however, that Battersea must not be taken as a precedent. They thought that that was rather curious, because if Mr Saklatvala had been an unknown person, who had slipped through without it being noticed, they would have thought probably the Executive had made a mistake and that they did not know he was a member of the Communist Party when they endorsed his candidature.

It had taken six months to get through this business. It was evident that the only thing against Mr Foulis was his membership of the Communist Party and for that reason alone he was turned down by the Scottish Executive, and the National Executive hid behind the decision of the Scottish Executive. He wished to know from Mr Henderson what was asked of Mr Saklatvala. To this day, neither Mr Henderson nor Mr Wake had answered that question. They had to go to the Battersea Labour Party for the information, and they were told there that nothing had been asked from them except what was stated in Mr Henderson's first letter. He wanted to draw attention to the treatment meted out to them in Leith as against the treatment meted out to the Labour Party in Battersea.

Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson, MP, in reply said that Mr McQuater had just told them that it had taken six months to reach a certain stage in the negotiations with regard to this candidature. He could assure the Conference it had been a fairly long six months so far as they at Head Office were concerned. There was a long and difficult history connected with this business. They had done their best to satisfy the friend who

had just spoken and those acting with him, but they found it absolutely impossible. After all, they had got to keep in mind that in Scotland the question of candidatures went, in the first instance, to the Scottish Council.

This question came up at the Scottish Council and the Scottish Council refused to endorse the candidature. The matter was then referred to the Head Office, and a good deal of correspondence had taken place. In the latter stages of the correspondence the Leith friends fastened very severely on to the endorsement the Executive had given to Comrade Saklatvala as a candidate for one of the Battersea constituencies. Their friend seemed to think that Mr Saklatvala was endorsed because he occupied some prominent position in connection with the Communist movement. He could assure them he was entirely mistaken, and he was going to give them the reasons why Saklatvala was endorsed.

Mr Henderson then read a communication of December 12th 1921, to Mr Coltman, the Secretary of the Battersea Party, setting out the terms on which the Executive had agreed to endorse the candidature of Mr Saklatvala for Battersea North, stating that the candidate should appear before the constituency with the designation of 'Labour Candidate' only, independent of all other political parties, and if elected should join the parliamentary Labour Party; that at the General Election he should, in his election address and in his campaign give prominence to the issues as defined by the National Executive from the general Party programme; that if elected he should act in harmony with the Constitution and Standing Orders of the Party.

On March 3rd 1922 a letter was received from Mr Coltman, addressed to Mr Wake, stating that he had called a Special Meeting of the Executive Committee of Battersea North, at which Mr Saklatvala was present, and that the following resolution had been unanimously passed: 'That this Special Meeting of the Executive Committee of Battersea Trades Council and Labour Party accepts the endorsement of the candidature of Mr Saklatvala for Battersea North on the conditions laid down in the communication from the Labour Party dated December 12th 1921,' and that Mr Saklatvala, who was present at the Committee, reaffirmed his adhesion to the conditions laid down in the above-mentioned

communication and that a copy of this letter had been sent to Mr Saklatvala, who would no doubt reply in due course.

Mr Henderson said the delegates would now see the position that the Executive took up with regard to the Saklatvala candidature. If there was anything wrong with that candidature, in his judgement it was not from the standpoint of the Labour Party but from the standpoint of the Communist Party. Mr Saklatvala who was a delegate sitting in that Conference, knew full well that he was in exactly the same position as one of their candidates as any of the 73 members of the House of Commons, or any of the 400 candidates whom the Executive had endorsed.

The Scottish people had not got the other people up to that position, and he hoped that until they did their candidate would not be endorsed, as it would be a most unfortunate thing for the Party if they were not going to make all their candidates accept the same conditions, no matter by which constituency they were nominated.

A Delegate asked whether it was not a fact that Mr Foulis had definitely refused to sign the undertaking of the Labour Party

Mr Henderson replied that that was so, and that was why he said he hoped they would all be made to toe the same line.

Another Delegate asked whether it was a fact that there were other candidates who were members of the Communist Party whose candidatures had been endorsed by the Executive.

Mr Henderson said there was not one to his knowledge, and they would see that the Executive had exercised a great deal of care before it endorsed the candidature at North Battersea.”

(Later on W. Windsor and J. Vaughan, both communists, were endorsed as Labour candidates for Bethnal Green, North-East and South-West respectively; neither of them won a seat in parliament).

Appendix B to Chapter 8:

‘Explanatory Notes on the Third International’

‘Explanatory Notes on the Second International versus the Third International, the Soviets, and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat’

The Second International cannot be called a Socialist International, as is proved both by its composition and the decisions it came to at its recent meetings in Berne in January - February 1919 and in Amsterdam in April 1919.

The Second International adheres to the ‘Social Patriotic’ Parties which supported their capitalist governments during the war. These include the British Labour Party; the Belgian Socialist Party, which even after the war, is taking part in a new capitalist coalition formed since the armistice; and the Social-Democratic Party of Scheidemann and Noske in Germany, which in upholding the capitalist system, threatened by the first revolution, even abetted the murder of Rosa Luxembour, Karl Leibknecht, Leo Yogehe and large numbers of other devoted socialists.

The Italian, Swiss, Serbian and Romanian socialist Parties refused to take part in the Conference of the Second International at Berne, and the Norwegian socialist Party, as also the German Independent socialists opposed to the Noske-Scheidemann Party, have now seceded from the same.

The Second International fails to recognise the conflict of class interests created by the capitalist system, takes up a reformist, instead of a socialist programme, and therefore it decided for:

(1) The League of Nations

Because of its failure to recognise the working class struggle, the Second

International proposed to give to the League of Nations the power to rectify frontiers at any time and to control the production and distribution of food-stuffs and raw materials throughout the world. Such powers in the hands of a capitalist League of Nations, whether composed of representatives of governments, or of capitalist majorities in Parliament, would be used, as was done against the Workers' Revolution in Russia, in every other country where their interest was at stake.

(2) Free Trade and the 'open door' in the colonies.

The exploitation and practical enslavement of the colonial natives notwithstanding!

(3) The Recommendation of: The establishment of an International Labour Charter by the League of Nations.

They placed the framing of a Labour Charter in the hands of a League in which employers predominate, and made a recommendation in line with that which created the National Alliance of Employers and Employed.

Russia:

On Russia three resolutions were before the Second International at Berne. One of these by the French Communist, Loriot, upholding the Bolsheviks, received no support. Even the mild resolution declaring that the Conference had not sufficient material to judge of the state of affairs in Russia, found favour with a very small minority only. The resolution adopted by the majority, and supported by the British section, declared:

(4) Against the Soviets.

(5) Against the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

(6) Against socialism, with control of industry by the workers in it.

(7) For bourgeois democracy, including Parliament, with a government responsible to it, and freedom of speech, press and assembly.

(8) For nationalisation of industry 'under the control of the democracy,' apparently through Parliament, like the Post Office.

Labour Legislation:

(9) The Berne Conference adopted a long reformist programme, which it called a Labour Charter, and which included the following

commonplace provisions:

Compulsory primary education, free higher education.

Children under 15 years not to be employed in industry.

Eight hour working day, six hours for children between 15 and 18 years.

Wages Boards representing employers and employed to fix wages for home industries.

A legal minimum to be fixed in sweated industries by Wages Boards, equally representing employers and employed.

Unemployment to be reduced by linking up the Labour Exchanges, and by unemployment insurance in each country.

A permanent Commission, consisting of an equal number of the governments, which are members of the League of Nations, and of the International Trades Union Federation.

This Labour Charter, drawn up by the pseudo-socialist Conference of the Second International, formed the basis of the Labour Charter afterwards adopted by the capitalist League of Nations.

The Permanent Commission of the Second International Meeting in Amsterdam in April 1919 issued further declarations:

(10) It made a point of demanding self-determination for Georgia, Estonia and the Ukraine, at a time when the revolutionary workers of those states fighting to unite with Soviet Russia, were being forcibly suppressed, and their capitalists were making war on Soviet Russia, which granted the independence of those states.

(11) It said that it 'welcomes the introduction into the Covenant of the League of Nations of the idea that peoples unable to stand on their own feet shall be placed as wards, under the protecting care of the advanced states.'

How blind is the Second International regarding the 'protecting care' of capitalistic governments! Peoples of Ireland, India, Egypt, Persia, all 'unable to stand on their own feet!'

(12) It declared that 'the economic opportunities of colonies should be open to all nations equally.'

It said nothing about the rights of the real and natural owners of colonial lands!

(13) It demanded that Germany should make reparation for the war losses of the Allies as required by the Wilson programme, characterising this as 'both necessary and just.'

(14) It demanded open diplomacy as employed by President Wilson with regard to the differences between Italy and the Yugoslavs. It said this method guarantees that the claims of the different nations shall be settled strictly on the justice of each case and in the only way calculated to assist the permanency of a world peace.

In that sentence is summed up the Second International's disregard of the realities of capitalist diplomacy and Imperialism, and of the fact that under capitalism, international disputes are settled according to the strength of the contending parties.

(15) It declared that it was 'determined to oppose any peace which is in contradiction to President Wilson's 14 points, as those form the only basis which will ensure an enduring harmony between all peaceful and free democracies.'

Thus the Second International takes its stand with bourgeois politicians, and asks only for mild reforms within the capitalist system.

The Third International:

The Third International was inaugurated in Moscow in response to the call of the Russian Communists. To it the Italian socialist Party, as well as Communist Parties in France, Germany, Austria, Holland, America, China, Japan and other countries affiliated,

The Third International stands for:

1. The overthrow of capitalism and the substitution of socialism.
2. The abolition of the present parliamentary and Local government system and the substitution of Soviets, which are composed of delegates from the workers in industry and on the land, from the Army and navy, from villages and hamlets where the population is too sparse to be represented occupationally, and from women not employed in industry; the delegates to be always subject to recall by, and to receive instructions from, and report to those who elect them.
3. The dictatorship of the workers during the stage of transition from

capitalism into communism. This means that only the persons engaged in productive work, who do not employ others for private gain, may vote or be elected or possess political power. This certainly does not disqualify any honest able-bodied person that does not wish to shirk work. This dictatorship is necessary to prevent the capitalists from re-establishing capitalism, and from committing sabotage against the communist society. The dictatorship will last until capitalism is extinct and the ex-capitalists have settled down to work in the communist community.

4. The socialisation and workers' control of the land and the industries. This means that the land and the industries will become the property of the nation as a whole, and that they will be administered by committees of the people engaged in working in them.

5. Every member of the community doing useful work for the community is entitled to assured sustenance, whether well or ill, old or young, in accordance with the general standard of living. Thus, in Soviet Russia, though complete communism is not yet achieved, the people are moving towards equality of remuneration, and everyone is assured of the usual wages during illness or in old age.

6. Everything to be free to the children. Education is free to all, and there is maintenance for students; the age for leaving school in 1920 was fixed at 20 years of age; though it may be that war conditions have caused the postponement of this decree.

7. Self determination of peoples by a referendum vote of all the men and women over 18 years of age in disputed territories.

8. Disarmament of the bourgeoisie in all countries, and arming of the workers to protect the socialist communities from capitalist attacks until capitalism has disappeared, when armaments will no longer be necessary.

9. Abolition of all racial distinctions. Whoever goes to live and work in Soviet Russia becomes a citizen of the Soviet state with full citizen rights without regard to his or her original nationality, race or creed.

10. A world federation of communist republics.

11. The Third International, recognising the capitalist nature of the War,

voiced the demand that it should be ended on the basis of no annexations, no indemnities, the right of the peoples to decide their own destinies.

The Third International recognises the class war. It calls: 'Workers of all countries unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains.' The Third International struggles directly for socialism.

The Second International advises the workers to make the best of capitalism and to form councils of employers and employed.

The Soviets:

A good deal of unnecessary doubt is created in the public mind regarding Soviets and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat by persons who desire to continue as 'socialists' but who dare not be advocates of true and bona-fide socialism that refuses to shake hands with capitalism.

First a good deal of capital is made out of the fact of the word Soviet being a foreign word in all countries except in Russia. Once upon a time the French word 'Parliament' must have equally shocked the forefathers of the Anglo-Saxons of Britain, who ultimately adopted it as being the most convenient one word that expressed a series of new ideas. Translate the word as you may in different languages, but the purpose is obvious that it is desired to express by this one word a new chain of thoughts showing the marked and fundamental differences between the new socialist organisation and the old parliamentary systems, viz.:

1. A genuine representation of all groups of people.
2. A full and continuous control over the representatives by the electors, by the right of recall.
3. Full local autonomy of the people to appoint or dismiss their own officers from their own ranks.
4. An unrestricted franchise to all honest workers of adult age (or those physically unable to work) without sex or economic or social disabilities as in British Parliament, or colour, race and creed bar, as observed in America and British South Africa.

It is obvious that those who use the short term 'Soviet' as against 'Parliament' desire to express in one word these fundamental and several other principles whose superiority over existing systems cannot

be denied. Every country and people may adopt a different word for expressing the same idea, but before this is done, the word Soviet is the most convenient to use, and best understood internationally.

To argue that what is good for Russia is not good for Britain, and what is good for Britain is not good for China, is the very negation of international socialism which seeks a new international mode of life to replace capitalism which, in its essentials, is uniform and universal in all countries of the world.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat:

These words can also be moulded into a number of misinterpretations. The fundamental and political social changes in British life, e.g., the Reformation, the Civil War, The Glorious Revolution, the struggle for parliamentary Reform, Chartism, the memorable Peterloo and the rise of the Unions, all give historical proof of what was done in these Isles during periods of transition from the existing to a new state of affairs. No settled human society lives without a final arbitrament.

We have dictatorship in the United Kingdom at every turn of life. The real issue is, shall it be a dictatorship of the minority over the vast masses, or shall it be the dictatorship of the wish of the masses over those who desire to disagree and overturn the plans of the masses. We have examples of both kinds in daily life in Great Britain. Every public meeting is under its chairman, who in his turn is under the dictatorship of the meeting in certain matters. Grown-up patients in a hospital are as much under the restrictive orders of the staff as children in a school or inmates of a prison.

The masses here recognise generally the value of primary education, and the proletariat fines, punishes and compels the parents in minority who do not believe in universal education. Similarly we have penalties for persons driving on the wrong side of the road, or spitting in public places, and disagreeing minorities are not at liberty to 'exercise freedom' in matters which the proletariat consider to be of communistic advantage. In our entire economic and political life we are absolutely under the Dictatorship of a powerful minority.

During the transition period when: a) the supreme power is to be passed out of the hands of a privileged minority and handed over to the masses;

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and b) when the poor down-trodden masses, accustomed to life-long bondage and hereditary submission are to be called upon to remain self assertive and undiminished in the new ideology, it becomes evident to the thinking mind that the super-imposed as well as the self-imposed dictatorship of the proletariat over the selfish opponents as well as over the diffident and relapsing proletariat themselves would be needed.

The raising of the marriage age in India by the almost common consent of the people, or America going dry by the vote of the majority does not denote that enforcement of these principles will no longer be needed. The hue and cry against the dictatorship of the Proletariat in new socialist states is at best futile, and at worst, malicious.

Appendix C to Chapter 8: Saklatvala's Election Addresses of 1922

Saklatvala's General Election addresses of 1922

North Battersea Division.

Vote for Saklatvala the Labour Candidate.

Polling Day Wednesday November 15th 8am to 9pm

Electors of North Battersea,

I DO know where I am, though Mr Bonar Law does not. After our folly in the 1918 Election you ALL do know where you are today and where you want to be!

Our gullibility in December 1918, has shut down workshops to a million and a half honest British Workers, with degrading cuts in wages to four million others. Our Tory-Liberal Rulers have devastated three fourths of Europe, and have antagonised practically the whole of Asia, and wonder why we are workless.

If elected, I pledge myself to the fullest extent to support the well-known programme of the Labour Party. To meet the changing positions which will arise, I promise to present myself to my Labour electors, about once a month, to ascertain their wishes on all fresh issues.

The spirit of the Labour Programme may be summarised as under:

1) A Levy on massed fortunes exceeding £5,000, for the specific purpose of unloading the weight of National Debt. Mr Bonar Law said, to a deputation in the House, on November 14th 1917, 'My own feeling is that it would be better, both for the wealthy classes and the country, to have this Levy on Capital, and reduce the burden of the National Debt;

that is my own feeling.' TAXATION, FOOD PRICES, and HOUSE RENTS, can NEVER be LOWERED OTHERWISE.

2) A more just distribution of the INCOME TAX, relieving the Middle-Class wage-earner, and abolition of TAXES ON FOOD and the necessaries of life.

3) Prompt NATIONALISATION of such Industries, to begin with, where grievous harm by private ownership has already been proved. This would lead to re-organisation of all Industries and International Commerce, and ABOLISH UNEMPLOYMENT and periodical Reduction of Wages.

4) An immediate transformation of the Imperial relations of England with Ireland, Egypt, and India, and an equitable and honest inter-relationship with all the peoples of the world through a UNIVERSAL INTERNATIONAL MACHINERY, in place of the present conglomeration of armed nations.

5) Immediately to provide for the long-neglected social and intellectual needs of the people, in the shape of STATE HOUSING, the highest possible type of STATE EDUCATION, and ample financial provision for Aged People, Mothers, Widows, Orphans, Ex-Service victims, and Locked-out Workers.

6) To strengthen the House of Commons, elected on an ADULT SUFFRAGE for Women and Men, and to strengthen the Working-Class Organisations, as effective weapons of defence of mass rights. At present the two Houses of Parliament are used as convenient tools against the people by Political and Financial cliques, and the Organisations of the Working Classes, really representing the majority of the population, are continually defrauded and defied. THE TRADE UNION CONGRESS OF 1869 STARTED WITH A DEMAND FOR DIRECT INDUSTRIAL REPRESENTATION, WHICH IS YET TO COME.

Do not listen to the cry of 'Wolf, Wolf,' against the Capital Levy. Large Banking Accounts in the name of wealthy persons or Corporations, built on the strength of the War Debt, really represent unscrupulous profiteering out of the Nation's need during the War. On this Debt the Nation is called upon to pay £340,000,000 yearly. We are asked to saddle posterity with this unbearable burden, not because we gave them

any New Houses, Schools or Hospitals, but because our Rulers, from 1914-1922 unscrupulously allowed a few Contractors and Merchants to use the War as a grand opportunity and medium for making exorbitant profits. This SURELY is not an honourable deed. Such National Loans are starving industries, and while the Unemployed Workers receive NO WAGES, the INTEREST on War Loans of the rich continues. We are all paying this £340,000,000, or £8 per head, man, woman and child in the shape of High Taxes and High Prices for Food, Clothing, Rents, Railway Travelling, Postages, etc. The Labour Party is determined to alter this.

What is this talk of driving away Capital from the Country? Selfish rich people refuse to share the burden of the Nation in proportion to their surplus wealth, are threatening to take their Capital abroad, and are blaming the Labour Party for their action! This attitude justifies the claim of Labour to place all Capital under National Control, so that it may not be permitted by the Nation to go abroad, to the detriment of workers at home, in search of Cheap Labour and bigger Dividends in other parts of the world. In the 2 years, 1920-1921, for instance, £280,000,000 were invested in new concerns in India out of the huge war fortunes made in the British Empire, against the highest figure of £12,000,000 in any pre-war year. The individual British owners of Capital in the jute industry have opened 76 jute mills in India (of which 98% are under British control), in order to earn 100% to 400% dividends out of the toil of the enslaved cheap Indian Labour (paid 14s to 38s per month), and they shut down the jute mills in Dundee. Similar instances of British capitalist rivalry against home industries can be quoted from authentic records. Capital under individual control of British Magnates, is going out to South America, to India, to China, to Africa, and even to Spitzbergen, in search of HIGHER PROFITS and LOWER STANDARDS OF LABOUR.

Those who talk of confiscation of the Rich Man's Property by the Labour Party are the very persons who, by enforcing unemployment, have driven millions of Workers to the Pawnshop, and, in consequence, had all their past savings confiscated.

We are not concerned with the catch-cries of the Liberals or the Tories,

either in or out of the Coalition. During Strikes, Lock-outs, Unemployment, Wage-cuts, the Workers of Britain have found not the slightest difference between Liberal and Tory Employers. From 1906 to 1914 the Liberals were in power, and after completely and wickedly mismanaging our International Affairs by secret intrigues and through commercial rivalries, they told us in August, 1914, that they had created a condition which, in their own words, MADE WAR INEVITABLE. Human beings were led to destroy human life on a larger scale than the wild beasts of the forest are ever known to have done.

Then, in 1918, the Tories, assisted by the Liberals, promised us Universal peace. They pitched this country twice on the battle-front, once, against Russia, and then against Turkey, without the slightest regard for the constitutional voice of the People, till LABOUR rose equal to the occasion, and twice declared that the wishes of the masses to stop the war should prevail, and LABOUR'S VOICE DID PREVAIL

They gave to Ireland a peace perched on bayonets; they practised towards the Egyptians a deception of the most flagrant type; they gave to India the massacres of Amritsar, the Moplas, and the Sikhs, and have locked up thousands of innocent men and women in British gaols.

The freedom of these countries becomes necessary in the interests of the Working Classes of Great Britain, who have to depend in the future upon the raw materials and food stuffs from these countries, which can only be obtained by a free and friendly interchange, without the interference of Imperial Militarism.

They talk of the CLASS WAR at home, and they charge Labour with a desire to foment Class War. While artificial Classes exist it is beyond human power to stop Class War, and we have today, as we always had, the perpetual Class War in our midst. The victorious few are compelling the many millions to live in indescribable slums, on insufficient or unhealthy food, to be ill-clad, when we all know the needs of the human body. LABOUR IS OUT TO STOP THIS CLASS WAR, by the effective method of eradicating this Class distinction.

If we demand full Trade Union maintenance for the innocent unemployed, there is an outcry of 'Bolshevism.' All high state Officials, as Lord Chancellors, Privy Councillors, Cabinet Ministers, and also

Directors of private Companies, are not paid by the time clock. They serve Society whenever they are called upon to do so, and they do what they please with their whole time whenever they are not required by the Society to give any services, yet all the while they get their full maintenance wages. The selfish society that devised Dividend Equalisation Funds are now revolting against any system of Wage Equalisation Funds which could support the unemployed. The root cause of many social evils of the unfortunate girls and juvenile offenders is economic environment, and rarely moral depravity.

The outcry against the Labour Programme to relieve the lower middle-class earner from his Income Tax on unliveable incomes of £250 a year is discreditable. The wage-earner's machinery for earning his salary is his body and his mind, and why should he not be permitted to maintain that in proper order before he begins to pay his Taxes, as the rich man is allowed to deduct his maintenance charges on industries?

Beware of arguments used against Nationalisation as carried out by bureaucratic officials, who are of the class pledged to prove its failure, and who treat Nationalisation as an opportunity to favour Contractors and Profiteers.

A genuine NON-CAPITALIST SCHEME OF NATIONALISATION will give full benefits to workers and consumers.

May I be permitted to intrude upon your attention with a little personal note? You will, of course, be told I am a foreigner. The Liberal Party selected the first Indian MP, the Conservative Party selected another one, and recently, the House of Lords received in their midst the first Indian Peer [Satyendra Prassano, First Baron Sinha, took his seat in the upper house in February 1919 as the Under-Secretary of State for India].

Will it be wrong if the Labour Party, which is the Party of International Brotherhood, tries to do the same? My heart has never been foreign to the Labour Movement of this country, and there is not a part of Scotland, England, Wales, or Ireland, where there is a live Labour Movement, where I have not gone during the last ten years to give my free services to the Local Co-operative Branches, Trade Union Meetings, Labour Parties, Independent Labour Parties, or Communist Parties, as one of their own members.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

In spite of desperate and ludicrous efforts on the part of Liberals and Tories alike to split the Working Class Movement into hostile fragments, **THE LABOUR PARTY IS TODAY THE ONLY PARTY IN GREAT BRITAIN THAT STANDS SOLIDLY TOGETHER.** The scare-cry of 'Communist,' which is sure to be raised by eleventh-hour leaflets, will fortunately not frighten the Electors of North Battersea, as your two faithful servants on the London County Council, some half-a-dozen members of your Borough Council, and your retiring Mayor, have not proved themselves false to you, and have recently secured re-election as a token of your confidence.

During my strenuous work in the Labour Movement, I have always remembered one thing, that I have to fight for and to work for, the Working Classes, as through them alone I see a chance for a truly humane world. It is my turn today to ask for your support, and it will be your turn after giving me that support on the 15th November to command my further services.

Yours very cordially,

SHAPURJI SAKLATVALA.

455 Battersea Park Road, London SW11

Mr Saklatvala's LAST WORD

To the Electors of North Battersea.

Will you have further Wars, and International Hatreds, or International Fraternity and Peace and Progress at Home?

From 1906 to 1914 Liberals were in power and had every facility at their disposal.

They did not make universal friendships—their policy made War inevitable. They did not restore the Land to the People. They did not give freedom to Ireland. They did not administer justice in India (Lord Morley deported without trial nine honourable citizens against whom nothing has been proved). They did not give Educational facilities to the Children of the Poor as existed for the Children of the Rich. They pretended to safeguard Trade Unionism, but used the legislative machinery and the Forces against the Workers as freely as the Tories do.

Their Candidate wants Profits and Royalties to remain, which means reduced Wages and Salaries.

The Liberals today take credit for wishy-washy reforms, old age pensions, insurance, etc. These measures, more showy than useful, were the work of Mr Lloyd George, whom the Liberals now expose in his true colours, just as he exposes their impotency and hypocrisy.

The Liberal Candidate for North Battersea claims that the Industries of Britain have been built up by capitalists, and he says, 'Heaven help us if the wash-outs get hold of them!' Workers of Britain, with your superior workmanship YOU have built up British Industries, and when you take control of them periodical stoppages will cease, unemployment disappear, and British Industries generally become stronger.

Then there is the tricky argument: 'Ah!' say the Liberals, 'We do not mind the Labour Party MANAGING them—we dread the Communists and socialists seizing them.' The following is the official text of the objects of the British Labour Party: 'To secure for the producers by hand and brain the full fruits of their industry... upon the basis of COMMON OWNERSHIP OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION...' The following is the simple definition of the word 'Communism', as given in the Concise English Dictionary by Charles Annandale. MA, LL.D: 'Communism—The system or theory which upholds the absorption of all proprietary rights in a COMMON INTEREST: the doctrine of a community of property.' The Liberals and the Conservatives do not like to see a community of property. They flourish on a community living in slums, on high rents, and on low wages, for the benefit of landlords, profiteers, and royalty owners...

Mr Hogbin comes to you on behalf of the National Liberal Association, with an avowal to support Mr Lloyd George. It is rather a rash guess on the part of my friend to suppose that North Battersea wants to support Mr Lloyd George, whose dishonourable methods have ruined this country and shocked the whole world. When Conservatives inside and outside Parliament openly denounce a Liberal-Tory combination, to say the least it is a political imposture for candidates here and there to pretend that they represent two quarrelling factions. Self-help alone will save the People! We do not want benefactors and charity-mongers, and

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

MPs who are Masters of the People. We want Servants of the People who do not claim superiority for their brains, or profits and royalties for their few select brethren.

Voters for North Battersea! Come along now and Vote for the Representative of the People's Labour Party,

S. SAKLATVALA

Wm Louis Coltman, Election Agent

CHAPTER 9

A New Voice for the People

First parliamentary speeches on unemployment, imperialism, private enterprise.

The newly-elected Saklatvala lost no time in making his maiden speech, which he delivered on Thursday 23rd November 1922 during the debate on the King's speech that laid out the Conservative government's plans for the new session of parliament.

Saklatvala's speech is quoted in full below:

“The hon member who introduced the Motion thanking His Majesty for his Gracious Message said that as a newcomer he felt like a schoolboy. In a similar manner, and perhaps in a higher degree, I shall offer my apologies to you, Sir, as well as to the House, not only for tonight, but I am afraid, for all the nights that I shall be here. I am afraid that I may be misunderstood if I do not acquire what is known as the traditional manner of the House of Commons.

“We, the 142 [Labour members] who have come here, and I who was but yesterday with the people of Battersea, know the voice and the minds of the people, and we, who have talked outside upon politics and governmental affairs, wish now that the genuine bona fide human voice be talked inside, and I would therefore appeal to you, Sir, to realise that if we are found especially wanting in certain mannerisms or if our phraseology is not up to the standard, it is not for want of respect or want of love for any of you, but simply because we of the people shall now require that the people's matters shall be talked in the people's voice.

“His Majesty's Gracious Message referred to the question of unemployment. Unemployment prevails largely in the constituency which I represent. The first immediate thing, that is perhaps not of so great consequence from a strictly political point of view, but is of very great consequence from the immediately psychological point of view, is

the unfortunate attitude, at the beginning, of the Prime Minister.

“The Prime Minister says that he believes in the division of labour, and also in assigning responsibility to Ministers. All that may be true. But it is sometimes welcome to the heart of the British people to be heard by the Prime Minister. If they want a deputation is the Prime Minister to be the judge concerning whether a matter is an appropriate matter for the Prime Minister to hear or not, when the people who may be unemployed, who may be hungry, may have a special desire to see the Prime Minister himself?

“I make one last appeal to the Prime Minister. I agree with the Prime Minister, perhaps with a different viewpoint, that it would have been equally futile for the unemployed to have an interview with the Prime Minister or any other Minister. But it is just as well that they should see each other, for though no useful result could have been produced by an interview with the Prime Minister himself there is something in human life which is satisfying if not satisfactory, and if the Prime Minister would only have realised that it was a most satisfying measure, if not a satisfactory measure, to have seen a deputation of the unemployed, I believe that he would have spared the country a lot of unpleasant thoughts, and I think that even now it may not be too late.

“Coming to the larger problem of unemployment, the Mover and Seconder of the Address pointed out in their speeches what was wanting in the Message. One of our hon members referred to the position in Central Europe. Somebody referred to the collapse of the exchanges, and reference was made to the high taxation. All that may be true, but are we to sit in this House and keep on analysing today the condition of yesterday, and going on analysing tomorrow the condition of today? Are we not determined once for all to analyse the root causes of it all and to apply the remedy which would remove the real evil?

“It is perhaps an easy thing today to talk of the collapse of the exchanges on the Continent of Europe. Have we no right to ask those who have been ruling this country since 1906 until today as to what it was which brought about the conditions that produced the collapse of the exchanges of Europe? Have we no right to ask in a similar manner our friends and the government that is responsible today and the

government which was responsible during all these strenuous years of trial throughout the world as to how and why those conditions were produced? It is not satisfactory for us to say today that we are suffering because of these conditions. How are the lower exchanges to be set right?

“One of our speakers said that the continent of Europe had been impoverished because capital had gone abroad. Who took it abroad? Is it a sign of disservice to the country for enterprising men to take their capital abroad? If that is so, what can be said of private enterprise in Britain itself, and those British citizens who are taking abroad British capital produced by British working men, day after day and year after year?

“May I point out to the right hon gentleman, who today deplores the condition into which Europe has been brought by these greedy private enterprisers taking capital abroad, and ask him why over 74 jute mills have been erected in Bengal by British millers and capitalists who had got the capital produced with the hard toil of the workers of Dundee, with the result that today we have shut up shop in Dundee and our workers in Bengal are working at from 14s to 38s a month and producing for the owners dividends of from 150 per cent, to 400 per cent?

“Out of the 124 coal companies in my country, India, I know that 102 have been opened out by British capitalists who have taken capital abroad for these enterprises. If these are the root causes of private enterprise, may we ask our friends not to sit down and not to wait until the great calamity overtakes this country altogether, but to learn lessons from what has happened on the continent, and remove the causes which brought about the conditions which all of us agree are not worthy of any intelligent and civilised human race?

“One of my colleagues referred to the position of the trade with India, especially the textile trade, and I understood the Seconder of the Motion to refer to it in passing, showing how it had become impracticable for the Austrians to buy Indian hides and the Germans to buy any Indian cotton, and so forth. I want the House to note, carefully that the loss of trade with India is due to two separate reasons.

“One has been the desire of the, government in this country, who have always prided themselves as a constitutional nation and government, to try in the outside world the most unconstitutional method, namely, of dictating government to peoples in various parts of the world from outside. No Britisher would for a moment tolerate a constitution for Great Britain if it were written outside of Great Britain by people who are not British. In a similar way the constitutions for Ireland and India and Egypt and Mesopotamia should be constitutions written by the men of those countries, in those countries, without interference from outside.

“But there is another great cause, and I wish the House to understand it clearly. That cause is private enterprise. The story of private enterprise, with all its glamour and its seductive tale, has gone out from these shores to India, and it is the rivalry due to the spirit of private enterprise which is responsible now, and will be responsible in the future, for one country depriving the workers of another country of their legitimate livelihood. It is the growth of this private enterprise, of these large corporations and trusts, these huge industrial concerns in India, which is beginning to tell its tale upon the workers of this country. I wish to make no secret of it. The cotton industry of this country is bound to suffer from this two-fold evil, namely, the political sulking of the people of India with the people of Great Britain, and the spread of private enterprise and of the so-called legitimate privileges of the private enterprisers.

“The Indian private enterprisers have learned to ask for protective duties, for high dividends, for low wages, long hours, and all kinds of privileges which private enterprise in this country has claimed for 150 years. It is this combination and the spread of the cult of private enterprise by the political bosses in this country which is working the ruin of the workers of this land.

“In reference to the Near East there was a passing reference in the Address. I would not like to embarrass either the government or this House in dealing with the problem of the Near East or the Far East in a thoroughly different manner from that of the past if it be intended so to do. If the government merely intend to deliver different forms of speeches from those of the past government they will fail as the last

government failed.

“I remember the time when a British Prime Minister had to stop a Catholic procession from forming in the streets of Westminster because the Protestants would not allow it. If that happened in the streets of London not many years ago under a Liberal government, I think that the less the Britisher talks of taking care of the minorities in Armenia or Mesopotamia or Ulster or Southern Ireland or anywhere else, the better it will be for him. There is quite enough for him to take care of in the minorities here. There are many minorities.

“This morning we heard of the Prime Minister’s letter to the press relating to the unemployed who are now a minority in this country. The right hon gentleman exposes them as so many criminals. One reference in that correspondence was to the fact that these men had been dubbed criminals by a legal process in this country, because they dared to belong to political organisations which at present happen to be in a minority. The way in which that minority has been protected has been by bringing into operation legislative machinery, and by bringing the men for trial before judges or magistrates whose chief capital in the past has been party politics and party bitterness, which have made them incapable of dealing out justice.

“With this one-sided political machinery men have been tried and have been put into gaol. Then the Prime Minister says, ‘This is a set of criminals.’ That is the way in which the minority in this country is protected by the majority on the question of the right to express political opinion. I think the Prime Minister knows very well that had it not been for several of these prosecutions and persecutions he would not today have had at his back the number of supporters that he has.

“In reference to Ireland, I am afraid that I shall strike a jarring note in the hitherto harmonious music of this House. I am well disciplined and trained in the general principle of the Labour movement, namely, that the happiness of the world depends on international peace, and that international peace is possible only when the self-determined will of the people of each country prevails in each country. I deplore greatly those elements still existing in the Irish Treaty that are not compatible with that great and wholesome principle. It is no use denying the fact, for we

shall not in that way create peace in Ireland.

“As a House we say that we are giving this Irish Treaty with a view of bringing peace to Ireland, but we know that it is not bringing peace. Either we are actuated by the motive of restoring thorough peace in Ireland or we are doing it as partial conquerors in Ireland.

“Everyone knows that the Treaty has unfortunately gone forth as the only alternative to a new invasion of Ireland by British troops. As long as that element exists the people of Ireland have a right to say that the very narrow majority which in Ireland accepted the Treaty at the time, accepted it also on this understanding—that if they did not accept it the alternative was an invasion by the Black-and-Tans of this country. The Irish Treaty all along continues to suffer in Ireland from the fact that it is not a Treaty acceptable to the people as a whole.

“If it were possible in some way in the preamble of the Treaty or by an Act of this House to allow the people of Ireland to understand that their country’s constitution is to be framed by them as a majority may decide, and that the alternative would not be an invasion from this country, but that this, country would shake hands with Ireland as a neighbour, whatever shape or form that government took, it would be quite a different story. Otherwise, whatever we may do, however many treaties we may pass, however unanimous the British may be in their behaviour towards Ireland, Ireland will not be made a peaceful country.

“As in 1801 England gave them a forced Union, so in 1922 England is giving them a forced freedom. We must remove that factor. Unless we do so we shall not be giving to the Irish the Treaty of freedom which we have all decided mentally that we are doing.

“When I say so, I put forward not my personal views but the views of 90 per cent, of those Irishmen who are my electors. They have pointed out to me that, whereas under the threat of renewed invasion the Dail only passed the Treaty by a majority of barely half a dozen votes, Irishmen who are not under that threat—Irishmen who are living in Great Britain—have, by a tremendous majority, voted against it. As long as those factors continue to exist, the Irish Treaty is not going to be what we—in a sort of silent conspiracy—have decided to name it. The reality will not be there. The reality is not there.

“Before I conclude I wish to refer to one point which is conspicuous by its absence from the King’s Speech. If in the Empire, this House and this government is going to take the glory of the good, they will also have to take the ignominy of anything disgraceful which happens outside this country. This government may not be responsible. This House may not be responsible. The people of this country may not be responsible. Yet there is something like a public voice and public prejudice, and if this government and this House are proud of their association with the Colonies and the Empire, this government and this House will also have to satisfy this country as well as outside countries, why the policy of the South African government, in hanging and shooting workers, was permitted and was kept quiet.

“We are still calling Ireland a part of this Empire, and it is only last week that four young working-class lads, without an open trial and without even fair notice to their families, were shot dead. Even on the night before, their families were told that everything was all right, but on the following morning, when the mother of one of them went to convey a bundle of laundry to her son, she was informed that the poor boys had been executed.

“These acts might be described as the acts of independent governments. Either these governments are independent or they are part of this Empire. If they are part of this Empire, then the government in the centre of the Empire must see to it that a policy of this kind does not go without challenge and without, at least, protest from this House, if nothing else can be done.

“Our relationship with Russia is also a subject conspicuous by the absence of any mention. We hear of the revolution in Italy; we hear of Mussolini, the leader of it, and we have seen Mussolini’s manifesto. He does not care for the Italian Parliament, nor for the majority in it. He is going to rule the country by 300,000 most obedient and faithful followers who are fully armed. Here is a revolutionary.

“But our Foreign Secretary is sitting in consultation with him. Our Foreign Secretary is shaking hands with him. We do not object on the ground that the Italian government is a revolutionary government. Why? Because the revolution in this case belongs to another class.

“We have the case of the King of Serbia. His Majesty King Edward for two years and more refused to have any dealings with him because he had slain the monarch who sat on the throne of Serbia before him. Yet we are friends of Serbia. We honour King Peter; we respect him; we call Serbia our Ally; we co-operate with the Serbians, yet if the monarch in Russia has been assassinated, or something had happened, we refuse to join hands with the people of Russia on that account. Why? Because in the Serbian Revolution class interest was topmost. In the Russian Revolution the mass interest came topmost.

“I do not for a moment suggest that any of us in this House are purposely and consciously behaving in a dishonest manner. But the unfortunate part of every human life is that we are unconsciously the victims of many suppressed prejudices which are inborn in us and are traditional. Now we are face to face with a situation in this world in which, if we are not determined to burst out of these time-worn prejudices and boldly take a new place, if we are not prepared to push forward not only the good but the rights—even the sentimental rights—of the masses of humanity, into the forefront, and if the traditions, the family interests, the class privileges, the profits and dividends of private enterprise, are not set in the background, then neither this Ministry nor any other Ministry will cure the, evil, though they may deliver as many speeches as they please, upon it.”

At least on the question of unemployment, Saklatvala’s maiden speech upheld the official policy being pursued by the Labour Party. Ramsay MacDonald, leader of the party and of HM opposition, had said earlier in the debate:

“May I appeal to the Prime Minister, apart from the larger issues of this debate, to do something to allay the agitation that is gathering up in connection with his refusal to see the deputation from the unemployed men who are in London now?...

“I urge upon him that it is his duty to give the most tangible and simple proof... that he understands the distressful position in which these people are placed, and the best way to do that is not to take up a merely red-tape attitude but... to see these men and to tell them what his desires and intentions are...

“We have a system that blocks the road with Rolls Royce cars when the

rt hon gentleman became Leader of his Party, and which, the next week, blocks the Strand with processions of unemployed.”

However, on the question of Ireland, Saklatvala did not toe the party line. The most pressing business before the House was the urgent second reading of the Irish Free State Constitution Bill on 27th November 1922. In the King’s speech opening the session a few days before, it had been stated that:

“A Constitution for the Irish Free State having been passed by the House of Parliament established under the Irish Free State Act of the last Session of Parliament, and it being required by the terms of that Act that the Constitution should come into force by December 6th 1922, His Majesty had summoned His Parliament to meet in order that the legislation necessary to give effect to that Constitution and to make the provisions consequential on the Establishment of the Irish Free State might be at once submitted for the approval of the House.”

The MP for West Ham, David Margesson (Unionist), seconding the Address to the King, had said of Ireland:

“The present session has been made necessary... in order to bring to a conclusion, so far as this Parliament is concerned, the policy in relation to Ireland which was left incomplete by the late government. Some of us who have now for the first time entered this House may, perhaps, congratulate ourselves that there is no occasion to express any opinion as to the wisdom or otherwise of that policy.

“It has been publicly acknowledged even by those who most strenuously opposed the Treaty, that there is no longer any course open to this House, consistent with statesmanship and honour, other than to carry out the Treaty which the last Parliament accepted by an Act now on the Statute Book. Our part in the transaction is, in fact, purely formal. We have merely to seal and deliver an instrument already signed on behalf of the English people.”

The approval of the House of Commons was being taken for granted and the completion of the necessary formalities were being treated as a *fait accompli*. It was not the first time, and was assuredly not to be the last, that decisions of historic importance, crucial to the peace and stability of the world, were to be taken under the pressure of a self-imposed time limit, so that neither the decision-makers themselves nor the general public had time to realise all the

ramifications of the decisions being taken. Alas, we are still suffering violence and death in the streets of Ulster and, causing far greater outrages, even in the cities of mainland Britain. More time alone would not necessarily have been enough; time, wisdom and vision were needed, and all these also appear to have been in short supply.

Rising to open the debate on the Irish Free State Constitution Bill, Bonar Law expressed the government's regret that the time for dealing with it was so short, adding:

“I think that any government elected would have realised that if a really great calamity was to be prevented, this Bill should be passed by the 6th December... the circumstances are such that, in my belief, so far as the government are concerned... our liberty of action is circumscribed within the narrowest limits.”

Ramsay MacDonald, speaking as Leader of the Opposition, in associating himself with the sentiments expressed by Bonar Law, said:

“The less said about this Bill the better. Criticism is useless, sympathy is dangerous. All that this House can now do in relation to Irish government is to implement its part of the agreement and allow the Bill to become law...”

Despite the time limit, the debate became a lively one when Colonel Gretton, a Unionist member, painted in lurid though imprecise terms a picture of rape, pillage, shootings, sabotage and chaos amounting to “anarchy and civil war” in southern Ireland. He was frequently challenged by opposition members, who asked for names of the places involved, and who questioned the veracity and accuracy of the horror stories related.

It was quite late in the debate when Saklatvala rose and, new boy as he was, dropped something of a verbal bombshell in the form of an amendment:

“I beg to move, to leave out the word ‘now’, and at the end of the Question to add the words ‘upon this day three months’.

“I realise the unpopularity I am courting in taking this step, but it was distinctly understood between my electors and myself that they did not wish me to back up a Treaty which was based upon coercion, and was signed under duress. I do not now speak on behalf of the Labour Party in this House. I wish that to be made perfectly clear. I maintain that,

perhaps as a purist, I adhere in the amendment to a principle that the Labour Party has laid down, namely, the principle of self-determination. It is not to be understood that I do not share the wishes or the prayers of my chief, nor is it to be understood I have not the same desire as my colleagues, but I must frankly admit that I do not share their hopes.

“I believe that the only cure will come when either this government or a future Labour government tells our friends in Ireland that they have a right to a genuine and bona fide self-determined voice of their own. Unless that is done, neither the Treaty nor the Constitution nor the Bill now before the House is likely to do what we all, against our convictions, hope that they may do.

“We talk of a Treaty. Hon. members on all sides of the House have written and spoken in unmistakable terms in expressing their views that the unfortunate part of the Treaty was that the signatures were obtained under duress. I feel that duress was undoubtedly there, and the unfortunate fact was that it need not have been there. If matters had been left to the free will and the good sense of the people, the result would have been quite different from what it has been.

“We have heard today quotations and illustrations of similar enactments for colonies and dominions of the Empire. Is there any real parallel between those Constitutions and the hopes and desires of the people of the countries concerned and the hopes and desires of the Irish people? Was Australia not rejoicing and waiting almost to a man and woman for the day when her Constitution would be confirmed by this House? Was not South Africa, after a great war and defeat, gratefully awaiting the day when the Treaty would be passed and the little minority of the republicans in a constitutional manner would be permitted to express themselves as a minority? The people of Canada, too, were determined to have their Constitution and to work it.

“The case of Ireland is different. It is no use our pretending that it is not so. We cannot adopt the policy that by driving deeper into the soil the roots of a cactus, and by carefully covering it with soil, roses will grow later on.

“I pay my homage to the great spirit that reigns in this House today, and to the great spirit that pervades the people who sent members to

represent them in this House. I admire that spirit at its full value. In spite of all the bitter differences in the past, we are determined to come to a genuine and sincere unanimity upon this question. Were we settling the matter in dispute here among ourselves, that spirit would give us a permanent solution; but our unanimity does not affect the disunity in Ireland, and that point does not seem to be before this House as emphatically as it ought to be.

“Was there ever an instance in the history of treaties where immediately after a treaty had been signed, two out of the five signatories had to repudiate their signatures as not having been put down with a bona fide and conscientious intention? The hon member for Spen Valley (Sir John Simon) was pointing out to us the great improvement which has taken place since the Treaty. I am sorry to hear argument of that kind being advanced on rather imperfect observation.

(Hon. members: “Hear, hear!”)

“The imperfect observation which I wish to point out is not referred to in the spirit of the hon and gallant member for Burton (Col. Gretton). It is quite in another direction. In the first instance, what is the constituent assembly which has sent us this document? Soon after the Treaty and, apart from anything that was ever contemplated at the time of the Treaty, a truce was entered into between the factious parties in Ireland creating an artificial Dail to tackle the problem of the Treaty. I take no sides with either of the Irish parties, but I maintain that truce, or that promise to observe a truce was not fair to the people of Great Britain, and it was certainly more than unfair to the people of Ireland.

“Under the truce it was decided to call an artificial constituent assembly, and when the moment came, even that truce was not observed, and the so-called constituent assembly cannot on any bona fide and sincere principle of self-determination, be accepted as a truly and properly elected Dail representing the people of Ireland in the ratios and proportions in which they stand. I was present at the last great Labour Conference in Ireland; I attended its sittings in Dublin and I saw there written down in black and white and heard proclaimed from the platform: ‘A plague on both your houses!’—on both parties, both the pro-Treaty and the anti-Treaty party.

“I have heard it declared that Irish Labour, well organised, is determined to work for a workers’ republic. These are the views that are being expressed, and the Labour Party in Ireland is bound to come into its own, however much hon members may jeer or laugh. The Republicans are there; it is no use denying that they are there in very large numbers, and it is extremely doubtful, if coercive measures were not taken, whether they would not prove themselves to be the majority of the people of Ireland. These facts cannot be ignored, and they cannot be buried or covered up.

“We are assured by the Prime Minister that, according to Mr Cosgrave, Ireland is only waiting for the Constitution to be carried through this House, and that they are going to work it out. Mr Cosgrave knows that he had to shoot four human beings a week ago, and he has since had to take another life by violence—that of Erskine Childers. He knows that the prisons of Ireland are to be filled with thousands of men, and even some women, without charge and without trial. He knows that Ireland is to be prepared to receive this Constitution, not with joy and flags and illuminations, but with martial law, penalties and threats, imprisonment and ships waiting to depopulate the country. (Interruption)

“I will ask you, Mr Speaker, to save me from those who are pretending to be my friends. I appeal to the Prime Minister and I appeal to the House.

“Once, in 1801, our predecessors and your forefathers thought they had worked a great political trick and a mighty political charm when with great unanimity in Dublin and London they brought about the Act of Union. For 120 years that Act of Union has only produced distress to Ireland and disgrace to this country. I, as your friend—not as your critic nor as your opponent—feel that I am in conscience bound not to be a party to a bigger and greater mockery.

“Until the Labour Party in this country comes into power, until genuine self-determination is permitted to the people of Ireland, there is going to be neither peace nor fidelity to the Treaty, nor the carrying out of the Free State government, nor any of the ‘tosh’ we have been hearing of late.

“I am speaking in a most difficult position. I know I seem to be the

friend of my enemies and the enemy of my friends, but time and history will prove my case. I shall not be at all sorry or shamed to say that even if you were all unanimous, I stood aloof and away from you. Within five years this House will find the necessity for undoing this unanimous or semi-unanimous Act after more distress and more suffering.

“Let me predict that it will be the Labour Party sitting on those benches which will have to afford real freedom to Ireland. Instead of merely expressing a pious opinion, I take my courage in my hands and, true to my convictions, I move this amendment in order to create an opportunity for myself to vote against this Bill.”

The next day, the Manchester Guardian, under a sub-heading ‘Indian Communist Amendment’ reported that:

“After an amendment of an obviously irresponsible character (moved by Mr Saklatvala and seconded by Mr Newbold), for the rejection of the Bill had been negatived without a Division, the Bill received its 2nd Reading without challenge.”

Small wonder that Father said he was taking his courage in both hands! He had been in the House barely a week, he had been accepted by the Labour Party, if not reluctantly at any rate cautiously; the opposition were to support the Bill—and he stood up to move an amendment so that he would have an opportunity to vote against it. That needs a very special courage in my view; unlike a heroic act of courage which evokes praise and adulation, this kind of courage evokes derision, rejection and the jeers of your peers; it isolates you from your colleagues.

Father was to show this particular brand of courage in full measure throughout his political life; he was often alone; he may have been sometimes in a small minority but he was never one of the crowd. It is a form of courage that, lacking it myself, I admire almost more than any other. (Of course I cannot claim to be objective in this judgement—he was my father, after all).

Writing four years after this event, Shapurji recalled:

“...After a whirlwind campaign in the Election of 1922, I found myself ushered in to the Assembly of Westminster. My critics who were jesting and jeering and my friends who were smiling in doubt, confidently looked forward to my immediate conversion to the requisite mentality

for the Mother of Parliaments...

“I came fresh from a constituency where most of the Irish electors were annoyed by the proposed Irish settlement, and, as in duty bound, I attempted to act up to the expectations of my democratic voters. Ridicule, contempt, sneers, showered from all sides and a look of ‘cut him out—he’s no good to us in this assembly’ seemed to be on the faces of all my colleagues. The heavy frowns were not limited to reactionary capitalists, for [Ramsey] MacDonald’s and [Arthur] Henderson’s frowns were even more severe.”

After Saklatvala’s contribution to the debate on the Irish Free State Constitution Bill, Colonel Wedgwood (who had left the Liberals to join the Labour Party in 1919, and who was to develop a House of Commons friendship with Saklatvala as time went by) expressed the hope that he would not proceed with a division. He said the only result would be that he would find himself in the lobby with a large number of members with whom he really had no possible point of agreement. He went on to say:

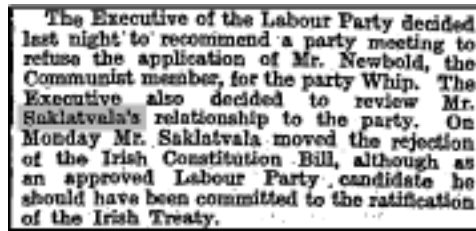
“I ask the hon member for Battersea to consider what would happen if he got his way and if this Bill were rejected. It would then appear that Great Britain having signed the Treaty is determined by the voice of a new Parliament to cancel the Treaty. I agree with the hon member there was a great deal which was undesirable in the way in which the Treaty was brought about. But whether those methods were desirable or undesirable we cannot now possibly go back upon the Treaty which was signed or fail to carry out to the letter the terms and the obligations into which we entered. The speech to which we have just listened, a very eloquent speech, ought to have been delivered not here but in the Dail [Irish parliament]...”

Saklatvala fought as strenuously for freedom for the Irish people as he did for the people of his own land, India. To him it was one and the same fight against imperialism. The fact that Ireland lay so close to the shores of Britain made it, in his view, no less a victim of imperialistic aggrandisement. (Is it not strange that the Isle of Man, closer to the UK mainland, should have its own Parliament, while a United Ireland could not enjoy the same right?)

Apart from his strong personal views, he had given an undertaking to the Irish constituents in Battersea to do all in his power to further the granting of self-

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determination to the people of the whole of a United Ireland; and he was not a man to break a pledge once given.



The Executive of the Labour Party decided last night to recommend a party meeting to refuse the application of Mr. Newbold, the Communist member, for the party Whip. The Executive also decided to review Mr. Saklatvala's relationship to the party. On Monday Mr. Saklatvala moved the rejection of the Irish Constitution Bill, although as an approved Labour Party candidate he should have been committed to the ratification of the Irish Treaty.

Clipping: The Times, 29th November 1922

On Monday 4th December 1922 the Trade Facilities and Loans Guarantee (Money) Bill was to be considered by the House of Commons in Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr James Hope. The motion before the House was a composite and complicated one, and the debate did not start until 11 o'clock that night. Several opposition members asked: a) that the several items should be dealt with individually; and b) that decisions of such moment should not be made late at night when members were tired and, consequently, unable perhaps to make sound judgements. But the debate went ahead as planned.

The first subject was The Trade Facilities Act, followed by discussion on a loan to Austria, and then on to the Treasury guarantee of interest on a loan for public works in the Sudan. It was on this last item that Saklatvala subsequently spoke, at about 3 o'clock in the morning of the 5th December. Stanley Baldwin, Chancellor of the Exchequer, in introducing the Motion, had stated:

“It is to guarantee a loan to be raised by the government of the Sudan for completing the great dam which is to aid in the irrigation of a large part of the Sudan. The scheme is of greater magnitude than was originally contemplated and like all large schemes prices have increased and the estimates are considerably beyond any that were considered reasonable when the scheme was first propounded; but it has been investigated more than once recently by an expert sent out by the Treasury to advise, and his report is that, even after the expenditure of this increased sum, when the scheme is finished, the benefit to that country will be so great, that there should be no doubt of the Sudan itself being able to pay out of its revenues the interest required on the loan.

“The whole object, or the main object is to enable cotton-growing to be

proceeded with in the Sudan. The Sudan, I am told, is one of the best fields in the world for growing long-staple cotton, and I am also told, by those who know the cotton trade, that there is a real fear that the supply of raw cotton in the world today is not sufficient for the world's trade, and unless immediate steps are taken to increase the growing capacity of the world for cotton, great disaster will overcome, if not the cotton trade of the world, at any rate the cotton trade of this country, which is dependent entirely on imported cotton.

"I am told that the area that it is proposed forthwith to irrigate is such that it will be possible to grow 70,000 bales for shipment each year to Lancashire. But as it may be possible when the dam is finished to bring under irrigation a vastly increased area to that already proposed, there seems no reason why the Sudan in... perhaps the not too distant future, will bid fair to become one of the great cotton-growing districts of the world..."

J. Walton Newbold (Communist) spoke first on the Austrian issue and then took up the subject of the Sudanese loan. Throughout his speech he was barracked and interrupted; when he appealed to the Chair to keep order to enable him to speak, the Chair admonished him for criticising the Chair! In spite of the general schoolboy rowdiness he managed to continue:

"Hon. members do not crowd those benches and support these Resolutions in the interests of liberty, in the interests of equality, in the interests of justice, but in the interests of the Stock Exchange, in the interests of the bankers, in the interests of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce (interruption), of the bill-brokers, of the cotton manufacturers, of the whole capitalist class that you are rolling up in your forces upon those benches. It is noticeable that this barrage project has the approval of a Committee presided over, I believe, by Sir R.M. Kindersley.

"Sir R.M. Kindersley, curiously enough, happens to be the Chairman of Lazard Bros.; Lazard Bros., curiously enough, have half their share capital held by S. Pearson & Sons and Clive Pearson. These people are the building contractors engaged upon the dam."

At 2.40am, Commander Kenworthy (Labour) stood to move an amendment deleting the proposed guarantee:

“The Sudan is not the only country which has long-staple cotton... Sudan is not a safe field for British investment. I would not put my money there and I would not advise anyone else to put theirs. Egypt today is a smouldering volcano... The regime of martial law, which I am sorry to see is supported by British bayonets, is bound, sooner or later, to lead to trouble in that country. In these circumstances I regard it as very foolish to guarantee loans in that country... and it is not fair to ask the British taxpayer to guarantee this large sum of money...”

“The employment supplied in this country will not be at all comparable with the amount of money we are to guarantee. It may and will provide... employment in the Sudan, but at the present moment one of the grievances that is felt up and down the country is that our government has been extremely slow and lax in providing useful work for our own unemployed.”

Mr P. Johnston (Labour), one of the Scottish MPs, then asked if the Sudan project was to be in private or in state hands. “Is the British public,” he asked, “being asked to guarantee large sums in order to ensure profit for private business in this country?”

The night and morning were far advanced when Saklatvala rose to make his contribution to the debate:

“I wish to call the attention of the Committee to the dangerous principle underlying the proposals put forward tonight, and I strongly take the view that the hon and gallant member for Central Hull (Lt. Commander Kenworthy) has put to the committee regarding this Sudanese scheme. There was a time when there were two parties in the House, both of which were interested in making loans and monetary grants. One was interested in taking up one group and the other was interested in taking up another group. There is now a third party [the Labour Party], and it has come to analyse the fundamental principle of these enterprises.

“We want to know something more than the people in the past wanted to know. It is very curious. We have sat here today a round of the clock and we have not had one word about the glories of private enterprise. Private enterprise has a wonderful power of abrogating rights. It puts forward schemes for the benefit of humanity, but asks the unemployed to strive and fight when it is a question of really being enterprising and

adventurous and taking risks.

“Then private enterprise is gone. From Plymouth to Pimlico there is not a word of private enterprise. I submit that the plan as put forward by the government today in the shape of a guarantee is a worse burden upon the taxpayer and, if I may be allowed to say so, a more dishonest burden than if it were one thing or another.”

(An hon member: “You pay your money and you take your choice.”)

“If it were private enterprise and the private enterprise was asking the sanction of this House to invest money, and if we were merely feeling angry at them at securing in this House a share of future profits, that would be one way of getting the profit. If we are placing the burden upon the taxpayer and telling the taxpayer to take the profit, or lose out of it, that is another thing; but this clever device of a guarantee means that if profit ensues, private enterprise will get it, and if it is a loss the taxpayer will pay it. We are not so simple. We see through the scheme. It is a very unsound looking scheme of guaranteeing. It means the profits are mine and the losses are yours.

“There is another point in regard to the former part of this Resolution. We were not told if any unconstitutional guarantee was exacted from the borrower, from the Sudan. We were told that if this House guaranteed 3½ million pounds to begin with, and subsequently went further into it, this country required 70,000 bales to begin with of long stapled Egyptian cotton.

“Why, may I ask, do we feel so certain that cotton grown in somebody else’s country, by the people of Sudan, shall for ever fall into our lap as our own property? We have not even got a Parliament in Sudan to smother and blackmail, and this is an unconstitutional law just as in the case of Vienna. We shall be told, perhaps three years hence in this House to sanction an expedition to Sudan to save our guarantee. That instrument of blackmail upon any Parliament in the Sudan does not exist.

“The only weapon that does exist in the hands of the loan controllers is the British Army and the British Navy, and we shall one day be told that we have pledged our honour, we have granted the loan, we have promised safety to the investors, and we shall want to sink a few

hundred millions to butcher the Sudanese to get our wretched money. We are engaged in a new departure of human butchery. That is, again, history repeating itself.

“What right has this House to take it for granted that the poor Sudanese shall bend their necks and backs and go on growing cotton year after year? There is one very serious point. In the midst of starvation, hunger, distress, and death, many of the unemployed in this country heard the hollow talk of sympathy. Where is that sympathy tonight? It is all very well to give us misleading speeches when introducing new schemes, but we have got before us our past history. Let us know how in the past this country has been misled into the cultivation of raw material abroad, and how the workers of this country have been cheated out of the little work they had.

“Take jute. The workers of this country were always told that by the production of jute in Bengal, and by the British government possessing it, the work of the workers in the Dundee works would be guaranteed for ever. At no time have the workers been so cheated by those who have the militaristic control. They were told that the people of India would never use for their own consumption more than 500,000 bales of jute.

“The people of Dundee used to work about five to six times that quantity of jute in the Dundee mills. But in 1921 the Dundee mills were compelled to do their work on only about 600,000 bales, while the jute mills in Bengal, where the jute grows, worked upon 4,300,000 bales, or seven times as much as the Dundee workers. The workers in India were overworking, and the workers in Dundee had to shut up their shop.”

(Hon. members: “Why not?”)

“I do not say why not, but when you were talking about jute production in India, did you tell the workers of Dundee it was to stop their work and start it in India? I am not asking whether yes, or whether no. I am asking you something more difficult than that. I am asking you to be honest. I am asking you to take the full history of finer cotton in India.

“You started the production of finer cotton in India, and what happened? Today, with the larger quantities of cotton, the Indian mills not only want to extend their industry, but demand that a prohibitive duty shall be placed on their goods. You might again ask, ‘Why not?’

That is not the question we are discussing tonight. Do you, then, tell the workers of Lancashire that one of the possibilities of growing finer cotton in India would be to curtail their work and increase their unemployment?

“I ask you today—I am not indulging in larger questions, but taking this matter by itself—I am asking you today as men of the world, why do you not realise that this very cotton, this long-staple cotton growing in the Sudan, will be a temptation to some of you, which in the past you never had the strength of character to resist, to take Sudanese slave labour and start your spinning mills in the Sudan?”

“You will do it as you have done it all over the world. You will grow long-staple cotton, and then when you come to grips with the operatives of Lancashire, you, as you have done in the past, will be the people who will start cotton mills in the Sudan and shut up Lancashire. That is your history, which you cannot deny. You want to cover it up by talking of guarantees and investments and so on. I have heard of a gentle scheme where a paper was read by a government expert sent out by the Manchester University, about a detailed plan of improving the staple cotton in India, and one part of it was that the Indian farmer, the ryot, does not count. He is of no account, and one of the clauses of that scheme is that if the farmer fails to mix his seeds and spoils the profit of some Lancashire ‘boss’, there shall be imprisonment for him up to 6 months.”

The Chairman: “I cannot see the relevancy of all this.”

Mr Saklatvala: “I was just showing the possibilities of what will happen in the Sudan. I am now coming directly to the point. In performing these two enterprises, you will have to fall back on human beings in the Sudan. You will have to rely upon their labour to grow cotton out of Nature. You will fall back on your methods of exacting toil out of human beings to suit your profits, and you will then introduce similar Clauses of imprisonment for farmers of the Sudan, and everything to secure you long-staple cotton.

“If you succeed you will pocket the profits. If you fail, you will not only throw the burden on the taxpayers, but out of revenge for your failure, you will lead this country into another murderous expedition against the

Sudanese. That is the history of private enterprise guaranteed by governments. The guarantee to the Sudan means the guarantee and nothing else. You will then come to the House, if we permit you, with long-drawn faces one day and say, 'The position is critical, but our High Commissioner is taking the situation in hand and he wants a few battleships and a few battalions.'

"We know that behind the thin end of this wedge of guarantees lies the same old seeking of profits, not in an enterprising spirit, but in an unenterprising spirit, so that if you succeed in the gamble the profit and the money and the glory are yours, and, if you fail, woe and death to those poor fellows in the country you tried to get, and the taxpayer who has to pay, not only for your loss, but for expeditions of revenge.

"Not only that, but as sure as the sun rises you will in process of time go further into the Sudan and you yourselves will be the bosses and the owners of the raw material. You will put factories there, you will exploit the labour with the positive design of ill-treating and degrading labour in this country.

(Laughter)

"I can see when the smiles are falsely put on. The Rt. hon gentleman the Chancellor of the Exchequer answered many questions of triviality, but when he was touching on certain principles he forgot them, or perhaps he was asked to forget them by his colleagues. The hon member for Motherwell (Mr Newbold) put forward two glaring instances which, apart from any possible emotion in them, are certainly an underlying principle which generally, in outward life, you seem to discourage and discountenance, but which, in this very favourite appeal of the government, you seem not only to encourage and tolerate, but even to patronise and practice.

"The member for Motherwell pointed out that here, in the name of the League of Nations, a gentleman who is going to be a beneficiary himself recommends a loan, and in the case of the Sudan, in the case of this contract, a gentleman who, directly and indirectly, is going to be a beneficiary, as a contractor, whether his tender was lowest or highest or 'middlest', that does not matter—one who in principle was to be the beneficiary by a contract is himself the inspirer of the whole scheme of

giving a nice little guarantee. We do not want your money we only want your guarantee!

“Day after day this slow degradation goes on. It is the demoralisation of public institutions which has brought down all nations. In the Sudan scheme the government ought to have taken precautions that those who are connected with reporting on the scheme, recommending it, or having anything to do with it, had no connection with the profits. The government has failed to see to that.

“Why did the enterprising free enterprise suddenly collapse in its spirit of enterprise, and make it necessary for us to sit here since eleven o'clock? Why did not the government call on their favourite cry of 'private enterprise'? Did the government make an attempt in the easy style of governmental parliamentary attempts of asking their friends what their wishes and desires were in this matter?

“Were they told by private enterprise that it saw a great future in it and a great risk, and that it would be clever to shift the risk on to the taxpayer who is generally a mug? That part requires to be explained by the government, not only explicitly, but even candidly, and having no regard to any secrecy between any negotiators and themselves.

“This House has a right to know the nature of any consultations, and the persons with whom those consultations were carried on. If no consultations took place, then the supporters of the government are bound in duty to tell their constituents, now that the General Election is over and the votes have been secured, that they forgot to go to the private enterprisers. There must be something in it.

“Neither the Chancellor of the Exchequer nor the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, so far as I am aware, is either by education or association a cotton expert. I do not believe that if a bale of Sudanese cotton were placed in the hands of either of those Gentlemen they would be able to say it was Sudanese cotton, or a piece of wool or anything else. I do not believe that either of them would be able to test the long staple or short staple article.

“I do not, therefore, believe that the whole scheme originated in their heads. They told us there was a deputation, but that was last year. They are a new government, and they tell us that, by some divine inspiration,

not financial investigation, they came to the conclusion that long-staple cotton was grown in the Sudan. Never mind about the methods of growing it, unemployment in Lancashire is going to be less. But the government cannot make us accept such a doctrine unless they take us into their confidence and tell us the full psychological evolution.

“We have heard of a deputation last year, and we see suddenly in this Session a Bill. We see two different and separate things in front of us. We have a very incomplete and undigested Bill about fine staple cotton in the Sudan, but without any information or any explanation. We heard of the deputation, but how the present occupants of office took up suddenly, in the midst of the difficulties of the Irish Constitution, this question of Sudanese cotton, and what experts they consulted in the matter I hardly know.

“What promise did they get from the Manchester Chamber of Commerce and from the Plymouth private enterprises as to how much money they were prepared to put in? There are schemes put forward by the public, by private companies and corporations, and these companies and corporations came to Parliament to ask for sanction, they apply for guarantees, and for security of interest, but nothing of that sort seems to have happened in the case of Sudanese cotton.

“We have not heard today that the private enterprisers of Britain are so dead that they are not able to stump up 3½ millions. We have not heard yet that the right hon members who support the government, and who only last week were burning with zeal about the agriculturists and farmers, have undertaken to take some of the unemployed farmers of this country and send them to Sudan.

“We have not heard from the government that the present unemployment in Lancashire has been due to a want of long staple cotton and the market for the yarn made out of the long staple cotton. We have heard from the government only a week ago, that stocks of cotton yarn made out of long staple are still lying in the warehouses of Manchester, Birkenhead and Liverpool. What do you want a further 70,000 bales of long staple cotton for if you have not been able to spin that which you have and the cotton you did spin you are not willing to sell because you do not get your pound of flesh?

“How the government, as the impartial arbiter between the workers and the financiers, between the state and private enterprise, suddenly came to this conclusion will remain a miracle and a mystery unless they explain it more fully than they have done. It may be a miracle and mystery to their friends, but it shall not be so to their opponents. When we saw the mere whispers of this Bill in the air, when we heard the gentle hints given to us tonight by the Prime Minister that it was something about which the least said the soonest mended, and that we sit up after eleven, the whole cat jumped out of the bag at once.

“Two issues spring out of the Sudanese cotton. Number one issue is that the government has been made to think about this scheme, and the second is that either they are unable to explain the details of the business or they thought it was a matter about which a long talk must not be permitted and that it might be got through in about half an hour. But as I have said, this House is entirely a new House. In this House you have not only human ears, but you have an intellectual microscope, and those little invisible germs—I do not mean the members of the opposition—”

The Chairman: “The hon member must approach the question of this loan.”

Mr Saklatvala: “The germs are now becoming visible in their whole alarming view to the public gaze. I submit that the whole idea underlying this Sudan scheme and to push this Bill through at this time, when we were least expecting to push it through, is to establish, what every government generally desires to do, a precedent and a pledge, so that throughout the coming Sessions this little nest will come up. I still submit that the scheme as propounded by the government is a scheme barren of the fundamental elements of justice. The scheme is based upon one fact, as if it were a truism, that it is going to produce 70,000 bales of long staple cotton.”

The Chairman: “It is not in order to repeat the same argument.”

Mr Saklatvala: “I am submitting, Mr Hope, that from parallel examples of similar hopefulness of the growing of long staple cotton in other parts of the world, thousands of pounds have been wasted, and the cotton that has been ultimately grown has been neither short staple nor long

staple.”

The House divided at 4am: ‘Ayes:’ 172, ‘Nos:’ 88 (a total of 260 members present out of 643 elected—such is the democratic process).

On the 10th December, The Observer referred to his speech:

“Mr Saklatvala, who is better acquainted with the grammar of the English tongue than with its slang, made a delightful perversion in his 3 o’clock-in-the-morning speech. ‘The whole cat,’ he said, ‘jumped out of the bag at once.’”

On the 13th December 1922, the Evening News carried the following item relating to a debate the previous day regarding the Army Supplementary Estimate, part of which was a government proposal to compensate the customers of a failed bank, all of whom were Army officers:

‘MPs’ All Night Liveliness—Storms and Yawns in Relay Race

Labour’s Plan

MP Talks Of Fighting In The Streets’

There then appear photographs of D. Kirkwood and Saklatvala.

“By deliberate obstruction tactics which a Labour MP called ‘the new game of Patience’ but which the Speaker designated ‘a very old game of Patience’, the Labour Party kept the House of Commons sitting until 7 minutes to 7 today.

“Lively scenes marked the sitting. ‘Scandal!’ and ‘Shame!’ were words in frequent use by Labour MPs whose declared intention was to ‘keep the House sitting continually until Friday night.’

“Mr Kirkwood of the Glasgow Labour MPs was particularly truculent. He advised Labour MPs to ‘show their contempt for the whole proceedings’ and talked of ‘fighting in the streets if necessary’.

‘A Parsi Oration—Mr Saklatvala talks for an hour on ‘Private enterprise’”

“The Labour Party set their men to work in relays. The government, to counter this, resorted to the closure motion every now and again. At 1am Mr Wheatley, who had been one of the most prominent obstructionists, moved the adjournment of the House. ‘I submit,’ he said, ‘that we have done a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay, and have registered a very practical protest against unemployment.’

“‘I, being a young man, require some sleep,’ drowsily remarked Mr

Buchanan, as he slowly rose to second the Motion. The House divided and the Motion for adjournment was defeated by 185 to 93.

“The Labour Party then settled down again to their policy of obstruction. They kept the House waiting for an hour for a Supplementary Estimate of £100,000 required for grants to refugees from Ireland, and obstructed the report stage of a Supplementary Army Estimates of £340,000 for the purpose of compensating Officers and others who have suffered from the failure of McGriggors Bank.

“Mr Ammon, who moved to reduce the sum by £100, complained that no compensation had been paid to working people who had deposited their savings in other banks.

“Mr Saklatvala, the Parsi Labour member, seized on this opportunity to fire off a solid hour’s speech in derision of private enterprise...”

Hansard recorded it thus:

Mr Ammon moved the amendment and Mr Saklatvala rose to second it.

Mr Saklatvala: “I beg to second the amendment.

“I must also draw the attention of the House to the principles which are expected to be observed by the constitutional government or, in fact, by any body of men standing as trustees of public funds, and these principles seem to me to be quite openly violated in this Grant. In the first place, it is an extremely difficult position to charge a body of honourable men with any bad motives or bad intentions, but a certain place [the House of Lords] and the British House of Commons are both paved with good intentions. That does not help anyone. Our actions must be such that they not only remain above suspicion, but that they are in conformity with the principles that we desire to enforce upon the public as a governing House.

“It has been pointed out that there have been other bank failures. The difference between the other bank failures and this bank failure appears to be, as far as one can judge from the Supplementary Estimate, that these are mostly members of the military Service. I put it that, because they are members of the Army Service, is the greater reason why the government should not, on sound principle, make this Grant, when in the case of private customers of private banks they have openly refused

to do so.

“After all, is there not a very close connection between the civil government of the country and the Army that supports the government and keeps it in its position? This means that the civil government and the Army which form a close fraternal union in the state are willing to scratch each other’s backs, but they are not acting in the same manner when people lose their money who are not part and parcel of themselves. That is the obvious conclusion.

“In the case of banks where the subscribers were a poorer class of the public, and who from a financial position were in need of greater assistance than the present set of investors, the government were drawing the distinction simply because it was the other arm of the government whom they considered it advisable to help, whereas they did not help the others.

“There is another consideration. We have seen how emphatically on two previous occasions the government refused, not only all liability, but even their liability of the soundness of the principle to help the ruined shareholders and depositors of other banks, especially in the case of the Penny Bank.

“I submit that the depositors had a claim at least, not only upon our sympathy, but upon the moral support of the state. Essentially that class of poor depositors were a class who were not highly educated, who were not supposed to understand all about banking, all about the soundness or otherwise of a bank, or of the status of the directors and persons who formed that bank.

“Here the position is quite a different one. Generally speaking we may take it that the depositors who have suffered here are people who ought to have known better and had acted wrongly through perhaps the motive of making a higher profit by dealing with this bank than by investing their money elsewhere. They could not plead that ignorance and that inability to understand their business which the depositors of the Penny Bank could very well plead.

“Another principle underlying this Grant appears to me to be almost a startling precedent. Personally, I do not mind that the members who are in a majority in this House should go to the constituencies a month ago

and proclaim the merits of private enterprise, and when they get into power, and when they find themselves and their friends in a very tight corner through the glories of private enterprise, that then they should rush to a scheme of Socialism for safety and emancipation.

“Personally, I do not regret it, but, as a matter of principle, taking the government as it is formed, and taking the government as the people of this country desire it to be, I think it is exceedingly wrong for the government to trifle with the money of the public in this fashion. If you look at the nature of the Grant itself, what does it mean? It is paying a premium on gambling. It is rewarding those who take part in a swindle, because, after all, though we may sympathise—”

Sir A. Holbrook: “On a point of Order. I think it unfair of the Hon. member to charge officers of the Army of being concerned in the swindle. That is what I object to.”

(Hon. members: “No!”)

Mr Saklatvala: “When the money disappears, it disappears either through gross negligence or through swindling directly by those who are in control of these moneys. There is not the slightest question in my mind whether one party directly swindles the depositors or another set of swindlers in the way of private enterprise. What I beg to point out and what I do point out, is that the government, by this action, are paying a premium on this system of swindling, because we must remember that in private enterprise, as constituted by law and carried on in an orderly manner, both parties are guilty either of negligence or of encouraging fraud, if not of practising it.

“The depositors who deposit their money in a concern and do not make proper investigation as to the nature of the soundness of that concern, as to the business ability of the heads of that concern, who are careless of going to that concern from time to time to demand proper accounts and analyse the affairs of that concern, are, themselves, a danger to society and especially, I should say, a danger to society composed of private enterprisers.

“It is a public duty, if it is not a personal duty, of every depositor in a money concern under a system of private enterprise, which always encourages sharp practice, it is the public duty of every investor in a

private enterprise to very carefully and analytically search into the conduct and condition of those persons responsible for conducting the industry; and the depositors of this particular concern, having failed in that personal duty as well as that public duty, have themselves been responsible for the very thing which has come to them and their deposits.

“The government now comes and says, ‘Oh, never mind; we are at your back, because most of you are akin to us in your social and economic conditions, and because most of you are followers of our politics, we are friends, we are one and the same; we will get you out of the trouble,’ whereas, the self-same government and the self-same country once upon a time refused to bring out of trouble a much poorer class and a much poorer set of depositors when they lost their money.

“But we are told, in a very indirect and vague manner, as if there is some thought of a liability hanging upon the government, that this bank was something like a double-faced Janus. It turned to the Army officers and said to them, ‘I am your agent; give me your money.’ Then it turned to the other side and became a speculative banker, and gambled or did what it pleased with the moneys of the depositors. The government, therefore, feel that, when they look at this particular concern from its banking face, they cannot easily forget its agency face. But that is the greater reason why the responsible government ought not to take this step of granting money.

“I should suggest that they ought to take steps to save the depositors as a compensation for having brought them into the dangerous position, but they ought not to have done so from public funds. I appeal to you; supposing the government was in a position of a director of a concern, what would have been your position? The government here are distinctly negligent themselves, because they have appointed as Army agents, or sanctioned the working as Army agents, of a certain party who, as results have proved, were unworthy of being put in that position.

“The government victimised the Army officers by inducing them to deposit their money with a concern with which otherwise, perhaps, they would not have entrusted so much. The government are helping

themselves. I use that word with due apology. The government are helping themselves with public funds in order to make up a loss to innocent people, the burden of which they feel upon their conscience as private human beings.

“I submit very seriously to this House, what would be the position of the same Ministers if they found themselves placed in a condition like this; were they the directors of a concern. We have recently seen some scandalous affairs attaching to banking corporations where directors have by their negligence brought a loss upon innocent depositors or those who have had dealings with the concern.

“The Courts of Justice, constitutionally, made demand that these directors put their hands into their own pockets and make up the loss. That is the moral law. But if the government sitting in Parliament says that they must make up the loss with the avowed enterprise of protecting them, it was setting a bad example and degrading the dignity of the House. The government appointed these people as Army agents, and their appointment was inducive to the depositors going to this particular concern and not only going to this particular concern—”

(An Hon. member: “But coming back!”)

“—but remaining very careless as to the modes of operation of this concern, thinking that as these were Army agents they would be safe. When it comes to the Ministers that the burden lies upon them, they ought to take some other means of raising this money, themselves or their friends, to defray these losses, but they ought not to touch money belonging to the public. I submit that we, as a Parliament and as a public, should be able to take Ministers to law and make them refund this money.

“We have heard about private enterprise. This case more than any other distinctly proves that what we know to be private enterprise is certainly private, but is always devoid of the spirit of honest enterprise. Private enterprise appears to me to be that moneys and properties belonging to others are dealt with in privacy, the profits accruing therefrom being pocketed by those who call themselves private enterprisers, and when their recklessness or carelessness or inability, or even their dishonesty, brings the whole thing to ruin, the position of the present government is

that the taxpayer is called upon to reimburse the losers. If this scheme passes—”

(An Hon. member: “It will!”)

“—I wonder how many more banking concerns will be encouraged to ‘mushroom’ up tomorrow in this country? If this grant be made to reimburse the losses of foolish and negligent depositors, giving back to them, a substantial assistance, after their remaining negligent, of their own ordinary interest, I wonder whether we are giving a lesson to the public to be more careful after a failure like this or are we giving a lesson to the public not to worry about carefulness, that the state is always at their back to make up their gambling losses, and that they can gamble away?

“These are Army officers. Had they no Post Office Savings Banks or were they too superior and too rich and aristocratic to go to the savings banks alongside the poor people? If they were too rich and too aristocratic to do that, why did they come with their hats to the British taxpayer? Were these the patriotic gentlemen of Great Britain who were putting their placards and posters on the walls, published and printed from public money, ‘Put in your 15s 6d and it will be 25s 6d’?

“Why do not they practise what they preach? Why did they come to this private bank for the deliberate purpose of speculating on a larger scale? All the bait you held out to them did not draw them even when that bait was steeped in the more attractive honey of patriotism. No appeal seems to have gone forth to these depositors at the time they were depositing their money that there were other channels open to them.

“What does that indicate? It distinctly indicates that they had some spare money about which they were not really very much concerned and with which they thought it possible to take a gamble in a so-called bank. It points to the fact that, while the Army itself is underpaid, the Army officers are paid more than was needed for their daily life, and that accounts for the large deposits in a certain concern in which they had no business to deposit any money.

“Secondly, it shows that the Army officers being well provided for with more liberal compensation than the old age pensioner gets in this country, were very unconcerned as to what really happened to their

savings, and they wanted laterally to gamble with it rather than save it in a state Savings Bank. The whole question is that there is no real financial need. This time it is not the failure of the needy and the poor ones; it is not the failure of those who would be dragged to the gutter absolutely in their old age by having lost these fortunes. This is money belonging to a class of officer who evidently, after living fairly well—

(An Hon. member: “How do you know?”)

“—From the very fact that the state issued this money. They got it exactly from the same government that starved the Tommy. They got this money after living on a much higher scale than the ordinary soldier and the ordinary average working-class man of this country, and they were so backed up by a system of pensions and so confident about it that they did not consider it necessary to take the ordinary care and precaution about saving this money for their old age. No one likes to lose money. Even we have seen millionaires, if they lost a few thousands, beginning to wail, and if they had to pay Excess Profits they would cut off some of their benefactions. The richer they are the more unwilling they are to part with it.”

Mr. Deputy-Speaker (Mr. James Hope): “The hon member is getting very wide from the point now.”

Mr. Saklatvala: “I submit that, while they may feel the loss of their money, they cannot be classed with the people rendered destitute by the other failures, people who have now got to pass a hopeless future in their old age without any means of support or livelihood, as was the case with the depositors in the Penny Bank. There is no particular reason, from a financial point of view, for the state to come with public funds and help them to the extent of £340,000 at a time when the government have no money for the men whose women and children have anxious moments to find a piece of bread for next morning.

“From a moral point of view, the government have not made out any particular case for this grant. Men are responsible for the way in which they invested their money in a concern conducted in a very indifferent manner, and in which no cautious man would have kept his money for any considerable time. Considering the moral responsibility of the government, that it was their own Army agents who had done it, I think

that the responsible persons in the government themselves, with the assistance, if they are too poor, of their rich friends, should have a donation fund, instead of paying compensation from the public funds because of their own negligence in dealing with a party that was not worthy to be dealt with.

“These are considerations which can go directly against making such a grant from public funds. We are told there are no precedents for such a grant being made. The government are not only making the public pay £340,000, but they are not making the public learn a costly lesson. Instead, they are, by making this grant, setting a bad example of appointing wrong Army agents for depositors to go ahead and gamble as they please, giving a premium to bankers who want to play fast and loose with the depositors’ money, knowing there will be no public howl about it, but that a generous government will come forward and help them with public money.

“They are also giving a bad example to the Army, which is maintained by the state, by showing by this grant that Army officers are not required to be cautious and thrifty. They are not of the people. They are not to go to the state arrangements for saving money in the Post Office banks. They are permitted to gamble. If they make a profit, the profit will be theirs. If they make a loss, the loss will be borne by the taxpayer.”

In reply to this peroration, the Financial Secretary to the War Office, Lieut. Col. Jackson said:

“I am sure the hon Gentlemen who moved and seconded the Reduction will not think me discourteous if I do not reply to their arguments at this particular moment. They will be replied to later in the debate and I am doubtful if I can reply to all the remarks of the last speaker. I am not sure I could do it in the sunshine and I am quite certain I cannot do it at this late hour...”

Thus ended Saklatvala’s first three weeks in the House of Commons; he had certainly already made his mark as a forceful and entertaining contributor to parliamentary debates.

CHAPTER 10

Speaking Against Imperialism

Unemployment Sunday. Speech during parliamentary debate on the 'Indian states—Protection Against Disaffection Act, 1922'. The campaign against substandard housing in London.

Much to the indignation of the Labour Party and the working class movement generally, the parliamentary Christmas recess was not to end until 13th February 1923. Saklatvala seconded a parliamentary resolution protesting against the prorogation, stating that by extending the parliamentary holiday to 13th February the government showed its indifference to the suffering of the long-term unemployed

The TUC organised a national day of demonstration that became known as Unemployment Sunday. A huge crowd gathered in Trafalgar Square on 7th January, where they were addressed by, among others, George Lansbury, Saklatvala and Wal Hannington.



Photo: Saklatvala speaking in Trafalgar Square; George Lansbury faces the camera

It was not until well after the Christmas recess that Saklatvala finally got the chance to address the House on the subject nearest to his heart, namely, the iniquities of imperialism as practiced in India. It was on the 27th February 1923, that under Orders of the Day, the House had before it the ‘Indian states (Protection Against Disaffection) Act, 1922’. Colonel Wedgewood (Labour) moved that, ‘A humble Address be presented to His Majesty that he withhold his assent to the Indian states (Protection Against Disaffection) Act 1922.’

This Act was to make it impossible for subjects of the Indian princely states, not under British rule, or Indian citizens in British India, to publicise in India or the Indian press, the malpractices of the Indian princes against their subjects. While several of the Princes were reasonably benevolent, many of them were despotic and cruel, and Colonel Wedgewood made an impassioned and detailed speech against Great Britain affording their protection to these despotic and tyrannical regimes.

Mr Snell (Labour), in seconding the Motion, referred to the Act as a measure which “very seriously limits human freedom.” The Act was to impose a penalty of five years imprisonment, with or without a fine, upon anyone who may “write, edit, print or publish, any book, newspaper or document calculated to bring into hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection against Princes or Chiefs of a state in India...”

Snell pointed out to the House that the punishment was to be administered not because any words published had actually caused riot or sabotage or revolution; “a person may be imprisoned... on the ground that the speculative mind of an official may think that his words may have caused disaffection.”

Later in his long and passionate speech he reminded the House that, by the famous Proclamation issued in 1858, which was the Magna Carta of Indian liberties, we undertook to concede the same rights and principles to the Indian people as to British subjects born elsewhere. This proposed Act negated that ideal.

Saklatvala took up the argument. at first with quiet sarcasm. He said:

“I suppose I shall be pardoned for saying that I cannot tear myself away from the feeling that we are conducting a mock debate, with a forgone conclusion. I want all my colleagues here tonight to remember that for

these few hours, they are not the same Parliament which they imagine they are, and which they were up till 4 o'clock this afternoon.

“Up till 4 o'clock this was a Parliament that believed in the representation of the people, in the supreme right, above the sovereign right, of the elected representatives of the people. After 4 o'clock, Parliament has reversed its engines, and it believes in a dictatorship over a foreign people, through a man whom they have sent out, in whose selection 300 million of people had no voice whatever. [He was, of course, alluding to the Viceroy, at whose personal instigation the Act was introduced.]

“The Parliament which here wants to give speed and growth to democratic institutions, desires to extend the franchise, and pretends to give further and further rights to the enfranchised people, is at the same time spreading itself thousands and thousands of more miles further away in other parts of the world, where this very Parliament demands that the people of those countries shall have no voice in the administration and governing of their affairs. This Parliament, as it now considers the Bill, is not the advocate of the right of representation of the people, but of the dictatorship of somebody outside, to other peoples of the world. And this is an entirely different Assembly.

“There is a danger in this sort of debate having, perhaps, a misleading effect. By our very effort to save the government from rushing into a mad act, we are liable here on the Labour Benches to be surreptitiously drawn into an Imperial policy, as if we wanted Imperialism to be run more correctly than they desire, but though there is such a danger, there is no reality in it. The Labour Party is asking the government not to do something ridiculous and silly, which would betray their own aims and efforts, but by so doing it does not give a pledge to the other side that the Labour Party desires a more correct form of Imperialism to be observed than the government desire.

“There is also a danger, on the part of our Indian friends that, by this kind of struggle, by this kind of tug-of-war with the imperialist, foreign, dominating power, they are tacitly accepting the right of this country to send a Viceroy at all. That is not the position from the Indian point of view, and we do not want to be snared into the false Imperialism which

after the War, the whole world, barring the Liberals and Conservatives of Great Britain, have cast to the winds.

“I am glad that on this occasion our friends, the Liberal Party, are openly associating themselves with the government so far as we have heard their speakers. We do not wish to have, on such imperialist questions, the idea that there are three groups in this House. There are only two groups. The one group is the group of Conservatives and Liberals combined that believes in the supreme right of this country and this Parliament in exploiting and dominating over the countries that do not belong to them and that never sent men forth here to disturb them at all; and opposed to them there is only one group that does not believe in such imperialist domination, but believes in the co-operation of all nations on terms of equality and equal rights.

“The real difficulty with regard to the Viceroy’s position arises from the system which he has got to maintain. After the War, the whole of the world, civilised as far as you may call yourselves, or uncivilised as far as others may think, has come to realise that political Imperialism is mere barbarity, however nicely you put it. The world has also come to realise that no country and no nation can now live at peace and in prosperity by crushing other nations economically.

“If there was no Viceroy in India to represent this political domination of Britain, but if there were dozens of Britishers to represent the fraternal co-operation of the working classes of Britain, this Bill and this question and this debate would not have arisen at all, and the result would have been far better than that at which the government or the present Viceroy may be aiming.

“I myself realise the position. You send out a Viceroy, and you tell 300 millions of people that they have got nothing to do with selecting the head of their administration. You have only got to send out a certain person for a number of years to run over the people—not to consult them, not to serve—to govern them in the interests that are not known to the people as the peoples’ interests. I quite imagine that Viceroy should more than once run away with the idea that he can only be doing his duty to the Mother Country whenever he defies the wishes of the people in whose midst he has got to live his life. That being the position,

the Viceroy runs to this House and asks that we should back him up, and in order to preserve Imperialism as such, you are going to back him up.

**COMMUNISTS IN
THE OPEN.**

**DEMONSTRATIONS BY
UNEMPLOYED.**

A "RED FLAG" EFFORT.

Demonstrations organized by the official Labour bodies in conjunction with the "National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement" were held in many parts of the country yesterday. At each a resolution was submitted demanding the immediate meeting of Parliament to deal with the unemployment problem. The opportunity was seized by the Communists to make a bold display in speeches and banners.

Many thousands were attracted to the London demonstration in Trafalgar-square. None of the banners was brighter or newer than those borne by the various branches of the Communist Party, who had apparently obeyed in full force the official instruction to identify themselves actively with the proceedings. It was a Communist banner, reared against the bronze relief depicting the Battle of Copenhagen, that formed the central feature of the background at the main platform on the Nelson Column. The "Red Flag" was frequently sung, both on the march and in the square. On the instrumental side the "Marseillaise" and the Sinn Fein "Soldier's Song" mingled with the pibrochs. Under the banner of the Stepney Young Communist League a group of foreign-looking youths sang Communist nursery rhymes.

The hunger-marchers did not parade separately, but were scattered in small contingents among the various processions. Among those taking part, according to the banners, were men from Liverpool, Newcastle, Sheffield, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Greenock. Mr. George Lansbury, M.P., headed one of the East-end processions, and among other members of Parliament who were present on the plinth were Mr. Bowerman, Mr. March, Mr. McKee, and Mr. Saklatvala.

Clipping: The Times, 8th January 1923

"May I ask this House to consider the effects upon the sections of the Indian population? The new Act dared to enfranchise 6% of the population of India, most of whom laughed at the artificial right of franchise given to them by a foreign domination, and 85% of those who were given that franchise scorned it, and said they would have nothing

to do with it. As the balance, there is just 1% of the population of India that is hanging on to the Viceroy and his Councils and is keeping faith in British administration as it now stands. It is 1%, but I know the men and the women that are in it. They are worthy of everybody's consideration, but above all, I want the government to realise that here is this 1% volunteering to keep faith in British institutions, volunteering to come forward to back up the Viceroy and British Councils and the British mode of administering the country—”

Mr Speaker: “This is not the occasion on which to review the government of India Act or the present system of government in India. The only question that arises here is whether the right judgement has been exercised within the law now existing in India.”

Mr Saklatvala: “I am going to make the point, Mr Speaker, of drawing the attention of the government to the people whom they are hurting by rejecting the Motion of the Labour Party. The people who are now protesting against the Viceroy's action, and the people whom the Labour Party is now trying to back up, are the people who have dared to become the laughing stock of 99% of their own countrymen in their effort to stand by the British institutions, and the Viceroy and the government here are now throwing them over.

“They are telling the people that there is no reality in the Councils, that they have believed in something that was a sham, and they are further telling these people, who the other day sent in a petition, which was duly sent forward, asking this House to consider their position, that this House does not exist in reality as a protector of representational popular freedom. This will be the effect if the government persist in their policy and do not take the warning that is offered them from the Labour Benches.

“The action of the Viceroy has another side, which I will ask the government to bear in mind, and that is this. The people of India do not believe that the Viceroy is taking this measure for the protection of the Princes as such. The people of India know that, up to the end of the reign by Lord Curzon, the Princes of India were driven by a whip by the Viceroys of India, and it was the Indian papers and the Indian public organisations that were always protecting them and protesting against

the action of the government.

“The people of India have now begun to believe—they may be right or they may be wrong—that the government are now adopting a policy of quietly influencing and even, where possible, of indirectly coercing, the Indian Princes to maintain a very reactionary policy in the Native states, and that the government of India are now afraid of their secret and silent influence at the back of what is known in India as Imperialism, which is being exposed by honest criticism in the Indian press, on which account they are out to pass this Act over the heads of the people of India.

“It was said by members on both sides in the debate that there is a pledge. Who gave the pledge? The Viceroy, whom the people have never elected. He gave the pledge, and he wants the representatives of the people to stand by his pledge. That is the unnatural position of Imperialism. There is no constitutional position in such a pledge, and there is no obligation on the people of India to maintain such a pledge. They are not parties to it... I should be extremely pleased if the government rejected the Motion of the Labour Party, because that is the only way by which this last lingering vestige of Imperialism in this world will go to its grave.

“If by any chance you began to show common sense, and if by any chance you began to retrace your steps, it would be somewhat calamitous, because it would still enable Imperialism to continue to exist, and I am quite ready to take sides with the Motion of the Labour Party, because it is quite obvious that the Labour Party can never advocate the principle that one individual should have autocratic power over the representatives of the people. At the same time, I hope that, after the action of the government in defying the Labour Party, the Labour Party will begin now to discriminate between the existence and non-existence of Imperialism.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Mr. SAKLATVALA (Battersea, N., Lab.) said he felt that the House were conducting a mock debate to a foregone conclusion. In this country they favoured the growth of democratic institutions, but in other parts of the world they demanded that the people should have no voice in the administration of their affairs. He would be extremely pleased if the Government rejected the motion of the Labour Party, because that was the way in which the last lingering vestige of Imperialism would go to its grave. (Labour cheers and Ministerial laughter.) As to the Indian Civil Service, it was not Indian, it was not civil, and it was a domination and a usurpation. (Laughter.) Barring those three great defects, the Service was all right. (Renewed laughter.) If the Government wished to destroy British Imperialism let them go on with their autocratic programme. If they wished to give an extended lease of life to British Imperialism they must tell the Viceroy to retrace his steps, to climb down, and to find some other camouflage with which to rule the Indian people. (Laughter.)

Clipping: The Times, 28th February 1923

“Before concluding, I may just add one word as to the Indian Civil Service, about which there was some argument on account of some remarks offered by the Hon. and Gallant member who moved the Labour Motion [Col. Wedgewood]. I do not believe that it is the intention to attack personalities or members with regard to this particular Bill.

“What we do feel is that it is not so much the individual desire of the Viceroy to push it through over the heads of quite a new Assembly, as it is the traditional practice of the Indian Civil Service, and not because the individuals who form the Indian Civil Service are themselves particularly selected wrong men. That is not the idea, but that the whole system and machinery has got its own faults. The Indian Civil Service is not Indian. It has no reputation for being civil, and it is a domination and a usurpation. Barring these three great defects, they are all right.

“I, therefore, say to the government that if they wish to destroy Imperialism, as they should, they should go on with their autocratic programme. If they wish to give an extended lease to British Imperialism, they may tell the Viceroy to retrace his steps, to climb down and find some other camouflage to rule the people of India.”

Mr Hope Simpson then rose and said he found himself at some disadvantage after the wonderful rhetorical effort to which the House had just listened with such enjoyment.

On the following day, Saklatvala turned his attention to more mundane matters nearer home, in his own constituency of North Battersea, and he

raised the question of sub-standard housing there. It is a speech that could well be echoed today, when housing is still an acute and agonising problem for thousands of working people in our great cities; when, in spite of the efforts through the years of so many sincere pleaders and champions for their cause, thousands of families are still without homes and shelter and many thousands more are living in derelict and unhealthy slums.

Well, here is a little effort my father made in 1923, sixty-five years ago as I write. We have found money for a world war, for armaments and nuclear weapons, for the upkeep of an elaborate and oh-so-secret-service, for propaganda and intervention throughout the world, for a mini-war in the Falklands, but still we cannot find the money to build enough homes for our people to live in. Human hearts must be adamantine hard.

Saklatvala said:

“I wish to bring to the notice of the substitute for the Minister of Health an urgent matter concerning the housing problem. I am specially requested by the Borough Council of Battersea to urge upon the Minister to give it sympathetic consideration and not to set it aside on grounds of Party feeling. It is not only a question of the shortage of houses and the delay in erecting new houses, but of a most acute problem, which has arisen of rendering existing houses useless by landlords sheltering behind certain imperfections in the law.

“In accordance with Section 28 of the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1918, while the Municipal authorities are empowered to put in repair certain houses, they are left in a position of great doubt as to ultimately recovering the sums of money spent on such repairs.

“The Battersea Council is faced with the fact that, having repaired certain houses when the cost was at its highest, they now stand no chance of recovering the sum from the landlords, and have had to come to terms for spreading the repayments over 15 years. Before they can recover the public funds which have been spent on taking care of private enterprise in Battersea, they will have to wait for 15 years. Further, on investigation it has been found that these landlords are not aliens but Britishers, and one happens to be a Scotsman.

“The most serious point is that Section 28 does not give any powers to the Borough Council over the freeholders, and the leaseholders are

merely undergoing a process of transferring houses from the name of one leaseholder to that of another, and in the meanwhile the tenants are dwelling in houses which are unfit for use as dwelling places. The municipal authorities have been compelled in Stanford Street, to take in charge about 25 houses, all in one street, and they cordially invite representative of the Ministry to visit these houses which are specimens...

"I am glad to say that all the inhabitants are on rent strike because they know that morally the landlords do not deserve the rents. The trouble is that the corporation have to put these houses into repair, and they do not know how they will recover the expenses.



Clipping: The Times, 8th January 1923

"The request of the Battersea Council is that the Minister should see his way to make an alteration in the Section as quickly as possible, with retrospective power, if possible, to arrange that instead of the landlord and leaseholder being sued for recovery of the expenses incurred, other arrangements shall be made.

"If they could permit the Corporation to go to the County Court Judge or the Magistrate before the repairs are effected, giving the landlord a reasonable time as adjudicated by the Court, and if he failed to effect such repairs within that time, if the Corporation could be allowed to

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take over charge of the house at its depreciated value, that would be the only way in which a solution could be found. We shall be obliged for an assurance from the Minister that such an alteration can be made speedily.”

The parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, Colonel Leslie Wilson apologised for the absence of Sir W. Joynson-Hicks. Efforts had been made to find him in order that he should be present to answer the Hon. member, but he had left the House. Colonel Wilson promised to convey Mr Saklatvala's remarks to the Minister and see that he takes all that has been said into consideration. The Session came to an end at 26 minutes after 11 o'clock.

A fortnight after this plea in the House, Saklatvala addressed a mass meeting convened by the Labour Party in Westminster on the subject of poor housing in that borough.

The Deportations to Ireland

The arrest in the UK of 112 people of Irish origin and their deportation to Dublin; widely protested and subsequently declared illegal.

On the 12th March 1923, a small paragraph appeared discreetly on page 12 of The Times under headlines, 'Irish Arrests in England—100 Men and Women Expelled—Free State Charges'.



Clipping: The Times, 12th March 1923

On the same day, the Manchester Guardian reported prominently on the arrests and published the following official statement by the Liverpool police:

“In accordance with a concerted plan and acting on the instructions of the Home Office, numerous arrests of Irish men and women resident in foreign towns were carried out during the course of Saturday night...”

It was the Daily Herald that really gave the news its full impact and importance in the centre of the front page, under a banner headline, ‘Sensational Round-Up of Irishmen.’

The report continued:

“Over 100 arrests in night raids. Prisoners taken from many parts of Britain and deported to Ireland in HMS Castor. London houses ransacked: member of Dail taken. The arrests had been carried out in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and Bootle as well as Glasgow and other Scottish towns.

“The arrests were carried out on an order signed by Mr Bridgeman, the Home Secretary. This document quoted the Defence of the Realm Act and the Restoration of Order Act, Ireland, as the authorities for the action taken. Some of the men arrested in London were told by the police and detectives who made the arrests that if they would assure the Free State Authorities that they were not performing Republican work, they would be speedily released. The arrests were on charges formulated by the Irish Free State.

“All the persons were brought to Liverpool and transferred to the British cruiser, Castor, which sailed yesterday afternoon (Sunday 11th March), it is believed, for Ireland. The majority of the arrested persons were men. All the women taken are described as of good address, one being, it is stated, a doctor... each were ordered to take with them a pillow, a rug and a spare suit...”

The next day, the headlines ran: ‘Commons Denounce Irish Deportations. Home Secretary Indicted’:

“110 prisoners including 19 women arrived in Dublin on board HMS Castor, accompanied by destroyers Victorious and Wolfhound. They were kept below deck until 2 o’clock yesterday morning (12th March) when, with every precaution taken, they were removed on motor charr-a-bancs to Mountjoy Prison. The charr-a-bancs were escorted by armoured cars, and strong patrols of National Troops held the streets until the prisoners were safely lodged.”

A three-hour-long discussion in the Commons received wide press coverage. The matter was debated under ‘Arrests In Great Britain—Statement By The

Home Secretary' on 12th March 1923, excerpted here:

Mr Ramsay Macdonald (Labour and Leader of HM Opposition) (by private notice) asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he can make a statement with regard to the reported arrest and immediate deportation to Ireland of a number of people residing in this country; the reason for the action taken, and the authority under which he acted?

Mr Bridgeman: (Secretary of State for Home Department): I will, if I may, answer this question, and another question of which Private Notice has also been given to me by the Hon. member for Silvertown (Mr Jones).

Mr J. Jones (Liberal): On a point of Order. I want to know if my question is exactly the same as put by my Hon. Friend the member for Aberavon. With due respect, I have raised a different issue altogether.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. member will have his opportunity if he raises a specific question after the Hon. gentleman has answered the general one.

Mr Bridgeman: I was proposing to read out the question of the Hon. member for Silvertown, and I thought my general answer would cover the points of both questions. The question of the Hon. member is as follows: 'To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is aware that a school teacher, born in England, named Frank Fitzgerald, of Forest Gate, was arrested about 12am on Sunday morning, 11th March and has since been deported to Ireland; if he will state the reason for this arrest and if there is any legal redress for a citizen of this country who has been arrested and deported in this way.'

Certain arrests, one of which is referred to by the Hon. member for Silvertown in his question, were carried out during the weekend in pursuance of orders made by me and the Secretary of Scotland, respectively, directing that a number of persons shall be interned under No. 14B of the Restoration of Order in Ireland Regulations. There has lately been a progressive increase in Irish Republican activity here. We are in possession of material clearly indicating the existence of a quasi-military organisation controlled by a person calling himself 'Officer Commanding, Britain'—

Mr Lansbury (Labour): Galloper Smith! [referring ironically to a Conservative politician well-known for his opposition to Irish nationalism]

Mr Bridgeman: —and of an intention on the part of that organisation primarily to do everything in their power, in co-operation with the irregulars in Ireland, to overthrow the Free State government, and also in certain contingencies to resort to acts of violence in this country in pursuance of their unlawful aims. It was clearly the duty of His Majesty's government being in possession of such information, to take action, and we have for some time past been in consultation with the Free State government as to the best method of dealing with the situation. The arrests have been made at the request of that government.

The persons arrested are all of Irish origin and are either members of the Organisation referred to, or have supported it directly or indirectly. They will be held in custody by the Free State government in their own country. This seemed, on the whole, after full consideration, the simplest and most effective method of dealing with these persons who, claiming to be Irish, and to be acting in the interests of Ireland, so grossly abused the hospitality of this country.

Captain Hay (Labour): That is begging the question.

Mr Bridgeman: If hon members express the wish to be more fully informed as to the organisation against which this action has been directed, I shall be pleased, as soon as possible, to place in the Library illustrative specimens of documents which have lately fallen into our hands. The persons arrested have all been informed that they may, if they wish, make representations to an Advisory Committee, which will be presided over by someone who holds, or has held, high judicial office.

Mr Macdonald: Arising out of the answer, first of all on the point of legality. Does the government hold that the Restoration of Order, Ireland, Regulations run in this country? And, secondly, with reference to the Committee, is that Committee sitting in this country, and are the deported persons to be allowed to return to this country during the enquiry into their deportation?

Mr Jones: Before the rt hon gentleman answers, I should like to ask if a

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reply is going to be given to my question. My question relates to a British subject, born in England, and if such are going to be deported without appeal to the ordinary Courts of Law? If this man has been guilty of an offence against the state, I am not here to defend him, but I am asking are not the ordinary Courts in this country available? (Interruption.) I am going to go on if I am chucked out.

Mr Bridgeman: With regard to the last question, I was told that this person was engaged in this organisation.

Mr Jones: He was not. He is a British subject. Why do you not answer my question?

Hon. Members: It has been answered.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. member must really listen to the answer.

Clearly he had not been answered, since he wanted to know why a British citizen was not being tried in a British court of law after being duly charged with whatever crime of which he might be suspected.

Mr Bridgeman: I have already said that this man has the power of appearing before an Advisory Committee.

Mr Jones: He is an English subject and he has a right to appear before the courts of this country... This man is an English subject, and he has not the right to be deported without trial...Why should they be deported like this?

Mr Lansbury: Does the Home Secretary claim the right to deport a British subject, born in this country, to another country, without trial either by judge or jury?

Mr Bridgeman: I have already answered that question. My answer is that I have taken legal advice on this matter, and I am assured that I am acting within my rights. With regard to the question as to where the location of the Advisory Committee would be, it would be in this country.

...

Mr Saklatvala: I desire to ask if in the case of Frank Fitzgerald of 3 Cave Street, the Rt. hon gentleman has not made a mistake and mixed him up with another Irishman of the same name, and whether he has deported entirely the wrong person? Is the Rt. hon gentleman aware that this

particular Frank Fitzgerald is not the Frank Fitzgerald concerned in a machine-gun case recently, and is he aware that this particular Frank Fitzgerald has never functioned in any of the Irish organisations after the establishment of the Free State in Southern Ireland, and is he aware that he has actually resigned his membership of the Self-determination League and has he not deported the wrong man?

Viscount Curzon: Is this the man who was arrested in the National Liberal Club?

Mr Jones: He was arrested in his own house.

The debate was resumed on 14th March 1922.

Mr Saklatvala asked the Prime Minister if he will place upon the Table of the House immediately a full report of written as well as verbal communications that passed between the Irish Free State Authorities and the Prime Minister or any other members of the British Cabinet which caused the Home Secretary to issue orders for the arrest and deportation of numerous citizens to be tried by ordinary and extraordinary Courts in the Irish Free State?

Mr Bridgeman: I have been asked to reply. No, Sir. I can add nothing to the statement made by the Attorney-General and myself on Monday last. As I explained then, nothing more than internment is proposed at the present time.

Mr Saklatvala: Is it within the constitutional power of the government of this country to prevent the Irish Free State from taking any measures against persons who are now deported and interned there?

Mr Bridgeman: I should like to see the question on the Paper before I answer it.

...

Mr Maxton: (by private notice) asked the under-secretary to the Scottish Board of Health if he is aware that James Hicky, Gallowgate, Glasgow, one of the men deported to Ireland on the night of Saturday 10th March, is a native of Glasgow, the son of a Glasgow policeman, and that a prominent local clergyman is prepared to testify to his complete innocence of any connection with Irish rebel organisations, and if in view of these facts he will take immediate steps to restore this man to

his home?

Capt. Elliot (Parliamentary Under-Sec. for Health, Scotland): Each of the persons interned was made aware, by the terms of the Internment Order, a copy of which was served on him, that it is open to him to submit representations against the Order. Any such representations will be referred to the Advisory Committee to be presided over by Lord Trevethin. Representations from any other persons who may have personal knowledge of a particular case will be considered.

It should be remembered that no Committee had as yet been set up, so that anyone wrongfully interned had to wait in prison until such time as there was a committee to hear their case!

Mr Saklatvala (by private notice) asked the Prime Minister if he will inform the House what arrangements, if any, have been made, either by His Majesty's government or the Free State government, to give the persons deported from this country to Ireland, there to be interned, an opportunity of communicating with their friends in order that legal advice may be provided for those of the prisoners who desire it; and further, will the British government take steps to ensure that the legal advisers of the deportees proceeding to Ireland from England shall be allowed freedom of access to them for the purpose of advising as to an appeal to the Advisory Committee?

Mr Bridgeman: The Free State government will see that every reasonable opportunity is afforded to these persons to communicate with their friends in order to procure legal advice as to any representations they may wish to make to the Advisory Committee, and their legal advisers will be allowed freedom of access to them for this purpose.

Mr Saklatvala: Who is going to judge as to the exact significance of the word 'reasonable'?

The debate continued, with Bridgeman being bombarded with questions—many of which remained without a satisfactory answer. The House wanted to know whether the internee could himself elect to appear before the Advisory Committee (whenever it might be set up) and not just appear before it on a summons from the Committee?

James Maxton pressed home his point concerning the Glasgow internee who

was British-born and who had been handed over to a foreign government, against whom there was no prima facie case; could he be returned home forthwith? On being told he must apply to the Advisory Committee (still not in existence), Maxton asked Bridgeman, "I am bringing it before you. Is this Advisory Committee to supersede your powers, suspending the ordinary law of the land?"

Ramsay Macdonald asked for a guarantee that the Committee would be set up without delay. Mr Buchanan followed this by asking whether, if it were proved that any of these persons are completely innocent, and have suffered any monetary loss or loss of situation, the Home Secretary would grant any compensation to them. (This was, later, to become quite a threat to the government, and to save themselves from liability for heavy damages, they passed an Act of Indemnity.)

Mr Jones again asked why English-born men and women could not be indicted and tried in the usual way in a British court of law, if it was thought that they were guilty of some breach of the law. Mr Sexton (Labour) asked whether or not he, as a member of the House, could vouch for one of the detainees who was known to him since boyhood and who had no connections with any revolutionary Party. Mr Sexton was told he could only submit his statement to the as-yet-unborn Advisory Committee.

Mr Maxton caused something of a stir when he asked the Home Secretary if arrangements could be made for him to visit one of his constituents in the place of internment in Dublin at the weekend. Although pressed on the point, the Home Secretary declined to give a reply.

Mr Saklatvala: (by private notice) asked the Home Secretary whether he has received an assurance from the Irish Free State government that the persons arrested and deported to Ireland are sent there for internment only, and that prior to their release and return to this country, no charge will be made against them, rendering these persons liable to trial and sentence?

Mr Bridgeman: Yes, Sir... nothing more than internment is proposed at present. If it should be desired later to proceed against any of the persons concerned on specific charges, the assent of HM government would first be obtained, and the subsequent procedure would be that provided by the Indictable Offences Act.

...

Mr Saklatvala: Will the Home Secretary make clear as to where that trial is to take place which is forecast to take place subsequently?

Mr Bridgeman: It depends on where the offence has been committed.

Mr Saklatvala: Does the Act provide for the place where they can be tried? Under the Act, can they be tried outside Great Britain if their offence was committed in Great Britain?

Mr Bridgeman: I am not quite sure to what Act the hon gentleman is referring.

Mr Saklatvala: The Indictable Offences Act.

Mr Thorne:(Labour) If anyone can prove that he is British and born in England, will he have a chance of being tried in England?

Mr Pringle: Can the Rt. hon gentleman say whether any of these men and women deported from this country are liable to be tried by court martial by the Free State Army in Ireland?

Mr Saklatvala: May I have an answer to my question?

Mr Bridgeman: It depends on the place where the offence was committed.

Mr Thorne: May I have an answer to my question?

Mr Bridgeman: Certainly. I am not certain they will be tried at all. (Hon. members: 'Oh!') But if the hon member means will they be heard by the Advisory Committee, I shall certainly make representation in that sense to that Committee.

Mr Thorne: The rt hon gentleman says he does not know whether they will be tried. Then, in the name of common sense, what have they been pinched for?

Mr Maclean (Labour): The Home Secretary says that the individuals who have been deported will, if they are to be tried, be tried in the country where the offence took place. Will he state whether it is not the case that all these individuals have been arrested under a charge of conspiring in this country against the Irish Free State, and in that case, will he inform the House what was the sense of deporting them to another country instead of trying them in this?

Mr Bridgeman: I think it would be unsatisfactory if I were to try to give,

off hand, an answer to a long question like that...

Mr McEntee (Labour): In view of the inability of the Rt. hon gentleman to give us any information in reply to the question, can he tell us, in the case of these English-born subjects, if he will be prepared to admit them to bail until he makes up his mind?

Mr Buchanan: May I ask you a question, Mr Speaker? I want your advice in this matter. I wish to move the Adjournment, owing to the unsatisfactory answer on the legal point by the Home Secretary. I wish to know if I am in order in doing so.

Mr Speaker: We had the Adjournment moved on this question on Monday last.

...

Mr Pringle (Liberal): Has not a new point arisen, in this respect, that today the Home Secretary is unable to give us any clear answer as to the liability to trial of persons who have been deported from this country?

Mr Speaker: There is perhaps this point—the question whether persons of British birth will be allowed to appear. But I understand the Home Secretary to say that he is going to make representations to the Advisory Committee. What I would suggest is that on this point a question could be put on Monday...

Mr Lansbury: I wish to ask the Home Secretary a question, of which I have given him Private Notice, namely, whether his attention has been called to the arrest and deportation to Ireland of Miss Barrett, lately residing at 24 Campbell Road, Bow and Miss Kathleen Brooks, lately residing at Whitehall Court, Highgate; whether he is aware that Miss Barrett and her father and mother were all born in this country, and are consequently British citizens, and since the signing of the Peace treaty between England and Ireland she has taken no part in any agitation either against the British or the Free State government; and whether he is aware that Miss Kathleen Brooks is also an English-born citizen, who at the time of her arrest was in company with her sister; and that the two ladies, being informed by the police officers that their orders were to arrest Miss M. Brooks, the ladies themselves should decide which should be taken; whether Kathleen volunteered to be arrested because her sister is suffering from illness; whether also he is aware that the

warrants served on these ladies are dated 7th March and were served on 11th March; that consequently 4 days of the time allowed for appeal had elapsed; and whether, under all the circumstances, and in order to restore public confidence, the Home Secretary will ask the Free State government to release these ladies forthwith and return them without delay to this country?

Mr Bridgeman: I only made the order for the arrest and internment of these ladies after being satisfied that there were good reasons for so doing. (An hon member: 'Which one?') The lady who has been arrested. If they desire to appeal against the provisions of the Orders, it is open to them to make representations to me to be laid before the Advisory Committee... I may add that I am satisfied that the Miss Brooks who was arrested is the lady in respect of whom the Order was made.

Mr Lansbury: Does the Rt. hon gentleman contradict the statement that the police officers admitted to these ladies that they didn't know which of them they wished to arrest, and that the ladies had to choose which one should be arrested? Is that the method by which the Criminal Investigation Department carries out its duties?

Mr Bridgeman: My information is that the lady they have arrested is the one they intended to arrest.

Mr Saklatvala: Is it the Home Secretary's conviction that the lady arrested is the right person based on the fact that, on Monday afternoon, two policemen were inside the house when a letter was delivered by a postman simply addressed to 'Miss M. Brooks' and was taken away by the policemen as a proof of there being a Miss M. Brooks.

Mr Bridgeman: This is the first time I have heard of that.

Mr Lansbury: Does the Rt. hon gentleman deny the statement that the police did not know which of these ladies they were sent to arrest?

It might be of interest here to quote a letter sent to my brother Beram after Father's death by a Miss Delia MacDermott of Bloomsbury, London:

"I wish to say [that Saklatvala] took the first step to offer help in the case of the Irish deportees who were wrongfully arrested and sent to Ireland in the year 1923. My sister, Miss S. MacDermott, was amongst them, and in attending to her affairs when she was imprisoned, I received your

Father's circular letter sent to her address. To me, it was the first ray of hope in a very difficult situation."

It is tantalising that Miss MacDermott gave no indication of the help that was offered. But she refers to it as a circular letter and I feel safe in assuming that Father sent the letter, whatever it contained, to all the deportees; it apparently brought some hope and comfort to at least one of the recipients and, perhaps, to many more of them.

On the 19th March 1923, the question of the legal position of the deportees was debated again under 'Deportations from Great Britain' In reply to question put to the Home Secretary by the Leader of the Opposition, Ramsay MacDonald, came the following:

The Attorney-General (Sir Douglas Hogg): I have been asked to reply. The arrangement with the Irish Free State government is that no proceedings shall be instituted against any of these persons anywhere without the consent of my Rt. hon Friend the Home Secretary. My Rt. hon Friend will, of course, have to be satisfied that there is a prima facie case before giving his consent, and he has arranged to consult with me in any matter of legal difficulty or doubt. [One would have thought a prima facie case should have been established before people were carried away by ship in the middle of the night to be transported to a foreign gaol!]

When the consent is given, the person to be tried will be placed in exactly the same position, and dealt with in exactly the same way, as if he had not been deported. If the crime is one committed in England and triable there, application will be made to an English magistrate for a summons or warrant, and the case will be tried before an English magistrate and sent for trial by him, if a prima facie case is made out.

If the crime is one committed in Ireland and triable there, a warrant will be applied for before an Irish magistrate. It will be backed by an English magistrate under the provisions of Section 12 of the Indictable Offences Act of 1848, and the accused person will then be tried before the Irish magistrate, and by him committed for trial, if a prima facie case is made out. Whether the trial takes place before an English or an Irish magistrate, the accused person will be present.

Mr W. Thorn: As far as these people are concerned, has the Habeas

Corpus Act been suspended?

No reply was forthcoming to this question!

Captain Benn: Will the Rt. hon gentleman say whether these deportees will have the right, if they desire, of personal access to the Advisory Committee?

The Attorney-General: Yes, and I ought to say that the third member of the Advisory Committee is Sir Matthew Wallace, JP, ex-President of the Scottish Chamber of Agriculture, member of the Royal Commission, Defence of the Realm... and member of the War Compensation Court. There will be access to the Committee for any of the deportees who wish to see them.

Mr Rhys Davies: What means were there for a solicitor on behalf of these deportees to get into touch with his client during the last few days, and particularly, what is the position in respect of George Clancy, of Manchester, whose solicitor sent a letter on behalf of this man which has not yet reached him?

The Attorney-General: I was not aware of the matter referred to in the last part of the hon member's question, but if he will send me a statement of the facts, I will be glad to enquire into them.

Mr Buchanan: Is the Rt. hon gentleman aware that certain Scottish members made an effort to get across to meet certain of their constituents, and were not provided with those full facilities to which they thought they were entitled for conversation with these men and inquiry into the subject?

The Attorney-General: In answer to a question like this, I gave last week a statement made by the Irish Free State government that the internees would be allowed to see their legal advisers on points of law and to receive communications from their friends; but I must leave it to the Free State governments to make regulations with regard to other people.

Mr Buchanan: Seeing that the British government take the responsibility for arresting and deporting these men, why cannot they take the responsibility of allowing, without the sanction of the Free State, Scottish members to be with these men? Is the reason that they

are afraid we might get to know the real position and the real reason why these men were arrested?

Further questions and answers were exchanged between several members and the Attorney-General on the subject of access to the deportees of their friends, legal advisers and members of Parliament.

Mr Clynes: Have any steps been taken to inform fully the persons arrested of the conditions and facilities covering the replies which he has given this afternoon?

The Attorney-General: I am afraid that I would like to have notice of that question.

Lt. Col. Archer-Shee (Unionist): Is it not a fact that these men have been deported under a Statute made by this House which expressly suspended the Habeas Corpus Act with reference to rebellion in Ireland, and that these men are simply shut up and that there is no necessity whatever for all these questions?

Mr Buchanan: In view of the unsatisfactory answers, may I be allowed to move the Adjournment of the House on a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely, the failure of the government to provide access to the interned persons by their parliamentary representatives.

Mr Speaker: The hon member must ask leave to make that Motion when we have disposed of the other questions.

Mr Pringle: May I repeat the question of the hon member for Bridgeton (Mr Maxton) which the Home Secretary did not answer, namely, whether the Home Office or the Scottish Office actually know the regulations regarding access made by the Irish Free State government?

Mr Bridgeman: I should like to have notice of that question. Obviously, I do not want to misquote.

Mr Shakespeare: May I ask whether, on the Internment Orders which the Rt. hon gentleman signed, the place of internment was in Ireland?

Mr Bridgeman: Yes, Sir.

Mr Shakespeare: How is it that such a place of internment can be mentioned, considering that Ireland is now outside the jurisdiction of the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act?

Mr Bridgeman: The warrant said a place within the Free State portion of

Ireland.

Mr Shakespeare: Is it not a fact that the Free State is now outside the jurisdiction of the Restoration of Order Act?

Mr Bridgeman: No, Sir.

Two days after this exchange in the House, the Daily Herald proclaimed in a front-page head-line, ‘Dublin Thunderbolt for Mr Bridgeman—Act for Deportation Said to be Dead—Mr Cosgrove’s Denials:’

“A thunderbolt from Dublin was launched yesterday at Mr Bridgeman, Home Secretary in Mr Bonar Law’s government. ‘Under whatever authority these men were deported and detained, ‘ said President Cosgrove in the Dail, ‘it was not under the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act’. This statement is in direct contradiction to Mr Bridgeman’s reply on March 12th to Mr Ramsay MacDonald.

“On that day the following question was asked and answered:

“Mr Macdonald: ‘Has my Rt. hon Friend acted under the Restoration of Order Ireland Act Regulation?’

“Mr Bridgeman: ‘Yes, I have...’

“Mr Cosgrove declared yesterday that the Act, so far as Ireland was concerned, had expired. ‘It might be the legal opinion in Great Britain,’ he added, ‘that the Act was still in force in Britain, but he thought it had not been suggested that that was so with regard to Ireland.’ Mr Cosgrove repudiated the suggestion that British Ministers had authority in the Free State’s Affairs.”

Questions regarding the legal niceties of British citizens being deported to a foreign country for trial continued. Saklatvala asked, “May we take it for granted from the answers given that there is no possibility of any of the interned persons being tried by Court Martial in Ireland?”

To which the Attorney-General replied: “Certainly, there is no such possibility.”

In the session on 19th March, under ‘Written Answers’, Saklatvala asked the Home Secretary whether, in sanctioning the deportation of 110 persons from here to Ireland, he had taken into consideration a precedent of any case of sending prisoners from areas where martial law does not exist to areas where martial law is in operation; and, if so, were such decisions in favour of such

action being considered constitutional?

Mr Bridgeman: Yes, Sir. This consideration was before me... The point, however, is not material, for, as I have already explained, it had been arranged with the Free State before these persons were sent to Ireland that no action other than internment would be taken without the agreement of His Majesty's government.

Mr Saklatvala asked the Home Secretary if he is aware that Miss Barrett and other deportees were asked in Mountjoy Prison to sign pledges not to work in future for the Republican Party in Great Britain; and, in view of his statement that the prisoners were sent over merely for internment, was he consulted by the Free State authorities before they attempted to exact such pledges from the internees; is he aware that in a letter sent by Eileen Cullinan to her mother, all portions were cut out excepting 3 lines at the commencement and 3 lines at the end; was this censorship exercised by the Home Office with knowledge of the offending paragraphs or was it done by the Irish Free State; and will he see that the rights of the interned persons to communicate with their families and friends are protected?

Mr Bridgeman: I am informed by the Free State government that no deportees have been asked to sign pledges, as stated in the question, not to work in future for the Republican Party in Great Britain; and that the terms of the undertaking which a number of prisoners in Ireland have given, and which it would be open to any internees to give, are as follows: 'I promise that I will not use arms against the Parliament elected by the Irish people or government for the time being responsible to that Parliament, and that I will not support in any way any such action, nor will I interfere with the property or the persons of others.' The letter referred to was censored by the Free State authorities as mentioned. Internees are allowed to communicate with their relatives and friends subject to censorship, and I have no reason to think that they are being unduly restricted in this respect.

On 22nd March 1923, the Daily Herald reported on the front page: 'All's Not Well With Irish Deportees. Disquieting statements Reach This Country. Brother's Futile Visit:'

"Disquieting statements as to the conditions under which the deportees

from England and Scotland are interned in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin, have reached the Reverend Herbert Dunnico MP, who is Treasurer of the fund for their legal defence and for the assistance of their relatives.

“Notwithstanding the ministerial assurances that the internees would be allowed to communicate with their friends, it appears that all letters and parcels have been stopped since last Saturday.

“Mr Francis Brooks, brother to Miss Kathleen Brooks, one of the internees, has returned from Dublin where he made applications to the Acting-Governor of Mountjoy Prison to be allowed to see his sister. He states that he was informed in reply that neither he nor a legal adviser could be allowed to see her.

“Mr Brooks also wanted to supply his sister, who was in delicate health, with a change of clothing, but was told that if she made application to the doctor she would be provided with prison clothing.”

The same newspaper, two days later, reported that:

“...the legality of the Irish deportations was challenged in the High Court yesterday when Mr Patrick Hastings KC applied on behalf of Mr Art O’Brien, one of the internees, for a writ of Habeas Corpus.

“Counsel explained that the affidavit on which he moved was that of Mr O’Brien’s sister. The rule required that the affidavit should be made by the person in custody, but there were peculiar circumstances in the case in the fact that Mr O’Brien was interned in Ireland and it would be impossible to get an affidavit from him in time for the application to be made this term.

“Mr Hastings quoted authority to show that the affidavit might be made—and in fact had been made on occasions by other persons, upon evidence that the person concerned was prevented from making such an affidavit. Counsel added that a telegram had been received from Mr O’Brien, stating that he desired application to be made for his release.

“Mr Justice Avory asked what grounds there were for saying Mr O’Brien was coerced, or for any other reason was unable to make application.

“Mr Hastings said there was none. The Crown, it appeared, had made arrangements whereby an attorney might see a man interned in Ireland, and if time and means permitted a solicitor could go to Ireland to get

the affidavit...

“(Mr W.H.Thompson, solicitor, London, may try to see Mr O’Brien during a weekend visit to Dublin.)

“Rev. H. Dunnico quoted another instance of a solicitor being refused permission to see one of the internees, Mr Macmahon. Mr Bridgeman promised that if given particulars, he would communicate with Dublin and facilitate the visit.”

On the 26th March 1923, the Daily Herald carried the following item, under headlines proclaiming ‘Deportees Challenge Home Secretary—Imprisoned Men Say Statements are Deliberate and Contemptible Falsehoods:’

“A striking indictment of the Home Secretary’s high-handed and illegal methods of rounding up men and women, against whom no charge is made, is contained in a letter written to him by some of the Irish deportees now incarcerated in Mountjoy Prison. Passages from this document have been sent to the Daily Herald by Mr S. Saklatvala (Labour MP for Battersea) who states that he will today publish the letter in full.

“The letter, dated 18th March 1923, was written from C-Wing of Mountjoy Prison addressed to Mr Bridgeman. It ends by speaking of the Advisory Committee as a body created by the accusers before which the accused are to go to prove their innocence. They refuse to have anything to do with it. The letter was signed by 28 internees.” [The letter was, in fact, signed by 32 internees.]

House of Commons Hansard for 26th March 1923 reports under ‘Written Answers Ireland—Deportations From Great Britain’ the following debate:

Mr Shinwell asked the Home Secretary 1) On what grounds Ambrose Kenny, of Bathgate, was deported and in which part of Ireland was he interned; who is to be responsible for the maintenance of his wife and family; 2) on what grounds Patrick Hyland, of Winchburgh, was deported and in which part of Ireland was he interned, and who is to be responsible for the maintenance of his wife and family?

Capt. Elliot: I have been asked to reply to these questions. Ambrose Kenny and Patrick Hyland have been interned in Ireland on the ground that they are persons suspected of acting, having acted or being about to

act in a manner prejudicial to the restoration and maintenance of order in Ireland. They are at present interned in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin. The point raised in the third part of these 2 questions is now under consideration. [The men had been in prison for two weeks—presumably the families were expected to go hungry and their rent remain unpaid while the ponderous ‘consideration’ was taking place.]

Mr Trevelyan asked the Home Secretary whether he will publish the correspondence which took place between himself and the Free State government in relation to the action taken under the Restoration of Order (Ireland) Act?

Mr Bridgeman: I regret that I cannot add to the very full statements on this question made by the Attorney-General and myself in recent debates.

...

Mr Morris asked the Home Secretary whether the Advisory Committee recently appointed under Regulation 14B is going to sit in Great Britain or in the Irish Free State?

Mr Bridgeman: The Committee proposes to sit in this country.

Mr Saklatvala asked the Home Secretary if he has received direct statements of their case and claims from the deportees in Ireland; and, if so, will he place them upon the Table of the House, and also copies of any replies that he may make to the same?

Mr Bridgeman: I have received representations from one of these persons and his case is being referred to the Advisory Committee. I have also received a lengthy protest in general terms, signed by 32 of the deportees, in which they challenge the legality of the action taken by HM government and decline to recognise the Advisory Committee. The answer to the last part of the question is in the negative.

Mercifully, the deportees and opposition MPs were not the only people to challenge the legality of the Home Secretary’s autocratic and dictatorial orders to arrest and intern in a foreign country, without trial, these British men and women. As has already been mentioned, Patrick Campbell applied for a writ of habeus corpus on behalf of two of the internees and the case of Mr O’Brien was to prove once and for all, in the most public way possible, the illegality of

Mr Bridgeman's instructions to the arresting police. Patrick Hastings lost his application for a writ of habeus corpus in respect of Mr O'Brien but appealed against the decision given by Mr Justice Avory on the 23rd March.

On 10th May 1923, the Manchester Guardian reported the case under the headlines, 'Deportations Not Legal—O'Brien Case Goes Against The government'

"The Court of Appeal yesterday unanimously reversed the decision of the Lord Chief Justice's Court and decided that the deportation of Art O'Brien to the Irish Free State was illegal. The Court therefore granted O'Brien's application for a writ of Habeus Corpus, and ordered the Home Secretary to produce him in court next Wednesday. O'Brien is at present in a Dublin prison.

"It was also held that recent Orders in Council made by the government in support of the order for internment were ultra vires. The Attorney General announced that he would appeal to the House of Lords and ask for the case to be heard on Monday. The decision in the O'Brien case affects all the deportees, numbering over a hundred."

The arrogant optimism which induced the government of the day to appeal to the House of Lords is a frailty suffered by all too many governments. Their pride, most aptly, came before their fall.

On the 15th March, the Guardian reported the case once again in the following humiliating terms (humiliating for the government, that is, and much to the jubilation of all the internees and their supporters):

"It must be a long time since a British government has been placed in so mortifying a position by legal blunders of its own as the present government occupies after yesterday's decision of the House of Lords. Last week the Court of Appeal decided that the deportation of Mr O'Brien—and presumably of his 100 fellow-deportees from England to Ireland—was illegal and that Mr O'Brien must be brought up for release. That branded blunder number one. The government thereupon appealed to the House of Lords, and now it appears that this appeal itself was another legal blunder—the House of Lords has no jurisdiction in the matter. To laymen, the law as laid down yesterday by a majority of the Law Lords, seems highly reasonable...

"The Home Office, which we taxpayers supply at some expense with

legal advisers, ought never to have butted its head against a wall with such a high degree of stopping power as the law of Habeus Corpus... And now, to save the Home Secretary from the very natural claims which the persons improperly arrested are likely to make for pecuniary or other satisfaction, there will probably be an Act of Indemnity; that is to say, a special law that the Home Secretary is to be none the worse off for having acted unlawfully. Such special laws are not desirable things; the usual custom of allowing illegal acts to make their authors uncomfortable is much to be preferred.

“Still, the Home Secretary acted as agent for us all and ‘did it for the best’ though he did it badly; so, according to precedent, he has to be indemnified. And as the persons illegally treated must not be damnified, no doubt they will have to be compensated out of public money. Thus, at every turn of the whole business, the poor taxpayer pays...”

In fact, the particular Act of Indemnity that was passed, made no provision for the wronged deportees to be given any compensation except for actual expenses and losses incurred, and there is no doubt that many of them suffered financial hardship to the point of ruin, and were, in the words of the Manchester Guardian, “damnified.” Many lost their jobs and no doubt suffered great hardship on their release by a grudging, reluctant and one might almost claim, a vindictive government.

As to Bridgeman, he did have the grace to offer his resignation, but this was not accepted by the Prime Minister. (The Prime Minister, Andrew Bonar Law, had been absent from duty for some months when this crisis arose and Stanley Baldwin was acting for him in the House of Commons. Indeed, Law, suffering from cancer of the throat, was to resign from office only a few days after these events). It is possible that in other circumstances Mr Bridgeman’s resignation might have been accepted. His departure might have restored a little dignity to the government after the humiliating debacle it had suffered. It is to be hoped that the Home Secretary also had the grace to feel somewhat abashed when facing all those opposition MPs who had questioned the legality of his actions all along.

There is a usually unspoken but deep-rooted myth among the voters in Great Britain, thankfully dispelled occasionally, that right-wing governments are more efficient than left-wing ones. Well, this was only one of many instances

when the Labour and Liberal members were proved right and the Conservatives were proved to be in the wrong. O, yes, it does sometimes happen, I'm afraid! It is not that they are right in the sense of right versus wrong, it is just that they seem to be more persuasively plausible.

Ramsay MacDonald, opposing the introduction of the Bill of Indemnity proposed by Stanley Baldwin (acting for the Prime Minister), said:

...a decision was made without that discretion which should have been exercised and without due consideration for the constitutional rights of the people arrested. Hon. members on this side of the House, my hon Friend the member for Bow and Bromley (Mr Lansbury) the hon member for North Battersea (Mr Saklatvala), and various other members, in the early days of the arrests and deportations, brought here case after case where the warrants were irregularly served. The illegality of his actions had been voiced loudly and he did not listen. He, therefore, has no right to claim indemnity.

...the deportees have no means of proving that they were deported illegally (when looking for jobs or facing their employers). The government are in honour bound to do justice to these men.

...I do say that never in the whole history of this country, since legal processes were established firmly and fixedly, was an Indemnity Bill less worthy of support than the one which is before us now.

Saklatvala made the following contribution to the debate:

I beg to submit to the Committee considerations rather from a practical than merely from a political point of view. In the first place I submit that the amendment put forward from this side really restores to the Indemnity Act its correct as well as its impartial character. If it is to be an Act of Indemnity, surely we are not supposed to legislate for the partial benefit of a few citizens to the detriment of other citizens. Why not indemnify everyone who has suffered from these erroneous measures?

It is not merely the Home Secretary, it is not merely the police constable, it is not merely the government officers who have been put in the wrong or have suffered from these errors and are seeking relief. There are 112 victims. Why not indemnify them, and make this a real Act of Indemnity, giving an indemnity to everyone from the effects of

this most unfortunate and precipitate action that the Home Secretary was misled into taking under faulty advice?

From this point of view I suggest that, in order to make the Indemnity Act complete, the government ought to allow this kind of civil action to be taken. [The Act as proposed shielded the Home Secretary from both civil and criminal action—an amendment suggested by the opposition indemnified him only from criminal and not from civil proceedings].

I will urge another point, as to the difference between allowing the sufferers to take action under an existing and well-established law and their taking action under some new and speculative law. Of these 112 sufferers the majority, almost all, are people of very limited means—people without means, we may say. It is impossible for many of them to spend money speculatively on legal advice and on counsel, to go speculatively before a new tribunal and take their chance whether they will get their reward or whether they will be penalised by having to pay a higher cost than the reward they get. [Lloyd George had suggested setting up a tribunal to assess damages for the internees.]

Under the established law they know their position. It would be more or less a formal action, an inexpensive action, both to the state and to the individual sufferers: it would be a nominal action. People know exactly, under the well-defined law, what their rights are. There is very little legal argument to be proceeded with, and in that way we not only simplify the position of the sufferers but render them far happier and give them a greater amount of justice than by throwing them on the mercy of an unknown tribunal, to take their chance of fighting out a lawsuit the result of which they would not know.

There is another consideration. I suppose the Committee now realise we are all chastened, that the opinions of the lawyers are, after all, not infallible, or, at least, have been several times in conflict with the opinions of other lawyers. A few weeks ago the position was considered to be unshakeable at law, in spite of all the warnings given even by some competent lawyers from the Labour Benches, who had developed a sense, not only of seeing the law but even of seeing the people's point of view, after belonging to the people's party. We had it pointed out then that there was some chance of the law being faulty. I submit again to the

same lawyers that even this Indemnity Act may in itself still be a legal delusion. I still doubt the legality of this Act of Indemnity itself. I still would submit —

The Chairman: The hon member seems to me to be raising a broader question than that dealt with in the amendment.

Mr Saklatvala: I am coming to the amendment. I submit that the real indemnity to the Home Secretary will come not by this Act forced upon the people but that it can only come by the mutual consent of the sufferers.

The Chairman: That is really quite outside the amendment. I must ask the hon member to confine himself to the question of criminal and civil proceedings.

Mr Saklatvala: I am submitting that, if the sufferers are given the protection which is sought in this amendment, then they would be an agreeable party to accepting the position which is offered to them. If the government will not accept this amendment, and will force an issue upon the sufferers, then they will be inviting trouble again by inducing the sufferers to challenge the validity of this very Act, which seems to be in defiance of certain sections of the original Habeas Corpus Act, which does not permit the King, or his heirs, executors, or officers to set aside the punishment or indemnity levied under the Habeas Corpus Act.

The Chairman: That would be a relevant argument on the 2nd or 3rd Reading, but not on this amendment.

Mr Saklatvala: I submit to your ruling. To cut the argument short, I submit that, if the Labour Party's amendment, as it is now suggested in the most friendly spirit to the government, be accepted, it is only then that the government Officers will get the indemnity that they are seeking. If they are seeking a one-sided indemnity by depriving the sufferers of their rights, they will provoke a fight once again on the part of the sufferers and they will themselves suffer.

When the Indemnity Bill came up for the Third Reading on the 1st June, Mr Buchanan, (Labour member for Gorbals) "felt in duty bound to protest against its passing." He said:

I look upon it as one of the worst features of the political life of this

country, that a government should arrest persons illegally and deport them to another country, and then, having done that, pass a Bill to condone its action... Then, to get the opposition to agree, they say, 'We will compensate the victims of our action'... They can pile up the compensation as high as they care, but it does not matter to me; the thing that matters to me, much more than either the Labour Party or the Conservative Party or the Liberal Party, or anything else, is the freedom of the individual. If you are going to interfere with the right of a person to have opinions, to be free to express them within his country, without being deported to another country, then you are going to violate all that is great and good in this country... I feel it my duty to enter my protest against this obnoxious Bill."

He was followed by Mr F. Gray (Liberal member for Oxford) who protested equally strongly against the Bill. In the course of a long and strong speech, he said:

What penalty has this government paid for the mistake it has made by a responsible Minister? In the days of Disraeli or of Gladstone, or of the late Lord Salisbury, it would have been impossible for a mistake of this magnitude, infringing the liberty of the subject, to be made without bringing about the resignation of the government of the day...

I do not know whether any useful purpose will be served by my going heroically into the Lobby with the Hon member for Gorbals, (Mr Buchanan) I do not know, indeed, whether we two together would be allowed to go alone into the Lobby,, but certainly, at every stage I shall protest against, object to, and obstruct a Bill which I believe to be contrary to the Constitution of this country."

Mr Saklatvala: The sentiments expressed by the hon member for Gorbals (Mr Buchanan) are really the sentiments of many of us, although perhaps differently expressed, and though we may not have a chance of voting in the Lobby directly against this Bill, because that, perhaps, would be a needless process, we must not be taken on that account to be supporters of the principles embodied in the Bill—principles against which protests have been practically expressed more than once.

The hon member for Oxford City (Mr F. Gray) suggested that, if a

Liberal or Conservative Parliament in the past had adopted such a measure, the government would have resigned as a whole.. I may perhaps remind the House that a Liberal government has taken similar acts in deporting persons without trial, and interning them. That happened under the regime of Lord Morley [Secretary of State for India] in my poor country, India, but it being the act of a Liberal Minister of a Liberal government, neither had the self-respect to resign. It is another illustration of the saying that what is sauce for the gander is not always sauce for the goose. Liberalism has its different faces to be presented to different people according to their particular convenience. I now appeal to the government on two points.

I want to know whether they are going to say—with this indemnity granted to them with a certain amount of hopefulness on the part of the Labour members—that they will carry out in spirit the little concessions they are making to the deportees in a larger measure than has been indicated in some quarters. I appeal to the noble Lord to reflect on his remarks with regard to particular persons among the deportees and tell us how he intends to apply his logic in the case of those against whom further action is to be taken.

This Bill of Indemnity, as far as the deportees are concerned, is not a bonus for good character, neither is it a penalty for bad character. It has nothing to do with character. The damage to the deportees arises and becomes due, not from any bad action on their part, but from the wrong action of the government. In the case of those deportees against whom the government can take no action, probably we may accept the plea and give the benefit of it to the Home Secretary.

But there is another set of deportees whom the Home Secretary interned, and against whom he is now taking definite action on the basis of evidence captured at the time of their arrest. In those cases he had a clear alternative in front of him. He could have taken action against them but he preferred not to do so; he preferred to deport them without charge or trial, and so in their case his crime was greater than it was in the case of the other deportees. I submit that in their case the damage arising out of the unwarrantable action of the Home Secretary—technical though he may term it—gives them a more emphatic claim than exists in

the case of those against whom no proceedings are instituted.

I hope the words of the noble Lord will not prejudice the tribunal and make the members of it think that these persons are entitled to less damages on account of their bad character. Character has nothing to do with it. These persons, in whose cases a legal course was open to the Rt Hon .gentleman, are undoubtedly entitled to higher damages than are the other deportees.

The Home Secretary gave us an apologia which, to my mind, was a little worse than his crime. When he was appealed to not to prejudice the case of persons still to be tried, he suggested that the fact that only 8 of the deportees registered their protest with the Advisory Committee, was a tacit admission that he had acted correctly in interning them. These were ungenerous and clearly unjust observations for a representative of the government to make.

The Home Secretary did know that in a written document sent to him from Mountjoy Prison, it was clearly stated that internees challenged the right of the Home Secretary to intern them. They challenged his right under that particular Act, on the ground that it was void. The Committee was established in pursuance of that Act which the internees were challenging, and, on the particular occasion when they repudiated the right of the Home Secretary any longer to act under that Act, they naturally repudiated the authority of the Advisory Committee established under that Act; and they not only clearly refused to go before it, but 47 of the internees who, at first, hastily agreed to do so, on this definite principle, withdrew their applications.

The mere fact, therefore, that only eight persons agreed finally to go to the Advisory Committee was not any proof of their tacit admission of the right of the Home Secretary to intern them, but was a higher protest on their part against the entire action of the Home Secretary, and against everything connected with the Act on which the Home Secretary was, under a misapprehension, acting at the time.

These are the only two submissions that I desire to make to the government. The best way of expressing their regret and their sense of justice towards those who have been victimised for nothing is now to put into application the relief that they are offering in the right spirit,

instead of applying wrong logic and raising technical objections against the interest of poor men and women.

[Editor's note: Saklatvala visited Ireland on at least two occasions. On 21st April 1925 the Irish Times reported:

“The visit of Mr. Saklatvala, member of Parliament for North Battersea, to Dublin has created only a languid interest among the general public. He is an Indian Communist, whose ideal of government is the Soviet, and his trip to the Free State last Sunday was undertaken, apparently, with a view to the encouragement of Bolshevist principles in this country. Mr. Saklatvala was accompanied by Mr. Robert Stewart, of Dundee, also a Communist. A meeting was held in Sackville Street, under the shade of a crimson banner which was sent by the Russian proletariat to its Irish comrades; and after Mr. Saklatvala had spoken for two tedious hours, Mr. Stewart announced that before the end of next month he would have founded an organisation in the Free State for the purpose of promoting the interests of a Workers' Republic...

“The revolutionary method, said Mr. Saklatvala, was the only course that could befriend the labouring classes. If the workers wanted the land, said Mr. Stewart, let them take it, and legalise their action afterwards. The workers of Dublin had heard that sort of thing before last Sunday. They know precisely how much it is worth, and the amusement with which they listened to Mr. Saklatvala's vapourings was significant of their attitude towards him and his like. Dublin has had a taste of Communism and wants no more.”]

The MP for Battersea and India

The Chaura Chauri case. Campaign for the release of Lala Lajpat Rai from prison. Parliamentary speech on the doubling of the Salt Tax and on other Indian issues, 1923. First visit to the USSR, August 1923.

On the 28th March 1923, Lord Curzon asked in the House if Battersea Borough Council could not be prevented from purchasing a plot of land for £4,000 for the purpose of building a showroom for the sale of electrical appliances. Mr Saklatvala was quick to defend the local interests of his constituency: "Is the Hon. and Gallant gentleman aware," he asked, "that the Battersea Borough Council, by running its own power station, are selling electric current at fourpence-half-penny compared with eightpence in the neighbouring Borough by a private company, and in view of this, and especially when the landlord will not part with the land cheaper, will the Hon. and Gallant member consider this a reasonable demand?" Thus the benefits of privately- versus publicly-owned services were under discussion, then as now.

On the same day, Saklatvala asked the Home Secretary if he was aware that the appeal against the death sentence of Bernard Pomeroy had been dismissed; and, in view of the close similarity of the mental condition of Pomeroy to that of Ronald True, is he prepared to have a medical enquiry into this case in the same manner as in the case of Ronald True?

Mr Bridgeman replied that it did not appear that there is reason to believe that the prisoner is insane and no medical enquiry would take place. This is an illustration of Saklatvala's ability to plead compassionately for individuals as much as for the rights of millions.

[Editor's note: Bernard Pomeroy, a shop assistant aged 25, was sentenced on 1st March for the murder of Alice May Cheshire in a motor cab on 5th February, and was executed at Pentonville Prison on 5th April].

On the 16th April 1923, Stanley Baldwin presented his budget and, in the debate that followed, Saklatvala made the following contribution:

Mr Saklatvala: I wish to put a few questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in order that we may understand some of the issues raised by him in his speech. The Chancellor congratulated the country and the government on the appreciation of all government stocks. I should like to know from the Chancellor, who is a man of business experience, if he does not attribute some of this apparent financial appreciation and prosperity to the continuance of unemployment in this country.

There is no doubt that the public debt at the present moment is of a different character from what it was in pre-war days. The finances of this country as well as the finances of other countries are also of a different character. Everywhere we suffer either from inflation of currency, from paper currency or from unemployment. At the present time Great Britain is in the happy position from the financial point of view, and from the Bankers' point of view, of not having continually to put forward more paper money, because of a very substantial reduction in the wage-earning power of the working classes.

I will not enter into any disputable figures, but it is admitted that between three hundred million and five hundred million pounds a year represents the reduced wage bill, so that the government has not to produce so much money to be paid in wages. Is not that responsible for this apparent prosperity?

There is another lesson in this apparent prosperity. Last year Income Tax was reduced by a shilling in the pound, and it was supposed that all these shillings would go back into industrial investment. Instead of that it is obvious that those who have saved a shilling are less anxious to spend it on private enterprise and are running to government Securities, and that is the reason for the appreciation of government Securities.

That appreciation must be directly in proportion to the lack of private enterprise and industrial investment. It shows how sadly money is running away from industrial investment, and is trying to get some earning on a safe basis from government Securities. If that is so, is it wise for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to give another reduction of sixpence in the same fashion?

If reduction in the Income Tax was justifiable, was there not a way of making that reduction so as to increase the buying capacity of the

consumer? That way of doing it is by exemption of all income up to £250 from any Income Tax whatever. This is done in the case of large companies, which, before making their Income Tax returns are permitted to deduct the sums that are necessary for the requirements of staff and plant.

The individual wage-earner's staff and plant is his body. Why should we not allow for the maintenance of that before he begins to be taxed? Who can argue that four or five pounds is not a bare allowance to keep a man and his family going? That is the staff by which he earns his income.

If the Chancellor could still see his way to give this relaxation out of the Income Tax, not in the shape of another sixpence which will go into the pockets of the dividend earner, but by exempting entirely incomes up to £250 free from all taxes." (Do these arguments not have a familiar ring to them in 1989?)

...The Chancellor has referred to the interest on debt and the method of lightening it as speedily as possible. He has not said much with regard to his own successful manipulation of the American debt. The Chancellor went to America. He made certain appeals to the reason of the American financiers and was successful in inducing them to accept 3% interest.

Why should not the Chancellor, immediately after coming back, have called together the British financiers and appealed to their sense of patriotism and sense of human duty and told them that the Americans had put them to shame by reducing the interest, and why should the British financier not reduce the interest for the British poor and the working classes? That remains yet to be explained. We were told in a speech in the House that the question of interest on the debt is a question of contract. When there was an interjection regarding the American debt it was said that America voluntarily reduced the interest. Why do not the British owners of the national stock offer voluntarily to reduce their interest? Are they waiting for us to compel them to do so?

Has the Chancellor of the Exchequer made any attempt? It was his sacred duty to this nation to make that attempt and if it has failed he has not stood by the British nation as his duty required. If he made private efforts and failed it was his duty to expose the names of all those

patriots who refused to act towards the British people as the American financiers agreed to act. That information would be enlightening if the Chancellor of the Exchequer would give it.

It has been well known that out of the national debt there is about 250 million which may be said to belong to the man in the street. The remainder belongs to fairly comfortable people and to the big financiers themselves, and those people, in paying Income Tax and other taxes, are merely paying to themselves the interest on their national stock, and they are not shouldering the burden of national revenue for education, Army, Navy, and all the other estimated expenditure of the country...

At present, the burden of taxation for maintaining the services of the country falls upon the poor people, and those who pay Income Tax out of their incomes, which the poor people earn for them, are getting back almost the whole sum in the shape of interest due to themselves on the national stock which they hold. I submit for the serious consideration of the Chancellor that he should devise a method by which the Income Tax payer would do no more than he did before the War, paying a just contribution towards the standing expenses of the country.

During this his first term in Parliament, Saklatvala, as a member of both the Communist and Labour Parties, was anxious to promote cooperation between the two and to give offence to neither (indeed, for several years this cooperation was the hope and intention of the Communist Party). He had, in any case, promised at the time of his endorsement as a Labour Candidate, to follow the aims and the manifesto of the Labour Party. That he rebelled over the Irish question was inevitable, but in general terms he toed the official Labour Party line.

But on the question of India, he could be more independent, since he was frequently asked for guidance in this sphere by the Labour leadership and his expertise on Indian affairs was greatly valued by both the Labour and Communist parties. He was the only MP in both parties who had extensive experience and knowledge of Indian business and economics, Indian politics and the suffering of the urban and peasant poor.

This does not mean that the Party took the advice which he proffered; indeed, Saklatvala became more and more disillusioned with the Labour Party in this field, seeing them as behaving more like the Liberal Party than a socialist one.

While Saklatvala demanded absolute and total freedom for India, (and for all subject peoples) the Labour Party were loth to yield Great Britain's power and worked more for that power to be used benevolently than for it to be totally relinquished. In most matters, Saklatvala balanced on a precarious tightrope between the two parties but, since neither the Communist Party of Great Britain nor the Communist International had at that time finally resolved how to deal with imperialism and the colonies, when speaking on Indian affairs he could afford to follow his individual line without upsetting the Communists or the Labour Party.

As early as April, he had raised a question concerning a major mining disaster in India and the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State (Earl Winterton) revealed that until new legislation came into force in July, there was no question of paying compensation to the bereaved families or wounded miners. Saklatvala always used his position in Parliament to expose such inhuman iniquities of the imperial system.

A little later, in May, he raised the question of the Demster Steamship Company having introduced lower wages for Indian seamen as compared to European ones.

In June he spoke on a far more serious and emotive issue, asking the Under-Secretary of State if the decision of the Appeal Court against 172 death sentences in the Chauri Chaura case had been given; and, if so, would he tell the House of the final verdict? And the chilling answer was that nineteen death sentences had been confirmed, that in 110 cases they were commuted to transportation for life, and that there were 38 acquittals.

Some of the life transportations were later shortened to a specified number of years. Such was the fate of Indians who agitated in India for their freedom. I can just imagine the outcry in the UK press today if we read of such sentences being handed out in the Soviet Union against their freedom-loving dissidents. Anyway, Saklatvala at least gave the harsh and ignominious facts a public airing.

[Editor's note: On February 5th 1922, after three members of the Non-Cooperation Movement were killed by police in the town of Chauri Chaura in Uttar Pradesh, the police station was set on fire by protesters, killing 22 of the police occupants.]

On a similar theme, Saklatvala asked the Under-Secretary of State for India

whether he would state the nature of the offence proved against, and date and term of sentence passed, on Lala Lajpat Rai, President of the 1st Trade Union Congress of India, whether he is now reported to be suffering from tuberculosis, and whether, bearing in mind this disease, his age, and his past great services to India, the government will grant a remission of the remainder of his sentence? The reply revealed that Mr Rai had been sentenced in March 1922 to one year's simple imprisonment, and to one year's rigorous imprisonment under the Seditious Meetings Act, the sentences to run consecutively. And no, the noble Earl was not prepared to put in a plea for clemency.

When pressed by another member, Earl Winterton said, "...If enquiries are to be made into the health of any one prisoner, there is no logical reason why they should not be made into the health of hundreds of others..." What an admission from a responsible Minister of a democratic British government, that so many Indians whose only crime was to demand the same freedom that Englishmen were so proud to enjoy, were languishing in Indian jails.

Several Labour members spoke in support of Father's plea but the noble Earl was adamant. Saklatvala had the last word: "Will the noble Lord consider that a sentence of one year's penal servitude or simple imprisonment should not be permitted to be converted into sentence of death, if the state of the man's health is as reported?" In fact, Mr Rai was released from prison on 16th August due to his ill health and, perhaps in part, to the intervention of Saklatvala and his fellow members in the House.

[Editor's Note: Lala Lajpat Rai led the special session of the Congress Party that launched the noncooperation movement. Imprisoned from 1921 to 1923, he was elected to the legislative assembly on his release. In 1928 he sustained serious injuries by the police when leading a non-violent protest against the Simon Commission and died less than three weeks later. His death anniversary (November 17th) is one of several days celebrated as Martyrs' Day in India.]

On the 27th June 1923 Earl Winterton asked the House to pass a Bill enabling the government of India to raise a loan in the UK for fifty million pounds to spend on the development of the Indian railways.

Saklatvala pointed out that it was eventually the people of India who would thereby incur the responsibility for repayment of the loan; and, while the

railways were in public ownership, quite a few of them were managed by private companies acting as agents for the government of India. He spoke at some length and to forceful purpose against the Bill, which, of course, was carried anyway.

During the course of the debate, he was, at the request of a Labour member, reminded by the Chairman that it was not in order for the issue of nationalisation to be discussed. Saklatvala said, politely, "I will follow the procedure you have been good enough to suggest." His unfailing courtesy in the House was remarked on more than once; while he spoke fearlessly and honestly, he was invariably courteous; and while he himself was frequently subjected to jeers and schoolboy rudeness, he was never guilty of such ungentlemanly behaviour himself.

On April 21st 1923, the Workers' Weekly had carried an article headlined 'Indian Tax on Poverty'. It read:

"The Indian budget this year revealed a deficit of 12 million pounds—this is largely due to the enormous expense of the Army (60% of the budget). The government intend to make up the deficit on next years estimates by doubling the salt tax, already one of the most oppressive taxes on the millions of poverty-stricken Indian peasants. Even the servile members of the Legislative Assembly refused to pass the tax, but the Viceroy, Lord Reading, has once more made use of his supreme dictatorial power, which allows him to override decisions of the Assembly if he thinks fit, and he has re-imposed the measure. Thus the mockery of the so-called reforms granted to India is again exposed..."

Everyone who saw the film Gandhi will recall his dramatic march across the continent to the sea, followed by thousands of protesters against the tax; they all demonstrated their civil disobedience by making salt on the sea shore in contravention of the tax. They were unmercifully beaten by the police and soldiers. And many of the marchers, including prominent leaders, in the Indian political sphere, were imprisoned. This tax caused not only hardship but great unrest and agitation among millions of people.

It was not till July 5th that Saklatvala made a major speech in the House on the subject. It was reported the next day by the Evening News, without any reference to the hardships of the Indian workers, but merely making frivolous fun of Saklatvala:

“There were superbly turbaned Indians in the Gallery; and it was reported that they had left their elephants in Palace Yard, grazing on the lawns—do elephants graze, or do they feed on buns only?—However, no doubt the police saw to that while, for the benefit of his countrymen, Mr Saklatvala made a speech full of curry, real hot stuff, charging the government with causing death, insanity and the worst kind of poverty among Indians.”

This report was accompanied by a cartoon showing Saklatvala leaping in the air, brandishing his outstretched arms wildly above his head, with flushed face and lines radiating from his head suggesting the heat of his emotions. (When I was a little girl, people often remarked on my likeness to Father and they would say, “She’s just a little version of her Father!” And for years, I was convinced that I looked like the ‘little versions’ of Father as depicted in cartoons—so I had an anguished and unflattering view of what I looked like!)

Saklatvala’s speech started off mildly enough. He pointed out that the India Office were reluctant to pass their work to the newly formed High Commission for India, thereby creating administrative confusion and dissipation of money. He said that gradualness would not work and that the responsibilities that were to be handed over should be handed over immediately. (Was he perhaps sending a little message to the Fabians within the Labour Party?)

He went on to mention another injustice, “which the people of India have felt in a very small way, but there it is. I understand that the entire property belonging to the India Office has been obtained from monies paid by India, whereas no such charge has been levied for the Colonial Office on the Colonies; and when the India Office falls back on its normal political functions, to be carried on for this country, as it is now alleged, then I think due compensation ought to be paid for the property that the India Office will take over from the government of India completely under their own charge. In fact, if that had been done this year, the whole of the vexatious argument regarding the two and a half million pounds for salt would not have arisen.”

He then once again described the unfairness of loans being raised in the name of the Indian people, who were totally ignorant about such matters, but who would one day be called upon to repay vast sums of money raised by outsiders in their name.

“I think these people will be perfectly right, some day, in saying, ‘We

know nothing about these loans. Somebody came to our country, raised these loans in our name, and spent them on themselves just as they pleased, and we cannot honourably or honestly be asked to repay these loans.' It will create a very serious situation when the people of India do recover their consciousness, and, in view of this, not from any political motives, but in view of these ordinary standards of honour in business matters, the government of India must alter their methods of continually raising loans in Great Britain... there is one phase of life which the public politicians in Great Britain and India scarcely like to touch, but which brings the people of this country and the people of India into very intimate relationships.

"There may be troubles in the Punjab and a few riots in the streets of India, and you believe that that is endangering the lives of some Britishers, but I would point out that hon members sitting in this House are themselves quite unconsciously involved in activities which endanger the lives of many more Britishers than a few revolutionaries in the Punjab can ever do. I am drawing attention to the entire industrial activity which is being carried on in India...

"The noble Lord the Under-Secretary of State had occasion once or twice to tell us that the Trade Union Act is under consideration, that it is coming some day... but in the meantime I ask the Committee to give serious consideration to this close relationship of the ordinary daily lives of the working class people of Great Britain and the working class people of India...

"I will give you one example. We have recently heard a good deal in this House of trouble in Dundee. This House has tried to find many solutions and to appoint an arbitration board to find out how the life standard of the people of Dundee can be maintained so that their women and children can at least have daily food, if nothing else, and that they can somehow or other manage to have a decent house in which to live.

"This does not apply only to the workers of Dundee. It applies similarly to textile workers, to seamen, and colliers, and iron and steel workers, and people in the engineering trades. What is the position? In Bengal our British financial friends have raised 74 jute mills. They are quite

welcome to do so. The Bengalis have a right to see these jute mills erected in their midst, and the financier has a perfect right to go anywhere and direct any factory, if the people are simple enough to allow him to do so, but the real position is this.

“Only about 4 weeks ago, I minutely worked out the figures, taking the published reports of 41 concerns in this jute industry, every one of which is controlled by British firms... I have found that on a capital investment of £6,140,000 they earned, in the 4 years 1918-21, £22,900,000 as dividends and that those 41 jute mills had, besides their profits, set aside £19,000,000 as reserves.

“The standard of wages in these jute mills never reached 5 shillings a week in the spinning department and never reached 10 shillings in the weaving department, and taking the Bengali output at only 1/3 (in reality it is 2/5) of that of the Scottish worker, the disparity of the wages is evident.

“I can quite realise that this great jute industry may have increased the wealth of a few Scottish families... but does it not appear to members on the other side of the House that the position above means starvation for thousands of workers in Dundee and also for the workers of Bengal? Out of their low wages, the people in Bengal cannot have education, medical assistance or proper housing. The same with regard to the colliers...”

Here the Chairman intervened, saying, “The hon member must connect this with the government of India. I do not know whether he suggests that the Secretary of State for India can reform the conditions of which he speaks.”

Saklatvala replied with some heat:

“I mean that the government of India, having granted concessions to merchants, protecting them with their Armies and Navies, at the same time have failed to introduce Trade Union legislation and trade union activities and the union standards, and so are responsible for this condition I will give you a more direct example. Take, for instance, the iron and steel industries here.

“The government were bound, with regard to the giving of Indian orders, not to place orders for iron and steel materials where trade union wages were not paid. That condition automatically gets altered when the government of India puts orders with firms who pay one tenth

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

or one twentieth of the wages that are trade union wages in this country. There is another direct responsibility upon the government of India. In India, the largest employer of labour, the biggest capitalist, is the government of India, and they themselves started miserably low wages.

Mr. SAKLATVALA (Battersea, N., Lab.) said he held the Government of India responsible for the long hours and low wages of Indian workers in mines and factories—a condition of affairs which produced illiteracy and insanitary housing in India, and, by means of such “blackleg” competition, unemployment and starvation in this country. The Government, as the largest employer of labour and the biggest capitalist in India, had set the bad example of paying low wages. The people had to work under a Western industrial system and live under Eastern conditions that were three thousand years old. He called for a Committee of inquiry into the life of the workers of India. In regard to the salt tax, he contended that the fall in consumption owing to the rise in price was leading to the spread of leprosy. On remote seashores there were fishermen who, knowing nothing about the salt tax legislation or the Viceroy, steeped their fish in the salt water to salt them and then spread them to dry on the sands, and, to their consternation, they were fined for smuggling salt without paying the duty. (Laughter.) There was a disturbance in the House recently on account of the infant mortality in Scotland. The average rate of infant mortality in British India was 206 per thousand, as compared with ninety-one in the United Kingdom.

Clipping: The Times, 6th July 1923

“They set a bad example, they have maintained it, and have carried on the whole system as a practice. I ask the government of India to realise that, even if it does not matter to them, it does matter to thousands of working class people in this country that the standard of wages be not unequal, and I think it is most necessary and most important, in justice to the Indian investors, as well as to the British working classes, that a Committee of Investigation should be first appointed to find out the disparity of wages...

“There is another serious consideration. The government of India was asked only last March by the people of India, at least for the sake of humanity and morality, to stop, in the Mining Act, 50,000 women with their infants going into the pits every day to work. The government of India has got another direct responsibility in the matter...

“Here are the figures from the government of India’s statistics of infant mortality... In the northern Provinces, 216; Bengal, 185; Madras, 194; Punjab, 248; Bombay, 217; The Central Provinces, 227; Burma, 220; the whole average of British India being 206, compared with 97 in Scotland, and 91 for the United Kingdom. [These figures are per 1000 live

births).] You cannot attribute it to climatic conditions...

“There is a private and confidential report, which was published for private circulation only by Capt. E.D. Richards of the Calcutta Improvement Trust, in which it is stated that in certain wards the deaths of children up to 12 months old... from 1916-1919, were never less than 575, and reached as high as 680 [per 1000].

“These are not things which a responsible government can really pass over with the remark, ‘Well, these are Indian conditions...’ The people must have either an Eastern or a Western life, an agricultural peasant life or an industrial life; we cannot compel human beings to do work of different conditions, to live as they would live upon farms, where very little nervous or physical strain is required in their daily life.

“This is the position, and I ask the noble Lord to set aside all humbug about liberal reform. It is all cant—there is no soul in these reforms either for the people of India or Britain; it is only political tactics, to spread salt on the tails of one or two Indian politicians.—The real reforms are these. Let us have a Committee of Investigation to find out how the working classes in India are living, and how the conditions are responsible for want of education, want of sanitation and human dignity, and also responsible for starvation and unemployment in this country by the blacklegging of labour for large contracts.

“The other topic discussed was the Salt Tax. I remember a number of pleas put forward by the noble Lord. Of course, he was not responsible; he was telling us what the Viceroy told him. If we were to believe his whole series of pleas, and that it does not matter whether you double or treble the Salt Tax in India, then we have got to disbelieve a dozen British statesmen and Viceroys who have said horrible things about the cruelties of imposing the Salt Tax. I believe the noble Lord [Curzon] who now presides over the destinies of the Foreign Office, when he played the Super-Viceroy of India, considered himself very happy that he found it possible to reduce that Salt Tax, and laid it down that it should be the marking-stone for the future of British Policy to remove the Salt Tax as hastily as possible.

“Salt is not in the nature of raspberries and cream—No human being would take more salt than is necessary, and the noble Lord has got in his

own official record substantial statistics, worked out for over 50 years, to show that whenever the Salt Tax was high, the consumption of salt per head went down low.

“You do not want us to believe that when salt is cheap people eat handfuls of it. Perhaps it is never cheap enough to enable people to have a sufficient quantity at any time, but when cheap they take as near the necessary quantity as possible, and when it becomes costly they have to abstain from it. That is the only conclusion and I think the noble Lord must have in his archives a report from one of the Commissioners of Bombay... in which he, after due investigation, found that when the consumption of salt is curtailed it spread the horrible scourge of leprosy in those districts...

“I read a telegram in the Daily Herald that there is another conflict in Bengal already. In putting additional taxation on salt, the government of Bengal find it necessary to tighten the inspection against smuggling... but fishermen, and ignorant villagers who do not know what is the Salt Tax or what is legislation, or what is the Viceroy, go round the coast line, and on the sea board perhaps cure their fish by means of salt water.

“That is a contravention of the Salt Tax; they are smugglers and are punished. All along the sea board you have got thousands of inspectors who bully the poor villagers and make their lives miserable. People living on the sea shore often innocently get salt water and boil a few mangolds, and they are charged immediately with having smuggled salt without paying duty on it...

“You created an innocent Legislative Assembly, and you want this House, by confirming the erratic action of the Viceroy, to tell the people of India that all the members of the Legislative Assembly are brainless chaps who know nothing about the people and know nothing about salt, and that we here are the clever people who know everything about everything. That is the message which you want to send forth. You want to say to the Legislative Assembly, ‘It is not your job to know whether poor people are able to buy salt or not; we know much better here in Westminster.

“It is not for you to know whether the Salt Tax is good for you or bad for you. You represent your people, but that is nothing. When we take it in

our heads to ride rough shod over you, we shall do it, because we know everything under the sun, and you people do not know anything about your own country.' What is behind it all? The hon member for Derby (Mr C.Roberts) told us that the Indian extremists, of whom I am proud to be one, and the Conservative die-hards are sometimes akin. It may be so, because we both like to look at facts as facts, and do not wrap them up in diplomatic language...

"The action of the Viceroy in going over the heads of the people... is wrong in principle, and... it is a principle with which the House of Commons... should never associate itself, any more than with the idea that the dictation of the Crown is always superior to the wishes and intelligence of the people. Yet we are going to do this. Why?

"I hope that members of the Committee will not misunderstand me. I have no bitterness in my heart. I wish to see life as it stands... I agree with every member on this side of the House, that if it were possible to let the Viceroy obey the people of India, it should be done, but I doubt whether it is ever possible for any one country to dominate another country and to send out a Viceroy and to say: 'Go there and obey the people of that country.'

"Such a thing is impossible. I do not believe in political phraseology which is used for the sake of convenience—Dominion Home Rule, and this and that. It may all look very well on paper. How can you expect a self-respecting community to take charge of its country's purse and affairs and to say, 'I will preserve all this, and manage all this, for the benefit of the people of Britain in the first instance, and for the benefit of the people of India in the second instance, if possible.' Such a thing is unnatural and not to be expected...

"There is one solution and only one solution, for the future. Why not look at it like bold and brave people, who are conscious of the future? There are many results in our present life and constitution and civilisation to be ashamed of...

"Not politicians should count, but humanity. If you once start a scheme by which the workers and peasants of India enjoy the same standard of life as the workers and peasants of Europe and of America, you will have abolished every need for sending out a Viceroy either with a mandate to

obey the people of India or with a mandate to obey the people of Britain against the interests of the people of India.

“You are on the horns of a dilemma. When the day has come that the peasants and the working classes have established a uniform standard of life and political rights throughout the civilised world, the working-class international organisations will arrange our international life.”

Thus Saklatvala combined his pleas for Indian freedom with a proclamation of his own unshakeable conviction that international communism was the only answer to the exploitation of man by man. He was performing a double duty; and at the same time, he was expressing views which he personally, passionately, believed in. It was his last major speech in the House before the long summer recess.

Even though he was hardly ever absent from debates while the House was in session, Saklatvala continued to travel up and down the country at weekends, holding meetings and addressing large and enthusiastic crowds. He took part in demonstrations and mass meetings in Trafalgar Square, he held regular monthly assemblies in Battersea where he reported on the events in Parliament to his constituents; he visited universities and spoke to students, particularly to Indian students, clearly with the intention of passing on the message of communism to them; he hoped that they would actively engage in the cause when they finally returned home and form a strong Communist Party there to fight for India's freedom, and, more specifically, for freedom from exploitation of the working and peasant class from whatever quarter such exploitation might come, whether from British or from Indian capitalism. For Saklatvala, national freedom was not enough, he demanded freedom for the workers from oppression from any masters, be they British or Indian; he foresaw that they would need protection against exploitation even under Indian rule, so long as an Indian government remained a capitalist one. When one looks at the poverty persisting among the masses in India today, more than 40 years after independence, one must concede that he perhaps had a point.

Price One Halfpenny.

JUTE CRISIS

is created by a War of Wages between two sets of workers employed by British Masters under one Imperialist system. In Jute it is Bengal v. Scotland.

All British Workers are invited in their own interest to co-operate with the Indian Workers. Support the "Workers' Welfare League of India." Gen. Sec., J. E. Potter Wilson, 22 Luther Street, Leicester.

The fruits of Imperialism in the realms of Jute Industry are:
 Slavery for Bengal—Starvation for Dundee—and inordinately high Dividends for Imperialist British Capital invested abroad under military and naval protection paid for by the British Workers!
 Five Bengali Workers will produce the same output as two British Workers.
 Present Wages in British-owned Jute Mills situated in Bengal and superintended and managed by British Foremen, several of whom were associated with Trade Unions in Scotland, average under 5/- weekly for spinning department, and under 10/- weekly in weaving department!

THE ONLY REMEDY IS:

Equal wages for equal output—Equal standards of life—Equal Trade Union and other political rights for all workers working under British finance system—Trade Unionism without colour and race consideration—One united plan of working for Jute workers of Britain and India under one federated system of Trade Unionism, with mutual help and co-operation—A strong and united Labour Party in Parliament, fighting for workers of both lands.

The following table has been abstracted from the *Capital of Calcutta*, dated March 15, 1923. The *Capital* has published accounts of 31 Jute Mills in India, of which 10 are new concerns, and the older 41 concerns are quoted below. One old concern, the "India Jute Mills," with large dividends, is also omitted, owing to typographical error in the published accounts. For the convenience of British readers rupees are converted in round figures into £ sterling at the usual rate of 1/4 per rupee. Also percentage profits are converted into actual approximate figures on the assumption of the same capital figure holding good for all four years uniformly.

SHAPURJI SAKLATVALA, Secretary, Indian Section, Workers Welfare League of India.

Paid up Capital (Rupees) £ Sterling	NAMES OF MILLS	Managing Agents, Messing Directors, or Secretaries	Dividends Paid for years				Total Dividends for 4 years (Rupees) £ Sterling	Total of Rupees paid other than Dividends (Rupees) £ Sterling
			1918 £ Sterling	1919 £ Sterling	1920 £ Sterling	1921 £ Sterling		
80,000	Albion	Andrew Yule & Co., Ltd	116,000	64,000	75,000	40,000	295,000	300,000
40,000	Alexandra	Egg, Dunlop & Co.	28,000	50,000	37,000	8,000	123,000	165,000
100,000	Alliance	" "	150,000	175,000	150,000	40,000	515,000	620,000
333,000	Anglo-India	Duncan Bros. & Co.	106,000	99,000	113,200	133,200	472,300	1,180,000
133,000	Auckland	Bird & Co.	186,200	159,500	79,800	9,300	474,800	374,000
133,000	Bally	Geo. Henderson & Co.	26,500	26,600	26,600	19,900	99,700	315,000
275,000	Barnagore	" "	82,500	96,200	27,500	27,500	233,700	375,000
93,000	Belvedere	Andrew Yule & Co., Ltd	176,700	74,400	111,000	37,200	399,300	268,000
120,000	Budge Budge	" "	258,000	133,000	150,000	54,000	604,000	598,000
60,000	Calcuttan	" "	84,000	51,000	84,000	24,000	243,000	268,000
400,000	Champalany	Jas. Finlay & Co., Ltd	280,000	320,000	120,000	Nil	720,000	704,000
106,000	Clive	Bird & Co.	153,700	169,000	140,000	13,000	475,700	348,000
100,000	Dalhousie	" "	140,000	120,000	150,000	30,000	440,000	384,000
93,000	Delta	Andrew Yule & Co., Ltd	190,700	65,000	139,500	46,500	441,700	408,000
40,000	Empire	McLeod & Co.	50,200	60,000	80,000	28,000	218,200	265,000
93,000	Fort Gloster	Kettlewell Bullen & Co.	148,000	159,500	186,000	55,000	548,500	1,108,000
93,000	" William	" "	65,000	69,000	83,700	25,000	242,700	200,000
350,000	Ganges	Macneil & Co.	1,120,000	1,512,000	168,000	56,000	2,856,000	350,000
67,000	Gondolpara	Gillanders Arbuthnot	141,000	66,000	40,000	13,500	260,500	248,000
80,000	Gourapore	Barry & Co.	200,000	326,000	200,000	16,000	742,000	1,148,000
28,000	Hooghly	Gillanders Arbuthnot	112,000	56,000	21,000	8,000	197,000	240,000
175,000	Howrah	Howeson Bros., Ltd.	227,000	175,000	227,000	78,000	707,000	500,000
160,000	Kamarhaty	Jardine, Skinner & Co.	240,000	360,000	400,000	104,000	1,104,000	783,000
200,000	Kankarhah	" "	400,000	400,000	380,000	80,000	1,260,000	648,000
46,000	Kelvin	McLeod & Co.	69,000	103,500	138,000	47,000	357,500	490,000
240,000	Khardah	Anderson Wright Co.	300,000	432,000	312,000	72,000	1,116,000	860,000
100,000	Kinnison	F. W. Heilgers & Co.	250,000	250,000	400,000	135,000	1,035,000	700,000
113,000	Lansdowne	Bird & Co.	90,400	135,600	107,000	Nil	333,000	317,000
66,000	Laurence	" "	132,000	132,000	122,000	26,000	412,000	370,000
66,000	Lothian	Andrew Yule & Co., Ltd.	18,000	19,000	66,000	23,000	126,000	200,000
66,000	Naihati	F. W. Heilgers & Co.	132,000	99,000	99,000	9,800	339,800	375,000
230,000	National	Andrew Yule & Co.	307,000	184,000	230,000	103,500	824,500	137,000
70,000	New Central	" "	279,000	87,500	133,000	139,500	639,000	300,000
53,000	Northbrook	Bird & Co.	106,000	106,000	106,000	31,800	349,800	300,000
116,000	Reliance	Howeson Bros., Ltd.	121,000	110,000	143,000	55,000	429,000	400,000
450,000	Sammuggur	Thomas Duff & Co.	225,000	225,000	202,500	90,000	742,500	540,000
46,000	Sootah	McLeod & Co.	17,000	18,000	18,000	5,700	58,700	130,000
93,000	Standard	Bird & Co.	186,000	186,000	139,500	27,000	539,400	360,000
450,000	Titagbur	Thomas Duff & Co.	315,000	225,000	202,500	90,000	832,500	678,000
80,000	Union	Bird & Co.	220,000	200,000	152,000	Nil	572,000	450,000
300,000	Victoria	Thomas Duff & Co., Ltd.	180,000	150,000	135,000	60,000	525,000	375,000
£5,141,000							£22,094,100	£19,056,000

The year 1922 has been considered a bad one for Jute Dividends in Bengal. According to the *Times Trade Supplement* of April 14, 1923, the total dividends of all the Jute Mills (about 76) in India, have been only £2,400,000, and, according to published reports of 41 Mills only as above, £533,000 have been carried forward to 1923 accounts.

Printed at the Palliser Press, 1 Cornhill Street, E.C.

Clipping: Pamphlet from the Workers' Welfare League of India

Not all his meetings were without dramatic incident. The Oxford Times reported on June 1st 1923, under a headline 'Mr Saklatvala MP at the Town Hall—Alleged Kidnapping Plot'.

"Mr Saklatvala, the Indian socialist MP, addressed a public meeting in

the Town Hall on Friday evening under the auspices of the City Labour Party... In declaring the meeting closed, the Chairman asked that a number of friends should stay behind as... there was a 'rag' on foot and Mr Saklatvala might be kidnapped in a red Rolls-Royce car. A number of Indian students and members of Ruskin complied with the request and Mr Saklatvala had a strong body-guard as he walked to Ruskin College where he spent the night."

Saklatvala's impassioned speech and the questions that followed, were reported in full.

[Editor's note: 'rag' refers to a prank or stunt by students.]

This threat of kidnapping was not an isolated incident—such menaces were made several times, but there was always a willing contingent of strong men to protect him and sometimes he was whisked away through the back doors of halls down little side-streets, sometimes on the pillion of a motorbike. I do not think that either of my parents felt at all alarmed by these bullying tactics. My mother was even less impressed than Father, finding such histrionic behaviour too silly to be taken seriously—she treated threats very much as she treated squabbles between the boys at home, and remained her usual placid and unruffled self. And we all lived in the shelter of her calm and were consequently blissfully untouched by all the dramas.

Saklatvala was a tireless propagandist in the Communist cause. He was seldom home and when he was, he was almost always entertaining political friends, Indian journalists, doctors, businessmen. Our house was always full of strangers (well, strangers to us, that is; all, of course, well known to Father). They were entertained to breakfast, lunch, tea, supper. We all took it for granted that we sat quietly by while political discussions went on around us. When he was at home at weekends, his old friend Kaikoo Mehta was a frequent and welcome visitor; he brought jollity and light-hearted chatter, social, frivolous, non-political—we were all happy to see him. He would take us on to Hampstead Heath and play cricket and tennis with us and generally entertain us.

Another frequent and welcome visitor was Dr Gotla, another old boyhood friend of Father's from his Bombay days. He had a very vivacious English wife and three children, the youngest, Mickey, a boy of my age. We all enjoyed each other's company and visited each other's homes. Mummy and Mrs Gotla

enjoyed days out together and their close friendship lasted through to old age and ended only when Mrs Gotla died at about 80 years old. This personal warmth and affection between the two families thrived in spite of acute political and social differences.

Dr Gotla, along with many other socially successful Parsis, thought that Father's concerns for working people were something of a joke. I remember once when I was in Dr Gotla's car with all his family we passed one of the new complexes of slum-clearance flats; Mickey, the young son, said incredulously, "Fancy building flats with balconies for poor people!" But I had learned at a very young age to keep outrage and indignation to myself until I reached the private haven of home, when I could explode to Mother and liberate my frustrations. Love and friendship had to transcend such differences.

The house was not only open to outsiders and political allies, but we nearly always had one of Mummy's numerous relatives staying with us, Grandma or one of the sisters with their children. So, although Father was so often away, we were never lonely. I loved all my mother's sisters and all my cousins and looked forward to their visits and dreaded their departures—and Father was always more than happy to have them around—there was never any sign of music-hall-joke, in-law tension; we were a happy tribe.

During the summer while the House was in recess, Saklatvala and Walton Newbold were invited to Moscow to a private meeting with members of the Communist International. It was to be Father's first visit, and he took my mother with him. When I say he was invited, it is probably an understatement—I imagine it was more an order than an invitation. The same went for Father's invitation to Mother to accompany him—I don't think she was given any choice. Father sent her off early in the summer to Dymchurch to look for cheap accommodation for the family. Sally's sister Annie was to be asked to come to Dymchurch with her daughter, my close and much-loved cousin Lily. Annie was to look after all of us while both our parents were in Soviet Russia; they were to visit the Ruhr on the way back, for Father to see for himself the sorry plight of the German people.

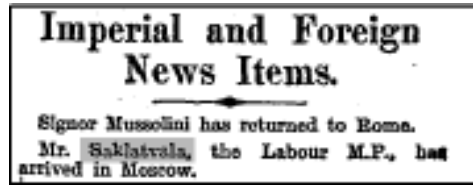
It is likely that the two communists who were members of Parliament were to discuss with members of the Communist International exactly what their role in the British Parliament should be, what strategy was to be followed in relation to the colonies and imperialism, and what other functions they might

be able to fulfil. It was Father's first direct contact, though doubtless he had had similar consultations at second-hand in London. It is certain that Saklatvala did not merely receive orders and instructions, but contributed his own ideas, particularly where Indian and imperialist problems were concerned and his expertise on this subject was recognised and appreciated. At that time, an Indian communist, M.N. Roy, was on the Executive Committee of the Communist International; but he and Father were not always in agreement.

During this period, the Communists were anxious to unite with the Labour Party (although the Labour Party were not willing to work with them and time after time rejected their applications for affiliation). The Communist Party sought political co-operation of all socialists to fight capitalism as a combined force. The Labour Party seems always to have viewed acceptance of members of the Communist Party, not as co-operation on the part of the Communists so much as infiltration. There was always the contention that all communists took their orders from Moscow and that, therefore, communists were anti-British. I really do not agree that this was in fact the case. Just as members of many nations come together at United Nations Assemblies for mutual discussion, and as members of the EEC [now the EU] discuss economic and political matters, so I think members of the Communist International discussed policies and events.

One has to agree that the Moscow voice was probably stronger than most other voices, but I am sure that Communists were able to put their views on many subjects to the Communist International, even if they might not always have been acted upon. But the idea that all Communists put love of Russia before love of Britain is a fostered error; the difference between traditional patriots and Communist patriots is that Communists accept that one must love all British people, not just the ruling class; they recognise that working class people are as British as the aristocracy (perhaps more purely so!) and to work for the working class Britisher is just as patriotic as to work for the master class Britisher.

Anyway, when Saklatvala went to Moscow on 27th August 1923, he went for consultations and discussions, and not merely to receive orders. It was also Father's first opportunity to witness communism as then practiced in Soviet Russia.



Clipping: The Times, 28th August 1923

There was at the time a big exhibition in Moscow of Russian handicrafts and, of greater interest, of the progress being made in agriculture. He was more favourably impressed than was my mother. Mother, who hated being parted from her children more than anything, was appalled at the idea of creches being used for children while their mothers went to work (they have become an accepted part of British life now, of course, but then they were unheard of). When she saw that workers' families were housed in what had been sumptuously furnished and beautifully appointed flats, and saw them with enamel washing-up bowls on buhl escritaires, her sensibilities were offended; whereas Father saw all this as a way of giving working people reasonably comfortable homes to live in instead of the hovels to which they had been relegated under Tsarist despotism.

My Band of Hope mother was scandalised by the drunkenness, while Father chose not to notice it. Knowing that his wife was likely to be uninhibited in her criticisms of the regime, he told her bluntly that it was he who had been to observe conditions and that she had gone merely to keep him company, and that therefore she should refrain from airing her views in public—it was his views that were sought, not hers. While I have to deplore this muzzling of female expression (especially from a man who publicly upheld the rights of women!), I have to concede that the Communist International would not have taken kindly to Mother's views being broadcast.

For the rest of us, our parents' travels gave us our first ever family sea-side holiday. Our landlady was not over-generous. The curtains were torn and none too clean; she had a little toddling boy who never wore trousers or knickers, but was always clad in a tatty old jersey, its front and back pinned together between his legs with a giant safety-pin as a concession to modest respectability. The food was apparently awful (though at 4 years old I was too young to notice)—one day when the meat was even tougher than usual, my outspoken sister said Mrs Clayton should have used the meat for curtains and stewed the curtains for lunch. The landlady was listening outside the door and

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

created a great hullabaloo; Auntie Annie was embarrassed but we all thought it was great fun, and that Candy had scored a point, since her remark (which we all thought so very witty!) had been overheard.

I was introduced to the lures of capitalism in the shape of a penny-dip in the local sweet-shop; Lily and I came rushing home and I proclaimed excitedly, “I gave him a little tiny white penny and he’s given me all these big brown ones and our presents as well!” (An old-fashioned sixpence had yielded four pennies and two goes in the penny dip). With all the excitement of the sea-side, and having all the family and Auntie Annie and Lily together, our parents were really not missed. And on their return we enjoyed having them to ourselves without the intrusion of friends, either social or political; just for a few days Father was just a Father and not a politician—and it was a most joyful holiday for us all.

Mr. J. T. W. Newbold, M.P., Communist member for the Motherwell Division of Glasgow, and Mr. S. Saklatvala, M.P., Labour member for Battersea, are spending a few days in Cologne, and will proceed to the Ruhr.

Clipping: The Times, 10th September 1923

The parliamentary recess ended on Tuesday 13th November, when Stanley Baldwin explained to the House that, after profound consideration on the problem of unemployment, he felt he could not steer the country through the winter without using “an instrument which I could not use having regard to the pledge given a year ago by Mr Bonar Law”; he needed to abandon the policy of free trade and to adopt a protectionist policy. Parliament was, therefore, to be dissolved on Friday 16th November 1923. There was to be a General Election, and Father’s first term as an MP was brought to an early close.

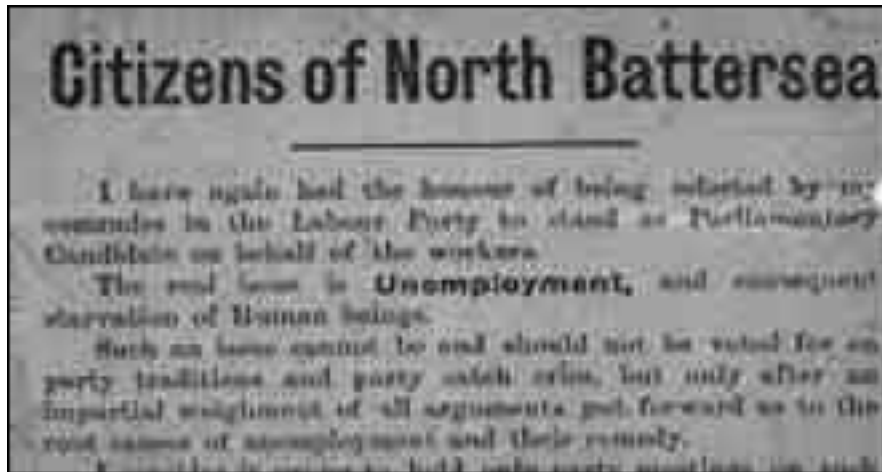
CHAPTER 13

A Narrow Defeat

Narrow defeat in the General Election of 1923. The first Labour government of Ramsey MacDonald. Labour Party rejection of affiliation to the Communist Party.

Saklatvala had been unanimously selected as the Labour candidate for Battersea North. In his Election Address he wrote:

“I enclose herewith the Labour Party’s Official Manifesto, which I pledge to support, with the only criticism that that is the least that one can demand under the present conditions of life all over the world, while our moral instincts, which transcend political conveniences, require us to go further. If re-elected, I shall, as usual, submit myself to you at least once every month to receive your instructions and to give attention to your wishes...”



Clipping: Saklatvala’s Election Address

But, once again, he proclaimed with pride his adherence to the Communist Party, saying:

“...I must ask your permission to say a word about my undoubted membership of the Communist Party, as for the last 12 months our opponents have been assiduously working a stunt under the vague term ‘Bolshevism’.

“Last week Edwin Percival Power, age 20, a cabinet maker, of Chester

Street, Bethnal Green, through depression from continued unemployment, took poison and died in Epping Forest, faithfully clutching his young sweetheart's photograph. A letter found on the body by the police read, 'I have come out in the open to die—out in the glorious air away from the paltry deceit and strife of the world. It will be a merciful release to die to ease the aching of my heart. May the Lord have mercy on my soul and receive me into the kingdom of Heaven.'

"Leibknecht, Rosa Luxembourg, Eisner, Vorovsky were assassinated by Fascist hands, but Edwin Power and his like are daily driven to despair and death by masters who shut their factories, and where Society has no right to take charge of them and work them.

"The new ILP and Labour Party International, as well as the Moscow International, are described as anti-British, alien influences. When militarist jingoes of all nations work together it is called, 'Council of War', when intriguing politicians of all nations conspire together, they are called 'Council of Ambassadors'; when armed financiers meet together to rob unarmed nations they are called the 'League of Nations'; when workers of all nations meet and work together, they are called 'Alien Bolsheviks'.

"We must have uniform standards for the workers all over Europe and Asia, and we can neither leave the Communists or the right wing trade unionists or the Social Democrats to fight their own battles singly. Before the final and universal success we shall all have to get a united plan of action."

On this same theme, earlier in the address he asked, "How many Liberal and Conservative investors are every day using British wealth, originally produced by British workers, in countries abroad, where they can find human beings to work at cheaper rates and in a more docile manner? With British money and with British foremen that they took abroad, why did they not take British standards of wages also?..."

Of the war debt he wrote, "Liberals boast that free trade financed the last war. This is untrue. The war was not carried on from accumulated profit made in the past. Instead, to finance the war, the workers of this country are called upon to pay £1,000,000 per day indefinitely." (He was alluding to the interest payable on the national war debt.)

The Evening Standard on 26th November 1923, announcing Saklatvala's candidature wrote:

“In North Battersea Mr Saklatvala is, in many respects, without a parallel. He is an Indian by birth, and his antecedents neither suggest nor explain his revolutionary doctrines. His brother, for instance, is President of the Mill Owners Association in Bombay.”

It was, perhaps, due to such references and frequent accusations in the Commons about his being part of a successful, capitalist family, that led him to include this in his election address: “I would here warn you against the attempt to misrepresent my position in the Labour world, by identifying me with others of a like name connected with finance in India and in America.”

One of the most interesting events in Saklatvala's campaign, in the light of present-day problems of racism in our multi-racial society, was a clear indication at a public meeting that such general antipathy towards Indians did not exist at that time. The Liberal candidate, Mr Hogbin, accused 'supporters of Saklatvala' of rowdiness and threats against his person; he claimed that the intimidations were such as to make it too dangerous for him to address any more meetings in person and he therefore appointed his agent, Captain A.P. Godfrey, to speak for him. (If such threats had in fact been made, and there was never any evidence or proof that they had been, it might seem somewhat cowardly to expose his agent to the abuse rather than face it himself).

The right-wing press upheld the view that supporters of Saklatvala were guilty; the left-wing press, notably the Daily Herald, thought the whole thing was a stunt to try to discredit Saklatvala.

THE "REDS" OF BATTERSEA.

UNIONIST-LIBERAL COALITION.

CONTESTS IN KENT AND BUCKS.

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)

Battersea is one of the few "Red" centres in the London area, and the North Division returned to Parliament last year an Indian Communist, who stood as the Labour Party candidate.

Mr. Saklatvala is again the Labour nominee. Writing in the *Workers' Weekly* a few months ago, while still occupying a seat in the House of Commons, he said: "The British Empire is made up of the aristocratic and cunning dirty dogs of Great Britain, who will assail anyone's country any time." His pernicious influence has crept like duck-weed among a large section of the electors, whose discontent has been created or fed by unemployment, and there is urgent reason in the public interest why it should be checked. It must be said that the other sections of the constituency have been largely to blame for the present situation. While the revolutionary element has been active among the electors and at the poll, thousands of others have been apathetic and have abstained from voting.

Both the Liberal and Unionist Parties appear at last to be awake to the necessity of doing something, and are making a determined effort to secure the constitutional representation of the constituency. At the election last year Mr. Saklatvala received 11,311 votes, against 11,046 cast for the National Liberal and Liberal candidates. Mr. H. C. Hogbin, the National Liberal nominee in that election, has now been nominated as the United Liberal candidate, and as the local Unionist leaders have issued an appeal to their followers to support him, on the ground that he is the constitutional candidate, the task of the combined parties ought not to be an impossible one.

In the 1922 election as many as 17,000 electors abstained from voting, approaching a half of the entire electorate. This was, no doubt, due very largely to the differences in the Liberal Party, which had previously for many years secured the representation of the district. The party now hope to pull their full strength, and should win if Liberal apathy does not come to the aid of their opponents.

Mr. Hogbin has put the question of the Constitution in the forefront of his address, and says that the great issue which the electors have to decide is "whether you will have Constitutional Government and maintain law and order, or submit to the forces of revolution and disorder."

For the rest, he promises to "support such measures as will, until such time as Europe is again on peaceful trading terms, and exchanges have become stabilized, bring immediate relief to unemployment." He embraces the Liberal social policy, as opposed to giving Mr. Baldwin "a blank cheque" on the question of protection, and expresses the belief that free trade is the best means of keeping all the commodities of life on the lowest level.

Mr. Saklatvala's election address is a very mild document, but his speeches are of the wild Communistic type.

Clipping: The Times, 29th November 1923

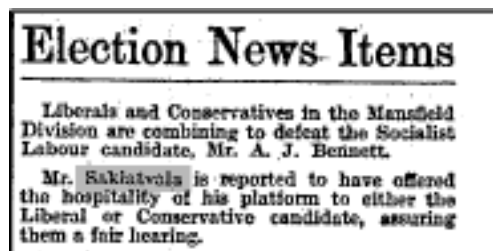
Saklatvala himself issued a leaflet which he distributed to audiences at his meetings; he also sent an ample supply of the leaflets to Mr Hogbin to give out at his meetings also. It was addressed to 'Battersea Comrades' and stated:

"Making a noise or causing a disturbance at Meetings of our Political Opponents is not in keeping with the traditions of Battersea where the people are ever ready to listen to all kinds of opinion.

"Many Elections have been won by Candidates in the past as a result of unfair treatment given to them at Public Meetings. I strongly advocate a fair hearing for and a calm discussion with everybody who wishes to express or explain his opinions. I strongly urge upon all to preserve the fair name of Battersea, and to be calm and well-conducted at all Meetings.

“Do not let me appeal to you in vain. Saklatvala”

The Daily Herald reported that Saklatvala thought it wrong to hold, at such times as these, Party meetings to be addressed by representatives of one side only: “He invites Conservatives and Liberals to attend his meetings and address his rallies. He asks for similar privileges in return.” As a result of this policy, Saklatvala and Captain Godfrey, (Mr Hogbin’s Election Agent) were addressing a joint meeting in Battersea, immediately after the distribution of Saklatvala’s exhortation to the voters to give everyone a fair hearing. Captain Godfrey first referred to the “splendid sportsmanship” shown by Saklatvala.



Clipping: The Times, 4th December 1923

“But,” he added, “I have to confess to having an instinctive preference for an Englishman.” Whereupon there was general uproar, the audience rose to their feet, “Withdraw!” “Shame!” “You’re asking for it!” and “What about Lady Astor?” (Who was a non-coloured but most colourful foreigner by birth) were some of the remarks distinguishable through the din, which continued until Mr Saklatvala himself intervened. In answer to the general clamour Captain Godfrey assured everyone that he had intended no offence and that if his remark had caused offence, he withdrew it. How wonderful it would be were such strong and wholesome reactions to be found in an audience today.

Early in the evening on Polling Day, 6th December, before the results had been declared, Saklatvala attended a big rally of the ILP in the Queen’s Hall, where he received a resounding ovation.

But his good fortune was not to hold and he lost the seat by 186 votes. Hogbin polled 12,527 and Saklatvala received 12,341 votes. It had been a hard-fought campaign and the gap was narrow, but the result was a bitter blow to Saklatvala and the Communist Party. Their were rowdy scenes at Battersea Town Hall when the four candidates (for South and North Battersea) appeared on the balcony of the Town Hall and, later, in the Council Chamber. The Daily Telegraph reported that:

“Mr Saklatvala, attempting to pour oil on the troubled waters,

thereupon appealed to all his friends present to understand that in a parliamentary Election someone had to win and someone else had to lose. Mr Hogbin had his disappointment 12 months ago. He (Mr Saklatvala) did not hide the fact that when, after hard work and great stress, a man lost an election, he must feel disappointed, but that need not make him bitter.”

After the election, Ramsey MacDonald was to form the first Labour government. Reginald Bishop, a close associate and Father’s secretary, has been quoted as saying that Saklatvala came under great pressure from the parliamentary Labour Party at that time. They not only sought his advice on India but apparently proffered all sorts of allurements with promises of high office if he would renounce his membership of the Communist Party and wholeheartedly and unreservedly toe the Labour Party line.

**LABOUR ELECTION
TACTICS.**

—

**ROWDYISM IN SOUTH
LONDON.**

—

**LIBERAL AND UNIONIST
VICTIMS.**

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)

The forces of disorder are conducting what appears to be an organized system of disturbance in some of the South London Divisions. The methods adopted in constituencies wide apart are similar, and, particularly in North Battersea, the main issue before the country is almost lost in a struggle to secure Constitutional representation.

When writing last week about the conditions in North Battersea, I pointed out that Mr. Hogbin, the Liberal candidate, had told the electors that the great question they had to decide was whether they would have Constitutional government and maintain law and order, or submit to the forces of revolution and disorder. Mr. Hogbin is receiving the full support of both the Constitutional parties in the division. He has shown great courage in his fight against the revolutionary element, led by Mr. Saklatvala, the Indian Communist, with the result that he has been seriously threatened by desperate gangs, and has been compelled to receive police protection.

All the Liberal meetings in the division have been cancelled, and it will probably be impossible for Mr. Hogbin to conduct his canvass any further. The fear is that many of the electors may be prevented by terror from voting, but it is clear that Liberals and Unionists have the power to reject the so-called Labour candidate if they can only be got to poll something like their full strength. It is this fact, no doubt, that has induced the “Reds” to spread terror in the division.

In other constituencies the disorder has been aimed at Unionist candidates. Dame Helen Gwynne Vaughan is running Mr. Ammon, the Labour nominee, who was returned last year by the narrow majority of 254, very close in North Camberwell, and has an excellent chance of securing the seat if she has fair play. This she is not getting. Communist bands, composed mainly of young men, disturb her meetings, but she has tackled her task fearlessly and with great spirit.

Clipping: The Times, 5th December 1923

Personally I do not think that any such inducements would be considered by Father to be a temptation or a pressure. He was being promised gifts for which he had no use and which did not tempt him at all. It was like offering a succulent steak to a vegetarian—they offered merely what he did not want. He wanted a free India and a communist India, and nothing short of that would satisfy him. He also wanted international communism and was determined to remain politically and morally free to preach his personal, communist gospel.

Like most left-wing socialists, Father became totally disillusioned by Ramsay MacDonald. It was said that on one occasion, listening to one of MacDonald's orations, Jimmy Maxton was actually crying and was heard to mutter, "Bastard!" under his breath. Beatrice Webb said of him that "He was a good substitute for a Leader." In fairness to MacDonald, it has to be remembered that he formed a government without having a clear majority in the House. Asquith said, "If a Labour government is ever to be tried in this country it could hardly be tried under safer conditions."

In an issue of *The Labour Monthly* in 1924, Lenin described MacDonald as using "smooth, melodious, banal, and socialist-seeming phraseology which serves in all developed capitalist countries to camouflage the policy of the bourgeoisie inside the Labour Movement."

The other changes have taken place in divisions which were represented by Liberals and Labour members. It will be remembered that in North Battersea, the Unionists decided to support Mr. Hogbin, the Liberal candidate, in order to secure the defeat of Mr. Saklatvala, the Indian Communist, who sat as a Labour member in the last Parliament. Mr. Hogbin has been returned with a majority of 186. Labour has gained from

Clipping: *The Times*, 8th December 1923

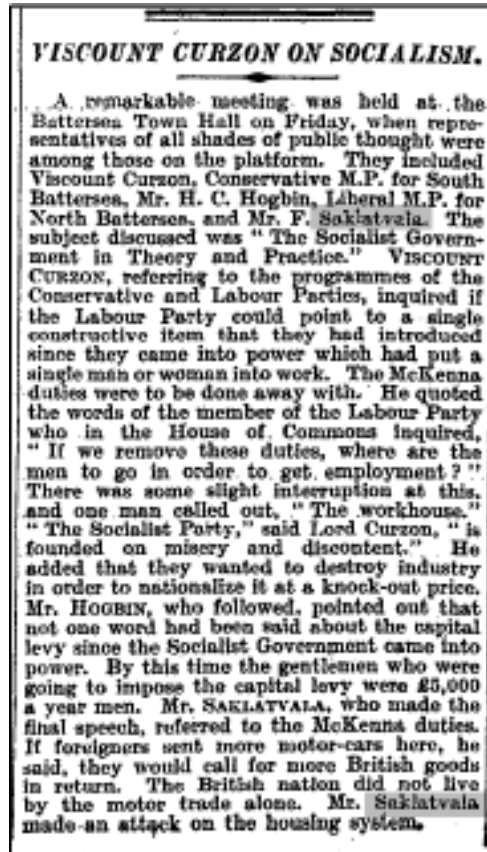
But a stronger leader and a more wholeheartedly dedicated socialist could certainly have achieved more. And Labour Policy on the Colonies was little better, in Saklatvala's view, than the Tory one. The Labour Secretary of State for India, Lord Olivier, was a Fabian and Saklatvala was totally out of sympathy with him. Saklatvala made this clear when he addressed the 24th Annual Conference of the Labour Party. In the report of that Conference it is stated that Mr Saklatvala complained:

"That no mention was made in the Report of the replies which were given to the deputations to the India Office. The Indian Labour

Problem, he submitted, had a great bearing on the progress as well as the safety of the Trade Union Movement in this country. In this respect the splendid case that was made out by the deputation was quoted, but there was not one single word as to what the India Office had to say in return. Very important suggestions were made to the India Office and it was pointed out that miners in India were working at very low wages, and that a very large number of women were employed underground. And yet they were told from time to time that Welsh coal was no longer in demand because foreign coal could be sold in certain markets at 10 shillings a ton cheaper.

“Throughout the whole industrial movement in India cruel, inhuman treatment was meted out to Indian workers. The deputation demanded from the Labour government that they should appoint a Commission to go out to India to examine the whole affair, but they were not told in this report what had happened or what the answer would be. There was no mention made in the report of the 2 boys shot down during the mills strike, nor of the trial and imprisonment of many people. The whole thing was a conspiracy against the workers both of India and of Great Britain.”

As an Indian communist working politically in England, which was the centre of the British Empire and the seat of its government, Saklatvala had an important and personal role to play in the Communist Party of Great Britain and in the Communist International. He certainly helped to create and foster a Communist Party in India. This work continued even when he ceased to be a member of Parliament; indeed, if anything, his propaganda and meetings up and down the country were carried on more vigorously than ever when he was freed from his duties as a member of the House of Commons.



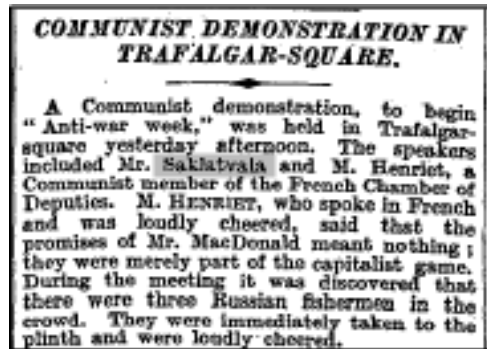
Clipping: The Times, 19th May 1924

Nor did he neglect the constituents of Battersea. There is a report in the Tooting and Balham Times of "an extraordinary meeting, unique in Party politics" held in Battersea Town Hall and addressed by Battersea's two MPs, Viscount Curzon and Mr Hogbin and also by the official Labour parliamentary candidate, Mr Saklatvala. The hall was packed by people of all shades of political opinion and there was applause when Saklatvala said that if he had his way, all political meetings should be organised on a multi-party basis.

Saklatvala made a blistering attack on Battersea's housing. He said Viscount Curzon had accompanied him on a tour of houses that "were disgraceful and diabolical. Houses where there were 5, 6 and 7 lodgers in one room. The slates had gone from the roofs, the windows were without panes of glass and the walls were filthy and full of millions of microbes." Earlier in his speech he claimed that he was in England "to expel from them their national hypocrisy and to make them real Christians."

"You go to Church," he said, "and the Church preaches morality and asks you to lead healthy lives, and observe in private life morality and decorum between the sexes. Yet under your capitalist system you allow father, mother and three

or four children to live in one room.” He declared that they studied medical science, economics, they gave mind-training and produced articles to improve the health and comfort of their people, and yet they permitted 90% of the population to live in insanitary houses. In Battersea, he said, there were houses that were a disgrace to any city.



Clipping: The Times, 28th July 1924

Saklatvala, as a delegate to the 24th annual Labour Party Conference held at the Queens Hall, London, in October, 1924, wound up the perennial debate on the affiliation to the Labour Party of the Communist Party, which was, of course, once again rejected. Indeed, the gap between the two parties was widening, although the Communists remained convinced that the Labour Movement could only gain in strength if all left wing movements worked together harmoniously against the united capitalist forces that were exploiting workers all over the world. But although they claimed to be working for the same aims, there was deep division as to the means used to achieve them.

Mr Frank Hodges MP, introduced the recommendations of the Executive, which were: “That the application for affiliation from the Communist Party be refused. And that no member of the Communist Party shall be eligible for endorsement as a Labour Candidate for Parliament or any Local Authority.”

At the end of the debate, in which Harry Pollitt also took part in favour of affiliation, Mr Saklatvala contended that:

“The Object in the Constitution of the Labour Party was also, in the main, the object of the Communist Party. With regard to parliamentary Democracy, it was a mistaken idea, he said, to say that the Communists did not believe in the right of the people as expressed in Parliament, but they refused to accept a sham democracy in the form of Parliament as it is now constituted. It was so undemocratic that it compelled the Prime Minister to keep a man like George Lansbury out of the Labour

government.

“As to the non-endorsement as Labour Candidates of members of the Communist Party, this was, he said, a very wrong step. There were members of the Labour Party who were also members of the National Liberal Club and of the Reform Club; if members of the Communist Party were to be debarred, so too should the members of these other organisations. He had sat for eight months in the House of Commons and he could honestly say that he had never received a single letter or telegraphic introduction from Moscow.

“The Communist Party, he said, was recognised all over Europe as a definitely working class organisation. Wise or unwise, stupid or prudent, it was admitted to be a working class movement, and yet it was proposed to put up a cast iron bar against it. He hoped the resolutions would be defeated.”

In this, he was, of course, to be disappointed as all three resolutions, excluding communists from membership of the party, from endorsement by the Labour Party as parliamentary candidates, and denying the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party, were all carried. In spite of these resolutions, Saklatvala was to remain an active member of the Labour Party until 1928.

Communism was then comparatively new to Britain, and was considered to be an import from abroad and was, therefore, dubbed by those who feared it, as ‘unpatriotic’—though more than any other Party, perhaps, it stood for the betterment of conditions for working men who were as much part of the British nation as were the bankers, businessmen and aristocracy. It was, perhaps, largely due to this accusation of disloyalty that the Labour Party feared it might lose middle-class votes if it consorted openly with the Communist Party. (We had, many centuries earlier, imported quite a few good ideas from foreign parts, such as the wheel from Egypt, arithmetic from the Arabs and Christianity from Jerusalem, and the basis of our legal system from Rome, to name but a few. But these were imported before England had become ‘top nation’. Now she was sitting on top of the world, perhaps she felt it no longer appropriate to introduce innovations from abroad.)

This, I suppose, is the greatest weakness of the democratic voting system; politicians, anxious from the best motives to achieve or gain power, all too

often prune their policies to court the voters rather than forming policies to further their fundamental political and economic principles. After all, there are still those who believe that a party has to trim its principles in order to woo reluctant voters. Personally, I think it a most dangerous course to follow; for such parties all too often lose their direction and miss their final destination. And in the last analysis, who is going to vote for a party that doesn't know where it is heading? The Vicar of Bray is remembered only as a figure of fun and certainly did not achieve much, other than to survive. True, he retained his head, but there are few who believe it was worth keeping.

It is hard—indeed it is distressing—to imagine the steadfast adherence to principle and the dogged spirit of optimism that prevailed among those early socialist and communist leaders, now that we have to witness the dismantling of our own welfare state and the disintegration of the communist governments in eastern Europe. They were all so positive that communism would spread all over the world ultimately and that, with it, would be achieved human happiness.

For my part, I remain convinced that depression and sorrow are the natural emotional state of mankind—after all, the first thing a human baby does is to cry—and it is to cheer ourselves up that we divert ourselves with learning, music, dance, theatre, games, drink, drugs and suicidal smoking, flirtations and the pursuit of love, good food, travel, hard work... and thus most of us manage for much of the time to hold our natural depression at bay. I do not subscribe to the belief in original sin, only to the belief in original despair; and despair is not an illness to be cured, but a natural condition which has to be endured. One has only to look into the eyes of the inmates of refugee camps, to realise that, stripped of human hope and the chance of activity and endeavour, our inborn depression reasserts itself.

And despair crept into Father's thinking sometimes for, in his latter years, he apparently said once to my mother, "Well, Sehri, have I been a fool? Should I have made money like the rest of them and given you and the children a comfortable life, instead of spending my energies on politics?" This mood of despondency passed, especially as my mother reassured him that she would not have had it any other way. But he would not have been human if he had never had moments of self-doubt and loss of hope.

But these moments were rare and, with his strength of purpose, he overcame

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them; for the most part he fervently believed that communism, and with it human happiness, would be achieved, that the poor and oppressed would be rescued, that, in the spirit of the Magnificat, the mighty should be put down from their seats, and those of low degree would be exalted; the hungry should be filled with good things, and the rich would be sent empty away.

Re-election and the Red Scare

The Zinoviev Letter. Parliamentary debate following the assassination of Sir Lee Stack, 1924. Resignation from the firm of Tata. Election victory, November 1924. The Tories regain power.

Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government was short-lived. He had been brave and realistic enough to give formal recognition to the government in Russia and had entered into a trade agreement with them. He was also negotiating a loan to the USSR. The opposition viewed such activity with distaste and alarm. But it was not any major political issue that brought the Labour government down, instead it was an accusation against one Mr J.R. Campbell, acting-editor of the communist journal *Workers' Weekly*. The Director of Public Prosecutions brought a case of sedition against him for publishing an article calling on the armed forces not to intervene against strikers in any industrial dispute, and not to fire on men who, after all, were their fellow-workers.

But the Attorney-General, Sir Patrick Hastings, deemed it wiser to withdraw the indictment. To bring a case against Campbell and have it fail would be worse than not bringing a suit at all. Campbell had sustained disabling wounds as a soldier during the war, when he had been awarded a decoration for exceptional gallantry, and he could well excite public sympathy on this account. It was also feared that such a prosecution could be interpreted as interference with the right of free speech. The Conservatives and Liberals in the House seized on the opportunity and successfully moved a vote of censure, and MacDonald was forced to ask for the dissolution of Parliament.

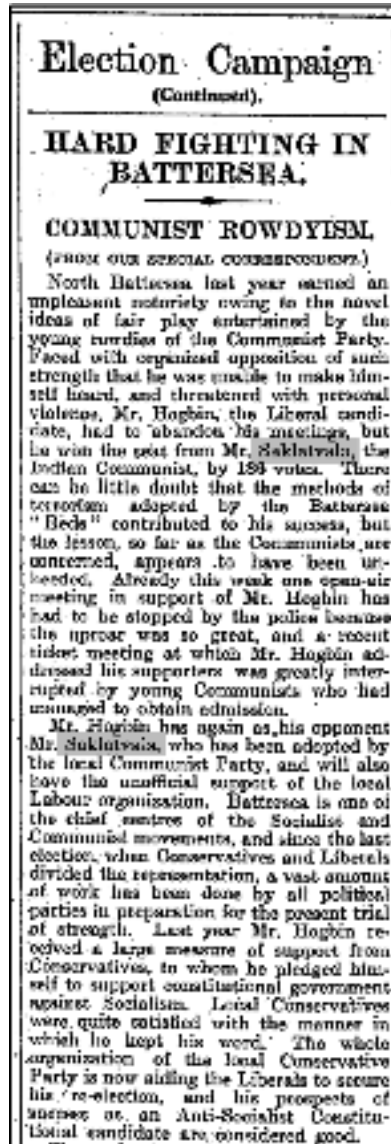
Whatever MacDonald's faults might have been, there is no doubt that he had endured a most exacting few months as Prime Minister and had suffered harsh personal criticism from Tories, Liberals and his own back-benchers; he had added to his responsibilities by conducting his own Foreign Affairs. He faced the prospective General Election a tired, and personally very injured man. Nor could the affairs of state be neglected; these had to be conducted

during the course of his travels between an arduous and demanding schedule of public meetings. He was addressing twenty or more meetings every day in different towns and was constantly travelling and on the move.

So it was that the scurrilous affair of the ‘Zinoviev Letter’ caught him unawares; though the whole deception was so skilfully and cunningly conducted that it is doubtful whether anyone in MacDonald’s position could have overcome the consequences of it, no matter how alert and leisured they might have been.

Just four days before Polling Day, on 25th October 1924, under melodramatic headlines, the Daily Mail published what purported to be a letter from the President of the Soviet Presidium in Moscow, Mr Zinoviev, addressed to Mr MacManus, the Secretary of the Communist Party in Great Britain. The Mail reported it as “Two dramatic documents just released by the Foreign Office—a copy of a letter from Zinoviev to the British Communist Party and a protest note issued by the Foreign Office to the Russian Charge d’Affaires in London.”

History leaves us in no doubt that the letter was a counterfeit; it was not until the summer of 1927 that one Drujalovsky, a known forger, confessed to having assisted in forging the Zinoviev Letter with a group of White Russian emigres in Berlin; but whomsoever actually wielded the pen, there can be no question of the fact that the contents of the letter were devised by someone with a profound and intimate knowledge of British politics, and its author showed consummate skill and political insight. What can never be established is how much the Foreign Office and press barons actually believed it to be true, or whether it was used, cynically, as probably one of the dirtiest of dirty political tricks to discredit the socialist movement.

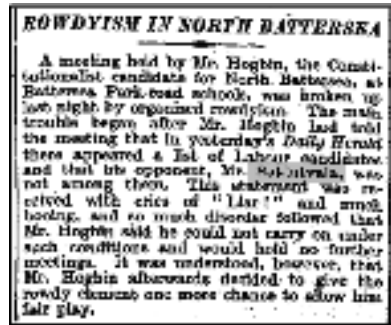


Clipping: The Times, 15th October 1924

No one can ever know who instigated it. It was certainly not the work of either the Labour or the Communist Party, both of whom were the victims of the plot; almost certainly, the Foreign Office, the British Intelligence Service and Conservative Central Office were to some degree involved, either acting in naive belief of the letter's authenticity or dishonestly, pretending that they believed it. The readers' views upon it will depend upon their personal political predilections. But could anyone genuinely believe that Zinoviev would impart such views and directives in an open letter to the British Communist Party, when it was common knowledge that letters and correspondence to that body were quite likely to be intercepted?

In any case, MacManus was actually in Moscow on the date appearing on the spurious letter, and so Zinoviev could have given him any orders by word of

mouth; for, as Saklatvala pointed out to a crowded election meeting in Trafalgar Square on 26th March, Zinoviev would never entrust such a confidential document to the British Post Office Service. One can only think that whoever perpetrated the swindle was either simple-minded or dishonest. The clever contents of the letter really rules out the possibility of simple-mindedness and, in my view, one is left, therefore, with the only other alternative.



Clipping: The Times, 22nd October 1924

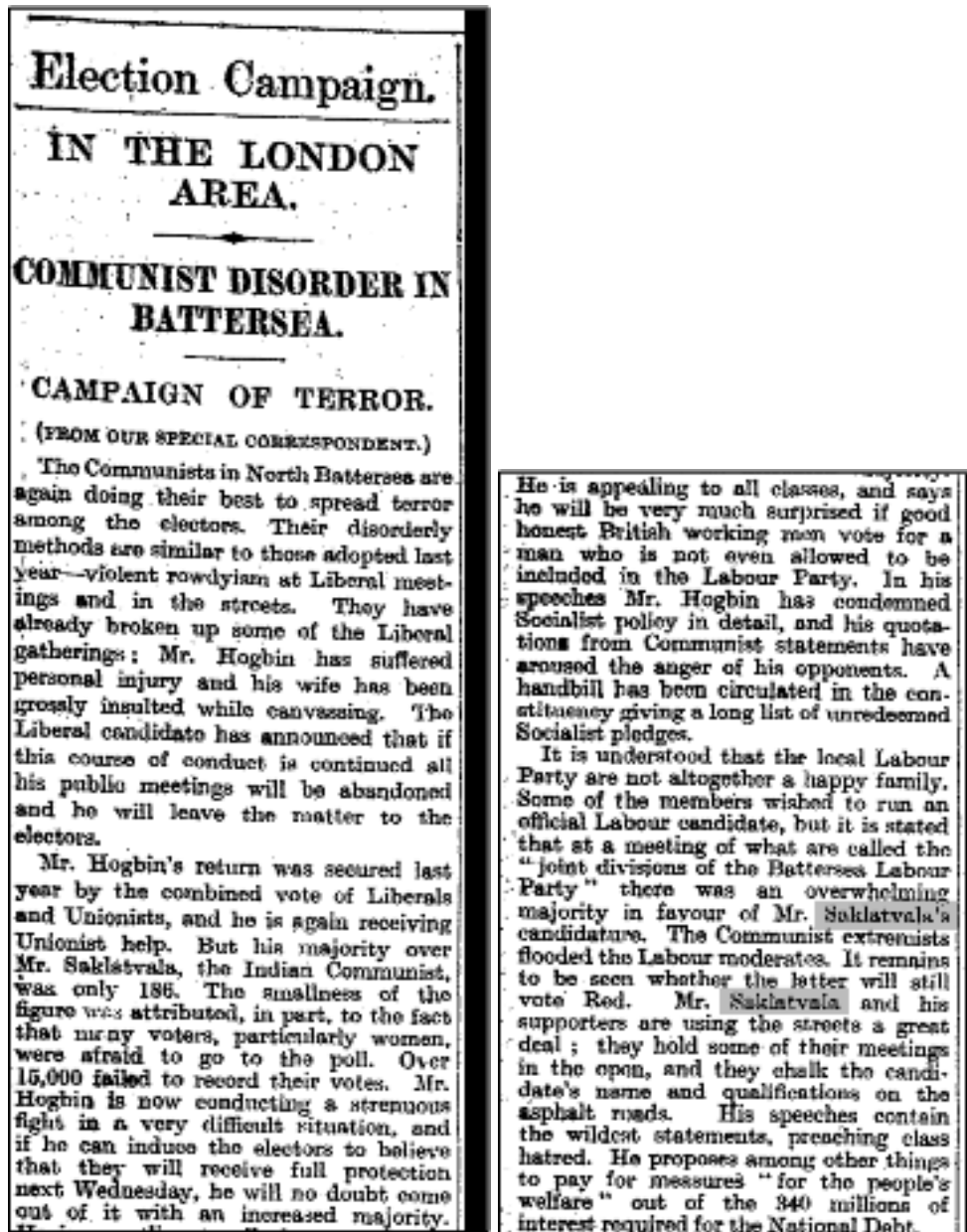
The 'letter' called upon the Communist Party in Great Britain to press for government ratification of the treaties drawn up by the Labour government and which were so bitterly opposed by the Conservative Party. It called upon the communists to agitate more strongly and carry on more vigorous propaganda within Britain's armed forces. And it goes on to call for action that would make it possible to paralyse Britain's armed forces and ultimately to stir up civil war.

[Editor's note: A report by Gill Bennett, "A Most Extraordinary and Mysterious Business": The Zinoviev Letter of 1924' published by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1999, offers the following "best guess" scenario of the document's origin:

"It is well documented that White Russian, Monarchist, anti-Bolshevik circles were outraged by the signature of the Anglo-Soviet treaties in August 1924. The statement in the House of Commons on 19 March 1928 by the Labour MP Saklatvala, to the effect that the signature of the treaties was followed by a flurry of communication between the Baltic states and Berlin, with the aim of devising 'ways and means... either to frighten [MacDonald] out of his position, or to strengthen his hands and enable him to shake off his extremists', may well be correct. White Russian Intelligence services were well developed and highly organised,

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and included the operation of a forgery ring in Berlin. It seems likely that they asked either those forgers, or their contacts in the Baltic states with similar skills, to produce a document which would derail the treaties and damage the Labour government. Because of British Intelligence links with Berlin, information about the proposed forgery could have reached certain members of British Intelligence Agencies who were on the look-out for opportunities to further the Conservative cause in Britain, and to discredit the Labour Party in the process. Anyone in that position, and with a wide net of contacts in London, was well placed not only to vouch for the authenticity of the Letter but also to encourage its dissemination in quarters where profitable—and mischievous—use might be made of it.”]



Clipping: The Times, 24th October 1924

The bombshell produced the desired effect among the British electorate. No one can definitively determine just to what extent the outcome of the election was affected by these sensation-seeking revelations. But the unusually large turnout of 80% of the voters could well have been an indication of the panic induced by the publication.

Needless to say, the Conservatives got in. (I hope I may be forgiven for reminding the reader of a principle of Roman law, that the author of a crime is he who profits therefrom). The Labour Party increased its votes by about a million, but nevertheless lost some fifty seats. The Liberals fared worst, losing some 100 seats in the House, leaving them with only 42 MPs.

But among the successful candidates was the Communist contender for North Battersea, Mr Saklatvala. I imagine this was pretty irritating to the instigators of the Zinoviev Letter scare! This time, he had presented himself to the electorate as a Communist Party candidate, although he was supported by the Labour Party and the Trades Union Council. That he survived the onslaught of the Zinoviev Letter is remarkable—but perhaps the British newspaper readers are not so gullible as might sometimes be supposed.

The failure of Mr. Hogbin, Constitutionalist, to retain the seat in Battersea North against Mr. Saklatvala, the Communist, is probably due in great measure to the disturbed state of the division. There was a good deal of rowdiness during the contest, and the fear of trouble prevented many voters from polling. Mr. Hogbin's majority last year was only 186. On Wednesday he polled 2,027 votes more than last year, but the Socialists, in co-operation with the Communists, whipped up an additional 2,755. The electorate had increased by 403, and it is likely that Mr. Saklatvala was helped by many of the new voters. As many as 10,936 electors abstained from voting. In Battersea South, Lord Curzon increased his majority from 1,118 to 5,217.

Clipping: The Times, 31st October 1924

The Zinoviev bogey was more frightening to middle-class than to working-class voters, on whose support Saklatvala relied. But psephologists would have to concede, I think, that it was a great personal triumph for him to have won the seat, and is an indication that the voters of Battersea trusted his word and his integrity. It was only the Communists at the time who could be absolutely certain that the letter was a forgery, since they and they alone knew, positively and beyond any doubt, that no such letter had ever been received; and it seems Saklatvala succeeded in convincing the people of Battersea of this fact.

A short while after the election and before the House convened, Father came home late one night after Mother had gone to bed. He called up the stairs asking her to come down and help him up to bed, as he had broken his ankle and could not manage by himself. Mummy thought he was teasing her (as he frequently did) and just laughed, told him to stop fooling and to come to bed. But he was not fooling—he had indeed broken his ankle, and when she finally took his pleading seriously, Mother found him standing in the hall with the help of crutches. He was still on crutches when he took his seat in the new Parliament on 2nd December 1924.

On the 16th December Saklatvala was told by the leadership of the

parliamentary Labour Party that he was not to be given the Labour whip. He reminded them, politely, that he had not applied for it.

POLITICAL NOTES.

**LABOUR MANIFESTO
ON RUSSIA.**

**CRITICISM OF PARTY
TACTICS.**

For an hour and a half yesterday afternoon the members of the Parliamentary Labour Party, meeting under the chairmanship of Mr. MacDonald, discussed with considerable frankness their present position in the political drama. It is an open secret at Westminster that many of the rank and file are profoundly dissatisfied at the way in which they have been led in recent months, and when in private conclave they are not in the habit of mincing their words. The official report merely states that the course of the debate on the Russian Treaties and the Zinovieff letter was discussed, and consideration was given to the debate which is to take place on Friday "on the announcement made by the Prime Minister regarding Cabinet intervention in political prosecutions."

Labour members are already announcing that they do not regard Friday's debate as one on the Campbell case. They have no desire to press that particular case any further, but rather to concentrate on the broad question of the right of the Cabinet to intervene in political prosecutions. It is said that both Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Thomas, who are expected to speak, are fortifying themselves with precedents which they claim will entirely justify the action taken by the late Cabinet. But Conservative members are anxious that the Campbell case shall be kept well to the fore during the debate, as they desire to obtain further information as to the circumstances which led the Cabinet to issue the instruction that no political prosecution should be directed by the Attorney-General without the sanction of the Cabinet.

The official report of yesterday's meeting states that the position of Mr. Saklatvala, the Communist member, was also considered, and it was decided that in view of the resolutions of the Labour Party annual conference with respect to Communists and the Communist Party, it would be impossible to admit him as a member of the Parliamentary Party. No mention is made in the official report, however, of the anxiety that was displayed at the meeting concerning the performances of Mr. Purcell and his colleagues on the Labour delegation to Soviet Russia. Fears were expressed that the continual eulogies of the Soviet administration by the British visitors was bound to do considerable harm among the moderate members of the Labour Party in this country. It was agreed that a statement of the attitude of the Parliamentary Labour Party towards the present rulers of Soviet Russia should be prepared and issued without delay, and a small committee was appointed to keep the party in touch with any development in the Russian situation.

Clipping: The Times, 17th December 1924

There is a marked difference in his speeches in the House once Saklatvala was liberated from the Labour whip and adherence to Labour policy. No one man, being the sole representative of a political Party in the House of Commons, could hope to change the course of parliamentary events or to influence the voting in the House on any issue, but what Saklatvala did manage to do was to use the House as a platform from which to deliver persistent propoganda on behalf of the communists. He acted as the irritant within the oyster-shell of

the House of Commons and frequently produced pearls which were quoted by the press of the day—so the propaganda in the House spread to the newspapers and to the electorate in general.

It was at 11.25 on the night of 17th December 1924, that Saklatvala spoke in the House of his position as the sole communist member there:

“It may seem rather out of proportion for an individual to stand up and say he represents a Party which claims to put forward its views, but I appeal to the House to realise the position. We have heard about the great fondness this House has for its traditions, and I can well understand that it would take some time to adjust itself to some new feature that arises here. I represent a proper, well-organised, well-formed and rather too loudly acknowledged political party in the country now.

“I am not one of those international socialists who take offence at having friends in Moscow, Berlin or Delhi. As a member of the International Communist Party, I submit that our movement does extend from Moscow to Battersea, and much beyond that. It is as well organised a Party as any other Party in the state, with its machinery, its press, its branches all over the country. I would point out to hon and rt. hon Gentlemen opposite—I do not know whether it was merely put on or whether it was their sincere belief—that right up to the last Election they were saying that our Party was the vital tail that was wagging the whole of the Labour dog.

“We do not count by numbers, but what we lack in numbers we make up for in solid importance. Our friends of the Liberal Party only succeeded in returning to the House one member for every seven and a half candidates, whereas our Party succeeded in returning one member out of seven candidates.

“Considering the change that is now going on, and considering the rightful place the Communist Party is taking in the Parliaments all over Europe, this House might now grant to us justifiable claims and put us in the time-table. I do not for a moment claim that our Party should have a whole day, or a couple of days, allotted, but surely, now, the House could begin to allot to us, say, an hour, when other Parties can have a full day to themselves.

“I have looked over the debates for the last 4 or 5 days, and it seems to me that our Party would be the only one that would stand in real difference without getting mixed up at times. We find it very difficult to find a line of strong demarcation... We have heard during the last few days of the debate many points of agreement between the Tory Party and the administrators of the Labour Party, and we have seen very few points of strong disagreement... looking at it all I submit that it is for the good of this nation and not for its harm, that one party should stand up boldly to say that it always says what it believes in, and believes in what it is prepared to say, and to act up to it.

“We represent that section of the working class that does not believe in continuity of policy. We represent a section of the working class that does not believe in saying at one time that your employers are your enemies, that individual capitalism is the source of all your evils, and yet that we should sit down with them, make friends and form a joint club so that evils may disappear from time to time.

“With regard to the wording of my amendment, I remember that when I was in the House in 1922 the first King’s Speech I heard was read and debated. My hon Friend, the member for West Houghton was reported to have said this: ‘I was proud to come to the House because I did not during the war send any young boy to his doom, and the Labour Party, I feel sure, will echo every word when I say that their advent to this House, if it means anything at all, means goodwill among all the peoples of the earth.

“I am glad to learn that the people of India rejoice because our numbers are growing, and the people of Egypt feel better towards this country because they know that the Labour Party brings international good will.’ I offer no comment, but I suppose everybody is agreed that, foolish as the Indians may be, and wicked as the Egyptians may be, I do not believe that today they entertain that belief that was attributed to them last year.

**"LENIN MEMORIAL"
MEETING.**

USE OF THEATRE REFUSED.

The theatre authorities concerned have taken action banning the use of the New Oxford Theatre to-morrow, for the purpose of holding a "Lenin Memorial" meeting under the auspices of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Mr. Walter Payne, chairman of the Oxford Limited, owners of the theatre, has made the following statement:—"We have given notice to the company which holds the licence to use the theatre from us that we regard it as a breach of the licence to allow a meeting of this kind to be held, and that we, therefore, cannot permit it. The person concerned is Mr. Gulliver, who has a licence to produce plays for a term which expires at the end of March. Mr. Gulliver did not understand what was to be the character of the meeting when he agreed to let the building. Labour meetings have been held there, and they have been quite proper and orderly. But Mr. Gulliver did not know that this was to be a special "Lenin Memorial" meeting. Mr. Gulliver has accordingly communicated with the Communist Party cancelling the arrangement, and I understand that he will take legal steps in order to ensure that the ban shall be effective." Mr. Payne added that it was a debatable question whether the use of the theatre for the purpose intended can be within the terms of the licence granted to the owners, which makes provision for stage plays, concerts, and cinema performances.

Mr. C. B. Cochran, the superior licensee of the theatre, is also concerned, and Mr. Payne states that Mr. Cochran shares his view. When approached, however, Mr. Cochran preferred to make no statement.

The meeting was to have been addressed among others by Mr. Saklatvala, M.P., and Mr. J. R. Campbell.

Clipping: The Times, 17th January 1925

"With regard to the amendment of which I have given notice, I submit that it is based upon the teachings and doctrines preached to the working classes from one end of Great Britain to the other for the last 30 years. We are still telling the working classes that their struggle is a class struggle, that their emancipation lies in the complete extinction of the individual ownership system, and that their only salvation in international affairs is not based upon Imperialism and protective tariffs, and armies, bombs and insolent letters to Zaghul Pasha, saying, 'My soldiers and bayonets will remain where they are but still we are pacifists.' Or telling the people of India, 'My ordinances shall rule you, but still we are the Party of goodwill', and telling everybody, 'We believe in a certain philosophy of life, but we do not practice it when it is a question of the democratic Parliament of the British Empire.'

"In this respect I submit to the House that the things I would have placed before it would not have been in any hostile spirit, but would have been presented to this House and the country at large as the viewpoint which will have to be accepted some day or other as the only

sane and honest view of life.”

The “insolent letters to Zaghlul Pasha,” Prime Minister of Egypt, concerned an incident in Egypt on 20th November 1924, when Sir Lee Stack, Governor-General of the Sudan and Sirdar (that is, Commander-in-Chief) of the Egyptian Army, was shot and killed and his Aide-de-Camp and his chauffeur were also wounded.

The British government sent what The Times described as “a stern note” to Zaghlul Pasha saying, inter alia, that His Majesty’s government considered that the murder was “the natural outcome of a campaign of hostility to British rights and British subjects in Egypt and Sudan founded upon a heedless ingratitude for benefits conferred by Great Britain, not discouraged by your Excellency’s government.” The note went on to demand an apology, the punishment of those responsible, the immediate suppression of political demonstrations, and the payment of a fine of £500,000.

Egypt’s reply apologised, agreed to pay the fine and to seek out the criminals, but refused sundry other requests contained in Britain’s letter. As a result of further correspondence between the two governments, Zaghlul Pasha resigned as Prime Minister and there was a political crisis in Egypt.

These events were debated in the House of Commons, and the transfer of the Egyptian money (the fine of £500,000) to the Sudan “for benevolent purposes.” It is not surprising that the incident and ensuing correspondence raised the anti-imperialist hackles of the communist member for North Battersea, whose contribution to the debate was as follows:

“May I point out that even a wise use of this money is not going to satisfy the constitutional point involved in the whole issue. We were informed at the beginning that a cheque was demanded and promptly paid. The promptness of the payment does not at all prove either the justification for the demand or the willingness with which the payment was made. I have in mind 2 cheques amounting to £300,000 which were also promptly paid by an eminent gentleman, and I think that the British government have applied exactly the same tactics, and the promptness with which the £500,000 was paid was due to the same fear under pressure, intimidation and blackmail...”

“The rt hon gentleman seems to speak as if it were some amount due to the Sudanese government, that the British government were merely

collecting it in a spirit of benevolence. That is not so. The British government are now using the name of the Sudanese government ...

“The cheque was extorted from the Egyptian government in a manner which is discreditable to the whole history of international relations... and it was because of the mailed fist of Britain that this cheque was forthcoming... the justice at the back of it were your gunboats and your blue-jackets.

“The British government had to pay after all what appeared to them to be justifiable sums to the extent of £50,000 [it had been decided to pay £40,000 to Sir Lee Stack’s widow and sums of £3000 and £5000 each to the Aide-de-Camp and to the chauffeur] and not £500,000, and the Egyptian government might be looked to indemnify the British government for this £50,000... they have demanded ten times the money they paid and now there is talk of ‘benevolent purposes’...



Clipping: The Times, 26th January 1925

“What is the Sudanese government but a military tyranny of a foreign power imposed upon the innocent people of the Sudan? Who are the Sudanese government? How many Sudanese have created the Sudanese government? When the Germans entered Belgium and they created there the new Belgian government, every man in this country said that it

was not a Belgian government, but that it was a German tyranny. In the Sudan today the Briton is a robber who is sticking there by force of arms...

“I say in the name of the Communist Party [laughter] ... which makes you jeer here and makes your Brigadier-Generals go to Trafalgar Square and enlist thousands of young men as Fasciti to fight them, that this House is going to be now a party for the first time to this blackmail...

“Are we to understand that this nation is not entitled to recover its common sense and sense of justice a little later on when the angry mood has passed away? Are we to understand that the sense of justice of the British Foreign Office, the British Prime Minister, the British House of Commons and the British nation on this particular question is lost for ever, and that we are going to misappropriate this loot in perpetuity?

“Is there no possibility even now of referring the moral point involved in this exaction of £500,000 and of handing back to the Egyptians whatever balance an impartial international tribunal may say you wrongly took from them? Instead of talking loudly about benevolence to the Sudanese, cannot you ascertain that the Sudanese are more self-respecting than you are and would refuse to touch this blood money and use it for benevolent purposes...”

When the House was debating the granting of £15,000 to send the Prince of Wales on a visit to Africa and South America, David Kirkwood (Labour) said the Prince of Wales should go on a tour of this country, to be shown the slums, the poverty and the terrible working conditions of his own people. Saklatvala, always offering a novel twist to older ideas, said he would rather spend the money showing the living conditions of people like the Prince to some of the slum dwellers of Battersea, by giving them a week of luxury living.

It was also stated that one of the purposes of the Prince's tour was to promote the sale abroad of British goods.

Saklatvala said:

“I fail to understand how a visit from the Prince of Wales can enable you to sell to Argentine any article which you are not capable of selling with the sound workmanship of British workers at a reasonable, competitive cost... You cannot send royal ambassadors to any country if your workmen are producing bad materials and try to induce trade through

the splendours of royalty. I would challenge hon members opposite to take any shoddy material... and effect a large trade in it by sending royalties abroad as salesmen..."

George Lansbury (Labour) added, "I can understand the argument that we need a King to act as a representative of the British Dominions, but I have yet to learn that it is the function of kingship to go round as a commercial bagman doing trade."

[Editor's note: George Lansbury, later to become leader of the Labour Party, had been Mayor of Poplar in 1921, when he led the Poplar Rates Rebellion, opposing not only the government and the London County Council, but leaders of his own party. The borough council, instead of forwarding collected tax monies to LCC, dispersed the money as aid to the needy. Thirty councillors, including six women, were jailed by the High Court for six weeks. Council meetings during this time were held in Brixton Prison, until the LCC asked the High Court to release them.]

On 26th February 1925, there was a debate on estimates for the Air Force. Ernest Thurtle (Labour) proposed an amendment, thereby giving one or two Labour members the opportunity to deliver impassioned speeches on disarmament. George Lansbury's appeal was particularly moving. He ended by saying: "I believe our people have got the greatest God-given opportunity that the masses of no other country have ever had—no democracy has ever had the opportunity our people have. You have given them education, you have given them municipal administrative powers, you have given them the right to organise, the right to vote, the right to come here—what for? To let the world be as it has been? No. We are here to say that mankind is one and that the one-ness of human life is sacred—that the lives of the black child and white child are equally sacred, because Christ was born and because Christ died to make those lives sacred."

[Editor's note: Ernest Thurtle is noteworthy for having brought about the abolition of the death penalty for cowardice or desertion in the British Army—over 300 soldiers had been shot by firing squad during the First World War].

THE COMMUNIST VIEW.

Mr. SAKLATVALA (Battersea, N., Com.), speaking on behalf of the Communist Party, said he supported the amendment. He objected to this use of public money. At the same time, some of his friends among the Opposition loved the Empire; they wanted Royalty and Royal Ambassadors. If they wanted all those luxuries they must pay for them. If they wanted an Empire and a Royal nob at the head of it— (Loud cries of "Order" and "Withdraw.")

The CHAIRMAN.—I did not catch the expression. (Ministerial cries of "Royal nob.")

Mr. SAKLATVALA.—The Royal head, I mean.

The CHAIRMAN was understood to say he did not catch Mr. Saklatvala's expression, or he would have dealt with it.

Mr. SAKLATVALA, continuing, said that if this country or the Opposition wanted an Empire and a Royal head for the Empire, and a Royal Ambassador to go about, either in the streets of Ayrshire or of Buenos Aires, they must pay adequately. Therefore, as a member representing the out-and-out working-class point of view (laughter), he opposed the Vote on the ground that the whole of the expenditure was the usual trickery of the minority, who were helping themselves at the expense of the majority. This was class expenditure. It was all camouflage to talk of the commercial activities of the Prince of Wales and of his discussing with any appreciable intelligence the commercial problems of this or that trade. Nothing of the sort did happen. To put it forward that these invitations from Africa, the Argentine, or from Glasgow came from the people in those places was one more sham in that House of many shams. (Ministerial cries of "Order.") It was a complete sham. Some time ago they were told that the Prince of Wales had received a cordial invitation from India to visit that country as a Royal Ambassador. The people of India said they did not want his Royal Highness there, and the Government of India had to empty out the goals and pay money to spectators — (Ministerial cries of "Withdraw.")

The CHAIRMAN said Mr. Saklatvala was travelling rather far from Africa and South America. India did not come into the Vote.

Mr. SAKLATVALA said he was drawing a parallel in order to show the want of sincerity in these invitations, which were meant to serve class interests.

Mr. LANSBURY (Bow and Bromley, Lab.) said he understood the argument that a King was needed as a kind of titular representative of the British Dominions, but he had yet to learn that it was the function of Kingship to go round as a commercial bagman for trade. The question before the House was not Republic or Monarchy, but whether this money should be spent. They were not allowed to criticize the King or the Prince of Wales on the floor of that House, but if members of the Royal Family were to be sent round as Ambassadors, he claimed the right to criticize them. He did not object to the Prince of Wales or any other person enjoying himself, but let it not be camouflaged by saying he was going to do business for the British Empire. He thought it a disgrace to this country that money should be spent as it was proposed to spend the sum in the Vote while there were tens of thousands of men and women living on the border-line of subsistence.

The amendment was rejected by 304 votes to 90—majority against, 214—and the Vote was carried by 205 votes to 87—majority, 208.

A Supplementary Vote of £500,885 for a grant in aid of the Irish Sailors' and Soldiers' Land Trust was agreed to without debate.

Clipping: The Times, 13th February 1925

Father's plea was more pragmatic and mundane. He referred to the contention of former speakers that Britain and France were life-long friends and that there was no chance of going to war against each other. In that case, said Saklatvala, since France has a powerful air-force of 120 squadrons, can we not rely on their protection? He went on to say:

"It is said that we of the Communist Party are the enemies of the Christian Church; that we are out to destroy all Christian churches. I submit that the foundation stone of the Christian Church is, 'Thou shalt not kill'. You, who pretend to be the supporters and faithful upholders of that Church, come and tell the nation tonight that the biggest function of the government and of the state is to organise the most efficient weapons for murder and killing. Organised murder, you say, is the duty of the state and preaching 'Thou shalt not kill' is the duty of the Church and you pretend that Church and state are the best friends of each

other...

WESTMINSTER, THURSDAY.
On the Vote for the Prince of Wales's visit to South Africa and elsewhere, Mr. KIRKWOOD said he thought the Prince should pay for his own voyage, and no public money be spent for such purposes while so many unemployed were in want. On the whole he succeeded in being earnest without being offensive, a considerable feat in the circumstances. Not so Mr. BUCHANAN nor Mr. SAKLATVALA, who "had no use for Royalty," nor apparently for manners. Mr. GUNSWOOD, in a brief but very effective reply, pointed out that the Prince was going to all these countries by invitation, which it would have been offensive to refuse; and that he was in the same position as any British Ambassador sent upon a national mission, except that not one penny of the money was for his personal expenses. The vote was, of course, carried by an immense majority.

Clipping: The Times, 13th February 1925

"Mr Ramsay MacDonald, speaking at Swindon the other night, said, in the usual dramatic fashion, that whatever was won by the sword and was attempted to be kept by the sword, would perish by the sword. Was he intentionally sending the British interests in Egypt, in Iraq and in India to perdition when he was trying to defend them by the British sword?"

[Editor's note: This refers to the violence perpetrated by the Army upon popular uprisings against imperial rule in these three countries.]

A few weeks later, on 19th March, estimates for the Royal Navy were being debated. Saklatvala said:

"We have in front of us an item of expenditure which the Rt. hon gentleman the First Lord of the Admiralty explained has to be taken by the world as an index and measure of the love of this nation for peace. We have a right to know from him, and the world has a right to know, before he describes this nation as the most peaceful nation, if he can produce in the records of the last 125 years any other nation that has waged so many wars as Great Britain.

"We have a right to know, the world has a right to know, from the rt hon gentleman the name of any other nation which during the last 125 years has taken the lives of so many people of other nations in war, or for the sake of keeping law and order, as the British nation during that period."

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

THE "WORKERS' WEEKLY."
SIR W. JOYNSON-HICKS, Home Secretary (Twickenham), in reply to Mr. SAKLATVALA (Battersea, N., Com.), who asked if he intended to take any action against the *Workers' Weekly* newspaper in respect of an article entitled "The Programme for the Army," said:—My attention has been called to the article in question, but as at present advised I do not propose to take any action in regard to it. (Labour laughter and Ministerial cheers.) Mr. SAKLATVALA.—Does the right hon. gentleman consider that the present case is in any way different from the previous article of the *Workers' Weekly*, in which action was wisely withdrawn? (Ministerial laughter.) SIR W. JOYNSON-HICKS.—It is perhaps a little difficult to express an opinion as to the various grades of wickedness. (Ministerial laughter and cheers.)

Clipping: The Times, 13th February 1925

In the same speech he referred to the discipline of men in the Navy and a member called out, "What do you know about it?" Saklatvala replied to the interruption, "I admit that Battersea is not noted as a naval port, though half of Battersea has the honour to be represented by a very valiant naval officer [Viscount Curzon, MP for Battersea South]." (Perhaps out of embarrassment at the interruption, Saklatvala in the next sentence addressed the Chair as 'Comrade' Fitzroy, instead of 'Captain'! The Times reported the amusing and almost certainly unique incident the next day, saying there was laughter in which the Hon. member himself joined.)

Saklatvala was to return often to this contention of Great Britain's record as an historic killer-nation. And when people criticised the Russian revolution because of the bloodshed, he always claimed that far more human blood had been spilled to create and maintain the British Empire than had been shed in the creation of the Russian Bolshevik state.

**BRITISH RED CRESCENT
SOCIETY.**

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—My attention has been drawn to the report in the "Parliamentary Debates" of the 12th inst. that Mr. Saklatvala questioned his Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs as to whether the Government intended to move the French and Spanish authorities to give facilities to the British Red Crescent Society to send a medical mission and medical supplies to the Rif. We are gratified to see that Mr. Saklatvala takes an interest in our humanitarian work. I desire, however, to say that his question was not, either directly or indirectly, inspired by this society.

Yours faithfully,
AMJERR ALI, President, British
Red Crescent Society.

Clipping: The Times, 25th February 1925

He took the opportunity to use the Naval Estimates debate to call for a better standard of life for naval ratings and their families; he claimed the right for naval ratings to join trade unions just as their fellow-workers outside the forces were allowed to do; he called for more freedom of worship and political affiliation for the ordinary seamen.

THE L.C.C. ELECTION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—May I direct the attention of your readers to the grave peril which threatens London at the L.C.C. election on Thursday next, March 5?

The London Labour Party have nominated 113 candidates, who have the full support of the Communist forces. There are Communists among the "Labour" candidates. The recent decision of the National Labour Party not to expel the Communists from its ranks has revealed the strength of Communism, particularly in London. As the *Workers' Weekly*, the Communist organ, recently stated, "not a single large local Labour Party in the large towns and cities of Britain have supported the decision to expel the Communists from their ranks."

The spirit which animates the London Labour Party is shown by the violent speeches which are being made in many divisions. For example, at a meeting held on Sunday last in support of the Socialist candidates for North Battersea, Mr. Saklatvala, M.P., stated:—

We want the Municipal Reformers to know that London belongs to the Socialist workers, the revolutionary workers, the class-conscious workers, and the international workers. We want the L.C.C. converted into the instrument of Communist propaganda.

There can be no doubt that the Socialist and Communist Party are making a most formidable attempt to capture London's central authority, not with the object of giving good municipal administration but for the purpose of introducing "Poplar" methods into London government. I therefore appeal to every man and woman who voted for constitutional government at the Parliamentary election in October last to vote again on Thursday next for sound, sane and economical municipal government. Failure to do so must inevitably result in grave damage and injury to our municipal services, to our trade and industry, and to the welfare and happiness of the citizens of London.

REGINALD BLAIR, chairman, London
Municipal Society and National Union
of Ratepayers' Associations.
Palace Chambers, Bridge-street, West-
minster, S.W.1, Feb. 26.

Clipping: The Times, 27th February 1925

"If Admirals can go to Trafalgar Square and deliver fulsome speeches to the British Fascisti, why should the members of the Army and the Navy in the lower ranks not be at liberty to join the Communist Party and carry on Communist propaganda?" he asked.

Early in April, Saklatvala moved an amendment to the Co-partnership Bill at its second reading. He returned to his strongly held conviction that cheap labour in the British Empire was causing unemployment and great hardship among the workers of Great Britain: "The factor which creates opposition between capital and labour is the unjustifiably existing capitalist, and the only way to remove opposition between capital and labour is to remove this interloper called the individual capitalist." [Hon. member: "Are not you a capitalist?"]

"Then remove me!" retorted Saklatvala. Once again, he was being identified with his capitalist family, from whom he was to be officially severed within the next few weeks.

COMMUNISTS ARRESTED AT JAFFA.
 Mr. ORMSBY-GORR, Under-Secretary, Colonies (Stafford), replying to Mr. SAKLATVALA (Battersea, N., Com.) said:—Sixteen persons were arrested on the day of Lord Balfour's arrival in Jaffa on a magistrate's warrant for action likely to cause an immediate breach of the peace. They were all members of a small Communist group. No breach of the peace actually occurred. Mr. SAKLATVALA.—May I ask whether his Majesty's Government cannot really devise a plan to introduce British civilization into other people's countries without the use of prison cells and air-bombs? Mr. ORMSBY-GORR.—These 16 Communists issued inflammatory attacks on Lord Balfour of the most insulting nature and distributed them about the town. I think that the action taken by the Palestine Government was absolutely essential; otherwise there would have been a very serious breach of the peace. Mr. SAKLATVALA.—Would not 16 young Englishmen do the same if an Arab chief came here to dictate to you how you should live?

Clipping: The Times, 25th February 1925

In another debate he said it was cruel to divide people into those who worked with their brain and those who worked with their hands. "There is," he said, "no worker who works by hand alone without working with his brain at the same time. No engine-driver, driving his mail train at the rate of 50 or 60 miles an hour in a blizzard, is working merely with his hands. No spinner, no weaver, no smelter, no miner, no carpenter, no brick-layer, no stone-mason can do his work correctly if he does not use his brain just as much as the Lord Chancellor and the judges and lawyers and architects. Each individual worker works by his brain as well as by his hand, while a few lucky ones sit in easy chairs and pretend to work by brain and refuse to work by hand." [Hon. member: "Like yourself!"]

“Like myself!” Saklatvala continued, “I do not claim to be an angel on earth. I claim to be full of all those vices, all those defects, all those drawbacks which the present hideous individual capitalist system imposes upon me. The only difference between me and hon members opposite is that I am willing to get out of it at the first possible moment...”

So Saklatvala remained extremely active in the Commons, making lively and apposite contributions to many debates on a variety of subjects. At the same time, he remained as vigorous as ever in his political campaigning outside the House, travelling up and down the country addressing large and enthusiastic crowds of working people. Although we had very little money, Father never accepted anything in the way of expenses and travelled often at night (largely to save time, but also I think in those days there were concessional fares for nocturnal journeys).

Whenever he had to change trains in the middle of the night, he would telephone my mother and have a conversation with her; he remained always a sentimentally ardent partner and tried to mitigate the loneliness he felt during these enforced separations by frequent telephone calls; just as when the House sat late, he would make a point of phoning her in the course of the evening to keep in touch.



Clipping: Sunday Worker No 1, March 1925

In March 1925, The Sunday Worker newspaper was launched, to which he

gave his support, being one of its founders. He journeyed to Dublin and addressed a large meeting there. He spoke in favour of the Labour candidates in Battersea during the London County Council Elections in February. He continued to give much attention to the Workers' Welfare League of India, and a resolution was passed by the Executive Committee of the All India Trade Union Congress that the WWLI should be their representative at the Trade Union Congress in the UK.

A journalist described how he was going up in the lift at the House of Commons to hear Oswald Mosley speak in one of the Committee rooms after his brief visit to India

“I met Saklatvala, his head, as usual, deeply immersed in statistics. ‘On your way to hear Mosley?’ I asked. ‘Mosley!’ he exclaimed, ‘what can he know about India? Five weeks there at the outside! No’, he went on, ‘I’m going to hear Sir Willoughby Carey—he was Chairman of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and he is a great employer of labour in Calcutta. He’s the man to listen to—not Mosley.’”

[Editor’s note: Oswald Mosley, having begun as a Conservative, was at this time a member of the ILP and a Fabian. In 1932 he would go on to form the British Union of Fascists].

During the parliamentary debate on Winston Churchill’s budget speech in April, there was pandemonium and uproar in the House when Churchill accused working people of cheating over unemployment benefits. Labour members said he was insulting the whole Labour Movement and demanded that he withdrew the offensive remarks. Saklatvala rose and said: “The Chancellor of the Exchequer has brought about this disorder, and it falls upon a revolutionary Communist to restore order.” He proceeded to give a detailed and critical analysis of the budget proposals.

Mr. SAKLATVALA (Battersea, S., Com.) rising to continue the debate, was received with cries of "Divide" from the Ministerialists, but these died down, and there was much laughter when the hon. member said:—
 "The Chancellor of the Exchequer having failed, it falls to a Communist revolutionary to restore order."
 At two minutes to 11 o'clock, while Mr. SAKLATVALA was still speaking, Mr. BALDWIN moved that the question be now put. A division was at first challenged, but was not persisted in.
 The original motion was then agreed to, and the House resumed.

Clipping: The Times, 1st May 1925

CHAPTER 15

Banned from the USA

Refused a visa to enter the USA in 1925; subsequent protests.

One of the most notable events of Saklatvala's career, which became quite a cause celebre in the press, occurred in connection with a conference to be held in Washington by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

For the second time within a week the Glasgow Corporation meeting yesterday ended abruptly. On each occasion the trouble was due to the refusal of the magistrates to sanction a British Communist Party meeting in the City Hall at which Mr. Saklatvala, M.P., was to speak. The Labour group obstructed the proceedings and brought about a closure, arguing that favourable consideration should be given to the application for a meeting when the speaker was a Member of Parliament who had taken the oath of allegiance to the King and Constitution.

Clipping: The Times, 19th August 1925

In 1923 Father and Mother had attended the IPU conference held in Copenhagen, which my mother had greatly enjoyed; she often spoke of it to me in later life, when she recalled with nostalgia how the wives of the members had been entertained by the Danish royal family, and their friendly simplicity and lack of formality made a great impression on her.

MINORITY MOVEMENT.

CONFERENCE IN BATTERSEA.

Communists in this country have lately become more direct in their demands for a propaganda campaign among the rank and file of the Army, Navy, and Air Forces. The subject was raised again on Saturday at the second annual conference of the National Minority Movement, the body which is seeking in this country to disseminate the doctrines of revolutionary Communism through permeation of the trade unions.

The conference was held in the Battersea Town Hall, and it is stated that some 600 "delegates" were present, "including 137 from the provinces." Mr. TOM MANN presided, and had with him on the platform Mr. Saklatvala, the Communist M.P. for Battersea, and the Mayor of Battersea (Mr. C. Mason).

The CHAIRMAN said that in the struggle with the mineowners it was something to be glad of that the miners, backed by trade union solidarity, successfully "held up" the owners. They had to ask themselves, he continued, whether they were prepared to meet the opposing forces when the next round began. They must be frank and admit that at present they were not ready. The problem of getting public opinion on their side was easier and simpler than the question of the Forces.

It was their duty to start immediately a big campaign of propaganda among the workers in the Army, Navy, and Air Forces, in order that they should know the full truth of the matter. The Trades Union Congress, the Labour Party Conference, the local party organizations, the trade union branches, the trades councils, the factory committees, and the organizations of the unemployed should get busy in order to avoid the calamity which the ruling classes were planning. Let them make sure that there would not be a single soldier, sailor, or airman who would dare to raise a finger against their brothers.

Mr. SAKLATVALA said that the orders of the Minority Movement for the workers were, "Work, produce, enjoy life, and boss the world." A great struggle was coming along. The miners' problem could not be solved by Royal Commissions. He stood openly, he declared, as a determined and inveterate enemy of the Union Jack and British Imperialism.

Clipping: The Times, 31st August 1925

As anything of an international nature (anything but an international war, that is!) appealed to Father, he arranged to attend the 1925 conference in Washington. My mother elected not to go—she had visited the States many years before and had no wish ever to go there again. Father had two brothers in the states and, fond of his immediate family as he undoubtedly was, no doubt he must have been greatly looking forward to visiting his younger brothers, Phirozeshah and Beram. He applied for and received his visa in readiness for the trip.

Sir Robert Horne and Colonel H.C. Woodcock then wrote to the Times complaining that Saklatvala was to be part of the British parliamentary delegation; Woodcock went as far as to say that if Saklatvala was included, he himself would refuse to attend. The Times wrote that Mr Kellogg, American Secretary of State, appeared to have no objection to receiving Mr Saklatvala.

<p>M.P.S' DELEGATION TO WASHINGTON.</p> <p>COL. WOODCOCK AND MR. SAKLATVALA.</p> <p>We have received from Colonel H. C. Woodcock, Unionist M.P. for Everton, a copy of the following letter which he has addressed to Mr. F. Maddison, Secretary of the Inter-Parliamentary Union :—</p> <p>Dear Sir,—When I accepted the invitation to visit Washington and Ottawa as a British delegate at the forthcoming Inter-Parliamentary Conference I was unaware of the fact that Mr. Saklatvala, the Communist M.P. for North Battersea, was also to be a member of the delegation. I have since made myself acquainted with some of his public declarations, amongst which I may quote the following :—</p> <p>The British Empire is made up of the aristocratic and cunning dirty dogs of Britain who will smash anyone's country any time.</p> <p>The Union Jack is the symbol of enslaved labour all over the world. It is the weapon with which the worker is down-trodden. In the name of the British worker I demand that the Union Jack shall cease to function.</p> <p>I say, "Let us abolish the Union Jack."</p> <p>These are but a few typical quotations from Mr. Saklatvala's utterances, and they have led me to the conclusion that, much as I wish to make my first visit to the United States and Canada, I must refuse to be in any way associated with a delegate who holds such views as Mr. Saklatvala has expressed.</p>	<p>I have had the honour to serve for over 25 years in his Majesty's Forces, and as a loyal subject to H.M. the King I think I should be disloyal to those with whom I have served, and to my constituents who have sent me to Parliament to maintain the integrity of our great Empire, if I consented to be a fellow delegate with one whose loyalty and interest are opposed to this country.</p> <p>The danger of misunderstanding and misrepresentation is too great to those who do not understand the isolated position which Mr. Saklatvala holds in this country.</p> <p>Under these circumstances I am forced to the decision that if he goes as a representative of the Parliament of Great Britain, in spite of my great disappointment, I must decline to be associated with the delegation, and, much as I regret it, I must ask you to withdraw my name from the list of British delegates.</p> <p>Yours truly, H. C. WOODCOCK.</p> <p>House of Commons.</p>
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Clipping: The Times, 8th September 1925

Further letters were sent to The Times asserting that other members would withdraw from the delegation if Saklatvala was to be a part of it. One member wisely observed that if all members withdrew as a protest, this would leave Mr Saklatvala as the sole representative in Washington of the British House of Commons!

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

A report from America published in the British press said that Senator Borah conferred with President Coolidge and Mr Kellogg and afterwards said that Mr Saklatvala should not be excluded from the USA. He added: "This man has been free to express his opinions in England, and our government cannot afford to be more afraid than the British."

But at the last moment, on 16th September, Mr Kellogg announced that instructions had been telegraphed to London to revoke the passport visa that had been granted earlier to Mr Saklatvala. All the newspapers headlined the news of his exclusion. Many speculated that the revocation of the visa could only have been on advice from the British government.



Clipping: *The Sphere*, 1925

Under a full-length photograph of Shapurji and Sehri in their London garden, *The Sphere* wrote, “It seems so obvious to me that Mr Saklatvala might, in a party of 41 members, be expected to suffer some measure of modification of

his extreme views, and that there was no virtue in making a hero of him.”

The Morning Post correspondent wrote that the paper had arranged to send a reporter to Washington to report on the conference, but that since Mr Saklatvala was not to be a part of it, they would not bother to send anyone: “There is nothing in it for us if Mr Saklatvala is not there.”

After the delegates leave New York for Washington they will be the guests of the American group, and will receive board, lodging, and transport free of cost. The same hospitality will be offered by the Canadian group on Dominion territory. It must be remembered that the members of the delegation are in no way relieved from the obligation of making the usual declaration that during their stay in the United States they will do nothing to upset the existing order of constitutional government.

Colonel Woodcock's letter was considered yesterday afternoon at a meeting of the members of the British group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, under the presidency of Sir Robert Horne. After a short discussion it was agreed that the honorary secretary of the group (Mr. F. Maddison) should send the following reply:—

Dear Colonel Woodcock,—I regret that you should have thought it necessary to resign your place in the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union which is travelling to the conference at Washington. I hope you will permit me to say that I think you are doing so under a misapprehension.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is composed of a great many Parliaments, who hold every shade of political opinion. Any member of Parliament may join the Union, and every member of the Union is entitled to be present at all conferences of the Union, unless a financial limit is imposed by the Inviting Group, and this the Americans have not done. Mr. Saklatvala is a member of the British Parliament, and has joined the Inter-Parliamentary Union. He is therefore entitled to go to the conference, and has announced his intention of doing so. You, accordingly, had him in the British Group, just as you are acquainted with him as a fellow member of the House of Commons.

The Group going to America is to be a special delegation, not one which bears the responsibilities of a delegation. It is not selected, and the members, therefore, may hold many divergent points of view. It is obvious, therefore, that if every member of the British Group were to take the same course as you propose, Mr. Saklatvala might appear alone as a member of the British Parliament to receive the hospitality of the American nation, along with the members of 10 other Parliaments

M.P.'S DELEGATION TO WASHINGTON.

BRITISH GROUP AND MR. SAKLATVALA.

REPLY TO COLONEL WOODCOCK.

(By Our Parliamentary Correspondent.)

It is not expected that any other member of Parliament who had decided to join the British delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference at Washington and Ottawa will follow the lead set by Colonel H. C. Woodcock, M.P., who has withdrawn his name on the ground that Mr. Saklatvala, the Communist member of the House of Commons, is to be one of the delegation.

It has been known for some weeks past that Mr. Saklatvala intended to attend the conference, so he did what it was held at Copenhagen two years ago, and the matter was discussed at a meeting of the British group during the Parliamentary session. It was then pointed out, however, and the group agreed, that every member of Parliament who belongs to the Union has a perfect right to attend the conference if he so desires. Members are not selected by their parties, as is the case with the Empire Parliamentary Delegations, where the number has to be limited. Any member of the Union who is willing to pay his expenses from London to New York and back may join the party.

who are to assemble at Washington. That, surely, is not a point which you would desire.

The members of the delegation will leave England in the Carnarvon on September 19, and will travel from New York by special train on September 30 to Washington, where the conference will open in the Capitol on October 1. The Washington sessions of the conference will close on October 7, when the delegates will have for New York. On October 10 they will visit Niagara Falls, and then proceed to Hamilton, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec. At Ottawa a sitting will be held in the House of Parliament. Among the subjects to be discussed are the development of international law, European customs, the problem of national minorities, dangerous drugs, the reduction of armaments, and the Parliamentary system. Sir Robert Horne will head the delegation from this country, and it is hoped that the French delegation will include M. Herriot, and the German delegation Herr Wirth.

The following resolution was passed unanimously at a meeting held in the Bristol Constitutional Club yesterday:—

That the members of the Bristol Constitutional Club thank Colonel H. C. Woodcock, M.P., for his courteous letter in relation to requests to send him with an official of the Home Office.

Clippings: The Times, 9th September 1925

The Daily Telegraph reported a huge protest meeting held in Battersea:

“For some hours before the building was opened there were long queues extending around the Town Hall, and when the doors opened, there was a wild rush for admission. The hall, which is capable of holding 2000 people, was quickly filled, and an overflow meeting was held...

“To cheers from his audience [Saklatvala] is reported as saying that for the last four months attacks had been launched against him, underground and overground, and he had resisted them all with a smile of indifference. ‘I stand by every word of the columns I have spoken,’ said Mr Saklatvala. ‘I have not spoken these words with any feeling of

hatred for the people of Britain, or through any nationalist emotion at being an Indian. I challenge any honest person to face me with them on a public platform. Great Britain has no right to rule India any more than Germany had a right to rule Great Britain.'

"His passport for America was in his pocket, he said, his passage was paid and his baggage was packed; three or four men were watching his house, and saw his luggage on the steamer. And, like the allies, they had to send an SOS to America to win their battles for them. The first thing America did in answer to the appeal was to adopt most unconstitutional and unreasonable methods. If America were so thin-skinned, if she always lived in terror of Bolshevism, if she had not the back-bone of a man, if she were afraid of the voice of truth on behalf of the workers, she ought not to have given out pompously and said, 'We welcome all the world's representatives to a world's conference.'

"He was ready to go to America now and face any tribunal or any Committee of the Senate or any public meeting. If any one of the British Delegates had the courage of a man, let him come out on a public platform. He took no exception to being classed a poor, common immigrant, he added, he only represented the poor devils of Battersea. (Cheers)..."

After this demonstration of popular support in Battersea, some of the more reactionary elements of the constituency tried to organise a petition to the Mayor, asking him to prohibit Saklatvala (their elected parliamentary representative) from holding any further meetings in the Town Hall. Nothing came of it. A number of resolutions protesting against the ban were prepared to put before the Washington conference.

George Lansbury wrote in the press:

"The American government, by its action, has made Comrade Saklatvala a political figure of international importance... The action of Coolidge and Kellogg was that of the usual capitalist cowards. Liberty to them means liberty for those who will do and say what the capitalists want them to say or do... It is well that in so public a manner, American statesmen should reveal themselves for what they are. Today in America, hundreds of men are in jail for their activities on behalf of the Workers' Movement... hundreds of foreign workers are being deported

for their activities in the Labour Movement...

“There is no reason why any of us should feel disgruntled because of the action taken against Saklatvala. It is good that the world should know that all anti-Labour governments now are united in hunting down those who wish to overthrow capitalism. I do not agree with all Saklatvala’s policies or methods, but I do believe in freedom, and certainly believe in his ultimate aim, which is the aim of all true socialists, namely, the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of Socialism.”

In the US, Senator Borah refused to address the conference, the chief reason being that he objected to the ban on Saklatvala. The American Civil Liberties Union held a huge protest meeting in New York to coincide with the arrival of delegates to the conference.

MR. SAKLATVALA.

**PROTEST TO CONSUL-
GENERAL.**

**SIR ROBERT HORNE ON
THE BAN.**

(By Our Parliamentary Correspondent.)

The decision of the American authorities to revoke the passport visa granted to Mr. Saklatvala, the Communist member of Parliament, was officially communicated to him yesterday and to Mr. F. Maddison, the secretary of the British branch of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, under whose auspices the delegation, of which Mr. Saklatvala was to have been a member, leaves for the United States and Canada to-morrow. Mr. Maddison at once got into communication with Colonel Woodcock and Sir Robert Bird, who had declined to make the journey so long as Mr. Saklatvala remained a member of the party, and received replies from them that they would now be pleased to rescind the delegation.

The case of Captain Peter Macdonald, M.P., is somewhat different. He announced that the presence of Mr. Saklatvala was his reason for withdrawing from the delegation, but he had previously intimated that business reasons prevented him from going to the United States, and suggested that another Unionist member might be willing to take over his cabin accommodation. As the other member agreed to do so, Captain Macdonald will not now be a member of the party.

The action of the American authorities commended itself to most of the members of the delegation as the best way out of the unfortunate position which had arisen.

This feeling was expressed by Sir Robert Horne, who is to lead the delegation, and who had insisted throughout that as many members of Parliament as possible ought to go in order to counter the effect of any speeches that Mr. Saklatvala might make. Sir Robert stated:—

I think that the difficulty which was raised by Mr. Saklatvala's intention to go to the Conference at Washington has now received the best possible solution. Up to to-day he has had a passport from the United States representative in this country which gave him permission to enter America. So long as he was in possession of that permission the situation was a very embarrassing one for the loyal British members of the group who purposed going to Washington. As the public now know, I took the view that it was my duty, both to my own country and to the others who were to be represented at Washington, to appear there, no matter how embarrassing the position might be, nor how repugnant it was to me personally to see Mr. Saklatvala there as a member of the British Parliament.

Now everything has been cleared up by the only power which had the requisite authority to intervene. The American Government have decided that such a person as Mr. Saklatvala ought not to be received within their borders. Personally, although not having any right to pronounce upon the subject, I think that the decision is not only within their rights, but is also in accordance with their duty. Britain tolerates the expression of sedition much more than any other civilized country, and perhaps in time even our revolutionaries will realize that the country which they produce is the freest and the most tolerant in the world. For my own part, I am glad that America has shown to the world how she treats people of a kind whom we often meet too complacently ignore. I hope, indeed, that this will be an object-lesson to our people, and that this incident, which has been embarrassing many of us in the last few weeks, may produce a beneficial result. It will do so if it brings home to the minds of the electors in North Battersea what a disgrace they bring upon themselves and upon the whole of their fellow-subjects by electing as their representative in the House of Commons such a notorious person as Mr. Saklatvala.

**MR. SAKLATVALA'S
LETTER.**

Mr. Saklatvala's views are explained in the following letter which he addressed yesterday to Mr. H. L. Washington, the American Consul-General, who had written to him intimating that the visa had been revoked:—

Sir,—I acknowledge receipt of your letter of even date and I note from the contents that America, after assuming the responsibility of host to convene the Inter-Parliamentary Conference in their country, and thereby agreeing to respect and abide by the regulations that govern the convocation, procedure, and freedom of such conferences, now claims an arbitrary right of interference as to character of delegates from other countries purely from the American standpoint, and that, therefore, your Government have instructed you to take the extraordinary step of stopping my entry to the conference which, in every other way, is fully valid.

I apologise in advance if the newspaper reports quoting Mr. Secretary Kellogg are wrong or inadequate, but, according to them, your nation, having international bodies to assemble in your country, possesses the right of searching speeches of members delivered in their parliaments or country, and of awarding reward or punishment to them according to your Government's internal standards. There is not a word of truth in the suggestion that I intend to preach anarchy in your country, and Mr. Secretary Kellogg's interpretation of a few picked out words from my Parliamentary speech on India is contrary to truth. The speech first exposes the notorious fact that British Imperialist rulers claim extraordinary distasteful privileges in other people's countries, and threateningly term as sedition, conspiracy, and revolt the same conduct of citizens which, in their own country, they describe as advance of democracy, and that I was coming up to activities which ardent political opponents describe in offensive words, without being balked by such offensive terms, and the uproar in the whole of my speech is clear to all impartial politicians. Mr. Secretary Kellogg will be deceiving the American public by not fully quoting numerous sentences in that speech similar to the following:—

"You call Indians seditious when they protest against these things, but when you rise in revolt in this country against the ruling classes it is called the spirit of democracy. In India it is sedition, conspiracy, subversive propaganda."

I agree that your Government's might, its arbitrary use of a power intended for other purposes, and its submission to political intrigues from outside, stand triumphant for the moment, and a poverty-stricken and socially humble worker stands baffled and disappointed for the moment. Yet I have an unyielding faith in the conscience of people who are free from taints of wealth and social influence. I am sure that just as America has her diplomats, she has her robust, freedom-loving men and women too, and with calm confidence and unshakable faith in them, I await an invitation from them to go to your country after all within a measurable space of time, and I am sure, without any personal ill-feeling or bias, you will grant me your visa then as you were good enough to do on June 23 last.

As a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union itself, I do protest that I ought to have been permitted to go, that any objection against me should have been submitted to the Council of that body, and on their deciding to exclude me, your Government would have decided from their national standard whether to permit me to stay on an educative trip for a few weeks or to ask me to leave forthwith.

Mr. Saklatvala also addressed the following telegram to Senator William McKinley, chairman of the American group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union:—

Respectfully protest against right American Government to interfere with members of International Assembly from American standard, thereby destroying constitutional freedom of international bodies after extending hospitality. Also protest against Secretary Kellogg's false interpretation of my India debate British Parliament misleading American public to cover his weak submission to British influences. For truth, see British Hansard, July 8, column 713, last paragraph, also other similar paragraphs explaining my sarcastic quotation.

Mr. Saklatvala in an interview suggested that the American Government (Continued at foot of next column.)

might have let him go, so that the question of his admission to the conference could be considered by the conference itself.

Mr. Saklatvala's resignation as departmental manager of Messrs. Tata, Limited, was considered by the board yesterday, and a formal letter accepting his resignation was sent to him. He will address his constituents in North Battersea on Sunday evening, when he proposes to explain the true significance of the recent developments in connexion with his proposed visit to America.

Clipping: The Times, 18th September 1925

It is interesting to note here the speech which Saklatvala had made when addressing the Inter-parliamentary Conference in 1923: nothing could have been more pacific—indeed its sentiments might be expressed by any of our modern and moderate speakers in defence of today's Common Market. He had said:

“The resolutions before the Conference are quite clear and, to put the matter briefly, they appeal to our sense of fair play and common brotherhood all over Europe and all over the world. The war-guns boomed and are silenced... and they have left the world worse than it was when they began. We have therefore to come round to the position of everybody playing fairly towards others, the stronger ones helping the weaker ones, and the weaker ones playing fairly again towards the stronger ones when they themselves become strong once more. (Hear, hear!)

“I may be pardoned, Mr President, if I am rather personal, but I speak with a particular faith in the existence of fair-play and the spirit of brotherhood. After all, who am I? One of a conquered and vanquished race, a subject Indian, conquered by another nation. Well, here I am in this great Conference because of that spirit of fair-play and brotherhood that does exist in Great Britain and does exist in other parts of Europe.

“Coming from the British section I may say that only the other day Great Britain signed a treaty with Turkey. Turkey was defeated in war... Great Britain would like to have a Treaty more advantageous to herself, but still she did not land soldiers in Constantinople and go forth to conquer, but followed brotherhood and fair-play, and peace for the future. We could have done so towards Russia, but still Great Britain refrained, and I am sure will refrain, from any hostile act against Russia...

“If I may ask you... to hark back to what happened immediately after the War. I would remind you that our friends from America sat at the conference table and the other Allies drove the US President to sign a Peace treaty which, according to his conviction, was against the spirit of brotherhood and fair-play... that has resulted in driving America away from the brotherhood of Europe.

“We want America back (applause). We want Germany, Russia, France,

Italy, Belgium, Great Britain all to unite together on a basis of fair-play... we do not want national victories on our banner now. We want human good, human equality, and the uplifting of human beings to be the objects inscribed on our banners now...

“We have got to talk of reparations not in terms of money penalties but in terms of human happiness and human peace and human gladness, which is all we want to see upon the earth. When there is peace in Europe there will be peace in Asia. When there are good relations between these European nations there will be good relations between the others...

“We want all countries and all political parties—and I include my friends the Communists of whom I am one—we want them all to seek the good of their neighbours and not their downfall. We want Germany to understand that if France is suffering from devastation and injustice, Germany has proved herself a bad neighbour; we want France to understand that if Germany is steeped in misery and poverty and injustice, France is a bad neighbour. We do not want our own homes to be in bad order, or the homes of our neighbours, but we want an era of peace and full confidence and brotherhood and fair-play, and this will not be realised by reparations. (Applause.)”

Certainly nothing Saklatvala said at that conference could justify his being denied access to the IPU conference of 1925.

[Editor’s note: In July 1926, Saklatvala sent the following cablegram to President Coolidge, as reported by the International Herald Tribune: “Congratulations on 150 years of national freedom and social progress. Your nation must feel thankful there were no Kelloggs with Immigration Acts then to ban George Washington and other revolutionary spirits from entering the country.”].

It was during all the hullabaloo over the ban on Saklatvala’s admission to the States that he resigned officially from Tata. His brother, Sorab, came to England for the first and only time that year, largely to bring pressure to bear on Father, whose widely proclaimed communism was proving an embarrassment to the capitalist firm. He and his wife, Auntie Mehri and three-year old daughter, Rhoda, stayed in the Cecil Hotel. Rhoda was accompanied by her Nanny, a concept of family life entirely new to me. I was

overwhelmed with pity for her, since it seemed to my six year-old mind, that she was closer to the Nanny than to her Mother. I clung to my mother like a limpet during the whole of their stay.

Father's letter of resignation was addressed to Tata Ltd in London and read:

“Dear Sirs, I may briefly state that I have been studying the recent trend of events arising out of my political activities and views. I candidly admit that at the present juncture one's political obligations require at times a somewhat uncompromising stand, irrespective of ones personal interests. In my case, I realise, that with the prominence of your office as an outstanding East India House, and with my relationship with the leading members of the firm in Bombay, this sacrifice does not, and will not, stop at a voluntary surrender of my personal advantages, but it may unjustly operate as an unnecessary and unjustifiable harm to others and to the firm's standing in commercial banking circles. Such criticism may be uncharitable now and yet it may grow day by day. Therefore, after a full and calm consideration of the question, with the benefits of consultation with my brother in London, I have decided to offer my resignation from your firm as Manager of the Cotton Mills Department, as I can do so without inconvenience to you with your preparation made ready for my absence in America.

“In this step I assure you of the inseparable good will on my part towards all the members of the firm, and I am sure of the continuance of the same on their part...”

Interviewed by a Sunday Worker representative, he said he did not regret the step: “My services in the cause of the struggling workers... will now be able to command my fuller attention.”

MR. SAKLATVALA

**VISA REVOKED BY
U.S.A.**

WASHINGTON, Sept. 16.—Mr. Kellogg, the Secretary of State, announces that instructions have been telegraphed to London to revoke the passport visa granted to Mr. Saklatvala, M.P., because of inflammatory revolutionary speeches in Parliament and elsewhere.

"I do not believe," Mr. Kellogg added, "that we should admit foreigners to the country to preach anarchy.—*Reuter.*

**RESIGNATION FROM
MESSRS. TATA.**

We are officially informed by Messrs. Tata, Limited, that Mr. Saklatvala, M.P., yesterday resigned his position as a departmental manager in the firm. His resignation was conveyed to the firm in the following letter:—

62, New Broad-street, London, E.C.
Sept. 16, 1925.

Messrs. Tata, Limited, 62, New Broad-street, E.C.

Dear Sirs,—I may briefly state that I have been studying the recent trend of events arising out of my political activities and views. I candidly admit that at the present juncture one's political obligations require at times a somewhat uncompromising stand, irrespective of one's personal interests. In my case I realize that with the prominence of your office as an outstanding East India house, and with my relationship with the leading members of the firm in Bombay, this sacrifice does not, and will not, stop at a voluntary surrender of my personal advantages, but it may unjustly operate as an unnecessary and unjustifiable harm to others and to the firm's standing in commercial and banking circles. Such criticism may be uncharitable now and yet it may grow day by day. Therefore after a full and calm consideration of the question, with the benefits of consultation with my brother in London, I have decided to offer my resignation from your firm as the manager of the cotton mills department, as I can do so without inconvenience to you with your preparations made ready for my absence in America.

In this step I assure you of the inseparable good will on my part towards all the members of the firm, and I am sure of the continuance of the same on their part.

Yours faithfully,
(Sd.) BHAPURJI SAKLATVALA.

Clipping: The Times, 17th September 1925

On 25th May 1925, the Home Secretary had announced to the House that certain delegates from Germany who intended to attend the annual conference of the Communist Party of Great Britain to be held in Glasgow, had been refused permission to enter the country for this purpose. There was a lively debate initiated by Jimmy Maxton, claiming that the conference of the Communist Party was a perfectly legal and bona fide event and that to exclude these fraternal delegates from the country was a denial of the rights of free speech. Maxton was supported by several other members on the Labour

benches and during the course of the debate, it was claimed that German and British members of the employing class were getting together and making agreements, so members of the working class of both countries should also be allowed to come together under the auspices of a legally constituted political Party.

<p style="text-align: center;">The Exclusion of Mr. Saklatvala.</p> <p>The intention of Mr. SHARPLEY SAKLATVALA to accompany the British "delegation" to the Inter-Parliamentary Conference at Washington has been frustrated by the Government of the United States. After a conference with PARSONS COOKSON, the Secretary of State, announced that instructions had been cabled to the American Consular authorities in this country to cancel the passport visa previously granted to the Communist M.P. for North Barchena. This action had been taken on account of Mr. SAKLATVALA's inflammatory speeches in Parliament and elsewhere. Would-be immigrants who are known to hold subversive or revolutionary views, or carry on propaganda hostile to American political institutions, are excluded from the United States; and Mr. COOKSON expressed the opinion that in this case no other course was consistent with the American Immigration Law. Though SENATOR HONAN has criticized the official decision as impolitic, it cannot be reversed on legal grounds. Mr. COOKSON indeed might well retort that he would rather exclude an orator of such notorious intemperance of speech as Mr. SAKLATVALA than be compelled to deport him. Since Mr. SAKLATVALA first combined Communist Parliamentary activity in this country with the management of a department of a great Indian capitalist house which he has just resigned, he has delivered a number of speeches which fully merit the description of subversive and revolutionary. There was no reason to suppose that his utterances would be less lurid in the New World than in the Old. Furthermore, in spite of the inaccurate description of the British Parliamentary group who leave for the United States and Canada to-morrow as a "delegation," its members have no official or representative character whatever. The member for North Barchena represents neither the British Government nor the House of Commons. Any member of Parliament may join the union and attend its conference. As SIR HENRY CAMPBELL-BANMANN pointed out as long ago as 1905, the conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union is an unofficial gathering. The majority of those who attend it and all its British members are not accredited delegates of any Parliament or of any Parliamentary party.</p>	<p>Fuller comprehension of its character would have prevented some futile criticism of the Government and of Parliament for "permitting" a revolutionary Communist to accompany other members of Parliament to Washington. The question of "permission" does not arise. If Mr. SAKLATVALA, in spite of the absence of an American visa, insisted on embarking on a British ship bound to New York, the Government could not prevent him, as long as this country remained at peace with the United States. Equally his membership of the British Legislature would give him no right to land in defiance of the American Immigration Law.</p> <p>In explaining why the American visa was originally granted to Mr. SAKLATVALA under general instructions to admit the delegates of all countries attending the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr. COOKSON drew attention to some of his recent speeches which had only just come to the knowledge of the Department. Whether he was well advised in paying them this compliment of quotation is doubtful, though the almost friendly termination of Mr. SAKLATVALA's letter of resignation to MESSRS. TATA (which was published in <i>The Times</i> of yesterday) might otherwise suggest that there is something of the "parlour Bohemian" in the M.P. for North Barchena. It is certainly surprising to find an advanced Communist assuring all the members of a capitalist firm of his "incomparable good will." Meanwhile he has had his advertisement. The scruples of the members of the British group who declined to visit the United States and Canada in his company need trouble them no more, and many of them will doubtless feel that the action of the State Department has probably saved them from the duty of blushing and apologising for his unrepresentative extravagances. One point, however, in Mr. COOKSON's defence of his Government's action deserves correction. He speaks of Mr. SAKLATVALA and agitators of his type as supporters of anarchy. But in Russia, where</p>
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Clipping: The Times, 18th September 1925

The Home Secretary, Joynson-Hicks, said that the policy had always been to afford free speech to our own nationals but not necessarily to foreigners: "I say frankly that we have a right, as an imperial government, to prevent these men coming in for destructive purposes... they [the government] do object to having Communist Party doctrines enlarged, improved and spread by agitators from abroad..."

To which Saklatvala replied: "On the same democratic principle, would Indians also have the right to say by a majority that no Englishmen should enter their country; or would the Chinese have the right to say that no Christian missionaries should enter their country?"

Joynson-Hicks said sarcastically, "I had not noticed that the Communist Party had arrived. It is perfectly clear that wherever, in any country, there is a democratic House of Commons and a democratic government, that government has the right to do what it considers to be in the best interests of its people."

THE REVOKED VISA.

MR. KELLOGG'S REASONS.
(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)
WASHINGTON, SEPT. 17.

The decision to revoke the passport visas of Mr. Saklatvala announced by the Secretary of State, Mr. Kellogg, last night has aroused some criticism in the United States. Senator Borah, who has discussed the question with Mr. Kellogg, has pointed out that any utterances here of this delegate to the inter-Parliamentary Union would hardly have been as dangerous as the publicity given to him by refusing him admission to the United States, and the recent case of Count Karolyi, who observed his vow of silence in the United States, only to cross the Canadian border and say all that he wished to say, will support this contention. There is also an apparent lack of official consistency in the fact that the Russian Soviets maintain an office and publish a "Trade Review" in Washington without interference from the authorities.

It is not consistency that the State Department seeks, however, as much as that prevention which is better than cure. Mr. Kellogg would rather refuse admission to Mr. Saklatvala than later find himself forced to resort to deportation, and if he is correct in the assumption that the Battersea member's intemperance of speech could be counted on to bring him into conflict with American law, he has probably taken the least troublesome course. The Secretary of State's reminder that Mr. Saklatvala "is not appointed by the British Government, nor selected by any authority of the British Government" and his conclusion that there is accordingly "no reason why he should be considered exempt from the immigration law, any more than the humblest immigrant who holds subversive or revolutionary views," is sufficient indication that no protest is expected from the British Foreign Office.

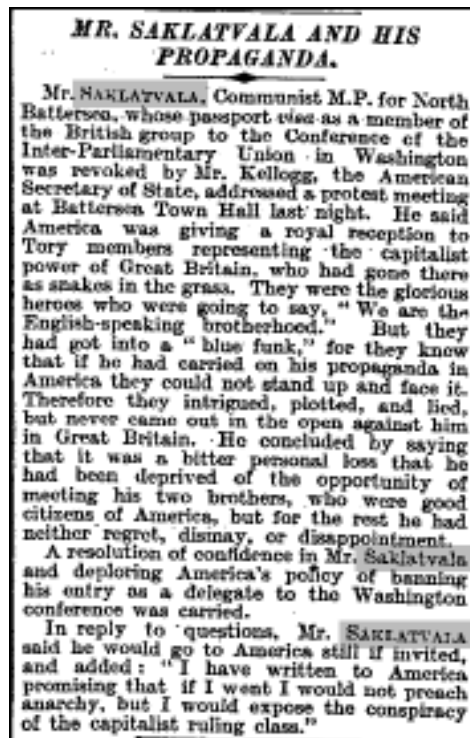
Clipping: The Times, 18th September 1925

Saklatvala asked him, "Do the government make the democracy, or do the

people of the country make the democracy?"

Joynson-Hicks explained, "The government is the expression of the views of the people of a democratic country," to which Saklatvala rejoined, "In conquered countries would the government have the right to express the views of the people? Were the Germans expressing the views of the Belgian people during the occupation? If the Russians conquered England would they be expressing your feelings?"

This debate on the exclusion of the German delegates to Scotland throws some light on the feelings engendered by the later exclusion of Saklatvala from the United States of America. Saklatvala and Joynson-Hicks were often to cross swords in the House, and Joynson-Hicks was one of only a few members who showed a personal animosity towards the Communist member; he was to make it patently clear the following year.



Clipping: The Times, 21st September 1925

During the course of one debate, George Lansbury took exception to a remark made by Austen Chamberlain, relating to Saklatvala not being a native of Great Britain, and called for a withdrawal of the remark. In complaining to the Speaker, Lansbury claimed, "Another hon member has insulted one of the best-living men in this or any other country..."

Chamberlain assured the House, "What I thought was a perfectly innocent

remark has aroused a good deal of criticism. I beg, through you, Sir, to assure the hon member that I meant nothing insulting.” The remark in question—which he was never allowed to complete—began, “When the hon member knows this country more intimately...”

In a reply published in the Sunday Worker, Saklatvala said:

“...throughout these 19 years [the period of his stay in Britain] I have not spared myself in studying the conditions, troubles, temperament and needs of the working class, for whom alone I am concerned. Against one Chamberlain, I have the voice of 15,000 British workers in Battersea, and during my visits to the provinces for communist propaganda I have reason to know that there are as many thousands elsewhere who know that I have a far more intimate knowledge of the conditions and needs of the workers of Britain than ever Mr Austen Chamberlain will be able to possess.”

In the course of a parliamentary debate on the Poor Law in Scotland, Saklatvala made an amusing comment on the system of voting in the House:

“I rise to support the amendment. In doing so I fully realise that I am not supporting a cause which is going to win in the lobbies. It was only on Tuesday night that the followers of the government had been weeded out of what little conscience they had, and since then they had not had sufficient time to recover. It is just as easy for them to support their leaders whether they are right or wrong. I am perfectly sure that the reclining figure on the back bench will become perpendicular when the Division comes and that he will vote for the government.”



Clipping: The Times, 29th September 1925

Also in lighter vein, he intervened humorously in an exchange between Captain Wedgwood Benn and Joynson-Hicks. Wedgwood Benn asked the Home Secretary what general rules governed the attendance of secret police at meetings; on what subjects were they asked to report; and whether they were employed to register in general opinions expressed, or whether their duties were limited to the prevention of crime and of the advocacy of crime? On getting an evasive reply, Wedgwood Benn pressed his point. Joynson-Hicks then said that the object of police attendance was to inform him of what takes place, "...and if there are revolutionary sentiments or revolutionary projects discussed at that meeting..."

Saklatvala rose to ask the innocent question, "Will the Rt. hon gentleman say if police duties also include attendance at dinner parties where revolutionary talk may be going on, and if that is extended to the private dining rooms of the House of Commons, where I hold dinners with my revolutionary friends on

occasions?"

During one debate taking place very late at night, Saklatvala said, "I hope I will not be charged with an attempt to keep hon members opposite up—because it is my honest desire to keep them down!"

**AMERICAN METHOD WITH
COMMUNISTS.**

—♦—

**COL. WOODCOCK, M.P., ON HIS
VISIT.**

Colonel Woodcock, M.P., who arrived at Liverpool on Saturday, after attending the conference at Washington of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, said he was convinced that the action he took in preventing Mr. Saklatvala, the Communist M.P., from going to America would have far-reaching results. "The prominence my action gave in drawing attention to the activities of Communists," he went on, "has not only given a lead to this country and America, but other countries are now apt to follow our action in dealing with this menace. The result must be to put back the growth of their destructive forces for many years to come. The United States are very much alive to this menace. Their methods are much more forceful than ours. We had evidence of this when we arrived in New York. When we landed there was a demonstration of about 400 people to protest against the exclusion of Mr. Saklatvala. This crowd was suppressed by police, who were supported by soldiers and a squad of bombers. Everywhere I went I was complimented for preventing Mr. Saklatvala going to America. The promulgation of Communist doctrines is being dealt with firmly and promptly. A conversation I had with Mr. Davis, Secretary for Labour in the United States, convinced me that that country is giving a lead to other countries in the exclusion and deportation of Communists. Many aliens, members of the Communist party of America, have been deported, and are being deported whenever their presence in that country comes to the notice of the immigration authorities.

Clipping: The Times, 26th October 1925

In spite of personal attacks and disappointments, Saklatvala never lost his sense of humour—he saw many of the flaws of imperial society, its pomposity, its double standards, its claim to its own freedom, while denying freedom to more than half the world, as ludicrous as well as wicked—and laughter, even when silent, is a great booster of morale.

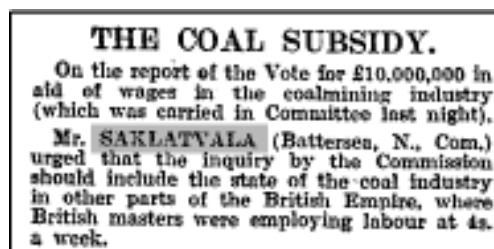
CHAPTER 16

A Subversive in Parliament

Parliamentary speech on British rule in India and on imperialism in general, 1925.

On 9th July 1925, under the Chairmanship of James Hope, the House of Commons debated the estimates for expenditure on the India Office, which gave Saklatvala the opportunity to express in the House his views on the government of India by Great Britain and on imperialism in general. His speech that night sums up much of his thinking on this subject, which was central to all his political thought. I therefore quote it here at length:

“I am thankful to the noble Lord that towards the close of his speech he told the Committee that I am bound to take a different view from both Front Benches, who are more or less alike in their policy and their outlook on Indian affairs...



Clipping: The Times, 8th August 1925

“What I say here is not in any mood of anger or hatred, but positively with a view to speaking the truth, when sometimes truth, though unpleasant, is ultimately better than diplomatic statesmanship and political thought. I pay homage to the British spirit of hypocritical statesmanship. It is a wonderful sight today. We are talking of the Indian Empire just in the same strain of common agreement, with that very placid attitude of mind and phraseology of speech as if we were discussing some matters relating to the renewal of furniture in the library or cooking utensils in the kitchen of the House of Commons.”

At this point, notice was taken that there were less than 40 members present—thereby proving Father’s point that little importance was attached to Indian

affairs in the minds of the British members of Parliament who were responsible for the government of the country. More members were brought in to enable the debate to continue. (When members of the public are critical of MPs for poor attendances in the House, it is often put forward that many of them are busy in Committee Rooms; but it is not surprising if the electorate sometimes form the opinion that the bar is more popular than the debating chamber.)

“I am thankful to the hon member for getting me a bigger audience. I assure the Committee that my whole object in taking the line I do is to place before the Committee, as well as before the country, not only the Communist Party point of view, but the general international point of view, the overlooking of which in the near future is going to bring serious calamity to many European countries, and especially to Great Britain.

“We are debating here as if the Bengal Ordinances were never promulgated [Editor’s note: The Bengal Criminal Law amendment Ordinance, 1924, instituted special courts and dispensed with habeus corpus in an attempt to suppress dissent], as if the shooting of Bombay operatives during the cotton strike had never taken place [Editor’s note: Five protestors were killed by police on March 7th 1924], as if a great strike of thousands of railway workers is not even now going on in the Punjab, with men starving and the government, the controller of those railways, taking up a hard-faced attitude, as if all these things had not happened, as if a great controversy is not raging, not only with the people of India but with the people all over the world, whether British Imperialism, whatever its past history, is at all permissible to exist now for the benefit of the citizens of Great Britain herself.

“There are great problems pertaining to India and Britain which ought to have been discussed on an afternoon like this. I agree that the commonness of parties and the commonness of policy between the last government and the present government has tabooed all these important questions from being uttered in the House. The main question with which we are confronted is the entire question of Imperialism in its present form.

“It is rather unfortunate that from the earliest time you have called this

agglomeration of different people and different races the British Empire. I wish you had from the first designated it as the Indo-British Empire, so that what we may say about the Indian subjects in the Empire may not be taken as a reflection by our Colonial friends in Canada, Australia and elsewhere.

“The conditions are entirely different. Rules and regulations, formulae, political remedies and experiences which apply to that part of the British Empire which is composed of Great Britain and her white Colonies are not at all applicable to the other portions of the Empire, such as India and certain portions of China and Africa...

“I do not take the view that there are progressive ways of self-government, of Dominion Home Rule, of Indianisation of the Army and all those things just as there are certain progressive measures for cultivating apples in Canada, cattle markets in Australia and bringing the fruit and meat to this country from the distant parts of the Empire. I take the view of the reality of life, that if genuine self-rule is in the hands of the Indians and if there exists a genuine Indianisation of the Indian Army, no Indian will be so despicable, as to say that they would hold that country and that Army for the benefit of some people other than their own...

“Take the problem as a human problem. India is a large country with a population of over 300,000,000. You talk of 10% of the people being educated today. That 10% in that large country represents 30,000,000 people, and you admit that these 30,000,000 people—which means a much larger population than many other smaller European countries—are educated and as fit as other similarly educated persons in several parts of Europe.



Clipping: The Times, 22nd September 1925

“Then you style yourselves the trustees of the whole of India, and as trustees you take jolly good care to see that the other 280,000,000 remain ignorant, illiterate, uneducated with no freedom to call their souls their own... because Great Britain, to suit her own purpose, treats those 280,000,000 persons as so many animals or beasts of burden...

“Is there a single British man or woman today, is there a person anywhere in any country in Europe, in any of the backward countries in the Balkan states, in any of the small nations which are not yet so fully developed as Great Britain, who would tolerate for one day a power so despotic and arbitrary as the Crown, under the Imperial system, is insisting upon enjoying in India? There would not be a man or woman who tomorrow would not rise and fight to the bitter end to claim their rights if the monarchy claimed one tenth of the privileges which in the name of the Crown are exercised over the people of India. Because you keep the other 280,000,000 people back, you are asking the 30 or 40 million of educated people there also to swallow such an indignity and such an impossibility in public life.

“...Human feeling, the human heart and the human mind are just the same in India as here or elsewhere. You call the Indians seditious when they protest against these things, but when you rise in revolt in this country against the ruling classes, it is called the spirit of democracy. In India, it is sedition, conspiracy, subversive propaganda...

“I put it to my Indian friends that no sensible persons expect them to

submit to such an unnatural state of mind and to such hypocritical expressions in their speeches. They are fully entitled to strain every nerve to carry on what is called seditious propaganda, what is called a revolutionary movement, and to fight with all their might and main such iniquitous and unjust and brutal privileges as are claimed by the Crown, through their Agents, in India. It is perfectly right. You would all do it. No one doing it in this country would be condemned for doing it...

As a protest against the action of the Glasgow Magistrates in banning Mr. Soltau's Communist meeting, the Labour group in the City Council have recommended the members of the Labour Party to abstain from attending any of the ceremonies connected with Mr. Baldwin's visit to Glasgow next week. The Prime Minister is to receive the freedom of the city, and the Labour group assert that it would be a mockery for them to be present when freedom of speech is denied to Labour organisations in Glasgow.

Clipping: The Times, 25th September 1925

"...The noble Lord [Earl Winterton], if he will forgive me for saying so, stood up in a school-boyish fashion, and referred us to the lessons of history for the last 700 years. As I read English history for the last 700 years, it is a more ignominious record than ours. He says, 'You have always had a foreign monarch, always an invader coming in from outside to rule you.' Since my childhood days, when I was studying English history, I have known that England so far never has had an English monarch. She has always had a foreign invader. Never has her monarchy been a home-grown product. Monarchy is a sort of family privilege. A few families supply monarchs to Europe just as a few biscuit factories supply biscuits all over Europe...

"I am simply showing the want of logic in the position he [Winterton] took up in reproaching India as a country which was always governed by a foreign monarch, and thereby trying to establish the right of himself and his family and future generations, to go on governing India...

"It was entirely a futile argument, and if you go back 200 years, your education, your sanitation, and internal arrangements, with Bishops burning people, and the persecution and religious terrorism, you have nothing much to be proud of. You had your struggles and we have ours, and shall still have them. I put it to the noble Lord as well as to his own Party, not to take the narrow-minded, schoolboyish view of life when talking of the biggest affairs of mankind.

“...We want to put it to you that you are talking in contradictory terms. Sometimes one thing is right and at another moment it is wrong. If you decide to go to India and revolutionise the lives of the Eastern people, you do not talk of castes, you do not talk of Hindu and Mohammedan ideas, or of depressed classes. When it is your intention to start cotton factories, jute factories, railways and telegraphs, you do not say, ‘We cannot do it, because India is cut up by caste or because of Hindu and Mohammedan hatreds, or because there are depressed classes.’

“With just the same ease, comfort and confidence with which you start these machines for grinding human life and freedom here, you start factories, mines, railroads and dockyards there. Nothing stands in your way then. But when we tell you, ‘See here, you pay so much a head here —(not that you pay willingly for it—it was extorted by the workers fighting inch by inch against you)—and we say to you that if you apply these modern instruments of production... you must also apply other conditions...

“...Then you begin to talk of castes, of Hindus and Mohammedans and the depressed classes... I put it to you that it is a very cowardly game. I do not impeach your intention, but I do impeach your habit of mind. It is a very crooked habit of mind. If you were setting the Indian worker the same equal race with his employer that you have in this country, your argument might be at least logical, even if it were not humanitarian.

“But here you have a fully developed master class, who with their struggle for a hundred years with the working classes in Europe are experienced, well-informed and well equipped with all the methods of enslaving and grinding down human life. That ready-made master... goes to India, to Bengal, Bombay or somewhere else, and pitches his camp there, and applies his up-to-date knowledge and his full blast methods of controlling labour and grinding down human beings. His informed mind, well equipped with experience, devises schemes.

“The government from time to time say, ‘We are the trustees of the people, protectors of the undefended.’ Where are you when it comes to defending the people against the robbers of your own country? ...Two years ago, when our Indian friends wanted to hold a Trade Union

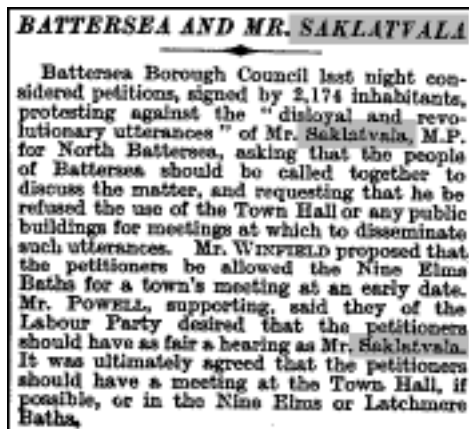
THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Congress in the mining area, to draw the attention of the whole country to the most hideous and the most brutal conditions prevailing in the Bengal mines, the Merchants' Association, the European Mine Owners' Association, asked the government to stop the Congress.

"They demanded the presence of a Ghurka Regiment. Machine guns and soldiers, with bayonets ready, were in the mining areas. That is the part they played in granting the rights of the workers. When these tactics did not succeed, and when the Indians who devoted themselves to work on behalf of the miners, showed their determination and were backed up by 50 or 60 thousand miners laying down their tools and attending the Congress, the Chairman of the Miners' Association wrote a letter of apology and presented himself and said he would now agree.

"I appeal to my British friends that if they are so proud of being Britishers, let them remain Britishers when they go abroad. If they want to take credit for everything that somebody else does and refuse to take discredit for everything they neglect to do, the least I can say is that they are a very funny people...

"The noble Lord, the under-secretary [Earl Winterton] has entirely evaded the issue of the Bengal Ordinances, seditious movements, suppression of the Communists, and so forth. I plead guilty that I am at the bottom of many of the Communist manifestoes and Communist propaganda in India. I am not ashamed of it, and I say that my work is a hundred times more humanitarian than the work of all your missionaries and merchants taken together. Why are you taking this bigoted, narrow-minded view of life?...



Clipping: The Times, 1st October 1925

“It is alleged that whatever is said in this House travels abroad and creates misunderstanding. Why be afraid of the truth being known abroad? I, as a Communist, as a true believer in Internationalism, do not speak with the intention of offending, but with the intention of giving a shock to your mentality, so that you can think in terms of humanity instead of in terms of banking accounts and profits.

“You say you are the trustees of the people. You have had 150 years and today you say you cannot give the franchise to the agricultural population; you tell hon and Rt. hon members of this House that they do not know the conditions in India, that the education of the villager in India is impossible and that they are not to think that the population of India is like the population of Great Britain.

“It may be that you are honest incompetents, and that you say this in your impotence and incapacity, but why not learn from others? Our Russian Bolshevist friends have, in five years time, been able to give the political franchise to the agriculturists of Russia, who are a class parallel with the agriculturist population of India. They are also people of diverse religions, including Mohammedans, Jews, Greeks, Church people and others.

“The Bolshevists have been able to give them education in 5 years, yet in the Tsar’s days, these people were treated with the same callousness and brutal cruelty as that with which you have been treating the Indian peasant for 150 years. In 5 years after the Communist international revolution in Russia, 65% of the agricultural population have received education, and you have, today, the testimony of half-a-dozen British men and women that, in spite of blood-curdling articles in your newspapers, the Russians have done their job well. Why play a dog-in-the-manger part?

“I appeal to this Committee to allow a commission of Indians to go to Russia to study and to find what the British have failed to discover—the way of granting to the people political franchise and education, scientific laboratories, institutions, health-homes, compensation and allowances for industrial workers. If Russia, a country of agriculturists, could find the way out, how is it that you, with your world-proclaimed cleverness as administrators, have failed to find it?...

“The noble Lord delivered himself on a previous occasion of his views on Russian propaganda. Today we have to review his actions during the last 12 months with regard to the Cawnpore trials. Why does he consider himself entitled to suppress Communist propaganda? He says other propaganda may be allowed, but not seditious propaganda or subversive propaganda. That is another contradiction. Every propaganda must be subversive. If it is not subversive then there is no need for propaganda...

“Every propaganda, if it is effective and sincere, means something new, and if those who carry it on have the courage of their convictions and want to put what they feel to be right in the place of the old system, the propaganda must be subversive. You are talking to the 20th century in the terms of 18th century lawyers when you refer to subversive propaganda, sedition and revolution. They are the birthrights of modern nations, and the birthrights of the Indians just as much as they were your birthrights.

“I, for one, will not yield to terrorism. I am going to carry on subversive propaganda, revolutionary propaganda, Communist propaganda, international propaganda, with the assistance of the Russians, and the Chinese and the Germans and the British. I am not alone in that.

“The government has kept quiet about the great Indian Railway strike... the government of India forget that they are the largest employers of labour in the world ... and I put it quite definitely that, taking a comparison with any other eastern country, you pay the most miserable wages, and give the most miserable conditions, and deprive the population which works for you and for the prosperity of your great Empire of their rights, and inflict on them political indignity and humiliation worse than can be found in any part of Asia.

“...But I think even the noble Lord knows that the British government are treating with the most inhuman, callous oppression the railway workers, and imposing on them a negation of their rights...

“I touch on one more point, and that is the death rate... I tell you you are there to destroy human life. It may not be your intention, but that is part of the game. I ask hon members to analyse the infantile death rate a little more closely. The rate... for the City of Bombay was 411 per thousand. That is the normal rate, though it has been 834 in one year.

Even this, however, is a mistaken figure.

“The city of Bombay is a rich city. My own community is one of the richest communities there, and they do not present a death rate of 411 per thousand. Their infantile mortality is very near your own. There is also the European population and the rich Hindu and Mohammedan populations. But if you take the figures of infantile mortality in the municipal records before the final abstract is made, and if you study the rate in those wards where factory women live, the death rate there is not 411 per 1000, but it is from 600 to 700 per 1000.

“You cannot attribute that to climate or to insanitary conditions, because all over India in the agricultural areas without sanitation or education and with a hot climate, the infantile death rate is about 190. It is in the factory wards of Bombay, Calcutta, Allahabad, Delhi, and so on, wherever there are modern factories, that the infantile death rate comes to between 600 and 700 infants per 1000, and we think that, if nothing else, that one inhuman item, that cannibalistic feature of your imperialism, should be quite enough to make you come away.

“You went there, you say, to save the people, but you have acted in a contrary direction, and in the name of the people here, in the name of the people there, in the name of the masses, in the name of world civilisation, in the name of the necessity for world disarmament, I appeal to you to Bolshevise your own minds and hearts, and to determine, once and for all, that that imperialism, with all its good talking points, has got behind it a trail of inhuman murder, brutality, negation of rights and degradation of human life, and must be dissolved.

“British imperialism must go if humanity is to progress. I do not say that in a spirit of anger again. I say it for your own sakes ... do not despise Communist internationalism, study it from the point of view of the Indians and you will find it of greater value.”

Four days after this speech, Saklatvala addressed the Speaker with a personal explanation:

“With your permission, Mr Speaker, I ask the indulgence of the House while I make a brief personal explanation in regard to a sentence in my speech last Thursday night...

“When I said in the course of my speech that I held myself responsible

for, and that I am at the bottom of many of the Communist manifestoes, resolutions and Communist propaganda in India, I beg to explain that I unequivocally, unreservedly and without reservation associate myself with, and endorse such manifestoes, resolutions and propagandist literature as are openly and officially propagated by the Communist Party of Great Britain.

“This does not refer to documents of doubtful origin advocating crime, or whatever is alleged, which has no proven authenticity... I would not, Mr Speaker, endorse here in this House a propaganda which advocates individual crime through religious or racial animosities, or for personal revenge.”

When Arthur Field wrote to my brother after Father’s death, he asked the rhetorical question, “Why did he want to get into the gas-works?” Apart from the fact that anyone wanting to enter the world of politics aspires to membership of the House, I think he realised that the House offered him the opportunity of speaking under the protection of privilege; he was able, in the House of Commons, to express his thoughts and opinions much more freely than he would have been allowed to outside.

I think that Father regarded the role of the propagandist very much as early Christians regarded the role of the apostles, whose mission was to spread the word. Such preaching, admonishing people to change their existing ways, can never be popular with those in power who are thriving on the status quo. The martyrs have all suffered for it and Christ died for it. But every society and every generation produces its own preachers, teachers and propagandists and, as drops of water on stone, they have changed the shape of history.

The General Strike and a Term of Imprisonment

Arrest and imprisonment for sedition during the General Strike of 1926. The Emergency Powers Act and its many extensions.

The General Strike of 1926 cast its shadow before it—a dark and ominous shadow. Governments had mismanaged the economy, and exports fell as the value of the British pound rose abroad. Managers and owners of the mines mismanaged the mines. Coal was also being produced in the British Empire by colliers on starvation wages, thus—in the course of making huge profits for the greedy mine-owners—bringing down the international price of coal. Cheap coal was beginning to be exported from Poland and the Ruhr. For all these reasons, and certainly through no fault at all of the miners, there was less demand for British coal. The industry was facing a mounting crisis.

Yet the only remedy for the slump that anyone liked to contemplate was that the miners, the only efficient part of the equation, should be forced to accept lower wages and longer hours; there seemed no other way to maintain the high profits of the bunglers at the top. Even the most hard-hearted members of the ruling and employing class must have realised the gross unfairness of such a course and were fearful of the consequences—there is nothing so effective in stirring up panic and fear as a guilty conscience.

So the government started to prepare themselves for the suppression of any activity that was likely to arise as a protest from the mining community or the Trade Union community in general. The number of unemployed was still alarmingly high. The government knew perfectly well that what was to be suggested as a remedy was almost certain to meet with strong, if not violent, opposition from the victims, namely, the workers, whose wages and jobs were in jeopardy. Both sides prepared for battle. The United Kingdom was far from united—it was a nation divided.

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As early as August 1924, Army orders announced the formation of a Supplementary Reserve for the regular Army. Whatever the innocent reasons officially given for the raising of this Reserve, there was active recruitment among trade union members, who were understandably anxious about the intended use of such a body.

In January 1925 Arthur Henderson, General Secretary, reported to the National Executive of the Labour Party on the subject; he had, he said, enquired of Mr Stephen Walsh, who had replied in the following terms:

“The Supplementary Reserve as its name indicates is a formation supplementary to the existing Army Reserve and is in no sense a special reserve. It has been rendered necessary because of the vastly changed conditions of modern Army requirements... These changed conditions have to be met... It can only be effected by enabling the Army authorities to rely upon a reserve of men of the skilled artificer and technical class...

“Two classes will be enlisted, the first will be organised into technical units and trained as such, the second [and it was this category that set the alarm bells ringing for trade unionists] will require no training, their military duties, when called upon, being similar to the work they perform in peace...

HOME SECRETARY AND A GENERAL STRIKE.

PARLIAMENT AND EXTRA POWERS.

Sir William Joynson-Hicks, the Home Secretary, was the guest at luncheon of the Liverpool Conservative Club yesterday. LORD DUNN presided.

The CHAIRMAN said that as a candid friend of the Government there were one or two things which made Conservatives a little uneasy. If, as he believed, the Government had a mandate when it was elected, it was not to remain 25 years in Iraq, but for another purpose. Everybody had combined to support the present Conservative Government because they saw the head of Communism being raised in this country and an attempt being made to Russanize Great Britain. They wanted the Government to scotch any such attempt. What had the Home Secretary done about Communism? He (Lord Derby) believed he had done and was doing something, but at the present moment they did not quite know what it was. (Laughter.) If the Home Secretary had not the powers to deal with Communism, then they said, "Make those powers." (Cheers.)

Sir WILLIAM JOYNSON-HICKS, in reply, said that the statesman who declined to be warned by the views of his candid friends would, ere long, "come a cropper" in his administration of the affairs of the State. The Home Secretary knew perfectly well that he could not act or legislate in advance of public opinion in this country, which had long been noted for its freedom of speech. If they were going to effect a real change in these fundamental doctrines, they had got to be quite certain that the whole country was behind them. He wanted to convince the whole country that there was quite definitely an attempt being made to destroy its constitutional Government. The Labour Party had, for a long time, been wallowing in a kind of sea-trough, uncertain whether it was to act within the Constitution or outside it, or whether to govern or attempt to govern by councils of action. In spite of the Conference which had just taken place, he was not quite sure where Mr. MacDonald and the Labour Party really stood. The Communist Party might be small, but it was powerful, and definitely in alliance with Russia.

ANTI-BRITISH PROPAGANDA.

The Moscow propaganda was definitely anti-British, because they recognized that Great Britain was regarded as the bulwark of security by all countries in the world. He said that men like Mrosov, Parcell, Pollitt, Gallacher, and Saklatvala received their orders, directly or indirectly, from Zinovieff, and after the Scarborough Conference the Communist leaders sat down and wrote a long description of their victory to their paymaster in Moscow. At the recent conference, while Mr. MacDonald went the Communists in language which he (Sir William) would never have thought of using, no fewer than 1,100,000 votes were cast in favour of supporting a Communist newspaper. It did not look as if the Labour Party had quite cleared itself of the taint of Communism. It did not look as if the Labour Party were quite clearly determined to become the constitutional party.

His powers in regard to aliens were ample, but the real difficulty in dealing with these extremists was that they were Englishmen and entitled to the protection of the Government so long as they did not transgress the very narrow lines between what was and what was not constitutional. He proceeded to relate in detail the consultations he had had with the Attorney-General and Public Prosecutor in regard to utterances of Mr. Saklatvala and Mr. Tom Mann. "The decision was," he said, "that we thought these speeches would probably be held by a jury to be seditious, but, as such speeches were increasing from day to day in their violence, and as there was to be a series of meetings in the near future, it would not be at all a bad thing to wait a week or two and see if the next speeches by these men did not make the case conclusive. From the moment that a newspaper published details of my conferences neither Tom Mann nor Saklatvala has opened his mouth in public."

He was convinced that public opinion would give the Government any powers necessary to deal with this menace. It was a matter of life or death for the greatness of England. A Government which prosecuted and failed would make a martyr of a man at every street corner throughout England. He had asked the Attorney-General and the Public Prosecutor to consider if the powers at his disposal were sufficient, and even to consider what things were necessary, so that they might be introduced into Parliament as soon as it met.

REPLY TO MR. MACDONALD.

Replying to the letter of Mr. MacDonald, published in *The Times* yesterday, Sir WILLIAM said:—"In the first place, let me say at once that the community is entitled to protect itself against the effects of a general strike." (Cheers.) Was the community prepared to leave the very existence of the country, in the event of a general strike, to the Trades Union Congress, as suggested by Mr. MacDonald? "Quite definitely, I am not," the Home Secretary added. "I am prepared to take my full responsibility; I am prepared to say that the Government plans are there; they are ready to be put into operation. I have not called for half-a-million volunteers because I know well, if I call when a strike takes place and the State is in danger, there will not be half-a-million—there will be two or three millions."

"It is true I have given a qualified blessing to this organization, an organization of men of proved fidelity to the State. I have told them, as I have told every other organization that has come to me, that at the moment of trouble it will not be allowed to take any part with military status whatever. But, if any organization is prepared to hand me over classified lists of men, in Liverpool, in London, or any other place, some to serve as special constables, some as engineers, some as drivers of transport, I should be a fool, on behalf of the Government, if I declined to accept them. I believe that if this Communist organization dare to set themselves up against the people of the country, if they dare to promote revolution, they will be met with such an opposition on the part of the honest men and women of the community, and such a determination, that it will not be Great Britain, it will not be the Constitution which will be imperilled—it will be the Communist Party which will be smashed to atoms." (Cheers.)

Clipping: The Times, 6th October 1925

"The Army Order terms of last August setting up the Supplementary Reserve binds every officer in the Army from the highest to the lowest and are an explicit guarantee that the liability to be called out in aid of the civil power will not be enforced... As to the action taken by the Army

authorities in conjunction with the Railway Companies for recruiting of a Railway section of the Supplementary Reserve, I know nothing. That is an administrative act for which, of course, I can accept no responsibility.”

[Editor’s note: Stephen Walsh (Labour) had been vice-president of the National Union of Mineworkers from 1922 - 1924; he was then appointed Secretary of State for War by Ramsey MacDonald during the Labour government of 1924.]

But, not unnaturally, the trade unionists, the left-wing of the Labour Party and the Communist Party took the view that, in creating this Supplementary Reserve of skilled artificers and technical workers, the government was building up a reserve force of workers who would have to obey the orders issued by the Army, even if they were called upon to break any strike by their fellow-workers; a pool of men who were forgoing their right to withdraw their labour, since as Army reservists, to disobey their Army officers would be deemed to be mutiny.

Saklatvala asked over and over again in the House for details of recruitment to this Supplementary Reserve. On 18th February 1925, he put down a question to the Secretary of State for War asking for the number of men so far recruited and the trades from which they had been drawn. In reply, Sir Worthington Evans gave some figures and added, “The only groups of employers which have been approached by the War Office with a view to recruiting for this branch of the Reserve are the four railway companies of Great Britain, and certain engineering firms and transport companies.”

Of course, were there to be a coal strike, it was almost certain that the miners would be supported by railway and other transport workers, who in all probability would refuse to move any coal; thus in recruiting just these men into the Army, the government could be certain that the movement of coal and other goods, in the event of major strike action, could be undertaken by those workers who had been recruited into the Army reserve.

The following month, Saklatvala was on his feet in the House again, this time asking for a breakdown of the numbers of recruits in the various trades. He was told such statistics were not available. He then asked the Secretary of State for War whether he had approached trade union groups, as he did groups of employers, to enlist their sympathy and assistance in encouraging

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recruiting in the Army Supplementary Reserve; and if so, how many and which trade unions were they?

The Under Secretary admitted in reply that he was in negotiation with the National Union of Railwaymen and also the Transport and General Workers' Union. The next nagging question that Saklatvala raised was about assurances given that the Supplementary Reserve would not be called upon to intervene in any civil dispute; and he was told the only assurance to this effect was that contained in the Army Orders.

A few days later he asked for the numbers of engine-drivers, firemen, signalmen, motor drivers, electricians and clerks who had so far been recruited to the Army Supplementary Reserve. No details were forthcoming and he raised the question yet again a few days later, saying that, in view of the unsatisfactory replies to his questions he begged to give notice that he would raise the question on the adjournment; this he did on the 30th March 1925.



Clipping: The Times, 6th October 1925

In his speech he reiterated the history of the ASR and recounted what extreme importance was ascribed to it both by the present and the previous Secretary of State for War, who were both of the opinion that without sufficient numbers of skilled men being raised in the Supplementary Reserve, the Army would not be efficient. In view of the vital importance of the numbers being recruited, Saklatvala said, he found it astounding that the Secretary of State told him that the figures for the recruitment for each vital trade were not available either at the War Office or in the House. When the efficiency of the British Army depended on satisfactory recruitment, it was astonishing that these all-important statistics were not available.

“I put these questions one after another, making allowances for the democratic spirit of this House, and I put the same question in a

roundabout manner in five different forms, and I am still without an answer.”

He went on to quote the Secretary of State on the subject of coercing the members of the ASR into activity against their fellow workers in any civil dispute as saying:

“No doubt the Communists do claim that in no circumstances should the Army or the reserve be used in support of the Civil Power, but hitherto trade union leaders have never argued that the state is not entitled, if the police force proves insufficient, to claim the assistance of the armed forces of the Crown.”

Saklatvala said that the Communist Party went further:

“The Communist Party is right in its attitude that international war of the working classes of any other country is as criminal and fratricidal as Civil War at home... There must be a common understanding, and that can only be arrived at by facing facts, and the facts today are—I, for one, and my Party, as such are not ashamed in stating it—that we consider it our sacred and religious duty to tell all the British workers to keep away from the Army as well as from the Army Supplementary Reserve.” This forthright attitude to the Army was to land him in serious trouble the following year.

In September 1925 the Sunday Worker wrote:

“The Sunday Worker is able to state positively and definitely that the ASR is being used as a means of placing at the disposal of the big railway companies a corps of enrolled and oath-bound black-legs, liable to penalties of martial law for refusing to scab for their fellow workers. Couple this with revelations as to the recruiting into the ASR of thousands of local government employees and the reality of capitalist dictatorship is made clear... Are not all these preparations being made to ensure victory for the employing class in their forthcoming offensive against the workers’ standard of living?”

It was on the 30th June 1925 that the coal mine owners announced that they would terminate all existing wage agreements at the end of July, and demanded an immediate end to any minimum wage and an immediate reduction in miners’ pay. Not surprisingly, A.J. Cook, the militant secretary of the Mine Workers’ Federation, refused to accept the changes demanded. The

General Council of the Trades Union Congress gave its support to the miners. Prime minister Stanley Baldwin, on the other hand, said that all workers must take a reduction in wages to put industry on its feet. The TUC was as good as its word and, in response to these unreasonable demands by the government and the mine owners, put an embargo on the movement of coal by rail, road and sea. This prompt and strong action resulted in Baldwin offering a subsidy to the mining industry to maintain wages at their existing level until 1st May 1926.

A Royal Commission under Sir Herbert Samuel was set up to examine the state of the coal industry and to seek solutions for its ills. Meanwhile the government divided the country into ten regions, each with a Civil Commissioner and a team of civil servants to deal with any industrial unrest that might arise. The Royal Commission made its report on 26th March 1926 and it pleased neither side in the dispute. It condemned the mine-owners and it also condemned the government subsidy; and it decided that the miners must accept reduced wages. Both owners and miners rejected the report.

All these events united the working class in Britain as perhaps it has never been united since. The people had had enough and were determined to stand up for their rights.



Clipping: Daily Mirror, 17th October 1925

In an attempt to diminish the strength of the rising tide of the workers' anger, in October 1925, twelve leading communists were arrested and tried; five of them were given a sentence of twelve months and seven of them were given six months in jail. 167 miners were arrested and charged with 'riotous assembly'; fifty received sentences ranging from fourteen days to twelve months. But all this intimidation merely served to strengthen the resolve of the workers. Saklatvala was among 70 MPs who wrote to the press demanding the immediate release of the prisoners.

The Sunday Worker of 27th December 1925 wrote:

"Local Labour Parties, ILPs and other bodies are holding protest meetings and demonstrations from one end of the country to the other and 'Release the Twelve!' has become the slogan of the whole Labour Movement."

"At a Labour Party meeting in West Fulham, Saklatvala addressed the

crowded hall, saying he was not there to force them into the Communist Party, but the present political and economic situation would make communists of them all within the next twelve months. It was the government, he said, who were waging the class war by allowing any form of terrorism and force so long as it was directed against the working class.”

Herbert Smith, president of the Mine Workers’ Federation, wrote to the *Sunday Worker* in the same issue:

“...I am sure the forthcoming year is going to be a big test for the whole movement. We are now faced with a united capitalist class. The means for conducting our struggle are being endangered every day. The communist trial showed that very clearly. These lads who are now in prison are where they are because the right of free speech, together with other elementary civil liberties are being taken away. We must resist such attacks... and get the twelve communists out of prison. Yes—we’ll see things happen next year.”

A body called the International Class War Prisoners’ Aid collected over 300,000 signatures on a petition demanding the release of the communists and the miners. Saklatvala presented it to the Speaker in the House of Commons on the 24th February 1926. The *Sunday Worker* wrote of the occasion: “Comrade Saklatvala really performed a feat of physical endurance as he carried the entire petition—in his arms, on his back and suspended from his shoulders.”

Alas, far from gaining the release of the prisoners, many, many more were to be imprisoned before that fateful year was out. Joynson-Hicks (Home Secretary) admitted to 1760 arrests but it was generally believed that the number was more like 2,500.

Nor was it only the communists who took up a courageous stand against the bullying tactics being used to crush the workers’ defence of their livelihoods. George Lansbury said:

“We call upon all soldiers, sailors and airmen to refuse under any circumstances to shoot down the workers of Britain, and we call upon working men to refuse to join the capitalist Army. We further call upon the police to refuse to use their batons on strikers or locked-out workers during industrial disputes.”

By the end of April 1926, it was clear that no agreement was going to be reached, and that a strike of the miners, and almost certainly a General Strike, were inevitable.

[Editor's note: In February 1926 the Battersea branch of Labour Party was disaffiliated by the national Labour Party.]

May Day that year was of special significance, for it was also the day when the government subsidy came to an end. A multitude of workers assembled on the Embankment on May 1st and the vast procession marched to Hyde Park where nine public meetings were being held. On May 3rd, The Manchester Guardian reported under the headlines: 'Labour's May Day Celebrations—Procession of Unusually Large Scale':

“Saklatvala seemed to be the hero of the day. He was followed to his platform by a swirling wake of enthusiasts, and his meeting was much the biggest. He is, one imagines, the most powerful mob orator of his day. This sallow Indian, with a face worn by fanatical passion, dominated the whole scene as, with outstretched, claw-like hands, he harangued for a good half hour. With a sort of sombre joy, he acclaimed the General Strike as the definite rising of Labour against their oppressors, to a chorus of ‘Good old Saklatvala!’”

It is interesting to note that the Manchester Guardian reporter gave no indication that the speech might be considered as seditious, or that it might be interpreted as an incitement to violence. He reported that there was no mischief in the crowd—which, while being enthusiastic, seems to have been orderly, as was the case with Saklatvala's meetings in general. He appears always to have had complete control of his audiences and there is no evidence of their being rowdy scenes at any of his meetings.

MAY DAY.

LABOUR DEMONSTRATION IN LONDON.

A large number of organizations associated with the Labour Party in London took part in the May Day demonstrations on Saturday. As in former years, the main rallying point was the Thames Embankment near the Temple Station, and here the procession was marshalled for the march to Hyde Park. Among the strongest contingents were those from the cooperative societies, the trade unions, and the Independent Labour Party. The Communist Party was also represented, several of its members appearing in red shirts.

When the procession was drawn up ready to start it stretched from Temple Station to Blackfriars, but thanks to the assistance of a strong force of foot and mounted police it was dispatched without a hitch. A subsidiary procession, which was sent by a separate route to Hyde Park, was made up of horse-drawn vehicles containing children who were to dance round the maypole and to take part in a choral programme. The route followed by the main procession was via Norfolk-street, Kingsway, and Oxford-street to Marble Arch.

As it moved slowly on its way the procession lengthened, and when the vanguard had arrived at Hyde Park the rearmost units were still in the neighbourhood of St. Giles's-circus. A great congestion of traffic was caused in Oxford-street, and the police were obliged to allow westward bound vehicles to proceed on the wrong side of the road. Many of the demonstrators sang marching songs, and from time to time gave vent to Labour war cries. The most popular catch phrase seemed to be "Help the Miners."

Much speculation was aroused by a tableau which represented a capitalist lolling in an armchair with his feet resting amid a pile of money bags on a table. The car on which this set was mounted was drawn by a representative party of workers, and behind it marched a band of members of the Catholic Crusade. Among those who composed this curious rear-guard were men garbed as priests. One of them carried a cross while another swung a censer.

Although the leading members of the procession reached the Park about 3.30, late contingents were still arriving at 4.45. One of the last parties to reach the meeting-ground was a delegation from the Indian Seamen's Union. It was generally agreed among the organizers that the crowd was one of the largest which had ever attended a Labour Day demonstration in London. Its number was estimated at not less than 25,000.

SPEECHES IN HYDE PARK.

When the procession reached Hyde Park a number of meetings were formed, which were addressed by numerous speakers. Among them were Mr. C. G. Ammon, M.P., and Mr. Saklatvala, M.P. Another platform which attracted a large audience was one representative of the workers of Messrs. R. Hoe and Co., of Enfield, and here a scarlet-clad woman spoke for some time.

On the arrival of Mr. Saklatvala, a huge crowd escorted him across the park to the wagon of the Young Communist League. After upholding the side of the miners in the dispute, he urged on his hearers the advisability of not attempting to purchase the mines, the railways, and other great industries; instead, he said, the proper thing to do was to go ahead and take them. Another of his remarks was that the Union Jack had for hundreds of years harboured and protected fools and rogues, and it was high time it was torn down.

There was never any trouble between the Fascists or the Labour Party which warranted any action on the part of the police. At one time, however, there was a slight skirmish with a party of the national Fascists who drove up to the Marble Arch end of the Park, singing the National Anthem. They continued to drive on in their motor-coach and a number of the Labour people boarded an omnibus and gave chase. The conductor was powerless to stem the rush. Several of the men hung on to the rails and steps, and continued following the motor-coach as far as Kensington, where it turned down a side-street.

The May Day Revels organized by the Independent Labour Party were held yesterday afternoon at the Strand Theatre. Children from various Socialist schools danced and sang excellently, and a competition for choirs was won by the Clapham Socialist Sunday School. Miss Isabel MacDonald, in presenting the shield to the winners, said that it was pleasant to hear singing like that, as there was not much harmony in the outside world. The performance was brought to an end with the crowning of Vera Hillman as this year's May Queen.

Clipping: The Times, 3rd May 1926

On Monday 3rd May, he and my mother were sitting together in our billiard room at home when two men in raincoats and trilby hats could be seen coming through the garden gate and approaching the house. Father said to my mother: "Sehri, I think this means trouble, but don't worry." The two men were, of course, detectives. My brother opened the door to them and showed them in. They told Father they had come to arrest him and read out the charge. They then asked if they might use the telephone and put a call through to Bow Street police station; the telephone call informed them that they had

arrested Father prematurely, as the Emergency Powers Act, under which he was to be indicted, had not yet been passed. They then made the position clear to my parents and asked Father to make himself available later. My father assured them he would either be at home or in the House of Commons and would be ready at any time to receive them.

The detectives were not the only ones to be a bit premature. Home secretary Joynson-Hicks had said the following in the House of Commons, a week before Father had made his speech:

“If I may say so, the hon member for North Battersea has for a long time been a great temptation to me. I must confess that more than once my fingers have itched when I read some of the hon member’s speeches. Listen to this: on 22nd March this year he said: ‘The Union Jack is nothing but a symbol of murder and robbery’. That may not be seditious, but, after all, we on this side, and many members opposite, believe in the Union Jack. Our blood boils when we hear statements of that kind made in regard to the Union Jack.”

Father conducted his own defence when he appeared in Bow Street Police Court on 6th May, the case having been adjourned for two days when he first appeared on Tuesday 4th May.

[Editor’s note: Bail was provided by George Lansbury.]

After that first hearing and adjournment, he was certain that he would be sent to prison. He was afraid that I would be greatly distressed by the news and said he would explain everything to me himself, which he did, at bewildering length and detail—remember, I was not yet seven years old. He explained to me about the miners being asked to accept less money, he explained what a strike was, and he explained his speech in Hyde Park and why he had made it.

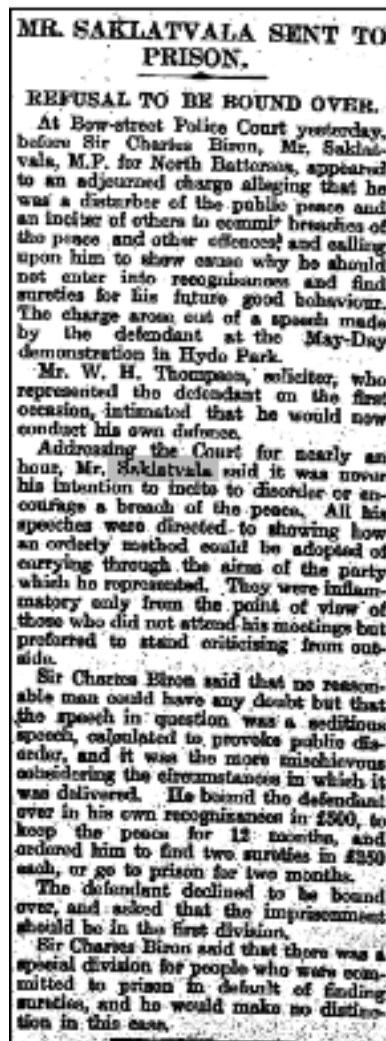
“So, you see, I think the government will send me to prison for a little while, and I may be away from home for quite some time.”

“O, good!” I exclaimed, jumping up and down and clapping my hands, “then I can sleep with Mummy!” I seemed to have inherited Mother’s capacity for minimising the dramatic effects of any political calamity. I hope Father was more relieved than disappointed by my apparent indifference to his enforced absence—after all, he had wanted to save me from any distress.

On 7th May 1926, Saklatvala appeared before Sir Charles Biron. He conducted

his own defence, addressing the court for nearly an hour. He said: "...I consider myself just as unnecessarily called upon to be bound over as our Prime Minister might be. It was never my intention either at this meeting or in any of my propaganda work to incite any sort of disorder or encourage any sort of breach of the peace." (The proof of the pudding was in the eating, for no breach of the peace and no disorder had in fact resulted from the speech.)

Sir Charles Biron contended that there was no doubt that the speech in question was a seditious speech, calculated to provoke public disorder. He bound the defendant over to keep the peace for twelve months.

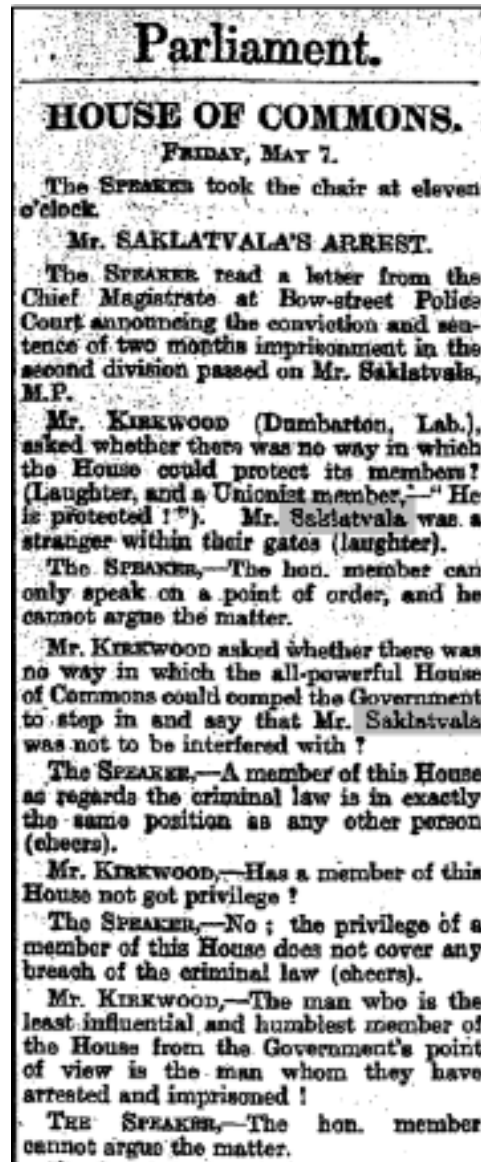


Clipping: The Times, 7th May 1926

The defendant said, "In my honour and conscience I cannot accept the decision to be bound over." (The report says that a voice in court cried, "Hear! Hear!" but that there was no further demonstration.) Saklatvala was sent to prison for two months; he served his sentence in Wormwood Scrubs.

On the way to the prison the escorting detective offered Father a cigarette, which he refused. The detective urged him to take it, "It's the last one you'll have for quite a while," he said. When Father explained that he did not smoke, the detective said, "Oh well, prison won't be such a hardship for you then—that's always what men miss most."

When Father reached the prison, more kindly advice was proffered, this time from the prison officer who was registering him as an inmate. When Father was asked to state his religion, he replied, "None." But the officer advised him to put down C of E, so that he would qualify for church services on Sunday mornings. "It makes a welcome break in the routine," he thoughtfully explained, "and gives you a chance to be with other prisoners." So he was admitted as a Church of England man! His visits to the Chapel gave him some comfort. When he got home he explained to Mummy that he joined in the prayers and hymns, but always put her name in place of the deity! (Although I was unaware of this until much later, whenever I was singing hymns in assembly at school, I invariably substituted 'Sak-lat-va-la!' for 'Hallelujah!')



Clipping: The Times, 8th May 1926

I was recently told an apocryphal story which is amusing, even though I cannot vouch for its veracity. It is said that when Father made his first appearance in the chapel, one prisoner asked another, "Who's that bloke?" His neighbour whispered in reply, "He's a Parsi—he's in for sedition," This was whispered along the line until it had become, "He's a parson—he's in here for seduction."!

The voice that had cried out "Hear! Hear!" in court so jubilantly was that of my mother, overwhelmed on this one occasion, so that despite her usual quiet and retiring demeanour, she expressed publicly her wifely pride. She was to receive many letters from wellwishers after Father's departure for prison. One of them was from Mr H.A. Heath, Hon. Secretary of the National Union of Clerks. He

told her that at a meeting of his Surrey Branch, there had been some discussion on the subject of Father's imprisonment, some members wishing to send their condolences and others to express admiration and congratulation; it had been left to Mr Heath to decide on how to write. Her reply I find touching in its simplicity and directness.

"Dear Mr Heath," she wrote on 21st May 1926:

"Very many thanks to you and your Branch for your message and kind feelings expressed by you all. I am afraid that my feelings, like your letter, are a little mixed, but on the whole, I think I am happy to receive your congratulations and not your sympathy. To tell you the truth, I have considered the many messages of sympathy rather out of place, because I was really very proud to see my husband make the firm stand he made, and to go to prison rather than go back on his word and pretend to be sorry for what he said. My husband's reply to the magistrate when he asked him to be bound over was the following: 'In my honour and conscience, I cannot accept your decision to be bound over but will go to prison for two months.' I could not help feeling proud; at the same time I felt sorry that he had to go to prison, but I would not have liked him to make any other decision. I shall keep your letter to show my husband when he comes home."

During Father's sojourn in prison, which he found very interesting and stimulating, (and which proved very restful for him physically), we received many visits from ex-prisoners, all bearing messages for my mother from Father. When the first one arrived, looking rather like a character out of a whodunnit, Mother was a bit nervous and asked my eldest brother, Dorab, to remain with her in the room. But, whatever their erstwhile crimes had been, they were all happy to bear glad and loving tidings from Father—they were all very kindly towards us and all spoke warmly of their unusual fellow-prisoner.

My mother asked one of them what he had been sent to prison for—he seemed so quiet and reserved; in reply he showed her a scar across his throat—he had been imprisoned for attempted suicide (a crime in those days). Mother felt deeply embarrassed and grieved and never again enquired about the reasons for their incarceration. One of them brought a piece of prison bread for Mother to taste, baked in the prison—a sort of 'specialité de maison.' Another one complained bitterly of the meagre prison diet and said sarcastically in a

gruff voice, "...and anuvver fing, they boil yer eggs too 'ard!" (meaning, of course, that they got no eggs). My innocent and ingenuous sister said blithely, "Oh, Daddy won't mind that—he loves hard boiled eggs!"

One of our unusual visitors smuggled a written message from Father out of the prison; he apologised for not coming immediately upon his release, but he had smuggled the note out under his tongue and had to wait for it to dry. He explained to Mummy, "There are other places I could have put it, begging your pardon!"

Father had used the tissue paper that covered photographs he had been allowed to keep with him. He received copies of Hansard as a member of Parliament, and also he was permitted special visits from his solicitor, because he was conducting a court case against Tata's and cousin Dorabji at the time.

I celebrated my seventh birthday while Father was in prison—it was the only birthday I ever spent without him during his lifetime. Wherever he was and whatever he was doing, even when it meant travelling all night to come and all night to go back to his work, he always celebrated my birthday at home. (I think this was true of all other family birthdays, but childhood memories tend to be self-centred). But Mother gave me a gabardine raincoat and told me it was Father's birthday present to me. I just assumed that he had been especially taken out of the prison to the shop to buy it for me! It seemed a very important present indeed.

An even more important birthday present came from Mother's aunt in Tansley in the shape of a little black puppy. We called him Binky and he was my faithful, loving and loved companion till his death when I was at college. Although Father was fond of animals he had never allowed any of us to have a dog, because it would add to my mother's already gruelling workload. But when he came home and found Binky already installed, he raised no objections.

Soon after the beginning of his sentence a rather spiteful girl at my convent school put her tongue out at me as she passed me in a corridor and said, mouthing and emphasising each cruel syllable, "Your daddy's in prison for saying nasty things about the King!" and I said, with an air of knowledgeable superiority, "Oh, no he isn't. He's in prison for sedition!"

All in all, 1926 was an eventful year for me as well as for the nation!

The authorities were afraid that there might be demonstrations in support of

Father on his release from prison. So they sent him out a day early, but would not tell him in advance of the exact time. Father sent a message to Mother through his solicitor, asking her to be outside the prison gates as early as possible on the morning in question; he said she should bring flowers for the chapel with her name on them; he would go to the chapel and would thus know when she had arrived. He explained when he got home that he just wanted to know Mother was near him and he wanted hers to be the first face he saw when he came out into the world again.

On his release the Workers' Weekly wrote:

“By far the most dramatic incident in the House of Commons this week was the sudden and unexpected appearance of Saklatvala, straight from Wormwood Scrubs. At 10.30 he was in prison; at noon he was sailing merrily into the Tories.”

Here are extracts from his speech on that day:

“I hope the House will pardon me for any slips on this occasion, because I have only just returned to this House from a semi-socialistic institution in which I have been taken care of on a much better scale than the poor miners. I also beg at this juncture to express my gratitude for the many considerations which have been shown to me, and also for the happy impressions I carry away of some of the brighter sides of British character in regard to the treatment meted out to me by British prison officials, which I have reason to admire...

“I have been permitted through the courtesy of Mr Speaker and the Home Secretary to follow the debates that have taken place from day to day during my absence and I understand from a study of those debates that this morning's special subject for discussion is the question of the money which has been sent to the miners from Russia in aid of the miners' families who at the present moment are in dire distress...

“We are apt to forget that it is the right of all those possessing money to spend it as they like, and in whatever country they like. This has been done by the British nation and by British individuals in the past and they are still doing it in other countries. When these facts are borne in mind, we soon see how mad we are in trying to differentiate between our own actions in this respect and similar actions by other nations when we are blinded by prejudice...

“I ask hon members to be good enough to remember how a short time ago a very keen interest was taken by a number of French citizens in the parliamentary elections in this country, where a campaign was being run by free-traders, and these Frenchmen sent subscriptions to help the Free Trade movement in this country. I was right in the middle of research into this subject when I was forced to take a rest. Again, I ask the House to make quite sure whether one or even two Liberal members of this House, who are honourably associated with the history of this House, were not enthusiastically financed, quite honourably, of course, by that well-known American citizen, Andrew Carnegie.

“I would ask the House whether this nation, individually as well as nationally, has not poured forth British gold into Armenia on humanitarian motives? Do they never think what suspicions the Turkish government has been casting upon that? Have you not been pouring out money to help the abolition of slavery? How would those people who sincerely believed in the benefit of the slave system at that time think about your action then? How about temperance associations?

“Travellers come from America, France, Germany or Belgium, look at various institutions here, and subscribe five, twenty, thirty or fifty pounds to any institution which appeals to them, merely from humanitarian motives. What is wrong? Do you want to undermine the whole of that? Do you want to say to the world that money shall only be subscribed geographically? Look at your Christian missions; look at the millions of pounds that you are sending out of this country to China. It may be a very noble act from your point of view, but it might be quite the contrary from the point of view of the Chinaman or the Mohammedan or the Buddhist in other countries.

“You want this country to forget its past, present and future proclivities, and to be ruled by blind prejudice against Russia. Let us look at the facts. There has been a strike—a general strike or a sectional strike—it doesn’t matter which. One thing which does matter, and which no human being can deny, is the economic and material hardship and distress that follows during the period of a strike...

“There is no denying that, in all sincerity... the present people of Russia believe that the supremest good in this world is to assist the struggling

and starving workers and their children, in whichever part of the world they may be. That is their new standard. They do not make a secret of it. There is no conspiracy whatever about it. To them, the supremest standard of philanthropy, the highest standard of human good, is not temperance, is not religious institutions, is not the question of legal slavery or its opposite, is not socialism. To them, at the present moment, honestly and in all sincerity, the highest standard of human good is the assistance of workers in other countries in their moments of distress.

“...I myself announced a few weeks ago, when there was a strike of mill operatives in Bombay, that I had been instrumental in remitting to Bombay £1,054, which I honestly believe was subscribed by the textile workers of Russia...

“We were permitted to listen to news from the outside world in the church on Saturday mornings in the Wormwood Scrubs socialist institution where I was... I heard there that miners and their children were still starving, that this is the 6th week of the strike, and so on, that trade union funds have become exhausted and then it was impressed upon us that a sinful and criminal action was being carried on when some human beings were sending £100,000 to assist these starving, human children.

“At the same time, we were told that a certain gentleman had offered the sum of £100,000 as a prize for some race horse. We are told to believe that this last action was a glorious, patriotic, righteous action, when miners and their families are starving owing to the action of those who came to possess that surplus of £100,000 for race horses...”

There was jubilation and celebration at Saklatvala's release. A big meeting and social was held in Battersea and he was, perhaps even more than before, in demand as a speaker. Even before the strike, a meeting addressed by Saklatvala was a great event in many of the mining and industrial areas of the provinces. It is recorded that on one occasion, miners were brought in from far and wide in buses and coaches, and 70 miners actually walked seven miles and back again to hear Saklatvala speak. There was never any disorder or breach of the peace at any of these meetings, attended as they were by hundreds of people, indeed, often by more than a thousand when the halls were big

enough, or meetings were held in the open air.

But throughout 1926 the Home Secretary kept extending the Emergency Powers Act, under which, again and again, the police, following instructions from Joynson-Hicks, cancelled any meeting that was to be addressed by Saklatvala. Often the cancellation came after the audience was assembled, many of them having come from miles away, and they were told to go home and that no meeting could take place after all. If the authorities really wanted to avoid a breach of the peace, this was surely a strange way to go about it. I cannot help but think that they would have welcomed rowdy scenes from these bitterly disappointed audiences, but nothing of the kind happened. Saklatvala himself was frustrated and unable to carry on the propaganda that had become his all-important work.

**SOVIET "NEWS" OF THE
STRIKE.**

**ENCOURAGEMENT BY
HEADLINE.**

From the beginning of the General Strike, the exultation and the headlines of the official Soviet newspapers, *Izvestia* and *Pravda*, proclaimed the triumphant progress of the "fight against the bourgeoisie." The following are some of the headings:—

"Four and a Half Million Workers on Strike." "Complete Railway Stoppage. Panic on the Exchange. Great Drop in the Rate of the Sterling." "Class against Class. The Government of the Coal Magnates is mobilising its Forces and Organizing Blacklegs for Fighting the Proletariat." "Britain Cut Off from the Continent." "Panic Stricken Bourgeoisie Fleeing to France." "Muzzling the Capitalist Press. Futile Attempts to Issue Bourgeois Papers." "Unrest Among Troops. Welsh Guards Confined to Barracks for Breach of Discipline. Government Statement on Riot at Aldershot." "Powerless Hatred. Comrade Saklatvala Sentenced to Imprisonment." "Communists Active. Councils (Soviets) of Action Formed Everywhere." "Soviets on the Watch. Electric Power Cut off from one of London's Hospitals frequented by the Bourgeoisie. The Local Soviet learnt that most of the Medical Staff had Enrolled in the O.M.S." "Baldwin Preparing a Bloody Bath for the Proletariat. Troops in London Docks. Blood of Workers Shed in Hull." "'Sacrilege' in Westminster Abbey. Parliament in Darkness." "Trade Union Council Organizes Transport, Information, Food, Instructions and Finance Sections. Millions of Copies of the *British Worker*." "Chaos in London Streets. Bourgeoisie Panic Stricken by Cancellation of Race Meetings and the Appearance of *The Times* as a small Type-written Sheet of Paper." "Only one Steamer may Perhaps be able to Leave England." "Railway Transport at a Standstill. Owing to Inexperience of the Blackleg Drivers, Railway Accidents are Becoming more frequent." (This is given as a T.U.C. official statement.) "Meagre Response to Appeal for Special Constables. Government Mobilizing Police Reserves."

Clipping: The Times, 18th May 1926

He could still, of course, speak in the House of Commons, and this he continued to do, forcefully and to great effect. Whenever the Emergency Powers Act was brought up for further extension, Saklatvala vigorously opposed it. In July, he contended:

“...It is from that point of view, that I, as a representative of the workers, should always oppose the Emergency Powers, because according to a confession of a supporter of the government this measure is required, not because any real or genuine emergency exists, but because we want to neutralise the rights of the workers as organised in their trade unions. That is the argument of the hon and learned gentleman, who perhaps was more clever than he required to be on this occasion.”

He went on to say:

“...The crisis came as a dispute between the employers and the employees. The armour of the employees is the trade union organisation, trade union legislation and trade union practice, and in order to make the fight unequal, the master class, through its puppet government, wants to deprive the working class of that legitimate and constitutional armour... We oppose this Emergency Powers Act exactly on this ground, and it is an Act which really does not enable the officials to meet some emergency... but it is an Act produced with the deliberate object of abusing it, as we have seen the present government abuse it every day of the last 2 months with the deliberate object of using it as a class instrument of the basest type, and the deliberate object not of using it against Lord Hunsden and others, but of using it against certain representatives of the working class...”

“The existing crisis is not only a money crisis... It does not simply mean that over a million men are out, with the families, facing all the dangers and hardships of life, and saying that they would rather starve than surrender... We who are responsible as representing the organised workers of this country... are responsible to them for carrying on a progressive fight to demand and obtain for them their social, political and constitutional advantages and rights...”

“The Emergency Powers Act prevents us from carrying on that fight. Some of our speakers have a perfect right in such a crisis to speak to the men and women of the nation and to show to them the dangers of the

indiscriminate use of the Army and the police. We have a right to demand for these men their rights in the managerial control of their own industry...

“The Emergency Powers Act permits the masters and the capitalist newspapers complete freedom to advance their rights... to put forward their claims, demands and criticisms, and to indulge in their vehement, unjust and unpardonable abuse of Cook and other persons fighting for the miners; while on the other side, those who are fighting the great battles of the working classes are deprived of the right of speaking and fighting for their political, social and other privileges.

“We are now asked to renew the Emergency Powers Act for the third time. I think we could have pardoned the government for the first time as they thought an emergency existed... and they sought to protect themselves behind the Emergency Powers Act... but if in two months the government fail to bring about a settled condition... the government ought to resign and give up the job...

“Honest men and women with clear and logical views, have definitely come to the conclusion... that the government and the Ministers of the Crown, have ceased from yesterday to be the impartial and trusted Ministers of the nation. From yesterday they are merely the hired agents of the coal owners. There is not the slightest doubt about it. Legislatively, officially, definitely, technically, they are the hired agents of the coal owners of this country. They have ceased to be Ministers of the Crown, and it is a falsehood to describe them as Ministers of the Crown, passing an Address to His Majesty. From today, under the Emergency Powers Act, they are going to use the police, the Army and other forces of the Crown, and even the Civil Servants, in a class war to fight their friends' battle...

“It is a great strain upon the loyalty of the policemen, the soldiers and the Civil Servants... Nevertheless, the government resent it when we go to these people and say, ‘The government are using you for a purpose which is immoral, unconstitutional and illegal.’

“Every policeman, every soldier and every Civil Servant who is a man of honour and conscience, should either chuck his job or act against the government, rather than lend himself to be a tool in their fight against

the nation.”

THE COMMUNIST PAPERS.
INSTRUCTIONS FROM MOSCOW.
PARTY ORGANIZATION AND FUNDS.

The Government issued yesterday a Blue Book (Cmd. 2682, Price 8s. net), more than 20 documents selected from those obtained on the arrest of nine Communist leaders on October 14 and 21 last year. The papers were seized at the headquarters of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 10, King-street, Covent Garden, and of the National Minority Movement, 28, Great Ormond-street, and at other addresses. Several tons in all were removed for examination.

The documents selected for publication, it is understood, were not chosen for their sensational character, but for the light they throw on the money-batched and systematic penetration of British life by poisonous foreign influences. It is shown that, while the native membership of the Communist Party in this country is small, it is so organized in accordance with instructions received from Moscow, that the members can operate in a way which, under favourable conditions might enable them to influence large numbers of non-Communists. There are also interesting revelations of the dependence of the party and its Press on money from the Communist International.

MR. SAKLATVALA.

A letter, dated October 3, 1933, is given from Mr. Saklatvala to the political bureau of the C.P.U.S. regarding the attitude of the Communist Party to the Labour Party. "There is no such doubt," he says, "in my mind that without drastic measures to build up our party we shall be submerged here by the Labour Party. Parliamentary democracy and tradition have still a very great attraction for the masses.

"In order to overcome this we must adopt measures to fight the Labour Party. We will not succeed to the point of actually wiping it out, but we do not require to do that. What we shall succeed in doing is to give a dangerous shaking to the Parliamentary position of all the right-wingers, and to send them by their turn to patch a peace with the C.P. of any price, and the left wing will be forced into an open fight against the right. We must appeal to the C.P. at Moscow to let us work temporarily along the line I am suggesting. We should adopt the attitude that the I.P. has now deserted its original function and turned itself into a Liberal reformist group like the Irish National Party and that the real political crusade for Socialism has been abandoned by the I.P., therefore the C.P. must now set itself up as the only avowed anti-capitalist party to take such action outside Parliament as will lead to the taking over of the means of production and the abolition of Imperialist exploitation and the consequent blackbills of Britain and Sarajevina to the victor and the vanquished.

"We should then in an open manner invite all U.K. members that take the view to affiliate to the C.P. for the purpose of assisting in carrying out the political-economic struggle of the workers. With the consent of the central committee at Moscow we should deliberately leave the position of those U.K. members to be of an indefinite and temporary nature. This affiliation would greatly weaken the position of right wing N.P.s."

DOMINION ACTIVITIES.

The final section of the Blue Book contains documents dealing with the activities of organizations affiliated with the Communist International, including the Communist Party of Great Britain, in British Dominions, Colonies, and spheres of influence abroad. These include a letter from the colonial department of the British Communist Party to Mr. Saklatvala, containing a memorandum by two non-British undergraduates at Oxford University regarding work done in relation among Indian students. This suggested the desirability of Mr. Saklatvala arranging an appointment with certain of those who would be returning to India in the course of a few weeks. The memorandum said that the 60 Indians, emerging from the halls at Oxford might be divided into the following political categories—Moderate, 12; Socialists, 11; Socialists, 5; I.L.R. and I.P.S., 21 (to help to support the Government); undetermined, 12.

Another letter from the colonial department of the British Communist Party, dated June 25, 1933, embodied a list survey of the progress made in connection with colonial work in India, Egypt, Palestine, Canada, and among African, West, and Chinese students and members of the Homecoming in the East kind of London. With regard to India it is stated that "a considerable portion of our time spent with these Indians has been devoted to the preparation of a programme specifically directed for the various groups of workers in the big towns. This programme is now in progress of preparation and will cover coal, jute, cotton, and village; the ultimate substance being a combination of these into a Workers' Charter with additional items covering peasants. This programme will be used as a rallying centre for the development of a definite Labour movement in India. The three Indians are now anxious to visit the U.K.S.P. and we also see very anxious that this should take place."

Clippings: The Times, 25th June 1926

So Saklatvala continued to make good use of the House to put forward views that the Home Secretary prevented him from putting directly to the people. He also drew the attention of the House to the prejudicial use of the Emergency Powers Act to suppress even the routine meetings that he always held in his constituency, and to the suppression of his meetings in general.

For instance, he explained to the House that:

“There is a democratic understanding as far as I am concerned—it is a definite pledge which I have observed and kept—to at least once a month render an account of what has gone on in Parliament. I do not see why suddenly all such meetings of a general character—which in the past in no single instance have put any strain upon the police—should be prohibited.”

He had been informed by the local police that they were going to prohibit and suppress any meeting that he might try to address in his constituency. Although he was the representative of that constituency in parliament and he was democratically answerable to the electorate there, he was to be prevented

from communicating with them. What price civil rights? What price democracy? What price the relationship between the people and their elected representative in parliament? Saklatvala claimed in the House that these emergency powers were being used, not to control any real national emergency, not on a nationwide and impartial manner, but were being abused merely to further the interests of the Tory Party.

When, in July, the Home Secretary asked the House to extend the Emergency Powers Act for the fourth time, Saklatvala again vehemently voiced his opposition:

“I want the Home Secretary to note that his coming back to the House for the fourth time for these special regulations is an epoch-making event. Here is a strong government, or one presumably strong, with a large majority in the House, armed with laws which are quite sufficient for carrying on the administration of the country, but it comes to the House for the fourth time when as a government it is only two years old, and says that it is incapable of carrying on the administration of the country unless it is armed with most extraordinary and despotic powers... and I say that the only honest course for the government to take is to throw up the sponge, to admit that it is incapable of finding a solution to the present industrial problem, and to tell the country to find persons capable of administering the country with ordinary law.”

I am writing this on November 21st 1989, having seen debate in the House of Commons televised for the first time. One of the most interesting aspects of these pictures was the sight of large numbers of Conservative members leaving the chamber as soon as their leader, the Prime Minister, had recited her little piece. These televised reports will undoubtedly show the British public how badly attended the debates are. It is not a new phenomenon.

On 4th August 1926, during the adjournment debate, it was claimed that a very long recess was needed for over-worked members of the House.

Saklatvala intervened to say:

“The present condition of the House shows about nine members of the Conservative Party present. That has been the maximum attendance on the opposite benches since the Foreign Secretary spoke. It has been known to us that out of the 400 Conservative members, for more than three fourths of the time, scarcely 20 members attend to their duties. To

describe them to the country as an overworked, exhausted band of hard-working men who deserve a three months' holiday, is a grossly misleading statement."

Let us hope that the present restriction on showing pictures of the chamber as a whole will soon be lifted, so that the general public can see how sparsely populated are the benches in that great chamber, seat of the mother of parliaments. Such absenteeism in our workshops and factories would leave the nation bankrupt and, no doubt, would bring down the wrath of MPs on the heads of the offending workers. It would add greatly to the interest of the TV viewers if pictures could be extended to include the bars and dining room in the House, so that we could see our members at play as well as at work. It is frequently emphasised that members have exacting duties to perform behind the scenes in committee; perhaps the public could be informed in the press of the timetable for the various committee meetings and the names of the members attending them.

On the 27th September 1926, Saklatvala spoke upholding the miners' claims for which they were still on strike, in spite of terrible hardship and want for themselves and their families. In the course of a long and detailed speech Saklatvala contended:

"We of the Communist Party, the Cookites or whatever our opponents call us, will continue our education of the miners until they realise that so long as this slave labour exists in the empire, so long the economic position of the British miner will be one of continual danger, and that a permanent peace can be established only when that scandalous part of British imperialism is ended once and for all. The miners must live. Their children must be fed and clothed and medically treated, and they are entitled to certain joys of life.

"If the economic fact is continually proved, generation after generation, that the mining industry is not capable of producing the complete economic requirements of the miner, and at the same time producing royalties, dividends, commissions, large salaries and all kinds of camouflaged dishonest profits for the mine-owners, that clearly indicates to the miner that the time has arrived when, in defence of his wife and children, he must demand the complete abolition of shareholders and royalties, and profits and commissions and individual

control. Until that time, there will not be a permanent settlement of the dispute.

“Even if the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party in the House became a triumvirate to deal with the problem, it is moonshine to say that they would bring about a permanent peace so long as the economic fact brought about by competition between country and country continually demands a raising of hours and a lowering of wages...

“Our appeal to the miners is quite clear. If they want permanent peace... we ask them to rely on their own internal strength and to demand immediately an embargo on foreign coal... The only salvation for the miners is to appeal to their brethren in the trade union movement. They should appeal to every man who stokes a boiler or a locomotive to say that he would not touch foreign coal, and to tell his employer, ‘If you want coal, get British coal and come to terms with the British miner.’”

On 28th September 1926, the Home Secretary again asked the House to extend the Emergency Powers Act. Again Saklatvala opposed the continuance of the Act. In the course of a long argument, he told the following anecdote, illustrating the muddled and arbitrary way in which these emergency powers were being applied. A large procession and a meeting to be addressed by Saklatvala had been advertised ten days or so before they were to take place, under the auspices of the South Wales Miners’ Federation, on 8th September. Late on 7th September, the superintendent of police informed the local agent of the Miners’ Federation verbally that the meeting at Hoelycue and procession were to be cancelled. It was not until the morning of the 8th that police notices appeared prohibiting the procession and adding, “The holding of any meeting at or in the vicinity of Hoelycue is also prohibited.”

Saklatvala asked the House:

“What is ‘the vicinity of Hoelycue’? Does it reach as far as London, Bristol, or even Moscow?... So the miners’ agent ... again telephoned to the Superintendent pointing out that they had another meeting, on which considerable expense had been incurred, at a place a few miles from Hoelycue. He (the Superintendent) said, ‘I cannot tell you whether that also comes within the word vicinity or not.’

“...Seeing the indefiniteness of it, I wired to the Home Secretary, asking

for clarification of the term 'in the vicinity'. I also wired to the Chief Constable, 'With reference to the circular, should you not define vicinity of Hoelycue in actual mileage radius, if you do not desire unnecessary harassment of Labour speakers?'

"...I had to keep running about in order to avoid the so-called area, and the government agent had to go about on a motor cycle to find out where I was. At about 3.30 he found me about 12 miles away, because the South Wales Miners' Federation was determined to have that meeting and had it, but we had no desire to walk into the provocative trap of the constable, or to clash with anybody."

Mr Harney: "A good meeting?"

Mr Saklatvala: "A very good meeting... The other method adopted was this: the authorities had a notice of the particular meeting and the procession a few days before. But the police did not give us five minutes to inform the public that the meeting was cancelled. They rushed the people hither and thither and sent out of the area even the charabancs in which some of the people arrived—[Hon. member: "Charabancs?"]—Yes, the miners have as much right to sit in a charabanc as you have to sit in Rolls Royces..."

"If that was the way in which Regulation 22 was used, it was a wrong way politically. I think the hon and gallant member for Leith (Captain Benn) told us that one of the ambitions of the Home Secretary, as proclaimed by his own followers, is that 'Jix [Joynson-Hicks] is the lad to keep the Reds away,' and if he is simply making use of that regulation to keep up that reputation, he is making a gross abuse of his position in Parliament."

In October, the emergency powers were again on the parliamentary agenda and again Saklatvala spoke on behalf of the miners; yet once more he emphasised that the cheap production of coal within the British Empire was putting unfair competition against the miners of Great Britain. He accused the government:

"There are 50 million tons of coal now raised in the Empire under conditions which are a disgrace to anyone who calls himself a civilised human being. Not only do the present government permit this, but members of the government take a share in the profits, and as long as

this game is allowed to go on, the state of affairs cannot be regarded as a mere accident of the trade, but as a weapon of the class war...

“There is not a particle of truth in the suggestion that the economic position of the coal industry is such that it will not produce sufficient wages for the miners. It will do so if only the government will see to it that the unfair competition created by exploited labour, by their own colleagues and friends, is checked instead of being helped on by exploiters whose names appear every year in the Honours List...”

In the following month, Saklatvala drew the attention of the House to yet another case of the abuse of the Emergency Powers Act by the Chief Constable of Derbyshire, who had verbally told the organisers of two meetings in the county that, if they would prevent Saklatvala from speaking, the meetings could go ahead; but that if Saklatvala were allowed to address the meetings or to take the chair, the meetings would be banned.

His protest was supported by a Labour member, Mr Morgan Jones, who stressed that he had no sympathy with the Communist Party but he maintained that the issue was of interest to “everyone who likes freedom of expression of political opinions.” He agreed with Saklatvala that the emergency powers were being abused and misused, suppressing any political discussions if they happened to relate to the Communist Party.

Two days later, the question of banned meetings was again up for discussion. The Home Secretary made it clear that chief constables had the right to ban any meeting which, in their opinion, was likely to cause a breach of the peace. In the course of that debate Saklatvala argued thus:

“...If I, or any of my communist colleagues, had had a notorious career in the past, if event after event had happened, and that as a result of addressing meetings, riots and brawls had taken place, I can understand that it would give a prima facie cause for anyone honestly to suspect that whenever I addressed a meeting, it would end in a brawl. I have addressed a few thousand meetings throughout the country and there never has been in any instance, any occasion for anyone to be turned out, such as is often the case at meetings held by friends of the Hon. gentleman. Nothing of that sort has ever happened.”

On 29th November 1926, the Home Secretary asked for the eighth time for an extension of the emergency powers. Saklatvala reiterated the view that, if a

Home Secretary could not keep order in the country under the longstanding, ordinary laws of the land, he proved himself to be an incompetent Home Secretary. He again stressed that the powers were not being used to prevent disturbances and riots but rather they were used exclusively against the Communist Party, the opponents of the party represented by the Home Secretary. He mentioned the case of a speech by a Colonel Leather, in which he spoke openly of “bloodshed,” yet there was to be no prosecution under the emergency powers.

“The excuse given was the flimsy excuse that that speech was not delivered in a mining area,” said Saklatvala. He continued:

“The Home Secretary pursued me from the first day of the Regulations, when I had spoken in Hyde Park, and I think the nearest coal mine was much further away from Hyde Park than from where Col. Leather spoke. Hundreds of persons who were arrested and tried, were not arrested and tried because they had spoken so many yards nearer or further away from a coal mine, but because they belonged to the working class movement and were against the coal owners; and whoever has spoken of bloodshed and riot and shooting, so long as he was a coal owner himself or in favour of the coal owners, is not tried under the Regulations...

“I want to draw his attention to the fact... that his own colleague, the Minister of Labour, has delivered a speech which is not only contemptible but is criminal under the Regulations, in which he said, ‘It is [A.J.] Cook’s folly and cowardice that are ruining the miners.’

“Just imagine it. A member of the cabinet, whose family has flourished on the starvation, under-payment and over-production of the miners, whose family has made money out of the blood of the miners, and are today crushing the miners that their future dividends may be higher than they ought to be under a just administration—that minister has the audacity to refer to Cook as carrying on a policy of folly and cowardice. Cook is fighting as a hero against the family of the Minister of Labour, who is one of the worst inhuman exploiters, living on the blood-money and the sweat-money of the miners...

“What I want to point out is that Regulations of this sort... are quite handy weapons... in the hands of one who has always shown himself to

be a party man above everything else. I honour him for being so zealous a member of his party; I do not blame him for it, but I suggest that it is this over-zealousness which induces him to ask for these regulations, rather than his impartial judgement on public peace and public affairs...”

The speech is a long and powerful one. When it was all over, the Home Secretary, Joynson-Hicks, felt constrained to say: “I feel that I should apologise to the House for being the unwitting cause of letting loose the torrent of eloquence which we have just heard from the hon gentleman. But he has, if I may say so, one point for which I admire him very much, and it is that he never loses his temper. He is always courteous in whatever he says.” I think that this observation says much for the character of Saklatvala and also for the then Home Secretary, the one for being always courteous, the other for acknowledging it.

This was to be the last time the Home Secretary appealed to the House for an extension of the emergency powers, because the miners were forced at last to capitulate to the coal owners, accepting longer working hours and reduced wages. There is a limit to everyone’s endurance. The hardest thing for strikers to endure is the knowledge that their fight, however justified and however much it may in the end benefit their families, is, in the short term, causing their wives and children to go short of food and warmth and clothing and is even putting their homes in jeopardy.

It is all too easy for strikers to be starved into submission in any prolonged fight. The threat of starvation is just as much an act of terrorism as the threat of death by quicker and more direct means. It is nonsense for governments all over the world to claim that they will not negotiate with terrorists—all governments, both capitalist and communist, are themselves terrorists; for their ultimate sanction is force, wielded by the Army or by the police or by the withholding of the means of livelihood. When they speak of ‘deterrents’ in law or by their standing armies, the deterrent is always the threat of violence, the instilling of fear, the instilling of terror

**EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT
AND MR. SAKLATVALA.**

—♦—

REFUSAL OF A VISA.

On instructions from Cairo, the Egyptian Legation has refused to *visa* the passport of Mr. Saklatvala, M.P., after he had obtained the British endorsement to visit Egypt. He wrote protesting, and the Legation has replied that their action is in accordance with regulations.

Writing on December 29 to the Secretary of the Egyptian Legation, Mr. Saklatvala said:—"It is somewhat puzzling that after the British Foreign Office, which is in reality a titular Power over Egypt, has granted a passport to a British M.P., after due inquiries, Egypt should condemn that Government and reverse that decision. I am experienced enough to realize that Egypt's refusal may be from Egypt, yet not from the Egyptians. I shall, therefore, thank you to enlighten me as to whether your refusal is based on your own authority, on any standing regulations against members of the British Communist Party, or whether it is the desire of the Egyptian Government to welcome only such British M.P.'s who endorsed the half-million sterling fine and the mulcting of the Sudan, and to refuse admission to those who opposed these measures, or whether the British authorities in Egypt are advising his Egyptian Majesty's Government to prohibit entry into Egypt of such members of the British Parliament as they disapprove of."

In reply the Secretary of the Legation wrote:—"I beg to state that, in accordance with our Consular regulations, endorsement of your passport cannot be granted." Mr. Saklatvala sailed on Thursday last by the P. and O. steamer Razmak for India via Marseilles. He had proposed to spend a few weeks in Egypt on his way back from India next March. In the meantime, he has circularized members of Parliament asking them to raise the question of this refusal of passport in the House of Commons.

Clipping: The Times, 3rd January 1927

It is not only governments, but individuals too who exert their power over each other to induce their fellow-beings to conform to their standards—the parent threatens the child, the teacher threatens the pupil, the manager threatens the worker, the law threatens the citizen, with some sort of punishment against non-conformity. It is inevitable. Terror is necessary to an orderly life—and a disorderly life is a terror in itself. But the hypocrisy in denying the use of terror is not inevitable and is shameful, as any hypocrisy must be.

For a man whose primary political function was the conduct of propaganda for his party, this all-but-total suppression of his meetings from May to November in 1926 was frustrating, both for Saklatvala himself as well as for the Communist Party, whose cause his oratory normally served so ardently and effectively. This mutual irritation may well have been the spur for the

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Comintern to arrange for Saklatvala to visit India and to conduct communist propaganda there.

Whatever the immediate reason, Saklatvala sailed for India at the end of December 1926, arriving in January 1927. The rapturous welcome he received from multitudes of the Indian people must have done much to assuage his recent frustrations in the UK; for the three-month tour could only be described as a great personal triumph for him, and of infinite benefit to the communist movement.

CHAPTER 18

A Return to India

Tour of India in 1927 and correspondence with Mohandas Gandhi. Parsi ceremony for the children incurs disapproval of the Communist Party. Passport endorsed, preventing further visits to India. Foundation of the League Against Imperialism. Second visit to the Soviet Union, 1927.

The following message, printed on cloth, was presented to Saklatvala at a meeting held in Bombay on 24th January 1927:

To Shapurji Saklatvala

Dear Brother,

Bombay, the City of your Birth, welcomes you with all her heart. It has been Bombay's pride and privilege, that all three Indians elected to the British Parliament, have been her own sons: Dadabhai Naoroji, Mancherjee Bhownagree and Shapurji Saklatvala.

Brother, though you were born in wealthy surroundings, you have been from your very youth a true Friend of the Poor, the Suffering and the Sorrowing. Whether in India, or in Europe, you have felt and fought for the Suppressed and the Oppressed—often so singly, and always nobly.

Brother, you are essentially a Citizen of the World. Castes and Creeds, Colour and Sex, Continents and Countries, do not affect you at all. To you, Humanity is One Great Family of the Divine Father; and you strive and struggle and suffer to bring mankind together, in loving links of Unity, Amity and Harmony.

To that noble goal, our great Gandhiji, Rabindranath Tagore, Jagdish Chandra Bose and T.L.Vaswani are all labouring with such love and light; and may you keep that Torch always ablaze abroad.

Brother, as a Friend of the Poor; as a fearless fighter for the Oppressed; as a Lover of Liberty and Freedom for all; and as an untiring Worker and Fighter for Fraternity, Equality and Peace in the World, dear brother, we greet you, we salute you, and we wish you a long and

luminous life, dedicated to the service of our dear Country and of the suffering Humanity at large. Amen!

We remain, Dear Brother, Your Dear Friends and Admirers, Countrymen and Comrades.

While Saklatvala was still aboard SS Razmak sailing towards India, the Evening Star in London reported that “he was recently granted a Passport after considerable delay, which resulted in a written protest to the Prime Minister.”

On 15th January 1927, the Bombay Chronicle, describing Saklatvala as “one of the finest orators, one of the most magnetic personalities, and one of the most consistent of India’s sons,” also reported the delay in the issuing of Saklatvala’s passport for India, which had only been granted after consultation with the government of India: “...It rendered impossible any pre-arrangement of meetings... So Mr Saklatvala goes to India unheralded and without any suspicion of advance agent or stage manager.”

The Bombay Chronicle of 15th January 1927 reported, under the eye-catching headline ‘I Come to Serve’:

“We publish below the following special message written by Mr Shapurji Saklatvala in response to a cable sent by us to him. It was handed over by him to our representative who was the first to see him on board. At the request of Mr Saklatvala, a copy of this message has been sent to all Indian papers.

“‘Yes, I have at last come to Bombay and to my mother, India, from the mother-country of my children.’ He said he was coming after a gap of 13 years. ‘That period of 13 years, first with the Great War and then with the Workers’ Revolution in Russia, has made history for almost 130 years for mankind... The war had many aims, some declared ones and some concealed ones. However, it is the results that have to be reckoned with.

“Nations and even sections of nations are divided up, they are asked to live in water-tight compartments politically and commercially. They are all to develop nationalist patriotism based upon suspicion and dread of their neighbour. The doctrine of implicit obedience to a strong governing class being the only safety for the masses is being preached openly... The powerful victor states are seeking more power and are

extending their influence over the newly created smaller states and nationalities...

“On the other hand the Russian revolution has made and still perseveres in another call. It wants to break down old barriers of nationality and creed. It calls upon the masses to realise that they are never really safe unless they govern themselves and their state from the workshop, or the farmyard and field upwards. It proclaims for international unity based on mutual economic safety in place of influence and domination of one nationality over another...

“When I come to India in this condition of the world, I realise I shall meet with a changed atmosphere, changed mentalities, and even altered personalities. There will be much for me to see, to learn, and to ponder over, and there will be quite a lot for me to impart out of my political experiences and observations... I come to serve and to serve with devotion, but not merely with emotion; I want to make my service of as much practical value and usefulness to my homeland as one humanly can, but for that I want the help, the good will and the trust of everyone who is working in the cause of India. I shall need every ounce of guidance, of good temper, of comradeship in war or peace.

“Therefore I appeal to the Indian press to broadcast my humble request. I desire to quarrel with, or to object to, nobody... I desire to work out a harmonious, pleasing and serviceable design to the pattern of my daily experience of the struggle of man, the sorrows of woman, and the suffering of children. There has to be honest disagreement without disagreeableness, there must be severe and outright analytical criticisms of policies without malice...

“Majorities do not overwhelm me, minorities, and small minorities, do not dishearten me or bring weariness on my brow. I face my issues calmly and I bear my Party's standard singly in the British Parliament of 615 members. So I am trained not to value opinions by counting noses...

“I am a believer in the human heart, and I have come directly to speak to it; I am a believer in the masses, in the poor, in the worker, in the peasant, and so, till I have met them, and till they have permitted me to speak to them, I shall say ‘au revoir’ to the pen and the printed word. I shall of course come back to you in my effort to bring about proletarian

unity from Battersea to Bombay and beyond.

“And now, my greetings to you all, and my salutations to the memory of Shradhanand. Sh. Saklatvala.”

It was reported in the press that hundreds of admirers assembled on Ballard Pier long before the boat was sighted. The article goes on to say:

“As soon as the steamer touched the wharf, representatives of the press and various organisations rushed on board to take precedence in honouring the great man. Heaps of garlands and bouquets were showered on him... Mr Saklatvala was all in smiles while the imposing ceremony of the reception was going on

“The curious thing about the whole function was that Mr Saklatvala refused to be garlanded. He smilingly remarked that he, as only an unknown soldier in the field did not deserve the unique honour that was done to him. He collected all the garlands on his arms and intimated his desire of making an offering of them on the grave of the Late Lokmanya Tilak, the ‘known soldier’ as he said, who really deserved, even in his death, all the honour which India could accord to her patriot sons...

“On landing on the wharf, Mr Saklatvala was immediately surrounded by enthusiastic crowds... it took almost half an hour for his car to bugle its way through the throng... Followed by many of his friends, Mr Saklatvala arrived at Chowpati and in profound reverence, he placed all the garlands and bouquets offered to him on the little stone memorial erected on the beach in memory of the Late Lokmanya...”

[Editor’s note: Bal Keshav Gangadhar Tilak (1856 - 1920) was an early leader of the Indian Independence Movement; his slogan “Swaraj (self-rule) is my birthright, and I shall have it!” remains well-known in India].

It is sadly interesting to note that Saklatvala was not invited to stay with his younger brother, Sorab, who, presumably would have found the public expression of his older sibling’s political beliefs an embarrassment in the capitalist circles in which he worked and socialised. Saklatvala was made welcome and stayed with one of his cousins, Jamsetji Saklatvala. This slight from his younger brother must have hurt my father deeply but, so far as I know, he never mentioned his disappointment to anyone, not even to my mother. (This same brother made me most welcome in his home after my father’s death and showed me great affection, generosity and kindness; I could

not help silently remembering the hurt he had inflicted on Father; but the good manners required of a guest, and the deference due from a niece to an uncle forced me to conceal my latent anger).

While Saklatvala was still on the high seas, the Sunday Worker of 2nd January 1927 wrote:

“Unlike the tired Leader of the Labour Party, Shapurji Saklatvala is not going abroad merely to bask in the sun. He says he is going to work for the brotherhood of Indian and British workers. He will certainly have a very energetic try. His record here in England is warrant of that. I have his diary of engagements for the past year before me as I write, and would offer a bet that Sak’s list of meetings addressed would beat that of any other propagandist in Britain. [This in spite of the cancellation of meetings under the emergency powers and the time spent in prison!]

“Bad health, including a very ‘dicky’ heart, does not deter Sak for a moment. On one page of his diary you may see entries showing that on two successive days he spoke at four meetings in Northumberland and Durham and two in his own constituency of Battersea. That means that during the intervening night he travelled South by train, sleeping as he always does, wrapped in his overcoat, even on the floor of the corridor in a crowded train—certainly never in a first class sleeper—but Sak did not say to the pressmen in Marseilles, ‘I am tired and need a rest.’”

Saklatvala wrote to the Daily Herald from India:

“I am not going on any idle holiday. I am going to make another great effort from the Indian end to pull the two working-class brotherhoods together. Every ounce of goodwill and encouragement from individuals and organisations of all types in the British Labour Movement is needed, and I appeal to you all to send me a word of support, a voice of encouraging good cheer for the poor, down-trodden Indian workers from every trade union and socialist branch...”

Such a crowded schedule was to be maintained and even increased during Saklatvala’s three month tour of India. On the same day on which he arrived, Friday 14th January, he addressed a meeting organised by the Trade Union Provincial Committee in the afternoon, and in the evening addressed a crowded meeting of textile workers. The following day he addressed a huge meeting and public reception in the Sir Cawasji Jehangir Hall, where,

according to press reports:

“[Saklatvala] spoke for an hour and a half and his whole speech was permeated with humour, sarcasm and wit, which kept the audience roaring with laughter all the time. At the end he was surrounded by a surging crowd that virtually smothered him with their congratulations and cheers.”

Saklatvala travelled all over India and was rapturously received by audiences numbering thousands wherever he went. The Indian newspapers reported all his speeches and triumphs.

After only a few days, the Bombay Chronicle wrote of Saklatvala:

“Whether he is at a tea-party or a reception, a Labour meeting or a public demonstration of thousands, he avails himself of every opportunity to drill his fresh and dynamic views into the hearts of his audience with his magnificent oratory, of which, indeed, there is no parallel in India today. Wherever he goes he enlivens the atmosphere and electrifies his hearers.”

He addressed big Muslim rallies (over 6,000 attended a meeting addressed by him in Bombay) and, while he advised them that the Muslims of the world should be united and should call a world conference every year, he also stressed the need for all peoples in India, both Hindu and Muslim, to unite as Indians and to live harmoniously together. As a Parsi and being neither Hindu nor Muslim, he was in a strong position to call for such unity. He addressed meetings in Hindi, Gujarati and English and was equally eloquent in all three languages.

A few days after his arrival he visited Navsari, his birthplace, and the freedom of the municipality was conferred upon him in a moving ceremony. In expressing his thanks, Saklatvala said that a life of simplicity was with him a religion and it was not ordained for him to receive honours. He said he was proud to be a citizen of Navsari that had given to India a Dadabhai Naoroji and a Tata. After the ceremony he went to the Lunsieni Maidan and addressed a huge gathering of thousands there. On his arrival in Navsari he had once again been presented with garlands and bouquets; he went, before attending any public meetings, to call on his Aunt, Mrs Bamji (his mother's sister) and presented her with all the garlands and flowers as a token of his respect and affection.

This is but one instance of the profound family feeling that Father always had, even for those members of the family whose conduct in private or public affairs ran contrary to his own political or even moral convictions. He was, after all, the only socialist in a clan of highly successful capitalists, but he loved the clan nevertheless; he loved the uncle who, in his eyes, had wronged his father. While he deplored the concepts of the family business, he still loved the individual members of the family as his kin—these were bonds which nothing could sever.

About three miles from Navsari, in a small village named Eru, a patriotic young man, Mr Nathubhai, was conducting a night school for children of the depressed classes. Saklatvala asked to see it and was taken there at 10pm. There he found 43 boys and 30 girls studying together. He learned from them that they earned one or two annas a day and depended upon philanthropic citizens for slates and books.

The Bombay Chronicle reported:

“Full of that milk of human kindness which distinguishes him he chatted with the boys and advised them to become thoroughly educated. He specially exhorted the girls to study and learn to be worthy mothers and to bring up a race of patriots with a burning love for humanity. He told them all that in education lay their salvation—moral, material and mental. He then advised them to teach children when they grew up just as their teacher was teaching them without expectation of material reward but out of love of service to humanity.”

Saklatvala's relationship with the Indian National Congress was a complicated one. He fully upheld their objective of freedom for India, but did not agree with their methods of obtaining it. And, of course, he disagreed profoundly with Gandhiji on many issues. The two men met during Saklatvala's visit. They also exchanged letters, which were published by the Communist Party in December 1927.

Saklatvala fired the first salvo on March 8th, writing from Bombay:

“Dear Comrade Gandhi, We are both erratic enough to permit each other to be rude in order to freely express oneself correctly, instead of getting lost in artificiality of phraseology... Let us understand, openly, whether the ‘Charka’ movement is or is not an attack upon machinery, upon physical sciences, upon material progress. If it is so, then it is a

most damaging disservice to our country and must be stopped. If it is not so, then your ardent followers ought not to be allowed to believe that it is so... The methods adopted in other countries of organising labour and peasantry and guiding and leading the workers in factories or farms to obtain their rights, have produced far more benevolent and efficient results in human life than the two-annas-a-day charka movement will ever do...

“Now, where do we stand with regard to the primary object of the charka movement and its position today? Are you shifting your limit of 2 years to 4 or to 20 or to 200 years? Do you suggest that a rise of 2 annas a day say of the whole population is a process which is going to drive the British out of this country?... Why do you persevere in hand-spinning with such superstitious adherence, and why not introduce alongside of it other more profitable handicrafts...? You are not teaching people to wear more clothes than before, your own example would rather lead them to wear less. At the same time you are teaching more people to produce clothes...

“The acuteness with which the class war operates upon the wage-earners of India is more than in most of the advanced European countries, where, thanks to the organisation of labour, several of the cruelties of class war are being moved. Just look at the palatial houses of any mill-owner of Bombay, Ahmedabad, Nagpur or Calcutta and look at the disgraceful and diabolical one-room tenements of the workers, devoid of all furniture, appointments at any embellishments. Such acute difference between dwelling conditions of the rich and the poor does not exist in Great Britain, America or any part of Europe where labour is organised...

“That is not all. The class war in India is murderous and more cruelly murderous because it is infanticidal... You will find that the mortality of infants under 12 months of age among the rich would be about 90 per 1000, whereas the infantile mortality in the municipal wards where the factory workers live would be from 600 to even 800 per 1000. Such a damnable attack upon human life is unknown in those countries where the working classes are organised.

“To defend such a position is criminal, but for anybody to go even

further and to throw dust in the eyes of the world that class war is not operating acutely in India is inhuman and monstrous, and I have always felt that through your misguided sentimentality, you have preferred to be one of them. Class war is there and will continue to be there until any successful scheme of communism abolishes it. But in the meantime, not to struggle against its evil effects from day to day is a doctrine which cannot appeal to any genuine humanitarian.

“...You emphatically argued that the charka movement was making organisation. I emphatically deny it... Then we come to the psychological value of the movement. This WAS great. It BEGAN well... But why create a psychology if you do not intend to mobilise the spirit so created...?”

“Whatever may be the feelings of some of your admirers, I hope you and I are both agreed that we are both very common and ordinary persons... If your purpose is to give your share in the national and political work, your approach to the people should be on terms of absolute equality and your task must be to inspire confidence in them.

“From this point of view you must stop allowing people to address you as a Mahatma. I have heard from your many friends that you have never wished the word to be used... You can easily refuse to receive letters so addressed, and you can easily refuse to attend functions where you are advertised with this appellation. You have only to express your wish publicly instead of whispering about it to a few friends and the thing would be done...”

“You should rigorously stop crowds and processions of human beings, specially poor women and little children, passing you with folded hands and downcast eyes. Once you create this abject submission of man to man, no wonder that you should yourself despair of obtaining civil disobedience from your followers...”

“Then there is one thing that I witnessed at Yeotmal which has hurt me greatly... Your work regarding the removal of untouchability is grand in its aspiration, and is not bad in its success as it is generally carried on. However, I strongly object to your permitting my countrymen and countrywomen to touch your feet and put their fingers in their eyes. Such touchability appears to be more damnable than untouchability,

and I would sooner wish that two persons did not touch each other than that any one human being should be touched by another in the way in which you were touched.

“The depressed classes were subject to a sort of general disability, but this new phase of a man of the depressed class worshipping the feet of his deliverer is a more real individual depression and degradation of life, and however much you misunderstand me, I must call upon you to stop this nonsense... You are ruining the mentality and the psychology of these villagers for another generation or two... Politically this career of yours is ruinous, and from a humanitarian point of view its degenerating influence appears to me to be a moral plague...”

“I have put down my candid thoughts in the above paragraphs not with a view to disburden my soul of personal grievance... What I am really attempting to do is to disburden your mind of a lot of confusion and contradiction and to demand from you, in the name of all sufferers not merely that you stop adding to their sufferings but that you come forward and live with us as a brother with brothers, and work with us in a manner and form in which we all consider your service to be most valuable and you to be most fitted...”

“What I want of you is that you be a good old Gandhi, put on an ordinary pair of khaddar trousers and coat and come out and work with us in the ordinary way. Come and organise with us... our workers, our peasants, our youths, not with a metaphysical sentimentality but with a set purpose, a clear-cut and well-defined object and by methods such as by experience are making success for all human beings.

“Instead of developing the vanity of making under-clothing or over-clothing as a primary object of administration, as an ordinary rough-and-tumble man, making your food and clothing secondary and unimportant items that should not require any special thought, you would still be able to undo great mistakes of the past, to make up for the damage done to India and other Asiatic countries, and be one of the successful workers for India as other successful leaders have actually worked for their country...”

“Therefore, before I go, I should like you to get up one morning as from a dream and to say, ‘Yes,’ and many of us can soon be put together in a

good team, and set about putting an end to so many deplorable conditions of life in India, about which none of us has any doubt.

“I remain, Yours fraternally, Shapurji Saklatvala”

[Editor’s note: the charka was a spinning wheel for producing khadi (homespun cloth) which Gandhi extolled as a symbolic and practical means of boycotting British-made textiles and furthering the economic independence of the poor].

Gandhi’s reply was published as an open letter in the Bombay Daily Mail of March 17th (he explained in a later letter that he did not at the time have an address to which he could send a personal reply—though I would have thought that a man of reasonable resourcefulness would have been able to find one). Not surprisingly, he did not get up one morning as from a dream and say ‘yes.’ Gandhi wrote:

“Comrade’ Saklatvala [I think the fact that he puts this form of address in inverted commas suggests that he preferred his normal title of Mahatma to the unaccustomed one of Comrade, used by Saklatvala] is dreadfully in earnest. His sincerity is transparent. His sacrifices are great. His passion for the poor is unquestioned. I have therefore given his fervent, open appeal to me that close attention which that of a sincere patriot and humanitarian must command. But in spite of all my desire to say ‘yes’ to his appeal, I must say ‘no’ if I am to return sincerity for sincerity...”

The two men had further correspondence dealing mainly with Gandhiji’s organisation of the workers of Ahmedabad, which he kept outside the All India Trade Union Congress. Needless to say, neither of them ever came any closer to agreement on their disparate methods of bettering the lot of the Indian people.

Saklatvala knew that for him openly to criticise a man revered by millions as a Mahatma was inviting his own unpopularity; but, on the whole, he was admired for his candour even by Gandhi’s ardent followers and earned the approbation of many who, like himself, abhorred the ‘holy man’s’ approach to matters mundane. Neither their exchange of letters nor their personal meeting brought them any nearer to agreement. Saklatvala continued to believe that Gandhi’s concept of the struggle for freedom was, in fact, helping to maintain the British grip of the country—he felt he was playing into the hands of the

British.

When the two men met and discussed their differences face-to-face in Yeotmal, there was no rapprochement, and although before their talks there had been much speculation and interest shown by the press, neither of them said much about their meeting. Saklatvala was, no doubt, extremely disappointed, because he seems always to have hoped that Gandhi would put his undoubted powers of leadership into a united effort and that he would promote a movement more practical than the promotion of spinning. It was unrealistically optimistic ever to envisage being able to persuade Gandhi to his way of approaching the problem of imperialism.

How distressed he would have been to see that the policies of the Indian National Congress, combined with those of the British Raj and the Muslim League, ended in the disintegration of the Indian nation, which has been so disastrously fragmented both physically and emotionally. (Indeed, it sometimes seems as if every man would like to set up a national frontier around his own backyard.) How despairing he would have been to see, more than forty years after the departure of the British, the persistence of poverty and illiteracy and an ever-widening gulf between the various religious factions, still savagely spilling each other's blood in their so-called service of God.

We will never know if the communist creed as recommended by Saklatvala would have brought greater or lesser happiness, but certainly the policies which he deplored have not brought the prosperity and peace that national liberation should have bestowed upon the people. But the wealthy are born with their hands in the pockets of the poor, and will never allow them to prosper; and man's greed will outlast any man's creed. Though I suppose it is better that the plunderers are now at least Indian plunderers—there might be some consolation in that for the down-trodden drudges of free India.

Experience has taught us, too, that so-called communist states provide all too fertile a soil in which tyranny and torture can flourish—so there is certainly no real grounds for believing that the introduction of a distorted communism into India would have produced anything better. Surely, Christ did not envisage that his advocacy of brotherly love would result in the Inquisition and the burning at the stake of one human being by another; and neither did Marx envisage the possibility of a Stalin rising in a society following his version of brotherly love; but man's cruelty is not so easily conquered—it is, like a weed,

an indomitable survivor.

While Saklatvala was in India, the seventh annual session of the All India Trade Union Congress took place in Delhi on March 12th and 13th. Saklatvala had, of course, been closely associated with the movement even before its inception and he was, as a visitor, invited to address the Congress. There were already deep divisions and dissensions within the trade union movement, and it was reported in the press that the meeting was attended largely by the right wing of the movement. The Bombay Chronicle reported that the only fighting speech was made by Comrade Saklatvala.

In a letter to the editor of the Bombay Chronicle, Saklatvala put forward his proposals for the education of the peasants and agricultural workers in the villages in India. He wrote:

“Thousands of students responded to the call of the Congress in 1921... with determination and devotion to become life-long servants of our dear Motherland. This call of the Congress was, indeed, the call of Comrade Gandhi endorsed and accepted by Congress.

“I was at that time yearning to come to India to take my share of the work, but my financial and other circumstances did not permit. I felt that the call was a good one, and the inspiration underlying it was a noble one, but the programme ahead of it was a vacant one.

“The great need of our country is to organise the peasants as well as the industrial workers, to inspire them with a confidence and a belief in themselves, and to arouse a political and class consciousness within them, so that they may be able to free themselves from their burdens instead of being victims to them under mis-belief of religious or civic virtues. This task cannot be performed by book education, or by thumping oratory of a travelling agitator...

“I wanted all our educated and devoted nationalist students to be mobilised into an organisation, galvanised by a nationalist fervour, and at the same time tempered with a personal humility. I want them even now in a methodical and in an organised manner to enter agricultural villages, factories, mines, dockyards, railway yards, and every place of human activity, as bona fide workers within those activities.

“I do not want them to go as external and superior preachers or welfare workers or advisers, but I want them to take their place with our

oppressed classes as one of them on terms of equality, doing the same hard and unpleasant work, eking out the same precarious existence, and suffering the same indignities and degradation of human life and human rights. Then they should under the guidance of a central organisation for all India, lead the peasants and the ignorant workers onto a path of self-assertion, and of defence against the might of the privileged class, and then of demands for the ultimate rights of their own class.

“India has about 6 lakhs of villages [i.e. 600,000], and about 20,000 places of modern industrial organisations. A band of 70,000 young educated men and 30,000 young educated women, whom Comrade Gandhi’s inspiring call makes available, could launch out on a gigantic programme of an Indian revival and produce results within 12 months...

“And now my last word. Can we not give up the garlands and the bouquets which in their nature and by traditional usage are an offering? How I wish that before I go, we offer to our guests little red flags to be worn as button-holes to serve as an emblem of equality and service. Let the red flag as a ground work of international brotherhood bear upon it different emblems like the Charka, or the Hindu Trident (Trishul) or the Moslem Crescent, or even the royal crown when the Liberals and moderates organise their meetings, but let us fall in a march with the world that is seeking for justice, equality, and national and international unity, or all put in one [word] ‘Bolshevism’.”

During his visit, the British government was sending Indian troops to fight their battles in China and opposition to this was another point of common agreement between Saklatvala and Indian Congress leaders. When Saklatvala went earlier than had been expected to Delhi, it was largely to discuss this issue with Indian leaders.

On 28th January, a mass meeting of over 5000 was convened in the Queens Gardens in Delhi to protest against the use of Indian troops in China. Pandit Motilal Nehru was in the chair and introduced Saklatvala to the assembly, and when Saklatvala rose to speak he was given an enthusiastic ovation. He said the meeting was called in order to tell the people of China that Indian forces were sent to China against the will of the Indian people and despite the strong disapproval of the Indian nation, which was, however, powerless to prevent it.

In moving a resolution expressing the sympathy of the citizens of Delhi with the Chinese people, Mr Iyengar asked why the blood of Indians should be shed for depriving the freedom of China, which was not an enemy of India.

He said, "It is not because India is near to China that Indian troops are being sent, but because India is a subject country. In other countries, the opinion of the people was taken before sending their troops out. In India they were debarred from even expressing their opinion."

Maulana Mahomed Ali, winding up the debate, said he would lay himself on the rails to stop a train laden with Indian troops for China, and he advised others to do the same.

Early in February, after his visit to Nagpur, Saklatvala went to Karachi, where a ceremonial welcome awaited him and a procession formed at the railway station and accompanied him through beflagged streets. A public meeting, attended by several thousand people, was packed to such an extent that some doors and windows were damaged. The following morning Saklatvala went to the Labour headquarters; in the afternoon he held a press conference; at 5pm he gave a talk to a gathering of political leaders of varying shades of opinion; then at 6.15pm, under the auspices of the Railway Union, he gave another lecture; later on the same evening he addressed a vast crowd on the Idgah Maidan, decrying that the lives of Indian labourers were no better than the lives of beasts.

Thus he worked every day during this exhausting but no doubt exhilarating tour of his country, with a vigour undiminished by the heat and the size of the meetings he was constantly addressing.

A mass meeting was held in Congress House, primarily to protest against sending Indian troops to fight the Chinese, with whom, it was stressed, the people of India had no quarrel and certainly no cause for war. As always, Saklatvala was greeted with a hearty ovation. It was reported that "his speech was full of wit which threw his audience into roars of laughter while his cogent arguments transposed them into serious and thoughtful mood." He said events had moved so swiftly in China that they could not hold too many meetings to protest strongly against what was going on:

"Chinamen do not demand Chinese judges and magistrates in Great Britain to protect Chinamen's interests. China does not send battalions to Liverpool where Chinamen abound to protect them, or to London

where Chinamen sell their goods. (laughter) ...India should therefore show to the world the unconstitutional method adopted by Britain in sending Indian troops to China against the wishes of the Indian people... It was a great abuse of power, and showed that Britain was a danger to the world..."

It had been claimed that the intentions of the British were essentially peaceful and that they only wanted the right to trade in China. Saklatvala contended that America sold goods in India, but they did not want to send their Viceroy to India. Japan sold more goods in India than India wanted, but they did not send their Commander-in-Chief. Chinamen were sending goods to England, but they did not send Chinese battalions. But to send troops to sell goods was characteristic of the British government—he did not mean the British nation but the British government. The methods of selling goods by the British were so unrighteous that they needed gunboats to sell their goods. (laughter)

He asked, "Is not Great Britain selling goods in France, or Italy or America? Why does she not send her troops to those countries also to protect her merchants?" (laughter) India must demand most emphatically the return of Indian troops from China. India, he claimed, had been trading with China long before the British knew how to trade with that country; the Chinese would treat Indian merchants as brothers, while the British would not allow Indian merchants into their white men's clubs and gymkhanas.

Having dealt with the question of Indian troops in China, Saklatvala addressed the meeting on more general social and political problems and explained, as he explained at all his meetings, the principles of communism.

Similar meetings were held in all the major cities, and Saklatvala was received wherever he went with great affection and acclaim; it was, I think, probably the most emotionally demanding and rewarding period of his whole political life. As always he travelled extensively and tirelessly, giving meetings that sometimes did not start until after 10 at night because he was speaking in so many different places. The tour went on until April 9th.

On the eve of his departure, at a farewell meeting in Bombay, Dr Deshmukh in the chair said:

"The other day, the Parsi community of Bombay honoured him as their representative [cheers]. I say we citizens of Bombay look upon him as the pride of the city. [applause] All India will be proud to claim him as

their best son and even the whole world will do him honour as an international hero. [continued applause] I hope it will not be long before Comrade Saklatvala again sets his foot on Indian soil.”

Amid deafening applause Saklatvala rose to reply and allowed himself a rare expression of personal feeling. He said,:

There are certain moments in a man’s life, which are more difficult than the normal ones. These are the moments when emotion is more overpowering than reason. At this moment, I also do feel a little overwhelmed, not with the thought that you have met with rejoicings that at last I am going back [in spite of the hurt of his impending departure, he could not resist a joke], but with the thought that you have met to encourage and assure me that I am of you, I am one of you and I shall ever remain inseparably with you... I feel confidence, not the confidence of a blustering politician but the confidence of a hopeful brother...”

In answer to a question about the murder of Swami Shradhandji, he said he had written to Professor Indra, the late Swami’s son, asking him to send a petition to the High Court asking pardon for the murderer of Swamiji. He said:

“India should be the first country in the world where we should abolish that savage system of capital punishment. I don’t believe in hanging and execution. The system of execution is, according to me, responsible for the system of murder. I don’t believe that execution is either sensible, scientific, nor a deterrent.”

Concluding, Saklatvala said, “Though I am leaving you, I do not feel like leaving.” He was then garlanded, amidst what the papers described as “sky-rending applause.”

On 9th April 1927, surrounded by throngs of emotionally charged admirers, Saklatvala sailed from the shores of India for the last time, away from the land of his fathers, from which he was to be forever exiled by the democratic government of his children’s motherland. Had he known at that poignant moment that the British government was never again to allow him to return to the land of his birth, his leave-taking would have been more heartrending still. But I will speak of that later.

During his many visits to Bombay, he had naturally spent as much time as his overcrowded schedule would allow with his sister. She had been very upset to learn that none of Shapurji’s five children had been initiated into the Parsi

faith. She, as all the rest of the family, were still ardent and strict followers of the Zoroastrian religion. She persuaded him that, whatever his personal beliefs, he did not have the right to withhold from his children their participation in the religion of their forefathers.

So one of the first things he did on his return to London was to arrange for the Parsi ceremony of a Navjote to be performed on all of us. (It was to be only the third time this ceremony had been performed in England, the first time being only the year before, on the son of one of Father's close friends). Fresh pomegranate leaves were required for some of the ritual and these were generously supplied by Kew Gardens, to whom my father, resourceful as ever, applied for help. He wrote down all the prayers in Roman script and proceeded to teach us every morning; we were not released to go to school until we had learnt the day's quota by heart—and there were therefore some very fraught and tearful mornings, for to be late for school was unthinkable.

For my part, the fear of unpunctuality put me in such a panic that the learning of the unfamiliar words became a nightmare, but Father was relentless, stern and unyielding. We all lined up at the bottom of his bed, and were only allowed to depart as each one of us recited the required portion of our devotions. Being the youngest (and, I fear, the most stupid), I was always the last to leave, and standing there in solitude, watching a clock as relentless as Father, was enough to add to my natural nervousness. But eventually the task was done and we were all word perfect.

Three priests were to officiate at the two ceremonies; one for my sister and myself, and one for my three brothers. But we were taken through the prayers and taught the significance and details of the ceremony by a most kindly and gentle priest who became a close friend to us all, R.R. Desai. It was during this period of preparation that Mr Desai and his house-keeper, Mrs Neal, were invited to dinner. Mother had the electric oven and all the burners going full blast, cooking an elaborate meal. Father, as usual when expecting guests, had put on all the lights in the house and switched on the electric radiators.

This all proved too much for the immature electric system and, while we were entertaining this apostle of light, the whole house was suddenly plunged into darkness, the cooker and the radiators gave up the struggle, and the evening was threatened with disaster. But in those days, help was quickly at hand, and a telephone call to the electric company brought immediate succour; the

service was restored in time to finish the cooking, a concave and soggy cake being the only lasting victim of the hiatus in supply.

Perhaps the disaster of the lights that evening should have warned Father of impending doom. Our ceremonies were to be held in Caxton Hall, Westminster, on 22nd July before a large audience and with many pressmen present.

Father was to be hauled over the coals by the Communist Party for participating in a religious ceremony, contrary to the tenets of communism. Why had he not asked their permission first, they demanded. He told them frankly that he knew they would refuse permission, that he had certain family obligations which had to be met and that he had therefore gone ahead with this private and family ceremony and only told them about it when it was too late to stop it. It had never been presented to us as a religious undertaking. Father made it plain that he believed neither in prayer nor in any barrier-building, religious ceremonial, but he said Ali Fui (his sister) would be very unhappy if we did not have it, that it did us no harm and made her happy; it was in that spirit that the service was conducted. But I don't think the die-hards of the Communist Party ever forgave him.

At the time of the offending ceremony, Saklatvala was recuperating after an operation for a severe and persistent throat infection, no doubt due to the strain and over-exertion of the Indian tour; he was to endure failing health for much of the rest of the year. The operation was performed in a nursing home very close to our house by an eminent Hindu surgeon, K.M. Pardhy. Father had been having treatment there for some time after his return from India. The matron and nurses were all very fond of Father and were always most kind to him and to all of us. They treated both my sister and myself during our childhood. (And when Father had his fatal heart attack in 1936, it was Matron who was first on the scene.)

Dr Fram Gotla, our family doctor and a lifelong friend of Father, issued a statement to the press saying, "Indeed, you can tell him and his friends that he sacrificed his health for his work and that he must moderate his programme of toil, for only by reasonable care will he keep the health he as regained." Photographs of Father at the Navjote ceremony show him with his neck bandaged, and on photographs taken during the whole of this period, he appears thinner and very drawn and obviously ill. Indeed, he himself did not

actually participate in the ceremony at all, but remained seated in an armchair throughout, due to his convalescent state.

Nonetheless, Saklatvala was to be as active as ever during this period. On May Day 1927 he and Harry Pollitt addressed a mass meeting in Hyde Park, followed by another in the Albert Hall in the evening; on 12th June he, Pollitt and other Communist leaders were at a rally in Trafalgar Square. On 19th June he addressed a crowd of 1200 people in Crumlin, where he was accompanied by my mother (she did go with him from time to time, but I think she went with him on this occasion because he was not well enough to make such a journey on his own). But throughout his indisposition he only missed one week of House of Commons debates, when he also had to cancel all his public engagements; this was announced in the press on 8th July.

In spite of the little lapse from grace over our Navjote, the Communist Party of Great Britain at its annual conference (held in another Caxton Hall, in Salford, Lancashire) showed its appreciation of the great contribution Saklatvala had made to the work of the party during his Indian visit:

“Comrade Saklatvala toured India on behalf of the Party during the first months of the year, getting a magnificent reception everywhere, and advocating in particular that the National Movement should adopt a programme of demands for the workers and peasants. His controversy with M.K. Gandhi over the question of the independent class organisation for the workers received wide publicity. His visit undoubtedly did much to stimulate the movement for an All India Workers’ and Peasants’ Party, a highly important field for Indian Communists...”

Alas, the communists were not the only body politic to appreciate the importance of Saklatvala’s impact on the jewel in the imperialist crown. On 5th September 1927 it was announced that the government had cancelled the endorsement for India on Saklatvala’s passport. Of course, permission for him to go to India in 1926 had been granted only after considerable delay and with great reluctance.

The effects of his travels in India must have caused the Secretary of State for India to wish that his journey had never been sanctioned. It so happened that the Viceroy, accompanied by Earl Winterton, went on a tour of Indian cities during the period of Saklatvala’s visit; and the citizens of some of the most

important centres turned out in their thousands to welcome Saklatvala, while they frequently boycotted any civic welcome accorded to the Viceroy. This must indeed have caused those eminent personages not a little chagrin. One might even venture to think that a certain element of pique might have entered into their decision to prevent Saklatvala from repeating his triumph ever again.

Of recent years we have heard a great deal of criticism of various communist regimes, for their disregard of human rights in refusing to allow their countrymen to leave their homeland to journey to distant lands with which they had no natural links; it has always been implied that communism was the only system to withhold human rights in this way. But the capitalist governments of Britain, both Conservative and Labour, never restored my father's human right to return to the land in which he was born. Human rights are not safe under any political regime, and no political system is blameless in this area.



Clipping: The Times, 5th September 1927

The fact that Father was primarily an internationalist did not in any way diminish the intense love he had for India; indeed, it was his desire to free his

own people from imperialism which was the spur that led him to desire freedom for all other peoples also. To hold him as an enforced and permanent exile from his country and from his family who lived there was a cruel transgression against human rights and liberty and one that cannot be justified or forgiven. He was a ‘refusenik’ in this country under a capitalist, not a communist, regime. It was, without doubt, the greatest hurt that was ever inflicted upon him—a shameful act by shameless men.

While Saklatvala was in India, the League Against Imperialism was founded on 7th April 1927 at a conference in Brussels, with Fenner Brockway as its first international chairman; but on Brockway’s return to England, the ILP disapproved of his close association with the League, which they thought (probably correctly) was communist-inspired. So Brockway resigned the chair and James Maxton replaced him. Saklatvala was elected to its executive committee later in the same year and continued to be actively involved with that body. In August he participated in a conference of the League in Cologne.

In 1927, the Soviet Union celebrated the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution and several specially invited guests, Saklatvala among them, spent several days in the USSR. Saklatvala was favourably impressed with the progress that had been made since his earlier visit in 1923. During the celebratory programme, he and William Gallagher addressed vast crowds in Red Square. In his address, Saklatvala alluded to the hypocrisy of the so-called democratic system of capitalist governments.

“I sit in Westminster,” he proclaimed,

“making laws for India, and, as an Indian, I am the despised slave of that Parliament and under the orders of an autocratic and idiotic Minister like Chamberlain, I am now told not to go back to my own country. That is parliamentary democracy.”

Later in his speech, appealing to the visitors from all over the world, he said:

“Ask you friends now to realise what we have witnessed in Leningrad, what we have witnessed in Moscow and other towns of the Soviet Republics, which probably our Russian comrades have not realised—it is a new humanity, an altogether new character of freedom... This is success conferred upon the world after our talking and singing about socialism for the last two generations. I appeal to you all, my Comrades, whether you go back to China, or Great Britain, or Africa or America, to

carry with you that great image of the real and truly free men, the real and truly emancipated women and the truly cared for children here...

“In that spirit, Comrades, I beg you to go back to your countries, and wish, morning, noon and night for greater success for Sovietism in the Soviet Republic and let us not only wish and pass resolutions, but let us act and work in our countries in such a manner that within the next two or three years we will come back together again as free citizens of our Soviets to this, the first Soviet Republic.”

The celebrations included what has now become a familiar feature of Russian life, a parade in Red Square, with cavalymen from all over the USSR riding past. A play lasting two days was performed, showing all the achievements of the Soviets during the ten years they had been governing the country, and it was broadcast on all the networks throughout the Union. On his return to England, Saklatvala told a Sunday Worker correspondent, “Amazing results have been achieved since my last visit in 1923, but if I attempted to describe them, I should probably be charged with exaggeration.”

It is interesting to note in passing that in Battersea Saklatvala enjoyed solid support from his Catholic constituents, despite the fact that it was always said that the Soviet Union made it impossible for Christians to worship freely. Three members of the Irish delegation to the Moscow celebrations wrote to Saklatvala on their return, proclaiming, “...I was surprised to find the churches open, because previously I had read the articles in the capitalist papers. I personally attended the Church of Sts Peter and Paul, for I had been told that the Red Army soldiers were keeping the people from going to church. I found the service going on and the church packed with people. We talked with the priests who told us that they had more freedom than under the Tsar.” Similar views were expressed by other Catholic members of the Irish Delegation to the USSR.

Despite his travels and various activities, Saklatvala continued to play his usual active role in House of Commons debates. Although most of 1926 had been taken up with the General Strike, the miners’ strike and Saklatvala’s battle against the Emergency Powers Act, he still had not neglected the affairs of India. It has always been asserted by those who fought for the liberation of India, that Great Britain pursued a policy of ‘divide and rule.’ In a debate on India on 20th July 1926, Saklatvala said:

“...I at once admit that, ...as a native of India, am not standing in this House in a very happy position at the present juncture. I quite admit the different positions of the various political sections in India, especially the Swaraj [Independence] Party, for which I have a greater partiality than for any other section; I do admit, as a native of the country, the most deplorable state of affairs with regard to these conflicts which are arising out of religion...

“I myself saw the remark in the Viceroy’s speech with regard to the very emphatic denial on the part of His Excellency as to any share in the exploitation of this religious movement, either by the Viceroy or by the officials generally. That may be quite true and I do not take it as a hypothesis, but admit it as a fact, that the Viceroy, as he has gone out there with a fair and open mind, would certainly be absolutely innocent of any such desire or any such complicity. But it cannot be said throughout that there is no ground even for a reasonable suspicion in this direction...

“I was in Newcastle-on-Tyne in Easter week—doing my wild propaganda work, as the Home secretary might put it—and I went to the Independent Labour Party Conference... A morning paper with a notorious title had an editorial article which I passed on to the late Minister of Health at the Conference. It deliberately takes credit for the cleverness with which the British officials have separated the solidarity between Hindus and Mohammedans in India. It claims full credit for undoing, within a very short period, the work that was done by Gandhi and [Chittaranjan] Das on sentimental grounds.

“Not only that, but these are almost the sentences in the article in which they say that though it may seem bad news, an intelligent Englishman who knows the real situation in India will look on it as the best news that has come to this country for the last three years. It deliberately puts it forward that peace between Hindus and Mohammedans would mean the end of the British rule in India, and they say that, not only is there no peace today, but they feel thankful that there is no hope of peace and that every Britisher rejoices in his heart. I commend that article to the noble Lord...

“I do not take the view, as my Indian friends do, that Indians in

association with this Empire will ever receive the treatment and the same rights as blood and flesh citizens of the Dominions associated with Great Britain, and while putting forward this false political title that you are all British citizens and you are a British Empire, three hundred million of those British citizens are to be treated in a manner in which not a man, woman, child or dog in this country would agree to be treated.

“I again press that point that if you call yourself an Indo-British Empire and candidly and frankly put forward a sort of British standard and a sort of Indian standard, which as long as it is in your power to impose on India you will insist on imposing, you will perhaps take away from the people many inconsistent and illogical acts of the government.

“...On a previous occasion I put to the House the position that the responsible British government in India, in which the Indians themselves have no part, were the largest employers in the world of human labour, and I put it, and I repeat it, that the G of I are employing hundreds of thousands of human beings at less than £3 a month... and that the same government had in front of it a report by a British official pointing out that the cost of living of the lowest type of labourer was nearer £4... My efforts have failed in asking the Under-Secretary of State for India to put forward the actual figures of these low wages...

“The government have set the standard, and the industrialists have followed it... The association of India with Great Britain may be perpetuated as the greatest blight and the greatest curse to human society, and especially to the working classes of Great Britain; or the association between Great Britain and India, in a spirit of international labour co-operation, can be turned into a great advanced movement for the civilisation of Europe itself and the salvation of Great Britain herself...

“India under British protection... is becoming a country that produces coal fields, jute and cotton mills and iron works in rivalry with this country... you will have to tell your citizens... that their trade is in danger unless the cost of production goes lower and lower. That is exactly what is happening in the coal trade... The reality of life is that here in British India, under the protection of the British Army and Navy,

with the full blessing of the British nation, there are miners employed at eight pence and nine pence a day underground to suffer.

“The conditions of this country will not be improved by lowering the standard of living of the workers. It is not a rotten country that wins the race but a united country. The real cure is for the British rulers of India to say, ‘We are British. We shall remain British. We shall look at human good and human standards from a British point of view, and if we cannot afford to do it, we shall be honest and march out, bag and baggage.’

“I appeal to my Swarajist friends, to Hindus and Mohammedans, to this Committee and to the government of India, to study the problem seriously and to clearly visualise that it was a mistaken policy to stop western Bolshevism, socialism or Labour politics from entering the Eastern countries. My Swarajist friends made that mistake. They neglected the policy of relying upon the strength of the working classes and upon the agricultural workers, and organising them and looking to them for support in their political struggles...

“If they will forget their religious differences, as the people of Europe forget them, in the mass, and realise that the mass of the workers must form themselves more closely into a united family, and not look upon each other as Hindus or Mohammedans... it will be all to the good....

“We say that Bolshevism, Labour programmes, socialist programmes, following on the general activities in the west, is the only salvation of Indians... It is on these grounds that I appeal to the noble Lord to remember that we are living in an age after the great civilising revolution in Russia, and not before it, and to frame his policy accordingly. (Laughter)

“If I may be allowed to reply to the laughter of hon members opposite, I would say that for 150 years the government of India has been struggling and have pretended to spread education in India, and today there is only 7% of education in India. (Hon. member: How much of it is there in Russia?) In the Tsarist time it amounted to 6%. In Russia the population is largely oriental, in habit and in mentality, and while the government of India have only been able to spread 7% of education in India... the Russian Soviet government has been able to increase

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education from 6% to 96%.”

Yet again, Saklatvala contrived to combine his cry for communism and his cry for the freedom of the Indian people—the two main aims of his political life.

CHAPTER 19

Defending the Rights of Workers

Introduction of the Trades Dispute Bill, 1927.

The ploy of 'divide and rule' was not used only against the Indian people; in 1927 the labour movement accused the Conservative government of using it to smash the power of the trade unions. There is no doubt that the solidarity of the workers that had led, the year before, to the General Strike had struck their exploiters with a somewhat hysterical fear. They now pressed the panic button and introduced the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Bill, that led the trade union movement to accuse them of 'union bashing'. Sympathetic and general strikes were to be made illegal, picketing was to be severely regulated and the power of the group was to be diminished in favour, the government claimed, of the power of the individual; but in practice this would mean diminished power for the trade unions and more power to management.

For those of us who have lived through the 1980s it is an all too familiar pattern.

It is generally said that patriotism is the love of one's country; I prefer to interpret it as love of one's nation. The nation consists of all the people in the land, the ruling class, the management class, as well as the workers who actually produce the goods that pay for the ruling class and the management class to live, and who provide them with the reason and the wherewithal to perform their lucrative functions.

So the ruling and management classes spread the word that the General Strike had put the nation in jeopardy and that therefore the people who organised it were unpatriotic; though the workers for whom the General Strike was supposed to bring benefit were as much a part of the nation as the ruling and management classes. To put the lives and happiness of the productive workers in danger was not considered unpatriotic; but to put the profit and power of the rulers in peril was said to be unpatriotic. It is a popular belief even today. A pity.

When the 1927 Trade Disputes Bill was introduced, the Conservative Party

published a pamphlet, 'The Trade Dispute Bill Popularly Explained'; and a specially convened Trade Union Defence Committee published a tract called, 'Union-Smashing By Law—What the Tory government's Trade Union Bill Means.' The labour movement realised that a national, authoritative, all-embracing campaign was needed to fight the bill, particularly since the government had such an overwhelming majority in the House that it needed more than parliamentary opposition to defeat it. Propaganda against the bill was carried on in one of the most well organised enterprises ever embarked upon by the combined forces of labour. The introduction of the bill was treated almost as a declaration of war against the working class.

When the Trade Disputes Bill was first introduced, Saklatvala was on the boat returning from his Indian tour; but one of the first things he did immediately after his return was to publish a pamphlet entitled 'May Day 1927; S.Saklatvala's Message to his Constituents on his Return from India'. This opened with the words: "I am glad to be back in my constituency of Battersea to take up my work in Parliament on behalf of the workers, and I will do all in my power to help in the struggle against the iniquitous Trade Union Bill." He went on to say:

"...I have just returned from India and can testify to the terrible conditions under which workers, unprotected by a strong Trade Union or Labour movement, are compelled to live. A similar state of degradation is in store for the workers of Britain... In every district a strong Council of Action and a Workers' Defence Corps should be formed to prepare the whole Labour movement for an energetic campaign against the Bill, culminating in a real General Strike of all workers...

"In Parliament, all the Labour MPs must be asked by their respective constituencies to obstruct all parliamentary procedure if the Bill is not withdrawn. It is no use fighting the Bill by pettifogging amendments... The necessary preliminary to all those effective measures which must be adopted if the Bill is to be fought, is the unity of the workers... Are British workers organised to safeguard their honour and freedom or are they to be split among themselves in spite against the Communist movement of Russia, China or Britain?...

"I, therefore, beseech you all, men and women of Battersea, to help your

committees to get over their personal squabbles and to let the working-class mass unite together as one family determined in its fight against capitalism and imperialism.”

It was on May 5th 1927 that Saklatvala launched his initial and forthright parliamentary attack against the bill when he addressed the House thus:

“To borrow the phraseology of Lord Birkenhead, I look upon this Bill as a downright act of treason against parliamentary government... I have said previously that it is legislation of this sort which completely destroys what we call the majesty of the law. Every British citizen would be a contemptible creature if, after the passing of this Bill, he held any British law in respect or reverence, and the Tory government will find out its mistake.”

Of course we are now long past the events of 1927; but that there is less and less regard for the law in this country is an undoubted and sad fact—there is little stigma attached to the breaking of many laws, and even a prison sentence no longer automatically invokes social condemnation for certain transgressions; indeed, people of public renown and repute drink and drive, break motoring laws, cheat on their income tax and other taxes, and frequently find it something to boast about. Somewhere along the line the law has put itself in a position where it is no longer believed always to be in the right. So perhaps Father was right in suggesting that anti-trade union, anti-working class laws would ultimately corrode the average citizen’s respect for the law in general.

The bill then being debated sought, among other things, to prevent trade unions from collecting funds from its members to donate to any political party, against the will of the individual member of the union. Saklatvala pointed out that a clause of conscience already existed in trade union law and any member could, as a matter of conscience, opt out of paying the political levy. He went farther; he contended that the Prime Minister had already come to an agreement that a clause in the bill restricting the payment of a political levy would not be included in the final bill. “I challenge him,” he declared, “has he not already made a pledge that the Bill will not be put on the Statute Book unless he is permitted to withdraw the political levy clause as a last moment peace-offering to the Labour Party. He knows quite well that he is wasting the time of the House in making it discuss the political levy... It would be worth

seeing if they put it in after the dissensions in their own ranks.”

“Then,” he continued, “we come to the question of lock-outs. Of course, lock-outs will not be needed after this Bill. The working man is a serf. He is a slave. He is not going to propose terms. He is going to be dictated to. He cannot strike; he cannot defend himself; he cannot take any counter-action in his own defence. So the Bill itself is devised as a perpetual lock-out in the hands of the master-class...”

One of the clauses in the bill was to make it illegal for any individual to be punished or intimidated for not participating in a strike or other action organised by the union; the wording ran: “Intimidation means to cause a person to fear injury to himself... ‘injury’ includes not only physical injury, but the fear of boycott, exposure to hatred, ridicule or contempt.”

Saklatvala was scornful of this clause:

“With regard to persecutions... I must tell the government that if ever they put this Bill into operation and a series of actions are brought into the courts of law on the grounds that this man said that, and that man said this, and so on, they would not in reality be punishing those who dared to pour contempt and ridicule upon one another, but would be causing the whole world to pour contempt and ridicule upon Great Britain. What a sight it would be for the nations of the world! Men and women going up to the magistrate and saying, ‘He made faces at me,’ ‘He did not speak to me,’ ‘He walked out of the assembly.’ What nonsense to come from the Tory Party!

“We heard last Monday morning of a Minister in the present government going to Hyde Park last Sunday. We saw a report in the Daily Mirror—that patriotic organ—that when the national anthem was sung, some people did not like to join in. Some did not remove their hats, but their neighbours promptly forced them to remove them. Could those people be put in prison?

“I do not know how far the members opposite were guilty, but after some visionary event in my own life, I read in the newspapers that the Tory members walked out of the House when the member for Battersea rose to speak... Were they all to be clapped into gaol? The whole point is so ridiculous, childish and nonsensical that the man who framed such a law ought to be turned out and his name scratched off as a lawyer of

merit.”

One of the most important clauses in the bill declared General Strikes or sympathetic strikes to be illegal. Saklatvala contended that it was the right of every worker to withdraw his labour to draw attention to his grievances and no one could make any strike, general or otherwise, illegal. He claimed the whole law to be merely farcical:

“The Prime Minister confessed yesterday that it was the events of last year that compelled him to change his mind [and to introduce the Bill], but he did not explain which event. Was it the event of our Foreign Secretary meeting his great Italian Master [he was referring to Mussolini] on a river yacht for secret conversations? Was it the event of the Foreign Secretary suddenly being introduced as an Honorary member of the Italian Fascisti? Which event of last year has made this Bill possible?

“In such a debate as this it does not behove one to take up much time. I have only got to say this to the government. We in the Communist movement do not believe in relief being sought by the working classes by a mere promise that the Bill shall be repealed, though we are heart and soul with those who desire that it shall be repealed, and we will work towards that end... We say that the working classes cannot get their rights so long as the capitalist class is in power. The capitalist class believe in giving knock-out blows of the most unscrupulous character every time they can find a chance, and the policy of the working class must be to give them open, deliberate, knock-out blows, one after another...

“This Bill will enlighten the proletariat and quicken them up, and then you will see the unity between the Communists and the Trade Unionists... You may take our word for it that settled government in this country and so-called law and order by a gang of conspirators and forgers is impossible. We challenge you to go ahead with this measure, and you will see where you fall down.”

When the debate was resumed on the following day, Saklatvala again took up the fight. He said:

“It has been made amply clear that the present series of amendments before the Committee are making the original Bill a little worse than it

was before... I suggest seriously to the government that if they want 'peace in our time, O Lord', they should scrap this Bill and accept all the eleven amendments which stand in my name."

These eleven amendments had been published as an article in the Sunday Worker on 13th May 1927 (see the [Appendix to this chapter](#)).

The Sunday Worker had claimed:

"The Bill is designed to abolish strikes of all descriptions, to do away with picketing, however peaceful, to cripple the political Labour Movement by destroying the effectiveness of the political levy, and to divorce civil servants from Trade Union activity."

Harry Pollitt called for a 24-hour General Strike of protest to be called as from midnight on 1st May. The Communist Party invited the ILP to a joint attack against the Bill and against the war being waged in China but the ILP did not respond to the suggestion. Mass rallies were held up and down the country to combat the threatened legislation. Saklatvala addressed a huge convocation of workers on Wormwood Scrubs on May 29th and the usual meetings were held in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square.

Of course, Ramsay MacDonald had been right when he said it would be impossible to defeat the passing of the Bill in the House and it was finally passed at the end of July. The voice of the people had rung out loud and clear but it had no effect on those in power.

(Strange is it not, that members of even democratically elected governments seem all too often to be stricken with deafness—what a pity they cannot at the same time be struck dumb).

Saklatvala's view of the bill was expressed with his usual quiet humour when he was making a report of his year's work in parliament and in India. He had tried, he said, time and time again to get the TUC General Council to help in organising Indian trade unions (in fact, he had approached them first in 1911), but all they did was to advise him to take what concessions the government would give, and so in time build up the Indian movement to the level of the British trade unions—and when they had said this, he added, we had the spectacle of the British government bringing the TUC down to that of the Indian unions.

Appendix to Chapter 19: Amendments to the Trade Disputes Bill

From the Sunday Worker on 13th May 1927:

Communist Reply to Scab Bill—Saklatvala's Amendments Which Turn its Edge Against Capitalism

A very forcible and marked contrast with the sham amendments to the Trade Union Bill put forward by the Labour Party leaders is shown by the following amendments which stand in the name of Comrade Saklatvala:

CLAUSE 1 to read: It is hereby declared that any strike having any object calculated to improve the wages, working conditions, or social conditions of the trade unionists, either directly or indirectly, is legal even though the strike involves the entire membership of the trade union movement.

It shall be legal for any body of workers to stop work to assist another body of workers even though they themselves are not in dispute with their own employers over any question of wages or conditions of labour. Any provision in previous Acts declaring such action to be a breach of contract shall be repealed.

For the purposes of the above, a trade dispute is any withdrawal of labour of any extent whatever which, in the view of the trade union movement, is calculated to improve the wages, working conditions, or social conditions of its members, either directly or indirectly.

It shall also be legal for a strike to be directed against a government which is supporting the employers in their attitude towards the Trade Union Movement on any industrial or political question affecting the

interests of trade unionists.

CLAUSE 2 to read: No person refusing to take part in any strike declared by his union shall be entitled to claim exemption from the penalties imposed on him by his trade union if such penalties are a part of the registered rules of the union.

CLAUSE 3 to read: It is hereby declared that it is lawful for one or two persons to attend at or near a house or place where a person resides or works for the purpose of obtaining or communicating information. The number of people so attending shall not be limited, and the duty of the police shall be confined to preventing any action of violence against individuals such as are punishable by ordinary law.

CLAUSE 4 to read: It shall not be lawful to require any member of a trade union to make any contribution to the political fund of a union unless before the date upon which the contribution is levied a ballot has been taken of the members of the union and a majority of the members participating in the ballot have declared in favour of creating a political fund. In the event of the majority of the members participating in the ballot declaring in favour of the creation of the political fund, this majority decision shall be binding on all members of the union until reversed by another ballot. A ballot on the question of creating or maintaining a political fund shall be taken every three years. Provided that no conference of the Labour Party or any other body to which the union is affiliated or the governing body of the union itself shall have power to refuse to levy any member in respect of political contributions or to refuse any member so levied the right to run for the parliamentary panel of the union or as delegate to any body to which the union is affiliated for political purposes.

CLAUSE 5 to read: Amongst the regulations as to the conditions of service in HM's civil establishments there shall be included regulations compelling every employee of the concern to be a member of the appropriate trade union catering for the grade of labour, whether mental or manual, to which he belongs. Employees in HM's civil establishments shall be granted the same rights as workers in private employment, viz., the right to strike in unison with workers in private employment, if necessary, to maintain or improve the wages, working

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conditions, or social conditions generally. Unions catering for workers employed in HM's civil establishments shall be free to unite or federate for any industrial or political purpose with unions of workers in private employment. It shall be lawful for any soldiers, sailors, airmen, or other ranks of the military, naval and air forces to continue membership of the trade unions of which they were members in civil life; or to enter such trade unions as may cater for their occupations; and it shall be lawful for organisers or other members of political organisations or Trade Unions to conduct any propaganda, verbal and in writing, amongst soldiers, sailors, airmen, or other ranks of the forces enumerated, intended or calculated to procure their entry into Trade Unions.

CLAUSE 6 to read: It shall not be lawful for any local or other public authority to employ any person for more than a week who is not a member of or who has not made application to become a member of a registered trade union.

CLAUSE 7 to read: Without prejudice to the right of any person having a sufficient interest in the relief sought to sue or apply for an injunction to restrain any application of the funds of a trade union in contravention of the provisions of this Act. No person not a member of the union against whom the injunction is being sought shall have powers to apply for an injunction.

The following additional amendments have also been sent in by Comrade Saklatvala:

TO CLAUSE 1: If any employer of labour shall combine with other employers for the purpose of reducing the wages, lengthening the hours of labour, worsening the working conditions or lowering the social status of their employees by lock-out or otherwise, they shall be liable, individually and collectively, on summary conviction to the confiscation and nationalisation of their factories, shops or other undertakings without compensation.

TO CLAUSE 2: An employer or group of employers recruiting, or attempting to recruit, by propaganda or otherwise, voluntary or paid labour during an industrial dispute in which he is or they are engaged; or forming, or attempting to form, or to procure the formation of a trade union embracing only his or their employers, and precluded by its rules

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from striking, shall be liable to a fine of not less than £10,000 or 5 years imprisonment with the penalty for a second offence of nationalisation of their property without compensation.

TO CLAUSE 3: It shall be unlawful for any employer or association of employers to draw up or cause to be drawn up, or to circulate in any shape or form, lists or names of workers whom they do not desire to be employed; or to dismiss from their employment any worker who is a member of a factory, works, shop, depot, or similar committee, elected by the employees of such employer or association of employers for the defence of their economic, political or social interests; the penalty for contravention of this regulation being a fine of not less than £10,000 or 5 years imprisonment, and nationalisation of their property without compensation for a second offence.

CHAPTER 20

A Cloak on the Tyranny

The Government of India Bill, establishing the Simon Commission.

In February 1927, while Saklatvala was away in India, the question of sending a Statutory Commission to India was raised in the House of Commons. Under the terms of the India Act 1919, there was to be a decennial review, and the Commons now sought to bring such a review forward.

It was not until June that the proposed composition of the Commission came up for discussion. Needless to say, although the Commission's task was to report on the future development of the administration of India, it was to be made up exclusively of English men. Small wonder, then, that from the first, it was rejected by the great majority of politically-minded Indians.

A joint committee was set up in India by the Indian National Congress with Motilal Nehru as its chairman. While not demanding out and out freedom for India, this committee demanded that Great Britain should grant dominion status; this did not please other political groups in the country which demanded total independence.

During a debate on 2nd June 1927 in the House of Commons, George Lansbury, in a speech praised by Saklatvala, said:

“I put it to the noble Lord (Earl Winterton) that the time has come when we should cease treating the Indians as if they were good or bad children. We should treat them as our equals in this matter of the right to determine the future of their own country...

“...And I say that the time is long since overdue when we should give back to that nation the thing which they have not had for generations, namely, the right to rule themselves.”

Saklatvala took part in the debate on India a few days later:

“I listened not only with interest, but with a great amount of respect and gratitude to the speech of the hon member for Bow and Bromley (Mr Lansbury), and yet on certain fundamental points I stand as much apart

from his views as those of Lord Birkenhead.

“The hon member who has just sat down (Mr Wardlow-Milne) said that the majority of the people of India held moderate opinions. I do not know what moderate opinions are when one talks of India. I suppose that ‘moderate opinion’ is that which agrees with the views of the hon member for Kidderminster (Mr Wardlow-Milne). I have frequently put it to this Committee and I do it once again that in the year 1927—never mind what happened in 1827—it is absolutely impossible for one country to hold another in subjection and pretend to offer them measures of reform giving them a partnership in the Commonwealth. That is all humbug.

“I see that a new Commission is to be appointed and I would like to ask, what is going to be the scope of that Commission and its terms of reference? Everybody knows, whether it is put in black and white or not, that the first thing that will be put in the terms of reference is how this country can keep a stranglehold over India. That is a primary condition.

“Another condition will be that you must give to the Viceroy full power, and place a whip in his hand by which the interest, the prestige and the political power of Britain shall never be allowed to suffer a scratch. Whether that is put down in print or not, it is the fact. Perhaps hon members will pardon me for putting things very bluntly, but I think it is the only way in which I can explain my views.

“Between slavery and freedom there is no middle course, and the transition from slavery to freedom can never be attained by gradual measures. As long as you continue slavery, it must continue with the full strength in the bond; the bond must be strong to hold down the people. When you make up your minds that there shall be no slavery, then the bond must break, and it must break completely. There is no human possibility of gradual reform and gradual freedom.

“The hon member for Kidderminster perverted an historical truth when he said that the last reforms of 1919 were not given to India by the government under coercion. The government of Great Britain played one of the most deceitful games in their history by pretending to give reforms to India, because the then government of Great Britain was working under the greatest force and pressure and coercion of American

and European nations.

“After the war, after the destruction of the power of the Kaiser, Great Britain stood, to the shame of the world, as worse than ten thousand Kaisers in her rule in India; and, in order to save the face of Great Britain, to show that Great Britain was no longer the only imperialist power in the world, that the British Imperialism after the war was modifying itself into a group of Commonwealths, under tremendous coercion, perfidious Albion played the perfidious game by giving what you call reforms. In the reforms granted to India there is no measure of freedom...

“Why does Great Britain presume that, of all the savage peoples in the world who cannot manage their affairs, she must be the controller of India only? Why do you not take into your charge the people of Persia, the people of China, the people of Egypt, the people of Turkey, and everywhere else in the same manner and fashion as you take charge of the people of India? Did you not believe that the people of Germany had no instinct of democracy? Why did you not take charge of them? You say the Italian people have not the same instincts of democracy that the British people have. Why do you not go and assume parentage over them?

“It is all nonsense to say that for the benefit of the Indians the British nation has got to be there, and is performing a benevolent action. For goodness sake, be honest and say you are a nation of enterprise, and in seeking for enterprise to seek your own good, opportunity placed you in a strong position to throttle the country and the people of India—you are there and you are determined to remain there as long as you can get any good out of it...

“The hon member for Kidderminster said that there has been tremendous progress in India since I do not know when—the last twenty or thirty years.”

Mr Wardlow-Milne: “I am quite willing to make it a hundred years.”

Mr Saklatvala: “Make it as much as you like. I am prepared to grant you a still further term of 150 years, and I say that a nation which, after 150 years of hypocritical pretence has kept the literacy of the people down to 6%, ought to be pilloried in public in the eyes of the nations of the

world.

“When a nation that says: ‘I control and give progress to the people of India,’ fails miserably—or rather, does not fail, but artfully and deceitfully, in its own interest, prevents 100% of education, and limits it like a tyrant and oppressor of an unspeakable character to 6%,—how can any member of that nation come and say, ‘I am proud of my progress.’?”

“Take the death rate in India, the crushing infantile death rate in that city of Bombay; take the progress of the hon member’s own firm there. It has been a progress in infantile mortality from 150 to 200 up to 600 and 800 per thousand. There is tremendous progress in the murder of children all over India, and all over the industrial towns and cities there...

“The hon member gives us the consolation that there are not so many deaths from famine... famine is no longer a periodical condition in India—it is the constant lot of the people. To die from semi-starvation is a permanent condition in the country; the condition is not one of periodical famine...

“A government that tolerates a death rate such as exists to day in India is the most unfit government on the face of the world, and, if nothing else, the murder of 4½ millions of Indians who are dying because of the British rule, over and above the normal death rate which should exist in a tropical country like India, is alone a sufficient reason to tell the British to go out, bag and baggage, in spite of all the chimneys that they are capable of erecting when they are there.”

Saklatvala then went on to speak of the plight of Indian workers in international and communist terms, relating the condition of the workers in India and in Great Britain; this was another of his constant and reiterated themes. He contended that the interests of the managers and owners of industry in the two countries were in competitive conflict the one with the other; whereas the workers of both nations should unite for their mutual benefit and common interest.

“The mill-owners of India and the mill owners of Lancashire would rather wish to see each other weakened and destroyed. The mill workers in India and the mill workers of Lancashire will both gain an advantage

by standing together, fighting together, working for a common standard of life, demanding the same standard of wages and demanding the same form of political franchise, liberty and freedom...

“And where this country continually comes into conflict is on this question, that whenever you talk of reforms, whenever you talk of progress, whenever you talk of any measure of liberty you in your hearts believe that by granting a few concessions to your own class-brethren in India you are building a bridge of some kind. You are doing nothing of the kind. You are strengthening a class which in its economic interests is your rival and your competitor...”

He returned to the subject of a Commission to draw up a new constitution for India:

“...Just as this country would not allow Chinamen or Germans to write a constitution for this country, it is equally absurd for this country to appoint a Committee to write a constitution for the people of India, on whatever basis. The only point of discussion in this Chamber should be whether this country is still to be a tyrant over India, or whether it will be courageous enough to say ‘no’ and cease to be a tyrant.”

When the government of India—Statutory Commission Bill came up for the second reading at the end of November 1927, Saklatvala moved an amendment. The intention of the bill was to bring forward the decennial review of the government of India Act 1919 (due in 1929).

“When the noble Lord (Lord Winterton) was introducing the Bill, he showed a little surprise that I should be prepared to offer opposition to the Bill as it stands... I think the noble Earl when he made the sweeping assertion that it is merely shifting the date, that there is no opposition in this country or in India, misinformed himself as well as the House, in that there is bitter opposition in responsible Indian circles capable of expressing themselves against this Bill...

“The Leader of the Opposition is supporting the Bill, I suppose taking it as a non-contentious Bill... members of this House are under the impression that a desire was expressed by the Indians themselves for an earlier appointment of the Commission.

“I think the House is mixing up two things. The Indians greatly desire, not a Commission that would justify the India Act, but a sort of round

table conference to clear the air... and not the appointment of a Statutory Commission under the Act... There are no issues which can be explored with any usefulness by any such Commission and therefore to expedite such a Commission is merely enacting a farce earlier.

“The issue is perfectly clear. Is Great Britain determined to carry on an antiquated, savage system of rule of another country and another people, or is Great Britain prepared to let the people of every country manage their own affairs, in a friendly way or even a hostile way if they choose so to do?... The early appointment of the Commission does not get rid of the belief that the only purpose of the government is to put a hypocritical cloak on the system of tyranny which, in the name of common sense and justice, ought to be abolished as soon as possible.

“I suggest to the government that they should be bold enough to withdraw the Bill, and that if they are not afraid of the truth they should appoint, not a Statutory Commission under the Act, but an independent Commission composed entirely of Indians. Let those Indians come over to this country and cross examine you and listen to your witnesses and advise the House as to what is the exact position.

“The Bill precludes all such chances of preliminary negotiations and hastens the appointment of a Commission which is hated by the Indians, which is not required by them, which is only serving a dishonest and hypocritical purpose of Imperialism and is not intended to advance the freedom of a conquered country which you have no right to govern. I therefore move the rejection of the Bill.”

Once again, Saklatvala stood almost alone in the House, supported by a mere handful of the more left-wing Labour members, since the Labour Party officially supported the Bill. His amendment was seconded by the Labour member for Glasgow, Gorbals, Mr Buchanan.

In the course of a further debate, during the Committee Stage of the Statutory Commission Bill, with Mr James Hope in the Chair, Saklatvala moved an amendment:

“to insert the words, ‘provided that the said Commission shall not be appointed until a Resolution shall have been agreed to by the Legislative Assembly of India approving of its appointment.’

“...Apart from the wording of the Act, (India Act 1919) I submit that

after its passage, though not perhaps during its passage, it had become a contract between two parties, between the government of this country and the body entrusted with whatever measure of popular government was granted to India.

“Today we are asked to take a course of action by which one of the contracting parties wants to alter the contract radically, completely disregarding the existence of the other contracting party. That other contracting party, having heard of our one-sided activity through other channels such as the press, is objecting as strongly as possible and in whatever manner it can against this proposal. I have just this morning received a cablegram from the Trade Union Congress of India—”

The Under-Secretary of State for India (Earl Winterton): “I wish to raise a point of order. I ask you, respectfully, Sir, whether it is not quite out of order on any part of this Bill, much less on this amendment, to discuss the composition or proposed composition of the Commission... As I understand the hon member, he is now dealing with objections which are being taken in India to the proposed Commission.”

Mr Saklatvala: “...I assure the noble Lord, I am not bothered about the personnel of the Commission. If the Commission is wrong, any saint or scoundrel appointed to it will be in the wrong place.”

In reply to Saklatvala, Earl Winterton launched into a vituperative attack upon him, thereby incurring great indignation among many fellow members. In the course of a bitter tirade he demanded:

“What right has the hon gentleman to come down here and make a most serious charge against every Party in the House of breaking faith with the people of India by breaking the spirit and the letter of the Act of 1919?... I must say quite frankly again, that no one who has the remotest knowledge of India could possibly accept the hon gentleman as an exponent of Indian opinion... he is repudiated by every responsible organisation in India. There is not a responsible organisation in India that accepts the hon gentleman as its spokesman...”

“May I point out to the hon gentleman the fact, although he ought to have known it before speaking with such confidence, that there have been no less than five resolutions passed in the Assembly in India in favour of the acceleration of the date?... Yet here is an hon gentleman

who comes down here and claims, forsooth, to be an exponent of India opinion, telling us that these five resolutions have got to be entirely disregarded, that he, the member for North Battersea, the representative of 300,000,000 Indian people, demands that this Committee shall retard the date ...”

Mr Buchanan, member for Glasgow, Gorbals, interrupted the aristocratic oration with the question, “Will the noble Lord kindly inform me of the dates of these five resolutions, or, say, the date of the last one?”

To which the noble Lord somewhat lamely replied, “I could not give the hon member the date off-hand, but resolutions have been passed at different times ever since the Assembly came into being in 1920.”

(In spite of repeated demands from many members during the period of over an hour, Winterton failed to produce any evidence of the five resolutions, being able to quote a date for only one, and that had been in 1921!)

Lieut. Commander Kenworthy (Labour) then intervened:

“The noble Lord must be very grateful to me, because but for my boldness in protesting against his attempt to rush the Committee stage yesterday, he would not have been able to treat the House this afternoon to this flow of invective against the hon member for North Battersea (Mr Saklatvala)...

“The noble Lord said that the hon member for North Battersea had no right to speak for any section of Indian opinion. I do not know that it behoves me particularly to defend the hon member for North Battersea; I think he can look after himself. But the noble Lord seemed to question the right of any member of this House to give certain opinions. The hon member for North Battersea was sent here by the electorate in his constituency, and has every right to voice his opinion in this House. I am sure the hon member treats the electors of North Battersea to a great many tirades on the Indian question, and that they well know his views. The noble Lord, beside being a great ornament to this House, is an Irish Peer. What section of Irish opinion does he represent?”

The Chairman: “The hon and gallant member’s question opens up an alarming vista.”

Lieut. Commander Kenworthy: “...I was only protesting against the

noble Lord's suggestion that the hon member on this side speaks for no section of Indian opinion, and when an Irish Peer, who has estates in England, and sits for a Sussex constituency, says that, I make the obvious retort, but I will not repeat it. I really think the under-secretary need not get heated over this matter at all.

"I, personally, am very glad to hear the views of the hon member for North Battersea on Indian affairs. He is the only Indian born native in the House as far as I know. The noble Lord can console himself that he is going to get the Committee stage of this Bill. He has no need to worry about that. What he has got to worry about is Indian opinion in India, and if he would address himself to that, and not allow his leg to be pulled by the hon member for North Battersea, it would be better."

Then came a very apt comment by Mr Stephen in support of Saklatvala:

"I wish to join in protesting against the tone of the Under-Secretary of State for India in his references to the hon member for North Battersea. He said the hon member does not represent any responsible Indian opinion. It is perhaps true or it is perhaps incorrect, but the point that struck me in this connection was that it came very badly from the noble Lord to make such a statement, seeing that the government of which he is a junior member was responsible for keeping the hon member for North Battersea from visiting his own country to get into touch with Indian opinion. I think that the noble Lord would have been well advised if he had kept his temper when he was replying to the speech of the hon member for North Battersea."

Mr Wallhead (Labour) then followed in defence of Saklatvala. In the course of his speech he said:

"It would have been as well if, before the noble Lord thought out his scheme of indictment against the hon member for North Battersea, he had been quite sure of his facts... he charged the hon member with not being representative of Indian opinion and said that he represented no one at all.

"I believe that on a recent visit to India the hon member was presented with nine open Addresses by nine of the great cities of India, some of which have refused the same privilege and honour to Lord Irwin, the Viceroy. If what I say is correct, as I am sure it is—and I believe the hon

member has these Addresses in his possession now—I think at least the noble Lord might have known those facts... I think the noble Lord should withdraw his statement and apologise to the hon member for North Battersea for the statement he has made.”

Nor did the attacks against the noble Lord rest there. Jimmy Maxton then took the floor. He said:

“...Listening to the noble Lord today and the subsequent discussion gives the impression that the government seems absolutely determined in the handling of this question to proceed from folly to folly; and as one who is genuinely anxious that the great Indian people shall be established in a position of liberty and dignity to develop their nation according to their own genius, I regret very much that first the noble Lord the Secretary of State, in the other place [the House of Lords], and then the noble Lord the Under-Secretary of State in this House, should indicate to the Indian people that they had nothing but contempt for them.

“What possible measure of confidence can we have that the government will deal with the Indian people in a decent, gentlemanly, man-to-man fashion, when they cannot treat with ordinary common courtesy the one representative of the Indian people who sits in this House? I think it should have been possible for a responsible Minister of the Crown... to have put through this Bill, to have listened to any criticism to it with restraint and dignity, having regard to the fact that there were greater issues at stake than his amour propre...”

Mr Becket then took up the cudgels on Saklatvala’s behalf:

“I am rather surprised that the Under-Secretary of State resented this amendment quite so strongly. I only felt, when reading it, amazement that the hon member for North Battersea (Mr Saklatvala) should have come forward with such an extremely mild amendment. It seems to me such a very reasonable request to make that I cannot understand why any hon member on the other side of the House should hesitate for a moment to support it. It certainly does not justify the very un-English practice of standing up supported by big battalions and taunting a man in the way that has been done, just because he happens to be in a minority of one.

“I do not suppose any member will find more points of disagreement with the hon member for North Battersea than myself, but he is certainly entitled to express his opinions without being treated insolently, and in this particular case I think that he has moved an amendment which has nothing to do with any particular Party prejudice, but it is an extremely moderate and very helpful amendment.”

It will be understood from the above lively exchanges that Saklatvala did not want for champions in the House of Commons, despite his political isolation in that body. Through his years of sincere service he had earned and acquired the respect and friendship of many members whose political views were divergent from his own. But, as Lieut. Commander Kenworthy had said, Saklatvala was well able to take care of himself (though I have no doubt he must have been deeply grateful for the support he received). Nevertheless, Saklatvala himself launched an offensive against the noble Lord:

“I apologise to the House for intervening in this debate a second time, but I think the extraordinary character of some of the arguments which have been used demands some further explanation. On former occasions, during general debates, many untruthful and unjustifiable assertions have been made by the noble Lord, the Under-Secretary of State for India, which I did not get an opportunity of answering.

“The noble Lord said emphatically that nearly every organisation in India repudiated my authority to speak on behalf of Indian subjects. That statement is far from the truth, and the noble Lord knows that it is contrary to the truth. I quite appreciate the reference to myself that has been made by an hon member with regard to the nine cities which welcomed me in India, while several of those cities refused to extend an official or even a formal welcome to the Viceroy of India.

“The noble Lord knows all this, and he has reports in his possession showing that hundreds of thousands of the people of India approve of my plans and my policy, and they also approve of what I have been doing for India while residing in this country. If the noble Lord would make a journey with me to India, I would be quite willing to organise open public meetings—not camouflaged and manoeuvred meetings—and he would then find that 99 people out of every 100 at those

meetings would declare in favour of my authority to speak on their behalf.

“I want to remind the noble Lord that he has been guilty of deceiving the British people and the whole world by placing unrepresentative Indian princes on the League of Nations. Some of these princes are corrupt men who are afraid to go back to India. Nevertheless, the noble Lord brings them to this country to speak in the name of the Indian people...

“I know that not one of those representatives of India on the League of Nations would be able to secure at a public meeting one vote, as compared with the million votes I could secure declaring the belief that I do represent Indian opinion. For the noble Lord to make such remarks as he has done on this point is rather stupid...”

The bill was, of course, passed. On 25th November 1927 the House was asked by Earl Winterton to concur in the submission to His Majesty of the names of the following persons, namely Sir John Simon, Viscount Burnham, Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, Mr Cadogan, Mr Walsh, Colonel Lane Fox, and Mr Attlee, to act as a Commission for the purposes of Section 84A of government of India Act (1919).

Once again, Saklatvala rose to move an amendment in the following terms:

“I beg to move, to leave out from the word ‘House’ in line 1 to the word ‘to’ in line 4, and to insert instead thereof the words, ‘resolve to invite Pandit Motilal Nehru, of the Legislative Assembly of India, to the Bar of the House to explain Indian sentiments and guide the House, as provided for in the Preamble of the government of India Act 1919, before concurring in the submission to His Majesty of the names of persons.’ [Motilal Nehru was in London at this time on a visit from India.]

“I hope the House will not attribute to me any maliciousness, because today I can speak only as one of the conquered and enslaved subject races. I can assure the House that I bear no malice to any person in this House or outside this House, but I always prefer, when I give expression to the faith and feelings of those who are crushed and those who are oppressed, to speak in plain, blunt language. Not that I mean to hurt, but I refuse to weigh and choose words which mean nothing.

“I do submit that this House today, with that very mistaken notion that,

because the Labour Party leaders and the government leaders combine for a couple of hours on a particular issue they can make no mistake, are making the gravest mistake. They are insulting and hurting the people of India with the government scheme, as well as with all the suggestions made from the Labour benches. There is nothing but downright insults and injury to the people of India.

“I realise my other responsibility. I stand here representing the interests of the British electorate who sent me. I stand here as representing the vital interests of the workers of this country, who show sufficient confidence in me, not one electorate alone, but all over England, Scotland, Wales and even Ireland, wherever I have the pleasure of going and mixing and speaking with the people. I say that this resolution today is one of the gravest injuries, and almost an act of treachery to the working class of Great Britain, apart from the injury it is going to inflict upon the Indians.

“It is not merely from any narrow nationalist point of view that I am expressing any sense of injured feelings or anger. May I remind the House that within a few days of my first entry here, when the Irish Free State was before this House, and when that same imperialist conspiracy of every British ruler was combining, irrespective of his conscientious belief to the contrary, new as I was in experience, almost nervous as I was, I felt it my duty to move the rejection of that Bill, and so do I feel again today, as one of the conquered races that know the curse of Imperialism, that know the evil to the rulers as well as the ruled of one nation ruling another.

“I am very sorry that the government had no other spokesman than the Under-Secretary of State for India. The noble Lord has got many good qualities, and yet, at the same time, his good qualities, from certain points of view, are at times exceedingly unfortunate... and you pretend to deceive the world that there are no conscientious objections against Imperialism, against exploitation, and against many of the evils of Great Britain ruling India, and that you are all unanimous; at the same time you make every diabolical effort—I do not mean to apply that word to the personality of the under-secretary, but to the effort which he made—to show that while you are united, India is disunited, scattered into

hundreds of fragments, and not only disunited but almost ununitable.

“While you make a hideous picture of the Indian people you try to make a virtuous picture of yourselves, and you know that both are untrue. The under-secretary opened his remarks by saying that there was welter and chaos when the British rulers went to India, and that they consolidated the conditions. May I ask the House just to review the historical position from 1910 to 1914? There was the Kaiser in Europe. He also felt the same thing, namely, that among the European communities there was such a welter and chaos that one strong man was required to rule the whole of Europe. He also felt like coming forward as the trustee and guardian of the small nationalities in Europe. He failed. You succeeded. That is the only difference, but the claim of the Kaiser and the claim of the British Kaisers is equally preposterous from the ethical standpoint and the point of view of national rights.”

“The under-secretary then told us about the trusteeship of minorities and one thing another, and he made a big picture...” [See Chapter 2 for the section of this speech referring to Saklatvala’s personal experiences].

“In 1919 you gave self-government—liberty, equality, fraternity—to the people of India. You, the heaven-born guardians of the depressed classes, what did you do? You have not enfranchised 2% of the depressed classes of the population. If you were sincere in your belief, why did you not give the people full political franchise? What is the trouble of the depressed classes, and the untouchable classes? Sixty million of people untouchable!

“Do not tell such cock-and-bull stories everywhere every time... 60 millions of people are not suffering from untouchability, but from the great curse of British imperialism, which keeps them illiterate and uneducated. Why did you not do your duty by these people? Why did you not give them education? You say, ‘Where is the money to come from? We cannot do it. They are an Asiatic people, full of religious superstition.’

“I have come from a second visit to Russia, and I unhesitatingly say, I say it seriously and most earnestly, that the British government ought to go and learn from Lunacharski, how in six years he has taken in hand all the Asiatic peoples of the Soviet Republic and turned illiteracy into

literacy, producing a good, scientific, well-educated people. [laughter]

“Yes, when real, genuine freedom came to Russia, the first effect was that the Asiatic peoples, who under the Tsar had been kept illiterate and ignorant, all got a good education, in some respects even better than and higher than the elementary schools in Britain. I was not alone when I went to Russia. There were 120 British men and women with me. Every one of them is as good if not better than those who have been roaring with laughter here. What I saw, they have seen, and what I believe, they believe.

“Political rights and depressed classes! Mohammedans, Sikhs and Parsees! It was your duty to grant them political rights, so that minorities could protect their own interests. What did you do? According to your own statements, only seven million out of two-hundred-and-forty-seven millions have the right to vote. That is how you have protected minorities.

“This Commission is to go out, not to protect minorities, but to decide how to keep the minorities under the thumb of a still smaller minority, namely, the British rulers. When we talk of the rights of minorities, it is the same story again: ‘Oh, they are illiterate, they are superstitious, they have different languages and different religions.’

“Let me go back to the illustration of Russia. In Russia the Asiatic tribes not only have different languages, but 18 new alphabets had to be created, but with goodwill, what have the Soviet rulers of the people achieved? There is a political vote for every man and woman at the age of 18, and the Asiatic people exercise the vote, with very great advantage and without any trouble.

“And yet the noble Lord stands up here today and says, ‘We are ruling India because there are depressed classes and Mohammedans and minorities.’ It is all bunkum and nonsense. The oppressors of India are here. You are responsible as a country—not you, personally, Mr Speaker, I mean the country is responsible—for all that ill picture which has been painted of India, and then you jibe at the people of India and tell the world that they are peculiarly bad and superstitious and ignorant, and that their women do this and that and the other [this is a reference to the book ‘Mother India,’ published a few months earlier]. The women of

India are as good sisters to the women of Britain and to the women of China as anybody else. Deprive the women of this country of their political rights, and of their education and they would come down to the same low level as the illiterate, uneducated women of India.

“What is wrong is the presence of British rule, which prevents the introduction of modern thought, modern evolution, modern education and scientific methods of evolving a people’s political, economic and social rights. That is what they are suffering from. You are sending out this Commission, not to unify religions, not to produce touchability, not to drive away superstition and ignorance with learning and literature, not to drive away slavery by giving political rights to the people, but you are sending out this Commission to find out how the British nation can tell lies to the world at large, and hypocritically pretend that the British are carrying out their trust in India. It is all nonsense and you all know it.

“It is not your fault. The Romans did the same thing once upon a time, when they were ruling your country. My ancestors, the Persians, did the same thing when they were ruling the Jews, the Assyrians and the Turks. We are all subject to the same failing. Whenever one country governs another, it always talks of acting on behalf of minorities, just as the League of Nations pretends today, but it always tramples upon the rights of majorities.

“Who are the majority among the Indian people? Never mind the Hindus and the Mohammedans, because religious differences exist in all nations of the world. The majority of the people of India are peasants and agriculturists. The majority of the people in the large cities are industrial workers. What rights have you given to them? What is your blooming Commission going to do for them? What instructions will it have? What is the purpose of this country’s rule in India? To keep talking of minorities and to trample on the rights and the progress of the majority. Because the Mohammedans are a minority in India—there are 80 million—is that a justification for 40 million Britishers to enslave 220 million Hindus? That is the logic of what the world is asked to believe.

“The Leader of the Opposition put forward certain schemes. I do not

want my colleagues in the Labour Party to misunderstand me. I do wish to offer criticism, but not because of any personal difference of opinion... I do not wish to offer criticism as to how the Indians will look upon the action of the Labour Party. I know the effect of it will be disastrous for the working Hindu and the British and Indian workers who will have to work side by side for the benefit of both...

“The Leader of the Opposition suggested that great advantages might accrue to India through these Committees being set up. All I can say is that the putting of more sugar on the propositions of these Committees will not make the Indian people swallow them more easily...

“When you are dealing with a fundamental question like the one we are now considering, if you believe that you have only to put a little more honey, sugar and cream on the top of it in order that India will swallow it, then you are making a disastrous mistake. On these matters the Indian mind has a little more penetration than the western mind. The Leader of the Opposition stated that he thought there was some possibility of good results from this Commission, but why did he say that? In my view the Commission will only create confusion...

“The Leader of the Opposition did place his finger on one essential fact that should make for war or peace. He said that people would give up arming, people would give up fighting—I use that phrase in reference to the Indian situation as meaning a political fight in the future—... if only everyone had a sense of security against the other. The Commission that is being appointed today—let us not be blind—is not driving, but it has driven, all sense of security from the mind of each and every politician, from every school and every thought in India...

“You can make as many speeches as you like, you can have any kind of concordats between yourselves and the Front Bench of the Labour Party, or the Back Bench of the Labour Party, but that is not going to restore a sense of security in the Indians. Every Indian politician has now the feeling that this roving Commission comes to insult us, to offend us, to deny to us our natural, undoubted right to rule our country.

“What on earth is a British Commission to find out in India in regard to whether Indians should rule in their own country, any more than if you

had the impudence to appoint a Commission to France tomorrow to see whether that country should be run by Frenchmen or whether the British should go there to take care of the minorities in Alsace-Lorraine?

“It is not too late for the government to abandon this almighty, pre-ordained attitude, to come off their perch and to realise that they must discuss with other nations the kind of government they propose and the action they are going to take... I am anxious to press upon the government, and upon the noble Lord in particular, that they cannot treat the Indians as coolies and they cannot treat HM’s opposition as coolies, as the noble Lord tried to do this afternoon.”

In another speech a little later in the same debate Saklatvala said:

“I appreciate the difficulty of my position, as is often the case, yet I have to carry on, expressing views which otherwise could not be expressed. While I have listened to the charming appeals... about the House unanimously passing the Bill with all graciousness and sympathy and so on, I honestly and sincerely warn the House that if that well-intentioned but misdirected advice is followed, in the eyes of intelligent Indian opinion this House will be stooping to a meanness towards the whole of India... the rt hon member for Preston and the noble Lord, ... still look upon this Bill as something against which India has not expressed an opinion. Let me submit certain evidence to the contrary:

“A member of this House, the hon member for Pontypridd (Mr Mardy-Jones), is now in India. When he reached Bombay he conveyed to many Indian friends a piece of advice as coming from this House generally and from the Labour Party in particular, namely, that the Indians should make the best of the coming opportunity, and accept the Commission. That hon member himself has sent a telegram from Calcutta to the effect that it is the unanimous opinion of all intelligent politicians in India that the Bill ought not to be carried; and that the Labour Party, at least, should be advised to wash its hands of it, and should remain aloof from the great tragedy that is being enacted against India and the conspiracy which is being hatched in the shape of this so-called harmless Bill..

“The hon member for the Forest of Dean (Mr Purcell) has also gone to India to confer with the Trade Union Congress and the labour elements

there, and yesterday we received a similar protest from the leaders of the Trade Union Congress—not from one individual but from the Congress Committee as a whole. Again, I put it to the House that this Bill is an act of meanness when seen from the Indian side of the transaction...

“The noble Lord, after all the manipulation of a surgeon extracting a tooth, at last produced one resolution out of the five which were mentioned... The spirit of that resolution was, ‘Your Act is a complete farce and a scrap of paper and worse than useless. Get on with the job and reconsider the situation.’ The subsequent resolutions, which the noble Lord, despite persistent demands, did not produce, will support that argument.

“As differences of opinion developed, Indians have appealed to various parties in this House and to individual friends in the Labour Party to the effect that it would be fatal merely to appoint a Commission such as was provided for in the old Act before certain issues were cleared up by heart-to-heart talks and unhampered discussions. They have asked for round table conferences. They have suggested that deputations should be officially invited by the Secretary of State to come here. They have asked that delegates should be sent from here to India and that delegates from India should be received here, but all these demands we are ignoring.

“We are pretending that this Bill is something desired by the Indians. I consider it my duty, not so much towards my Indian compatriots or towards the British working-class, as towards this House, to say that what we are doing today in the name of peace and harmony is an act of unpardonable and contemptible meanness towards India.

“I still advise the government to withdraw the Bill and to send a telegram to the Indian Legislative Assembly, and I undertake that there shall be no further delay than one week in obtaining an expression of their views. By doing so, the government will act in the manner provided for in the Preamble of the Act of 1919, and Parliament will be enabled to have that guidance from the Indian contracting party, which it is supposed to have. By proceeding along those lines, the government will tread a safer road than that which they propose tonight to take.”

Saklatvala's speech was followed by an eloquently moving speech by Mr Buchanan, Labour member for Glasgow-Gorbals, in the course of which he reiterated that Nehru, who was already in London, should, as an elected representative of the Indian people, be consulted.

The bill passed this third reading without amendment.

The British press reported great unrest in India during this period and there was little doubt that the proposed Simon Commission was adding fuel to the political flames. On 21st November 1927 the Daily Herald wrote:

“Mr George Lansbury, Chairman of the Labour Party, has received from Pundit Motilal Nehru, Leader of the Swarajist Party in the Indian Assembly and who is in London, a letter urging the Labour Party not to support the government's Indian Commission. Pundit Nehru enclosed in his letter the following cable from the President and General Secretary of the Indian National Congress:

“All Party leaders declare boycott Commission, rejecting proposals and improvements in reference to Select Committee procedure. Gandhi agrees. Please induce Labour to withdraw from the Commission and not support compromise proposals.’

“In his letter Pundit Nehru said: ‘I do not see how I can induce the Labour Party to withdraw its members from the Commission or to desist in its efforts for a compromise, except by appealing to you, as Chairman of the Party, and informing the Party, through you, that the Congress would very much appreciate strong and unqualified opposition by the Labour Party to the proposals of the Conservative government.

“It is evident that the compromise proposals do not meet either the demand of India or that of the Labour Party itself as expressed in their various Resolutions. India expects the Labour Party to stand firm by her, and I take this opportunity to inform you that any proposals falling short of some suitable form of fully responsible government will not satisfy the Congress.’

“The matter will be discussed at a meeting of the parliamentary Labour Party Executive today. Pundit Motilal Nehru, expressing his views to Reuter's correspondent said, ‘I am almost sure that if, as a concession to public opinion in India, some Indian names were now included, the

Commission and the programme laid out for it would remain as unacceptable as at present...

“So far as India is concerned, she will not be satisfied with anything short of some form of fully responsible government. I must add that, though the action of the government does not in the least surprise me, the attitude taken by the Labour Party was not expected by me, and has caused general disappointment in India, as is shown by the private telegrams I have received. I am authorised to state that the action of the Labour Party, in not withdrawing their members from the Commission and trying to effect some sort of compromise, is not supported by any responsible Party in India...”

The Sunday Worker of 18th December 1927 published a cable received from Chaman Lal, President of the Indian Trade Union Congress. It read:

“Indian Labour at the recent session of Trade Union Congress, under my Presidentship, at Cawnpore [to which for the first time, the British TUC sent fraternal delegates] passed a Resolution demanding that the British Labour Party should withdraw its members from the Simon Commission and resolved itself also to boycott the Commission.

“I, therefore, appeal through the Sunday Worker to British Labourists and Trade Unionists to protest against Mr Ramsay MacDonald’s imperialist proclivities. The movement for the boycott of the Simon Commission is universal. All Nationalists, including Moslems are for it. Such remarkable unanimity has not been witnessed since the days of the non-co-operation movement. Pundit Motilal Nehru’s lead is highly praised in all quarters...

“All classes in India are aghast at the betrayal by the Labour Party. The Simon Commission will register the middle-class imperialist verdict. MacDonald and company have written a shameful chapter in the history of both nations.”

It was not only the Sunday Worker that reported the antagonism of the Indians to the Commission. The Times carried several articles on the subject. Meetings were held in most of the big cities in India and all shades of political opinion expressed their unequivocal antipathy to the Simon Commission.

Even if Saklatvala had sat silent in the House (and I am sure many of the members must often have wished that he had!), the picture was plain to see,

and neither Earl Winterton nor Ramsay MacDonald could have been in any doubt that the Commission was loathed and hated by the Indian people; and yet they insisted, in their dictatorial way, upon imposing it upon the Indian people, showing the imperialist's all too common disregard for the feelings of the people they governed, by force and against the popular will. Democracy might be praised for home consumption but it was not to be allowed to blossom in India. Consultation with the Indian people and government by consent of the people was not to be considered.

Apart from official protests from political bodies in India, general popular unrest was manifestly worsening. There were thousands of political prisoners and questions were asked in parliament. Frederick Montague (Labour) raised the question of the people who committed suicide in prison. He was followed by George Hall (Labour), who protested at the practice of chaining prisoners; he quoted the 1926 Report of the Bombay Jail Department, which showed that the flogging of prisoners had increased.

There can be no doubt that the appointment of the Simon Commission aggravated the violent opposition to what was more and more considered to be the despotic rule of the British, and it made Gandhi's method of non-violent, non-co-operation more difficult to sustain. In 1926, a Marxist group in the city of Bombay had created a Workers and Peasants party, which, in effect, was a Communist Party; they were said to be responsible for organising massive strikes in the textile mills during 1928 and 1929, which all but paralysed the industry. How far this group was responsible for all this industrial unrest it is hard to prove, but that the Simon Commission inflamed the anger of the workers and provided fertile ground for the Peasants' and Workers' Party to flourish in, cannot be disputed.

This industrial unrest led, in turn, to the communist leaders of the Workers and Peasants party being arrested and subjected at Meerut to a trial lasting three years, which, in itself, was yet another cause of discontent and conflict.

It was during all this controversy that the League Against Imperialism convened an international conference in Brussels. James Maxton was elected Chairman and Saklatvala was elected to the Executive Council. Jawaharlal Nehru represented the Indian National Congress at the Conference, and the INC unanimously resolved to become a corporate Associate member of the LAI. It was reported from Brussels that Pandit Motilal Nehru's address on the

position of the Indian Movement with regard to the Simon Commission made the antagonism to the Commission abundantly clear.

Ellen Wilkinson's explanation that, under the government of India Act, a Commission had to be appointed after ten years, but that she strongly objected to Indians not being represented, was met with stony silence by the Council, which knew that she had failed to support Saklatvala's lone fight in the Commons. Saklatvala brought the house down when, in cutting tones, he said, "Miss Wilkinson explains that there is the 1919 Act in the law books. Whose law books? In the law books of the British tyrants, without the consent of the Indian people!" A strong resolution exposing and condemning the British Labour Party's policy was adopted unanimously.

[Editor's note: Ellen Wilkinson was one of the first female MPs in Britain and was known as "Red Ellen" for her radical views].

A few days later on his return from Brussels, Saklatvala was interviewed by the Sunday Worker. He is quoted as saying, concerning the ILP's leader's speech to the Indian National Congress in Bombay at which Fenner Brockway criticised the Royal Commission to India, that Brockway "has undertaken an impossible job... In India, Brockway denounces the Royal Commission, but in Great Britain the ILP takes no steps against Major Attlee, one of its members, for sitting and working on that Commission."

The Simon Commission eventually arrived in India on Friday 3rd February 1928. The Sunday Worker of the 5th gave prominence on its front page to a report from its Bombay correspondent, headlined 'India Described as an Armed Camp—Military Parades in Streets of Chief Cities—3 Killed, 100 Injured and 200 Arrests Reported:'

"India is an armed camp. In all the principal cities today the military parade the streets and arrests continue wholesale. It is now stated that 3 people were killed, 100 injured and 200 arrested following demonstrations here and in Madras and Calcutta.

"Armoured cars are on the streets of Calcutta. The 'hartal' (strike) which marked the arrival here of the Simon parliamentary Commission was a complete success. Mills, factories and dock work stopped. The workers were peaceful and the firing in Madras was the result of an unprovoked attack by the police."

"The Simon Commission has received the welcome which it deserved,'

Shapurji Saklatvala told the Sunday Worker yesterday.

‘It has been well-known for some time that the Commission would have a hostile reception from the Indian workers, who view it as the latest weapon of British imperialism. When the Commission arrived in Bombay, the government shut all the dock gates in order to prevent people from approaching the Commission... When this bona fide deputation of Bombay workers, led by their accredited representative, Shaokat Ali, marched down to the dock gates, the government closed the gates and adopted every method to prevent them from reaching the Commission...

“Everyone in the British Labour movement can see that my opposition to the Commission was correct and that when I warned the Labour Party that they would be viewed as an instrument of imperialism by the Indian workers, I spoke the truth. My prophesy has been verified by the events of the past two days. When the Bombay workers burned the effigy of MacDonald in the streets along with that of Lord Birkenhead and others, they showed that they viewed the Labour Party as nothing more nor less than the willing hirelings of British imperialism.

“Lord Winterton has also had his reply. He told me in the House of Commons that I was not voicing the sentiments of Indian workers. He only needs to look at what is happening now to see whether I spoke the truth or not.”

As usual, these all-too-serious events were not without their humour where Saklatvala was concerned. In a speech delivered at Blaengarw, Mr Hartshorn, much criticised Labour Party participant in the Simon Commission, was reported to have said that “Saklatvala should have his neck wrung.” When challenged to a debate with Saklatvala, he refused to appear with him. Saklatvala again invited Mr Hartshorn to a joint meeting, and Mrs Saklatvala added her assurance that, “if her husband’s neck was wrung, she undertook not to claim damages or compensation!”

Despite all the violent opposition to the Commission, it continued to traipse up and down India, speaking to the few politicians who had not officially boycotted it. Even if the Labour Party had not realised before the Commission went to India that the Indian people as a whole and nationalist politicians in particular, were profoundly opposed to it, they certainly were left in no doubt

during the years in which it operated.

By the time it finally published its report and set up its futile round table conference in 1930, Saklatvala was no longer in Parliament, and his words of protest could not be so widely heard. India was represented at the first round table conference only by the few Indian princes who, in their own self interest, remained true to the British Crown; no one could possibly imagine that they represented the views of the majority of the Indian people.

In March 1930, one of the most dramatic events to express the rejection by the Indian people of British rule in their country was the march to the sea by Gandhi, leading thousands of ordinary working people and also most of the leaders of the Indian National Congress; this was specifically against the Salt Tax, which the British government of India introduced at that time. It was a law that caused great hardship to masses of the people and served yet again to underline the helplessness of the Indian people in controlling their own affairs. Great brutality was used against thousands of peaceful demonstrators, which in itself inflamed the people and produced yet further antagonism.

The harsher the suppression of the peaceful expression of the Indian people, the more united did they become in fighting imperialist domination. The jails were full; but again, instead of curbing the unrest, it served merely to increase it. No matter what tactics the British employed, the demand for total independence and self-government was gaining momentum; the Indian people were marching relentlessly towards their longed-for goal of freedom.



Clipping: The Times, 20th November 1929

The Conservative-led National Government of 1931 hosted the second round table conference in England, which Gandhi was tempted into attending, much

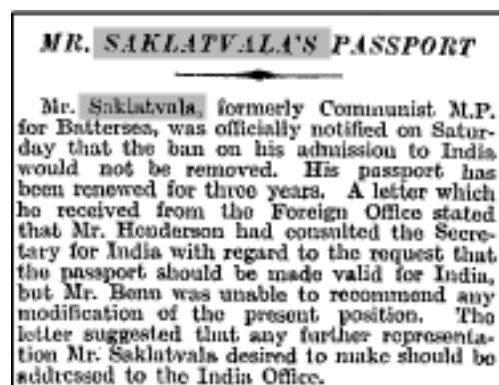
against the wishes of most of his Congress colleagues. He went to the conference in the hope of obtaining dominion status for his country, but went away at the end of it empty-handed and disillusioned.

It was during Gandhiji's visit to England in the autumn of 1931 that my middle brother, Beram, said to Mummy, "What's the matter with Father? Why is he so bad-tempered?" To which my mother, somewhat cynically replied, "Well, Gandhi's here and getting all the limelight."

"Tell Father to take off his trousers and appear in nothing but a loin-cloth, and he'll soon attract just as much attention as Gandhi!" was the irreverent reply.

But while there may have been an element of personal jealousy, Father undoubtedly felt that Gandhi was betraying the cause of the Indian National Congress, most of whose members were opposed to his participation in the conference. Following as it did the years of what Father thought of as the betrayal of India by the Labour Party, the participation in this useless conference by Gandhi was the unkindest cut of all. So when the Mahatma had to return home disappointed, empty-handed, humiliated and disillusioned. Father had at least the satisfaction of saying, yet again, "I told you so."

In a way the 1931 round table conference did bring Indian independence nearer, as the majority of Indian leaders then realised that Independence had to be struggled for—it was never going to be freely given by any British government under the leadership of any political party. In this way it perhaps served to unite the people against British rule and dispelled all illusions. Just as it had taken the Great War to produce the India Act of 1919, so it took the Second World War to achieve total independence for what was left of poor India after it had been carved up between the dissenting elements in the country. The Lord giveth, but the noble Lords taketh away.



Clipping: The Times, 21st June 1930

CHAPTER 21

Saklatvala on Socialism

Speech on socialism, communism and capitalism.

On the 22nd March 1928, the Manchester Guardian, commenting on a speech by Saklatvala in the Commons the day before, printed the following:

“No contribution to the debate had such a stirring effect as Mr Saklatvala’s, and for some hours afterwards the enquiry was everywhere made when two persons met within the walls of Parliament, ‘Did you hear Saklatvala?’”

The speech to which they referred was Saklatvala’s definition of socialism and is, therefore, of some importance in explaining to the reader his political aims.



Photo: Saklatvala

Under ‘Orders of the Day; Perils of Socialism,’ Sir Harry Brittain (Conservative) is quoted in Hansard in the following terms:

“I beg to move that this House, recognising the grave dissensions which exist amongst leaders of the socialist party and within the party itself on vital issues of public policy, consider that the formation of a socialist government would be a source of danger to the nation.”

To which, after trying unsuccessfully to amend (see the [Appendix to this](#)

chapter), Saklatvala replied thus:

I would ask the House to be patient only a short time, in order to permit me to place my point of view, which I believe to be the only point of view, for any genuine form of socialism. The rt hon gentleman the member for Central Edinburgh (Mr W. Graham) rightly charged the hon member for Acton (Sir Harry Brittain), the mover of the motion, with not defining socialism, and with not making clear what it was that he was attacking. The mover did refer to the fact that, in one of the responsible Labour publications, he found the production of about forty different definitions of socialism.

Misunderstanding has been created by the rt hon member for Central Edinburgh by the instances which he gave of some activities of industries which are under so-called public or municipal control, as if they could be a substitute for socialism. Socialism and capitalism are two entirely antagonistic forms.

It is possible for capitalism to extend and expand ownership from one individual to several individuals, as in the case of limited liability companies. It is equally possible to extend that ownership, that partnership, to the citizens of a whole borough, town or city, as the case may be, in owning something through a municipal council. It may be equally possible, without at all disturbing the capitalist character of society, and without coming near socialism, to extend the ownership of any particular enterprise to all the citizens of a country or a nation.

...I beg the House not to be misled into thinking that the ownership of the postal service, or a system of tramlines or transport, or the Broadcasting Corporation has any real bearing on genuine socialism. It is merely an enlargement of the number of shareholders. Let me take, for illustration, the Post Office. It is the height of absurdity to say that the Post Office system, within a capitalist country and a capitalist form of society, is a socialist organisation. It is nothing of the sort.

Mr W. Thorne: Is it private enterprise?

Mr Saklatvala: It is private enterprise as it is; it is not a socialist organisation in any shape or form. The only difference is that the shareholders are all the citizens of the nation, but it is a capitalist form and system. When the Post Office wants to erect buildings, it goes to a

profiteering contractor. That is not socialism. If it wants mail vans, it again goes to private profiteers. If it wants pillar boxes, it goes to another private company. If the Post Office wants postage stamps, it goes to a private company and buys the paper and gives a printing contract.

There is no socialism about a Post Office in a capitalist country. There is certainly the compensation that the shareholders are so expanded that everybody within the state stands to lose or gain by its losses or profits. That is the difference, but that is not socialism. The poor postmen working in the Post Office are no better off than working for a private corporation or company. It is entirely wrong and misleading to say that this is a form of socialism.

This is where we differ in the communist movement from the so-called socialist movement, which looks at these forms of capitalism as socialism. Though they have a socialist form, they have a capitalist soul. The poor postmen have no voice in the control of the Post Office. Instead of a board of directors appointed by shareholders, it has a board appointed by the state.

There may be a little difference between private enterprise owned by a few individuals in a nation, and an enterprise owned by all the individuals in a nation, but it is misleading to say that private ownership by all the persons in the state makes it a socialist organisation. It is far from being a socialist organisation.

I read last Sunday an article which the mover of the motion did not mention, though he was very copious in his references to literature. The article was in the Sunday Graphic and it was by the rt hon gentleman the Leader of the Opposition, who launched a severe attack on communism and communist methods, and tried to speak of socialism in terms of capitalism, or in terms that would confuse everybody and lead to no clear issue at all.

What was the gist of that article? What is the real problem before the country between socialism and capitalism? It is not merely the question of extending the field to a larger number of shareholders; it is a question of overthrowing the system of private ownership and introducing public ownership. It would become criminal for an individual to own land or

houses or places of industry.

Such a society would be quite a different society. If such a society were introduced, it is futile and absurd to argue that the whole of the social structure of the nation would quietly remain what it was and that the relationship of man to man within the state would continue to be what it was.

It is deceptive even to put forward such a proposition, and again I suggest, especially to my comrades within the Labour movement who aspire to be socialists generally, to take the example of the Post Office or the Broadcasting Corporation or of the municipal tramways; the capitalist state of society has not been altered by merely widening the ownership. The position of the workers within these industries is absolutely the position of workers who are under the dictation of somebody not appointed by themselves. It is the capitalist system.

The rt hon gentleman, member for Central Edinburgh, gave many points for serious thought with regard to trustification, but there again I want my socialist comrades to understand that competition by itself has never been the object of capitalism. The object of capitalism has been the increase of the profits of the individuals in industry. Competition has been used as a means to achieve that object.

For example, somebody for a time is making a profit in a particular industry; another individual or corporation enters into competition not for the benefit of the consumers, not out of a sportsmanlike spirit to oblige the world by producing a cheaper article, but to make a higher profit. Competition in itself has never been the object of capitalism and individual ownership. It is a means that is used at certain times only. When the opposite takes place, when unregulated and uncontrolled competition endangers the profits of a particular corporation or several corporations or individuals, quite justifiably and without any inconsistency, the capitalist controllers of these industries combine to get rid of that instrument of competition in order to secure the ultimate motive, namely, the safeguarding of their profits.

The mere abolition of the element of competition is not the victory of socialism at all. It is still another power at the disposal of private capitalism, either to use that competition or to submerge that

competition, to reach the main objective, namely, the increase of the individual's profits.

From those points of view, I submit, that within this capitalist country there never has been an experiment in socialism at all, and to people who have a right conception of socialism it is a mistaken notion to imagine for a moment that socialism can be introduced alongside capitalism, side by side, and gradually, and so on and so on. Such a thing would never happen; such a thing cannot happen.

The rt hon gentleman the member for Central Edinburgh gave us an example drawn from the coal industry to which I would specially direct the attention of genuine socialists, not only here but all over the country. Is it really satisfying to the socialist conscience to say that the coal industry of this country ought to be so pooled together and controlled to secure for it a certain trade in coal in somebody else's country, doing this by measures and tactics which will create unemployment amongst the coal miners of Poland, Germany, Belgium or elsewhere?

Such a proceeding would not be socialism, but merely nationalisation. To put under state control a particular national industry, with the same object as the capitalist owned and controlled industries, does not bring us any nearer the attainment of socialism.

If we were to apply the real principles of socialism to the coal mines, the first consideration would be to secure the control of the miners themselves over their own industry. The first consideration of the miners who took charge of the British coal industry would be the welfare of the miners in the coal industry in Poland, in Belgium, in Japan, in India, in Africa, and elsewhere, and the first socialist step would not be to pool the British coal but to pool the world's coal, and arrive at such a position that all miners in all parts of the world would be employed and all the coal produced by them would be of some use to all the nations of the world. The nationalisation of the coal industry in one country does not take us nearer to socialism but may even strengthen the capitalist atmosphere and the capitalist structure of society, in which this sort of nationalisation is practiced.

To come back to the argument used by the rt hon Leader of the

Opposition in last Sunday's Sunday Graphic in his futile attack upon communism. What does the rt hon Leader of the Opposition mean to say? I have no hesitation in saying that he is not in a position to say what he wants to say—[Hon. member: Why?—]—Because he has to attack the Communist Party, because he has got to attack the one country which has achieved socialism, and has also to keep up the appearance of preaching socialism.

Mr Thorne: Which country is that?

Mr Lamb: Will the hon member say which country has achieved socialism?

Mr Saklatvala: If you have patience you will have the whole story. We as a nation, and all other nations, are concerned not merely with the theory of socialism but with the practice of socialism; we are concerned not with expressions of pious hopes of what socialism will do and what public ownership will lead to but as practical politicians we are in duty bound to say how it is to come about.

The rt hon Leader of the Opposition says in that notorious article in the Sunday Graphic that it will come by the democratic will of the majority of the people, by learning lessons in socialism. That is exactly the charge of the Communist Party against the Leader of the Opposition, that instead of educating the electorate, instead of telling them to adhere to socialism, year after year he and his Party are receding from and going against socialism. There was a time when the Labour Party and the Communist Party had not such divergencies and differences of opinion.

Mr Montague: When was that?

Mr Saklatvala: You will get the full story by and by. [Interruption.] I am putting this without any passion or personality. There is no doubt that that divergence between the communists and the socialist groups, though communism and socialism are identical—

Mr Thorne: Not on your life!

Mr Saklatvala: My comrade here says 'Not on your life!' but I think the recently published Labour Encyclopaedia will show that it is so. There is no difference between communism and socialism—take any ordinary dictionary and see. There is certainly an ever-growing difference and

divergence between the Communist Party in Great Britain and the socialist party. I admit it quite candidly, and I do not suggest for a moment that in that ever-growing difference we are always the faultless party—we may be committing our errors and our own individual faults.

But the general picture is this, that since the revolution in Russia, the Communist Party are standing firm by one and the same programme. We are not adding anything to that, and the divergence does not occur because we want something more year after year, but because the socialist party want less and less socialism year after year.

At one time the Labour Party of this country were agreeable to forming the Council of British Workers and Soldiers. At that time the communists were agreeable to that proposition, and there was no difference of opinion between the two. Today the fault is that the Communist Party still demand that this country should be placed under the control of the Council of Workers and Soldiers, and the Labour Party does not want what it once wanted. The Council of Action was established by the Labour Party in this country. There was no divergence between the Communist Party and the Labour Party on that subject in those days. There is divergence today.

Today, the Communist Party says that during the Chinese expedition, during the Simon Commission, during the hundred-and-one struggles of the workers, there ought to have been Councils of Action all over the country amongst the working-class organisations. [Laughter] My Labour friends laugh at it. They did not laugh at it in 1921. And today they want to go away from the only method—the only method—which will introduce socialism, and then allow the people to imagine that socialism is to come in some unknown and mysterious way.

There is the question of the War Debts. There was a time when I, as a member of the Independent Labour Party, had learned my lesson, within the Independent Labour Party, that the whole of the War Debt of this country is blood money, it is the result of undue profiteering during the War, which every communist and socialist should repudiate.

When that was the cry of the Labour Party, the communists and the Labour Party stood together—nearer than today. The Labour Party receded from that position, through the exigencies of parliamentary vote

catching, and brought it down to disallowing half the debt instead of the whole of it. Then they came to the Capital Levy. They found the Communist Party would be dissatisfied with it, but the divergence occurred not because the Communist Party said, 'Your Capital Levy of a half is not sufficient, make it three quarters,' but because the Labour Party withdrew from the Capital Levy.

Today our objection is that when the country is appealed to, democratic support is sought not for socialism, but for subterfuges and substitutes for socialism. The surtax! I know it is rather a sore point. I have been bred and brought up in a capitalist business life myself, and I know the surtax is never going to be a reality. If you impose the surtax today, I vouch for it that at least one firm have got their plans ready in the City of London to have dummy shareholders in Buenos Aires, Calcutta and Hong Kong in whose names large numbers of shares will stand, and there will not be many capitalist mugs who will allow all the shares to stand in their own name. [Interruption] It is so.

We do not quarrel with the rt hon member for Aberavon (Mr Ramsay MacDonald) when he is seriously appealing to democratic methods, but we quarrel with him because he is depriving the working class of the opportunity of learning socialism and voting for socialism. He is making it criminal now to have anything in the programme—anything that is genuine socialism. That is why, in the amendment which I had hoped to move, but which I am not permitted to move, I point out that apart from the impracticability of the surtax, there is no socialism in the surtax. 'I will take two shillings in the pound out of your unearned profit, and I will then permit you to make twenty shillings of unearned profit.'

It is worse than the gambling business in which the government have become shareholders. The government will become shareholders in the unearned income of people who do not work and who exploit the working class, living as parasites upon them. The Labour Party says, 'I will square my conscience if you give me two shillings out of every twenty shillings and I will call it socialism.'

Then comes the living wage. We would certainly agree that the living wage would be a great battle-cry within a capitalist organisation inside a capitalist society, but it would only be useful to socialism if it were used

as a battle-cry leading up to an industrial revolution in the end... The living wage is not socialism. How can a living wage be produced within a capitalist society? A living wage within a capitalist society cannot be produced as long as there is international competition. Lancashire cannot afford to pay £4 a week to spinners when capitalists can erect cotton factories in Shanghai and get people to work for 6d or 8d a day of ten hours.

In such cases protection is no good at all. The people who sent out a Chinese expedition to Shanghai took away every protection from the Lancashire workers, and now no protection is possible. At the jute mills in Dundee the workers are not earning half a living wage, but how can you help that happening when the same fraternity of financiers are erecting jute mills in Calcutta, and paying miserably low wages to their workers?

If you wish to establish a permanent living wage, it can only be done by applying similar conditions of labour all over the world, and that cannot be achieved by Great Britain nationalising her cotton and jute industries. Supposing you nationalise the jute industry in this country and it was not nationalised in Calcutta?

Mr Maxton: The hon member knows I am interested in this point. Will he tell me whether it is not the case that in Russia Mr Stalin does believe that a socialist country can maintain itself and its conditions inside a capitalist world?

Mr Saklatvala: Not as the hon member puts it. The people of Russia want jute bags and how are you going to safeguard the living wage in the jute trade under your present system? All you can do is to shut down the jute mills whether they are nationalised or not. The only way in which the human interest can be safeguarded is by a complete understanding and adoption of a uniform standard and hours of labour.

We want to establish a uniform standard and hours for workers in America, Germany, Italy, Spain and all the other countries. It is obvious that in any real genuine socialist system, what is required is the control of the workers in the industry, so that an understanding may be arrived at with the workers of the same industry in other countries. It is no use trying to evade that issue. The beginning of socialism is not possible

without a socialist revolution. It is all very well to say that the capitalist world may exist and a socialist state may exist and flourish within that world, but we are not concerned with that.

Mr Maxton: I was merely putting the point that that was the view of Mr Stalin, who, when dealing with the present administration of Russia, said that a socialist state can maintain itself in a capitalist world.

Mr Saklatvala: The word I quarrel about is 'maintain' instead of 'struggle'. His point is that a socialist state under those conditions cannot maintain itself at the full height of its prosperity. The point raised is whether militarism is to play its full part in attacking the neighbouring industrial countries, especially Poland and Germany, and that seemed to some to be an absolutely unavoidable condition of the existence of a socialist Russia. The point is, can the Soviet Union accomplish its objective without those military expeditions, and find sufficient elements at their disposal to maintain the struggle in spite of the attacks of surrounding capitalist countries...

Mr Stalin's argument is that, deplorable as the industrial development of Russia is at the present time, the needs and requirements of the people of Russia make them dependent upon other countries for manufactured articles which cannot be supplied in Russia, and owing to the backwardness and the apathy of the working classes in other countries that have not yet developed as far as a socialist revolution.

The teachings of Zinoviev and Trotsky try to prove the necessity of attacking Poland and Germany in order to incorporate the neighbouring countries in the Soviet Republic. There is still a sufficient modicum of industrial activity within the Soviet Republic which could be built upon by some sort of compromise with the capitalist countries and machinery could be adopted to keep up the socialist struggle, until socialism is properly understood as something that can be introduced only through a socialist revolution, and no humbug. It is no use trying to deceive ourselves on that point.

The workers of Great Britain should realise that God has not created man to be ruled dictatorially and autocratically by another man. Through self-determination and mutual consent we should elect somebody to rule who is not a socialist boss, but a helper and adviser. If

that is our essential belief, how can the people of this country believe that God has created the British Labour Party to rule the Indians and the Africans in the way that they are being ruled? The leaders of the Labour movement say to the Indians and the Chinese, 'We are ruling you; we are sending Commissions to your countries because you are less experienced and we are more experienced, and we want to be kind to you and tell you how you should live your lives.'

That is exactly what the capitalist bosses are saying to the workers in this country. They say to them, 'We are more experienced in directing industry than you are, and we keep an Army and a Navy and an Airforce to protect you because you are less experienced than we are.' Socialism believes that that sort of incapacity is not inherent in human nature.

How can the Labour Party say that they are preaching socialism and collecting the majority of voices in favour of socialism, when they are pursuing such a policy as I have described? The Labour Party supports expeditions to China, the colonies and the Gold Coast; in fact, one member of the Labour Party has gone to visit one of those countries. How can those things go on?...

I believe in socialism because in my view all the devices adopted in the development of industrial life through individual ownership and capitalist control have ceased to produce any good for the workers. It has caused such degradation of human life and character within capitalist countries, and it is still more degrading and crushing as far as human life is concerned in the countries which have been conquered for the benefit of the capitalists.

For those reasons, I do not believe in Tory politics, because there is no genuine socialism at the back of conservatism. Capitalism and individual control only create misery and do more harm than good. We hear a lot of people talking about their hard earned wealth and savings, but what does it all mean? The capitalist society today is unjust. Consider the case of an honest man doing well, educating his children in a first-class institution and maintaining his wife in a luxurious manner. That man gets run over by a motor car and becomes incapacitated. Under the state of society, that man would be forced immediately to sell up his home and withdraw his children from the university, and his

family is crushed once and for all. That form of society is so unjust and cruel that I understand the justification of that man having savings in the bank, so that when he meets with an accident, there is enough in his bank to enable his family to go on.

I will give another illustration. Take the case of an acknowledged criminal. Your present state of society says, 'We punish him because he is dangerous to society,' and you lock him up in a prison; but you take care that three times a day he is fed, you take care that once a week he is medically examined, you take care that he has open-air exercise once or twice a day, you take care of many things, realising your liability to human life, even though it be that of an acknowledged criminal.

And yet you disown any responsibility and liability to the innocent wife and children of the same man and throw them on the scrap heap to starve—you are no longer responsible for the women and children who have not been criminals and have committed no fault. In these circumstances, that wife and those children would certainly be happier if, out of the stolen property, some provision were set aside for them.

We have seen that there have been some rich criminals lately, and when they have gone into prison, their wives and children have never had to go to the Board of Guardians, or be locked up in workhouses; they were amply provided for. I wish that every burglar would steal, and first amply provide for his wife.

But I urge this House and the country to realise that the very first principle of socialism, the very first principle of a communist state, the essential and fundamental principle, is that the state first assumes full liability and responsibility for the honourable and comfortable maintenance of all men, women and children as long as they honestly carry out their task; and, as long as society as a whole relieves the burden of these accidental catastrophes to individuals, that state is morally justified in denying the right of private ownership and private savings, which are no longer needed and for which there is no moral justification.

Therefore, I take it that, if socialism, genuine and bona fide, is ever to be introduced, it can only be introduced with the immediate deprivation of the right of any individual to possess or own private land, private house,

places of industry, and, above all, human labour.

That being so, we know what will happen. It is our nature to struggle against that. We do not give up our own parliamentary position so easily, we do not give up our little individual advantages which we create around us, and we are not under the delusion that a large, powerful, resourceful, well-organised class of capitalists, with its agents in all parts of the world, is going to say, 'From tomorrow morning we deliver up our possessions.' I do not say that that is impossible, but it is very unlikely. It is not the communist mind, it is not the communist mentality, it is not the socialist creed, but it is the individual capitalist greed that makes a revolution inevitable.

On that account we say without any delusion, that those who demand socialism, if they are true to their convictions, must first demand it by making it unlawful for any man to possess any private property. If they sincerely mean to make that unlawful, then they must be prepared to back up their legislative effort by a socialist revolution...

It is no use imagining that we shall suddenly have tomorrow morning a state of society in which there will be no private ownership, and that all industries will be nationalised, and in which the social structure will yet remain the same, so that a clerk will walk into an office and take his cap off as his master passes by and hide round the corner.

We cannot for a moment imagine that the policy of private ownership and of power in the hands of one individual to say, 'You obey me, or I starve you and your wife and children,' will remain; and with that power gone, it is a complete delusion on the part of anyone to say that society will still remain as it is, because we shall have destroyed individual ownership through the ballot-box, and there is not the slightest doubt that there is going to be a complete revolution from that moment in the relationship of man towards man.

You may consider that the Russians were mad in re-organising their Army and turning it into a Red Army instead of a capitalist Army; but the Red Army, its construction, its principles and its formation, the equal rights of the soldiers to political votes, their right to select their own officers and to dismiss their own officers, the right to pay their own officers... the same wages as are paid to the ordinary man who risks his

life, all these things are absolutely unavoidable consequences of establishing socialism, and it is no use for a socialist party to say that, because we are going to alter the world through the ballot-box, therefore there is no need for the workers to be prepared for a socialist revolution, there will not be a complete reversal of the present discipline of the Army, and it will not be followed by a complete destruction of what you call the British Empire.

Of course it means the destruction of the British Empire. Of course, in all the colonies, and in India and China, with the assistance of the workers, there will be the formation of the workers' organisations in those countries; there will be the overthrow of the zamindars, the landlords, the mandarins, the mine-owners, and all of that class in those countries. There is not the slightest doubt that, if you mean to pursue socialism, you have to pursue it by the first step of declaring capitalism and individual ownership to be illegal.

The second step will be the inevitable socialist revolution, not because a revolution is dear to the heart of the communist or the socialist, but because it is inevitable in the final struggle of those who possess individual property. There is not the slightest doubt that there will be a complete reversal of what you call law, order and discipline. Within offices, within factories, within the Army, within the police, within the navy, within the colonies and the relation of this country to the colonies and the conquered countries, everywhere the workers will organise themselves into their own organisation, the peasants will organise themselves into their own organisation, and they will not only say, 'This is possessed by the nation and the Post Master General is ruling us,' but the postmen and the miners and the railwaymen will say, 'We have no Post Master General except the one that we appoint, and, if he goes on delivering obnoxious speeches, and recommends private enterprise in the Post Office, we will dismiss him within 24 hours.'

That is the system, that is the control, that is socialism. Whether the Labour leaders foresee that such a thing will scare away the voters or not, we say that the teachings and lessons of the Labour Party were responsible for what happened in Russia, and that the events of 1917 in Russia would have been impossible but for the great fraternal backing

and support which the British working class organisation gave to their suffering comrades from 1902 right up to 1917. The Russian revolution would have been impossible but for that, and we say, similarly, that no pact, no contract, no wishy-washy phraseology in parliament, is going to keep the workers of Britain in this perpetual slavery. The example and progress of the socialist movement in Russia and the neighbouring countries—

Mr Maclaren: And in Battersea!

Mr Saklatvala: And in Battersea, in spite of the Labour Party's attempt now to drive Battersea out of existence [the Labour Party had recently selected an official Labour Candidate to stand against Saklatvala in the next General Election], those very examples will create a genuine socialist movement and a genuine socialist revolution in this country.

Later in the debate, Lady Astor proclaimed:

We have had, I think, a most interesting and instructive afternoon. It has been interesting because we have had two very brilliant speeches from entirely different points of view. The hon member for North Battersea (Mr Saklatvala) has a beautiful theory, but it is based on universal understanding and universal love. I ask the hon member, does he think that I could get up in Soviet Russia and make a speech such as he has made in the House of Commons today? Universal understanding! Why, I would not be allowed to land, let alone to speak.

To which Saklatvala gallantly replied, "I will guarantee the safe transport of the hon Lady to Russia, and also her safe and sound return from Russia, if she will repeat there what she says tonight."

[Editor's note: Nancy Astor, born in the USA, was a Tory and the first woman to take a seat in the House of Commons].

What a sensational tour of Russia might have ensued if the honourable Lady had taken up the offer of the honourable member for Battersea North! Had it been celebrated in verse, it could well have vied in popularity with the saga of the Owl and the Pussy Cat.

Appendix to Chapter 21: Amendment to ‘Perils of Socialism’

The following is the proposed amendment to Sir Harry Brittain’s House of Commons resolution ‘Perils of Socialism’, prepared by Saklatvala, but not moved on account of its being ruled out of order. It should be noted that, in accordance with custom, amendments must only contain commas or semi-colons for punctuation; hence the apparently involved manner of its presentation.

Omit all words after ‘House’ and insert: ‘Considering that the private ownership of land, industries and means of producing wealth engenders the struggle of competitor against competitor, of nation against nation, of class against class, thus leading to powerful commercial trusts within nations, fierce class struggles and the enslavement of foreign and colonial peoples by imperialist conquests, has failed and must fail to secure and maintain a full standard of living for the workers, to foster their mental and physical development and to secure international peace, this House, whilst condemning the capitalist system as responsible for the aforementioned circumstances, at the same time sees that the Labour Party is rapidly deserting the workers’ struggle for social emancipation and is adopting policies on finance, unemployment, imperial and foreign affairs, such as the Surtax, living wage, nationalisation by purchase, imposition of British conditions for the rule of India, Ireland, Egypt, China and Africa, makes necessary the perpetuation and strengthening of the capitalist system united with the militarist supremacy of the capitalists of Great Britain; and this House declares that the achievement of the social emancipation of the working class, the producers of the wealth of society, can only be secured along the lines of bona fide socialism, and urges the subversion of the

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capitalist system through the inevitable social revolution establishing the dictatorship of the working class during the process of transference of all land, houses and industrial undertakings from private ownership to the working-class state, and, during the period of bringing about the necessary and consequential changes in the judicial, military and administrative machinery, and in securing the independence of all those countries now under British subjugation.'

A Revolutionary in Parliament

Continuing contribution to debates on India. Tribute to the retiring speaker of the House. Speech against the use of the police in trade disputes.

By 1928 events in India were dominating the international scene as well as Saklatvala's politics. The demands for freedom, industrial unrest, violence as an instrument of repression and oppression, were all increasing. Gandhi and the Congress were uniting the people in their bid for total freedom, and the Communist Party was also gaining ground.

In April, railway workers who were on strike were fired on by the police, killing two and wounding three. Saklatvala asked the under-secretary for India several times in the House for details of the shooting, but received somewhat vague replies.

On the 30th July he asked Earl Winterton how many industrial disputes had occurred in India since January that year, how many were still in progress and on how many occasions had armed forces been used against the striking workers; also he asked for detailed figures of the dead and wounded among the workers and among the police. In his reply Early Winterton reported no less than 85 trade disputes between January and June 1928, and seven cases of serious rioting. There had been a total of six persons killed and 91 injured and 55 police had been injured; in addition people had been killed in rail derailments. Mr Saklatvala made a point of asking whether or not any of the strikers had been armed, or "is it the policy of the government to attack and shoot unarmed people?"

In April 1928, a British bookseller sent to India copies of two books, 'Socialism and the Living Wage' and 'The Politics of Oil' and all copies of both these publications were confiscated. The reason given by Earl Winterton for the prohibition of the books was that the first one was published by the Communist Party of Great Britain and the importation of all such literature into India was banned. The second book had been published at the request of

the Labour Research Department and no reasons for its confiscation were given to the House.

Saklatvala asked, "On what principle should any book published by the Communist Party be prevented from getting into India? Are the government of India afraid of the truth being told to the people of India?" No reply to this artless query was forthcoming.

In Bardoli, Gujarat there was a re-assessment of the land tax and the peasants were suddenly required to pay a 22% increase in the tax on their land. The great majority of them could scarcely afford the existing taxes and such an increase spelled complete ruin for most of them.

Gandhi took up their cause and succeeded, through his civil disobedience campaign, in having the new taxation reviewed. The increase was reduced to 5% and all the protests came to an end. Saklatvala was indignant, claiming that even the 5% increase would leave thousands of peasants in debt for the rest of their lives. Once again he challenged Gandhi's pacific methods and wanted a more active and vigorous fight to be waged against the government.

He wrote in the *Sunday Worker* of 12th August 1928:

"...The settlement of the Bardoli dispute is yet another proof of the failure of Gandhi's futile passive resistance policy against a determined and ruthless imperialist power which does not hesitate to use force against the defenceless peasants... The Bardoli peasants who now have to buy back land which they never sold, and consequently cannot pay for, are not likely to be so pleased as their middle-class leaders...

"Gandhi must be aware that this settlement is going to tie up the peasants through mortgages for generations to come and I say to him frankly, and to the whole Indian people, that such tactics as they have employed are calculated to blind the eyes of the peasants and workers, and hand them over helpless to their enemies.

"Real organisation of the Bardoli workers could have forced the government's hand, had it been linked up with the workers in the towns. In the city of Bombay there have been 150,000 workers on strike for 17 weeks, many of them from Bardoli. Had the struggle of the Bombay textile workers been linked up with that of the Bardoli peasants, had a nation-wide agitation to support them and the other strikers elsewhere

in India been started, the government must have surrendered...

“It is only by the organisation of a workers’ and peasants’ party, freed from middle-class influence, that Imperialism will be fought in India and the masses liberated.”

In Berlin, at a conference of the League Against Imperialism, it was claimed that 5,000,000 died of starvation every year in India. Saklatvala continued to bring attention to the upheavals in India through the press, through the League Against Imperialism, through the Workers’ Welfare League of India, through the Communist Party and, of course, in the House of Commons.

Despite all the frustrations and anxieties besetting him on the distress and dangers in India, his sense of the ridiculous did not desert him. In May, some members expressed disquiet in the Commons over unseemly behaviour after dark in Hyde Park, and suggested that certain by-laws were being flouted, thereby making it embarrassing to take respectable ladies in the park during the hours of darkness for fear of what they might unwittingly behold. A member remarked that it was in no way the duty of the police to be responsible for the morals of the general public. Another member insisted that the lighting in the park was inadequate and should be increased.

Saklatvala brought a little light into the gloom of the debate by saying that “what was required of the police was to make sure that any romantic behaviour on the part of some people should not be seen by respectable persons; and, in view of that fact, would not that duty be better performed by extinguishing all the lights in the park?”

In that same month there was a debate on estimates for the Foreign Office expenditure. At the end of a long speech, Mr Locker-Lampson said, “...The debate this evening has been an example for us to follow in future debates, and as near as possible to treat foreign questions from a non-controversial point of view...”

To which Saklatvala responded, “I agree that up to now the Committee has been, more or less, like a prayer meeting, with hon members pronouncing mutual benedictions upon one another. I hope the Committee will allow me to carry on the usual function of discussion in my own way, without feeling offended...” (His allusion to the “mutual benedictions” was a jocular reference to the increasing similarities between Conservative and Labour Party policies). He said he was frankly puzzled to understand the difference between

government policy and opposition policy on Egypt. His speech that followed was long and covered much ground in the field of foreign policy. When he finally sat down, Sir Martin Conway rose and commented that, “after the torrent of words to which we have just listened, it is difficult to turn our attention to practical matters.” Saklatvala certainly always managed to create a diversion in the tedium of some of the more prosaic debates in the Chamber.



Photo: Saklatvala at an anti-imperialist march (the banner depicts T.E. Lawrence)

In June 1928 the Liberal speaker of the House, J.H. Whitley retired. The Prime Minister paid tribute to him, as did several other members from all parties. Saklatvala, being the sole representative of the Communist Party in the House, made the following contribution to the tributes being paid to the retiring speaker:

“I hope the House will pardon me for uttering one or two sentences. I realise that in my own person I am one of the least important and most obscure members of this House. There are circumstances which have rendered my position in this House peculiarly exceptional at times, and

I have realised that, more often than the House has been a difficulty for me, I may have been a difficulty for you.

“I sincerely join in the expressions of opinion which we have heard, for not only have I enjoyed perfect and impartial protection at your hands but, on all those occasions when you have had to turn me down, your informative advice to me was even of greater value than the opportunity of speaking. Just one more word.

“The leader of the House paid a tribute to your hospitality and the impression created by it upon the dominion representatives. I say without exaggeration and with complete sincerity that my friends and countrymen from India who have come here and come in contact with you through the parliamentary Association and your leadership of it, have invariably gone away with the impression, however unfair it may appear to others, that in you they have met the finest gentleman of Britain; and there is not the slightest doubt that the feeling expressed today that there has been complete satisfaction with your Speakership is absolutely true without any exaggeration or exception.”

His admiration and appreciation of Mr Whitley was sincere, even heartfelt, but this did not deter him from supporting an amendment moved by Labour member, Mr Clynes, reducing the suggested pension for the retiring speaker from the proposed £4,000 a year to £1,000. The amendment was supported by many Labour MPs, who spoke of the financial hardship endured by so many of the working class in the country. Saklatvala compared the sum of £4,000 to the meagre ten shillings a week given to old age pensioners (£26 a year). He said the time had come when payments made to parliamentarians who held office should be models of moderation, and he contended that the time was past when ministers and others had to vie with royalty in their private lives, but should rather live as average citizens of the country. I think there are many people today who would agree with that view.

In August 1928, Saklatvala launched an attack on the Home Secretary, claiming that he was using the machinery of the Home Office and the police force to wage a class war. The police were used to prevent communist meetings or, if they did not prevent them, were always present. The police were always used on the side of employers in any trade dispute; they were used to harass street traders. Private individuals whose politics were in

conflict with the Conservative Party had their letters opened and their telephone calls intercepted.

Saklatvala claimed that the machinery of state was being used, not to prevent criminal or dangerous acts, but to protect and further the interests of the political party of the Home Secretary and of industrialists and employers and against the interests of the working class. He cited various instances of such abuse of Home Secretary's powers. He claimed there was a lack of confidence in the police in the 70% of the population that constituted the working class.

I think this view of police activity is shared by many people now, who have witnessed in television newscasts police freely using their truncheons on peaceful pickets and peaceful demonstrators who have been opposing the interests either of the ruling party of the day or of the employers. In all our history we have never seen the police used to protect the interests of the employed against the employers in any strike or confrontation—it has always, without exception, been the other way round. And yet the police force should be protecting all United Kingdom citizens; after all, we all pay for them, both employed and employers, and all are entitled to their protection. Sadly, their main object, that of reducing crime and apprehending criminals, is not nearly so successful as their efforts to repress demonstrators and pickets, and crime figures soar day by day.

So far the meetings have been immune from the rowdy scenes which characterized the last fight between the late Mr. F. H. Rose and Dr. Sandeman. This is largely due to the fact that the "Reds" have been following Mr. Ferguson from meeting place to meeting place as a supporting army, but there are indications that detachments of Communists are likely to devote their attention to pursuing the other three candidates and heckling them briskly. Mr. Saklatvala, M.P., addressing a meeting in support of Mr. Ferguson, dismissed the Conservative and Liberal candidates with the remark that if he were of a capitalistic tendency he would toss a coin and make it heads for the Conservatives and tails for the Liberals. In the Labour Party he said they had a party which retained a traditional name, but which long ago had thrown overboard all the traditions of the Labour movement. It was not only a party with a Liberal programme; it had even found a Liberal candidate for North Aberdeen. (Laughter.) There was a time when he used to see Captain Wedgwood Benn in the House of Commons voting like a sincere Radical. Captain Benn had now undergone a change. Instead of coming to the constituency as an honest Liberal he had discarded the Liberal Party that made him what he was and gave him his political knowledge, instinct, and reputation. The Communist programme Mr. Saklatvala described as "an original, genuine, sincere anti-capitalist programme that had been before the working class of Great Britain from the days of the 1848 manifesto."

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Clipping: The Times, 8th August 1928

I wonder if Robert Peel had such possibilities in mind when he first put his 'bobbies' on the beat. I think some recent scenes at the pit-heads, and some of the legal cases brought against individuals in the police force for fabricating evidence and other such deviations from the honourable path of justice, would have saddened him. This is just one more instance of a great good being misused and misinterpreted, of a beneficent force being distorted and perverted by a few who use good for evil and for their own selfish desire for petty power. How wonderful it would be to see police assisting pickets and coming to their aid and support when, as members themselves of the working class, they realise that frequently the workers have right and justice on their side. Father certainly did not live to see that day and I fear that I shall not live to see it either.

CHAPTER 23

Some Family Life

Family life, late 1920s.

About this time there was a little non-political and light relief in which the patient reader is invited to share. Kaikoo Mehta, still Father's boon companion, decided to visit India after a gap of some 16 years. There was great excitement in the family, for in those days travel was neither so casually nor so frequently enjoyed as it is now.



Photo: Saklatvala

Kaikoo was still looked after by the dignified Mrs Milton. I think Mrs Milton was the most beautiful woman I have ever known, even allowing for childhood fancifulness. I often think of her when the more extreme women's libbers talk of the oppression of women. Mrs Milton would, I think, have surprised them. She was, we were always told, of aristocratic lineage, but she married a man who turned out to be a gambler, a drunk and a wastrel. After the birth of a son, this disaster of a man was turned out by his exasperated wife and disappeared from the scene. But apparently there were slight manifestations of his existence from time to time, but she managed with skill and dignity to avoid any unpleasant contact. One morning she telephoned my mother to say she had received a telegram telling her that her husband was dead; she had immediately wired back demanding a photograph of the corpse—she feared news of his demise was just another ruse out of his usual bag of tricks! The

photograph was duly received and he was never spoken of again. Here was one Edwardian lady who was not to be oppressed by male chauvinists.

Although to be a house-keeper had its menial side, this was minimised and never brought into public view by the ladylike Mrs Milton. When laundry had to be done, she rose at five, got a good fire going, heated the water, hung the washing out in the garden in dry weather or round the fire in the large kitchen in bad weather, and it was always ironed, folded and out of sight by the time Kaikoo rose in time for a leisurely breakfast. The house-cleaning was done in those private hours when Kaikoo was in the office, and she always appeared in public immaculately dressed, with her gossamer-fine white hair piled elegantly on her aristocratic, held-high head.

A few days before Kaikoo's departure we were all invited to dinner and I was allowed to go and spend the afternoon with Mrs Milton; I was therefore one of the few who had ever seen her at work in her kitchen. She kept house on a modest budget and was, by nature, thrifty. I watched, enthralled, as she twisted each sausage in the middle, magically making each one into two; this, I thought, was masterly, and in the evening, when the dish was circulated at table along with the roast chicken, I proclaimed my admiration to the assembled guests—wasn't Mrs Milton clever, I cried, she made one sausage into two, just by squeezing and twisting them in the middle. I was too lost in admiration to notice the embarrassment my revelation caused to host, hostess and guests alike.

The night before he was to sail, Kaikoo and Mrs Milton came to dinner with us, and after a celebratory meal, we all wished him well on his journey, excitement giving way a little to sadness at the thought of his impending absence from us. As Mummy shut the front door after the guests, she said in a quiet, shocked and amused voice to Daddy, "Kaikoo has dyed his hair!" Daddy laughed. "Is that what it was? I have been looking at him all evening and wondering why he looked so different!" They were both really tickled by this unexpected effort at rejuvenation—dying one's hair in those days was not the norm that it has become today; but I do not think that either of them guessed the cause of this unusual act of vanity and desperation on the part of this ageing bachelor.

On the day of his return, poor Mrs Milton telephoned my mother to drop the bombshell—Kaikoo had arrived home with a wife and a mother-in-law in tow!

He had not mentioned his intentions to anyone, not even to Father. Mrs Milton was angry because she was convinced that my parents must have been in Kaikoo's confidence and she felt there had been a conspiracy of silence against her. But it was not so; neither Mother nor Father had had the least inkling of Kaikoo's romantic intentions. Indeed, the news intrigued and tickled them even more than the dyed hair had done.

Both bride and mother-in-law were charming and gentle Parsi ladies, but for Mrs Milton, used to keeping house for a bachelor gentleman, the advent of two women in the household was more than she could bear. When she had had time to get over the first shock and came to believe that neither Father nor Mother had been taken into Kaikoo's confidence, she came to visit Mummy to pour her heart out and seek some sympathy and consolation. "Well, Sehri," she asserted in her usual down-to-earth manner, "the East will be a lot sweeter now those two old faggots have left it!" She did not remain with them long but took herself off to an elegant mansion-flat in Hendon.

She and Mother continued to visit each other but, sadly, we saw much less of her than before. She must have found it very lonely after having participated in Kaikoo's life for so many years and sharing his friends. Her age, of course, in the tradition of the times, was never revealed; but I would guess she was nearing the age of retirement when she left, and perhaps the rest from toil compensated for the loss of the social round. And she was able to spend more time with her semi-invalidated son, Matt.

Now that Kaikoo was a family man, with a wife to go home to, we naturally saw less of him in our home, though, of course, we all met fairly often. There was an Indian social club in London and my parents had always been active members; Mummy was perennially on the committee, and when Kaikoo's wife joined, she was also elected to the committee, so the two wives met quite frequently without their menfolk and were always good friends. But I don't think any of us ever got over the surprise of Kaikoo's belated and secret matrimony and, to Father, I think it always remained something of a joke.

<p style="text-align: center;">HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE. CHANCERY DIVISION.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">THE ACTION BY MR. SAKLATVALA. SAKLATVALA v. SMITH.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Before Mr. Justice ASTBURY.)</p> <p>This action has been adjourned indefinitely. It was brought by Mr. Shapurji Dorabji Saklatvala, M.P., of 2, St. Alban's-villas, Highgate-road, Highgate, the member of Parliament for North Battersea, against Mr. Richard Tilden Smith, of Adelaide House, King William-street, E.C., claiming that, under an agreement reduced into writing or evidenced by a letter dated September 18, 1925, addressed to the plaintiff and signed by the defendant, the defendant was bound to pay to the plaintiff for the maintenance and education of his children £500 per annum by equal monthly payments from January 1, 1928, until January 1, 1941. Mr. Saklatvala said that monthly payments were made down to the beginning of April, 1927, since when the defendant had neglected to pay anything.</p> <p>By his defence the defendant alleged that on October 27, 1926, a settlement was made whereby £500 a year was to be provided for the maintenance and education of the plaintiff's children; that he was under no personal liability under the agreement of September, 1925, unless and until the trustees of the settlement refused or neglected to continue to make provision for the plaintiff's children under the settlement; that the trustees of the settlement were ready and willing to continue to make provision, but were prevented from doing so by the unreasonable conduct of the defendant.</p> <p>The matter arose out of the resignation of the plaintiff from the firm of Tata, Limited.</p> <p>Mr. Croom-Johnson, K.C., and Mr. Norman Daynes appeared for the plaintiff; Mr. Archer, K.C., and Mr. Beebee for the defendant.</p>	<p>Mr. Croom-Johnson, at the sitting of the Court to-day, said that since last night Mr. Archer, on behalf of the defendant, had made a communication to him—namely, that other questions beyond those arising in the present action might need consideration, and had suggested that the action should stand over generally with liberty to apply to restore. Both sides would then have an opportunity to consider the position. The plaintiff had agreed to that. In the meantime, it had been arranged that the monthly cheques which had been sent under the settlement, either to the plaintiff or to Mrs. Saklatvala, and had been received by them but had not been cashed, should now be cashed, and the plaintiff was to be at liberty to receive the proceeds without prejudice to any questions between the parties. If any further cheques were sent the plaintiff was to be at liberty to cash them on the same terms and conditions. If any monthly cheque were not sent the plaintiff was to have liberty to apply. In the circumstances it had been agreed that the costs thrown away by the adjournment should be the plaintiff's costs in any event.</p> <p>Mr. ASCHER said that he agreed with all that had been said by Mr. Croom-Johnson, and that there was no question of the payment of the £500 a year to the plaintiff being stopped while the action was pending.</p> <p>Mr. JUSTICE ASTBURY said that he thought that that was the most satisfactory course to be taken, and that he hoped that the plaintiff would have no further trouble. He consented to the action being retained to be heard by him.</p> <p>Solicitors.—Mr. W. H. Thompson; Messrs. Bull and Bull.</p>
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Clipping: The Times, 14th July 1928

One weekend, the committee of the Indian social club met in our house and they were all assembled in the drawing room. The president of the club at that time was Mr Mavlankar, a very old friend of my father's, whose three daughters were friends of my sister and myself. They were quite wealthy compared to us and it was always a great treat for me to spend a day in their comparatively lavish home, and to play with the youngest daughter's dolls; they were the kind I was taken to look at in Selfridges by way of a Christmas treat but which never found their way into my possession.

Towards the end of the meeting, Mr Mavlankar had a heart attack and died. We children were all upstairs out of the way of the grown-up activities, but I well remember all the hubbub, and the general sorrow and commotion. As usual, one of Mummy's sisters was staying with us and I remember them talking in hushed whispers for the rest of the day, though we were protectively kept upstairs until all the practical arrangements were completed. I was still too young to understand exactly what death was all about, but it was none-the-less a traumatic day. Mr Mavlankar had had his own business, and for several

months after the tragedy, Mrs Mavlankar would arrive at our house and stay closeted with her late husband's secretary and Father who, as always was ready to offer advice and support; he helped to keep the business going long enough to put all the affairs in order, after which the family left their Wimbledon home and went back to India.



Photo: Shapurji and Sehri Saklatvala

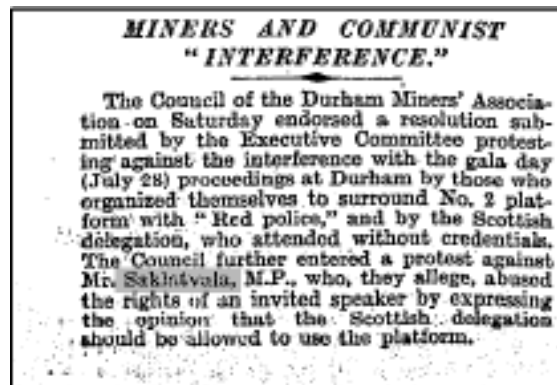
Every year, the Indian social club put on a christmas party at the Savoy Hotel and the children of members and their guests received gifts. Because Mummy was on the committee, we were always involved in the pre-party preparations, blowing up balloons, tying up parcels and decorating the tree—it was a highlight of our year. So Kaikoo Mehta's bride joined in all these festivities. As in all social clubs there were little jealousies and bickerings, and we quite looked forward to Mummy coming home and relating to us, and to whichever of her sisters happened to be there, all the goings-on at these committee meetings.

My mother was always a gifted mimic and she would give a humorous and colourful blow-by-blow account of any little tiffs between the committee members. Mummy's acting out of events in her own life were the nearest thing we had to theatre and she was every bit as entertaining as the real thing. Occasionally she would be really angry about some quarrel or disagreement and would relate the events with passion to anyone who would listen when she got home; in a way, I think we enjoyed these scenes of theatrical tragedy even more than the funnier episodes. Anyway, we all enjoyed the club at secondhand through Mother.

Sometimes, when matters of club policy were to be discussed, Father would try to persuade my mother to support what he would prefer—but she always insisted that she was the committee member and that she would make up her own mind. Occasionally this led to disagreements between the two of them, but Mother always stuck to her guns and went her own way. (She didn't need to burn her bra to keep her womanly dignity, integrity and self-respect).

As usual, Father could not think that all the children of the more affluent,

middle-class Indians should be given a party while the children of the poor lascars in dockland went without. So, through the Indian Workers' Welfare League, we always put on a similar party for the seamen's children and their wives. The children were given a toy and the mothers were given a packet of tea and other household goodies. This party was always held in Poplar town hall and we would be there the whole day, helping to make sandwiches and cakes and sweets. I always thought it a lot more fun than the rather formal party we had at the Savoy—playing 'Oranges and lemons' and 'Here we come gathering nuts in May' always made me feel horribly self-conscious and I dreaded it every year. I still don't enjoy light-hearted sociability. The Poplar party was less organised and much more fun. Father was always in a good mood and usually his political cronies in the IWWL would come home afterwards and talk above our heads, but I enjoyed just mingling with grown-ups. I suspect the older end of the family found it all a bit of a boring duty and made their escape as soon as they could.



Clipping: The Times, 20th August 1928

CHAPTER 24

A Conspiracy Against Colonialism

The case of the Meerut prisoners, 1929-1933.

Meerut is a small town about 100 miles from Delhi and almost a thousand miles away from Bombay and Calcutta; until 1929 it was of no particular significance or interest, being merely a small military station. But from 1929 to 1933 it became scandalously notorious, for the protracted trial of the Meerut prisoners took place there. Justice is always depicted with blindfolded eyes to signify her impartiality; but in Meerut she was rendered blind so that she could not even see that shameful trial in which Justice herself was to play so little part.

The general freedom movement in India had been gathering momentum and had been further strengthened by the almost universal antagonism to the Simon Commission. There was an intensification of political activity both by the Indian National Congress and the Peasants' and Workers' Party. The strength of the trade union movement was growing and therefore strikes and industrial unrest were increasing. Although this state of disturbance was largely brought about by the repressive measures of the government, the government's only attempt to halt the tide was to increase the repression.

On 20th March, 1929, two English nationals, Philip Spratt and B.F. Bradley, were arrested in India. Both these men were avowed communists and both had been elected members of the Executive Committee of the All India Trade Union Congress. At the same time, 29 Indians, most of whom were active and prominent in the trade union movement, were also arrested. All 31 men were charged with conspiring to deprive the King-Emperor of the Sovereignty of India. They were thrust into prison and were not allowed bail. These arrests were followed by one more in June 1929, when H. Lester Hutchinson (from Manchester) joined them, faced with the same charge.



Photo: Philip Spratt

Spratt was a Cambridge graduate who had gone out to India to study the conditions of the working class there and, finding conditions to be absolutely appalling, did what he could to further the trade union cause. Hutchinson had graduated from a Swiss university and from Edinburgh. While on the continent he had attended meetings of the League Against Imperialism in Berlin, had become interested in India and had journeyed there to see the situation at first hand. He was primarily a journalist rather than a political agitator and organiser, nevertheless he was imprisoned along with the others. Bradley was an active member of the Amalgamated Engineering Union and was, at the time of his arrest, vice president of the All India Trade Union Congress and of the Great India Peninsular Railwaymen's Union.

MEERUT CONSPIRACY CASE

THE CHARGES OF "RED" PROPAGANDA

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT)

ALLAHABAD, DEC. 3

Proceeding with his summing-up of the case for the prosecution in the Meerut Communist conspiracy trial, Mr. Mitter said that in July, 1924, there was held in Moscow the fifth session of the Congress of the Communist International, at which it was decided that Communist activities in the Colonies should be intensified. The Communist Party in Great Britain took over the work for India.

In England, counsel declared, there was also an Indian group. The work done by these two bodies included the sending of Gladding to India to inspect the position. Gladding returned and reported. Like most Bolshevik agents, he entered India surreptitiously and sent a letter to M. N. Roy signing himself R. O. Cochran. Special efforts were made at Oxford and Cambridge to capture the sympathies of Indian students. Similar work was done among Indian seamen at the docks in London, and an attempt was made to organize an Oriental convention for which Chamanlal Goswami and N. M. Joshi were employed. On the Continent there were various persons active, the best known to the prosecution being Roy and Sepassi. Roy was direct liaison officer with Moscow, while Sepassi could receive, answer, or forward letters. Some people in London had a conference with the Continental group at Amsterdam in July, 1928, and the main business appeared to have been the receiving of reports from Gladding and from Indian groups through Khan.

Roy was annoyed at the attitude adopted by the Communist Party in Great Britain. He resented their control and suggested that the main points of the work in India should be settled by the Executive Committee of the Communist International. It was proposed to send out Dutt, but the necessary funds were not to be supplied by the English group. A document filed by the prosecution showed that the Colonial Bureau of the Comintern had been drawing up a plan for work in British colonies, and this Bureau instructed Roy to visit England and take control over India from that point of vantage.

It was further determined that Indian trade unions be affiliated with the Red International of Labour Unions and that the training for colonial work of special cadets be set on foot.

An Indian group was admitted to the party to work up a revolution in India, and a programme of work was accepted. The plan for sending Dutt seemed to have been dropped; in his stead Alison was sent in April and Spratt in December. Spratt, who received a salary of £40 monthly through the Labour Research Department, came to India ostensibly as a bookseller. The Communist Party in England had already said that it had no money, and doubtless the finances for Alison or Spratt were supplied by Moscow. Mr. Saklatvala, when he visited India in 1927, doubtless intended to forward the movement, but he acted in a rather autocratic manner. He objected to attending the conference of the Communist Party of India because it was not officially affiliated to the Communist International.

The correspondence which passed between Spratt and Dutt could not strike the ordinary reader as innocent, as invisible ink, a figure cipher, a transposition code, and cryptic language were all employed. Some of the subjects discussed by the correspondents were the arrest of Alison, the lines on which the Workers' and Peasants' Parties should be run, their relationship to the Communist Party, and their work in trade unions; the means of getting out Communist literature, the arrest of Bradley, and the finance of the movement. One of the documents clearly pointed to certain money coming over the Afghan border, as each time some one had to go from Lahore to fetch it. An important point was the assumption that money would be supplied from Europe. Dutt was given a budget of the amount required, and Roy said the matter was being attended to. The work proceeded, and presumably the money did arrive, and some of it had been traced.

Bradley was clearly sent out by the Communist Party of Great Britain, of which, it was admitted in the report of the All-India Peasants' and Workers' Parties, he was a member. Bradley came with the approval of Dutt, and therefore of Roy, and six days after his arrival he sent a cover address in cipher.

Clipping: The Times, 4th December 1929

Among the Indians arrested, Dange and Ghate were Assistant Secretaries of the All India Trade Union Congress, Joglekar and Nimbkar were executive members of railway unions, as well as being well known in the Indian National Congress Party. The list included journalists, teachers, lawyers, and they were all connected with some form of working-class political activity.

As usual the government was quick to arrest but slow to bring to trial, and the prisoners were not brought before the courts until the end of January 1930, a full year after the first arrests, and the trial was not concluded until January 1933. Had they been tried in Bombay or Calcutta, where most of the alleged

offences were said to have taken place, the prisoners would have been entitled to trial by jury. But the magistrate in the preliminary hearing judged that, “Man is a political animal... justice in a case like this is more likely to be done by a trained judge than by a jury.” This preliminary enquiry started in April 1929 and lasted for eight months. But in fact the ‘trained judge’ turned out to be an individual from the British civil service, one Mr Yorke, who was appointed as an additional sessions judge for the purpose of the conspiracy trial.



Photo: The Meerut Prisoners

Although the arrests were carried out during the last few months of a Conservative government, it is to the lasting and ineradicable shame of the Labour Party that the trial itself was conducted under a Labour government. I have always thought of socialism as being the politics of compassion (indeed, that was nearly chosen as the title of this book), but compassion had no place in the events surrounding that iniquitous charade. Small wonder then that Saklatvala said he found it increasingly difficult to differentiate between the policies of the Conservative and Labour Parties. In July 1928 he wrote an article for the Sunday Worker in which he said that

“...the Commonwealth Conference was the struggle of British Labour MPs, through their leaders, to continue the time-honoured Tory policy of British imperialism accompanied by all its bloodshed and murder, through political and economic strangulation, but all to be done in the garb and cloak of socialist benevolence...”

Certainly in their political attitude to India and the rest of the Empire, there was little to choose between their very slightly varying forms of repression. Neither group thought that the freedom, so cherished and vaunted by Englishmen, should be bestowed upon the lesser mortals of ‘foreign parts’. Freedom was a commodity to be reserved for home consumption only—it wouldn’t do to have freedom spreading abroad.

While the Meerut prisoners were awaiting trial, they witnessed the barbaric and inhuman cruelty practiced against other political detainees. The prisons were already full and during the civil disobedience campaign of 1930, thousands of political prisoners were cast into gaol—by the end of that year, there were 23,000 political inmates of Indian prisons. Many prisoners were chained, flogged and kept in disgraceful conditions and many of them committed suicide because of their wretchedness.

One of the most inhuman practices was for violent criminals to be used to flog political prisoners; and these men were allowed to give vent to all their natural brutality, many of the flogged men being rendered unconscious by the beatings inflicted upon them. Despite their own suffering, thirty of the Meerut prisoners submitted a memorandum to the Governor of the United Provinces (which appears as the [Appendix to this chapter](#)).

British governments, Labour, Liberal and Conservative, do not appear to have attached so much importance to human rights in our not-too-distant past as they have expressed in more recent years, when criticising events in countries under regimes different from our own. There is no nation that does not make use of brutality when it deems it desirable—no nation that is guiltless. Let he who is without sin among you cast the first nuclear missile.

Perhaps the case of the Meerut prisoners would not have become such a cause celebre in Britain had it not been for the three Englishmen included in their number. Their plight was common to many thousands of Indians, about whom it was not fashionable then to care.

When, in 1930, Gandhi was invited to participate in the second round table conference, Congress said he would participate only if all political prisoners in India, including the now famous Meerut prisoners, were released. Gandhi told the Meerut prisoners, “If you are not released by the end of the year, I hope shortly to join you.” Despite this characteristically histrionic proclamation, he attended the conference and the prisoners were not released.

There can be no doubt that the aim of the arrests was to put the leaders of the working class movement out of the way and thereby to stop the current wave of strikes, discontent, street demonstrations and general turbulent unrest. It was supposed also to act as a deterrent to others. But the arrests and the subsequent long detention awaiting the outcome of the trial only served to provoke greater anger and frustration, and things got worse rather than better.

Neither the trade union movement nor the various movements demanding freedom and independence for the Indian people were intimidated into inactivity. Leaders were put in prison, but other leaders took their place.

In the UK there was great support for the prisoners, and meetings were held up and down the country to raise money to pay for their defence. Of course Saklatvala worked with his usual energy and enthusiasm for the cause. A National Meerut Defence Committee was formed with headquarters at 30 John Street, London, and regional committees were set up in towns and factories all over the country.

Money was collected to help pay for the defence and also to supply the prisoners with a little palatable food and other things they needed to relieve the hardship of their long detention in the sweltering heat of the Indian plains. It was stated after the trial that the government had spent £120,000 on the prosecution (it was, needless to say, Indian money); the defendants had no comparable sums to spend on their defence.

Meetings were also organised by the League Against Imperialism, by the Workers' Welfare League of India, the Meerut Trade Union Defence Committee, and the Meerut Prisoners' Release Committee. Saklatvala was a prominent speaker and propagandist in all these bodies. He travelled up and down the country addressing huge meetings, raising money, interest and support among the workers of Great Britain. He lost his parliamentary seat in the 1929 election and so he no longer had the floor of the House of Commons as his platform, but this did not diminish the power of his activities in any way.

He was also a frequent speaker in the London branch of the Indian National Congress, a body which reflected the divisions that were current in the parent body in India, namely, those who supported the non-violent approach of Gandhi and those who, like Saklatvala, demanded positive action and the use of the power of the working class masses to wrench freedom from the British—for they believed it would never be freely given but that it had to be taken.

In 1931, when Gandhi agreed to co-operate with the British government and attend the round table conference, Saklatvala led a faction in the London branch of Congress regretting this cooperative participation. At one meeting where he was speaking, the chairman, being pro-Gandhi, walked off the platform and hoped to bring the meeting to a close, but Saklatvala took over

the chair and the meeting continued, the anti-Gandhi-ites winning the day. Even before the arrests of the Meerut prisoners it was clear that the Labour Party was as repressive in India as the Conservatives were. In the *Socialist Review* of 1928, Ernest Thurtle wrote an article under the headline 'India's Lost Faith in Labour' in which he said that the Third International, in its campaign against imperialism had not neglected India; it had its agents there:

“Mr Saklatvala, too, has worked hard in this direction. He has great influence in India. Irrespective of his communist views, the Indian people are proud of him. They admire the way, by his oratorical gifts and force of character, he has won his way to the House of Commons. They, a subject race, suffering to some extent from an inferiority complex, are naturally intensely proud of the courage with which Saklatvala, one of themselves, denounces the British domination of India in unmeasured terms in the very House of Commons itself. He is rebel by proxy for them all and they love him for it. When he speaks to them, therefore, they listen, and he speaks to them frequently...”

And the British people listened to him also and he addressed meeting after meeting in the cause of the Meerut prisoners. Large halls were packed to capacity to hear him speak and advertisements appeared in the left wing press advising organisations who wanted Saklatvala to speak at their meetings to book him well in advance. He was much in demand still.

In January 1930 a further application was made on behalf of the prisoners to conduct the trial at Allahabad with a jury. Mr Chakravarty, the prisoners' defence counsel, was still in England because the case in India had been unforeseeably brought forward. Chakravarty wrote to the Secretary of State for India, Mr Wedgwood Benn, asking for an urgent interview, but he did not even receive a reply. He was later told by a junior official that a reply would be sent to him after he returned to India.

Meanwhile, Mrs Knight, the mother of Lester Hutchinson, visited the offices of the *Daily Worker* and told them of her experiences with members of the Labour Party. She said:

“I got in touch with Mr Lansbury and asked him to get me an interview with Wedgwood Benn at the India Office. This he refused to do, saying quite bluntly, I could not see anyone at the India Office, because the government had decided not to interfere in this case...”

“I then went to see Mr Fenner Brockway, as I understood he was interested in the Indian workers. He told me that he sincerely believed that these men had been arrested unjustly and would do all he could to secure their release. At that time he was trying to get an interview with Benn—later he succeeded—but he was told to put the question in the House. On doing this, he was told that the government would not interfere, and Mr Brockway, with all the other Lefts, was silent... I met Mr Horribin MP whom I had known for some time. He also said he would do all in his power to secure the release of my son and his comrades... However, Mr Horribin also changed his mind, and the next time I saw him, he would not even speak about it.

“Mr Brockway did raise the question at the Brighton Labour Party conference... the Chairman called on Dr Drummond Shields (under-secretary for India), who made a lying and misleading statement—but no protest came from Brockway or the other Lefts. I tried to make myself heard, asking to be allowed to answer Dr Shields, but the platform was not having any. At this stage, Ellen Wilkinson came off the platform to me, and said it was no use, I would not be allowed to speak. I asked her to speak but she said she could not. She said the reason for the attitude of the Labour Party and the government was that Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, was in England and had said that if the government interfered in the case, both he and others in the civil service would resign.

“On leaving the building I met Dr Drummond Shields. I stopped him, told him who I was, and put the statement just made to me by Ellen Wilkinson. His reply was, ‘Well, you see the position we are in, so what can we do—you know we lost our last government by interfering with the Campbell case—and we’re not going to lose this one on the Meerut case.’

“After this experience I have come to the conclusion that the only way to help my son and his comrades is to fight this Labour government, and I hope that all honest workers will join in this fight. These comrades’ only crime is helping the Indian workers to organise for a better standard of life, and to throw off this yoke of British imperialism that is sucking their life blood. I am proud of my son and his comrades. They are brave

fighters and well worthy of your fighting support.”

She found such support in Saklatvala.

Lester Hutchinson spent four years in appalling conditions in an Indian prison (where for part of the time he was extremely ill) while awaiting trial, sentence and appeal—and on appeal was found to be not guilty. He was acquitted and released, with no questions asked and no compensation; yet no one listened when his mother had asked for help. It is a terrible thing when courts of law are used as political weapons, rather than as instruments of justice.

Another lady involved in the trial was the young bride of one of the Indian prisoners, Mr Joglekar. The following letter from her appeared in the Manchester Guardian in February 1933 as ‘A Letter from Meerut.’

“The unique ‘Meerut Conspiracy Case’ is over. The result is out. The judgements vary from transportation for life to three years rigorous imprisonment. Because the persons concerned in the case represented Labour, ‘C’ class treatment has been awarded to them. In Indian gaols, ‘C’ class is for ordinary criminals. It means nine hours manual labour with bad food and clothing. After three months interval they are allowed to write a letter or to have an interview with a relative. As food and rest are necessary to live a life, reading and books are equally important for middle-class life. In gaol books are supposed to be something dangerous.

“The judgement was delivered on 16th January 1933. Not even the relatives were allowed to attend the court. We had to stand outside the gate, waiting for the result. We were promised an interview on the gaol premises. After hurrying three times to the gaol, we were told to come the next day... On that day I had to stand at the gate for nearly three hours and then only was I allowed to see my husband for 20 minutes.

“We were married on the 10th January 1933. Mr Joglekar could not be freed on bail or parole for one day. Just to sign the marriage deed he was brought to the District Magistrate’s Court for an hour. Now he is sentenced to 12 years (transportation).

“Signed, Ambika Joglekar.”

In January 1933, sentences were passed on 27 prisoners, the rest having died or been acquitted. Saklatvala wrote:

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“By savage and appalling sentences, after a monstrous trial, the British Raj in India has proclaimed to her three-hundred-and-fifty million conquered slaves that, henceforth, the study of the mighty triumph of communism in the USSR, which in 17 brief years has put to shame the inhuman results of 150 years of British rule in India, will be visited upon the heads of Communists in India with a revengeful ruthlessness.”

He was far from being alone in condemning the sentences. Although the prisoners had to endure for more than six months the threat of these excessive sentences being carried out, the appeal in August 1933 reduced the sentences significantly for many of the prisoners. The remaining eight prisoners were acquitted, having, in their innocence, spent four years in gaol.

When B.F. Bradley finally came back to the UK, he was ceremoniously welcomed by Saklatvala, who was at the head of a large demonstration at Victoria Station. Bradley had earned his hero's welcome the hard way.

We should not forget the prisoners of Meerut and the representatives of a democratic system that condemned them.

Appendix to Chapter 24: Memorial of the Meerut Prisoners

The Memorial addressed to the Governor of the United Provinces and signed by 30 of the Meerut prisoners while in jail awaiting trial.

Meerut, September 3rd 1930.

Your Excellency,

The memorial of the undersigned most respectfully showeth:

(1) That your memorialists as under-trial prisoners in the Meerut Conspiracy Case are the inmates of the District Jail, Meerut, and have been here since March 1929.

(2) That since the Civil Disobedience Movement began there has been a very large addition to the population of the jail, so much so that we believe that the jail is overcrowded far in excess of its usual capacity and the prescribed maximum.

(3) That apart from the fact that the system of making differentiations among political prisoners is bad in principle, the classification of these prisoners into 'A', 'B' and 'C' classes has been made in such a way as to cause great dissatisfaction, and in many instances no regard is paid even to the rules on the subject framed by the government. Instances are not wanting where invidious distinction has been made between prisoners of equal status and education.

(4) That the 'C' Class prisoners were from the beginning dissatisfied with the food supplied to them, particularly with regard to the 'bhujji' [vegetables].

(5) That they made repeated representations to the authorities concerned, with no practical result, and when a number of them declined to take the food, they were punished with 'cells', 'standing

handcuffs' and 'bar-fetters'.

(6) That the whole jail was full of all sorts of reports and rumours regarding the treatment meted out to them, and representations were made on their behalf by the 'A' and 'B' Class prisoners. A number of your memorialists also made representations in writing to the Superintendent of Jail on August 21st.

(7) That it may be mentioned in this connection that since the present jailer has come the discontent has further increased by reason of his harsh treatment and the abusive language he is reported to have been in the habit of using towards the prisoners.

(8) That alternately with the punishment meted out to the prisoners, and reported assaults on them by the ordinary convicts at the instance of the jail officials, offers are reported to have been made to these prisoners of prompt release if they would tender an apology. About sixty prisoners, unable to stand this treatment, accepted this offer and were released.

(9) That a number of boys were kept in cells at the absolute mercy of the convict overseer about whose habits and character the less said the better.

(10) That interviews with relatives, etc., such as are allowed by the jail rules, have been forbidden in many cases. The relatives of the prisoners coming to the jail for interviews have also been treated discourteously, having been kept waiting all day outside the jail gate, where there is no convenience for visitors, only to be told in the evening that interview is refused.

(11) That it was hoped that the Inspector-General of Prisons, in the course of his visit, which took place on August 27, would inquire personally into grievances of the 'C' Class prisoners, but so far as your memorialists are aware he did not visit them at all. One of your memorialists, Dr Mukerjee, as well as the 'A' and 'B' Class prisoners, made an oral representation about the 'C' Class prisoners to the Inspector-General when he visited them.

(12) That on the morning of August 29, at about 8.30, your memorialists were surprised to hear loud groans, and it seemed to them there was considerable commotion in and about the circle where the 'C' Class

prisoners are lodged. This was shortly followed by a gunshot and the alarm bell. Within a few minutes a very large number of armed policemen, preceded by a number of warders armed with lathis and rifles, rushed inside. Subsequently, the Superintendent of Jail and the Superintendent of Police, followed within a few minutes by the District Magistrate and the Joint Magistrate, went in. The cries and groans continued until these officials went inside. As long as they were there, and thereafter, there was absolute silence.

(13) That some of your memorialists, returning from court at about 12 noon found whipping going on and several prisoners lying on the ground groaning and bleeding.

(14) That within less than four hours from the start of what the District Magistrate calls a 'serious mutiny', inquiry was finished and punishment was given, and it did not, so far as your memorialists' information goes, take more than half an hour to conduct the inquiry.

(15) That the official communique issued by the District Magistrate, which states that it was a 'serious mutiny', and that it was quelled 'without the use of firearms,' and that 'no prisoner was reported to have been injured,' seems to your memorialists to be self-contradictory, and calculated to mislead the public as to the extent and character of the matter.

(16) That although the disturbance itself was of a trivial character, and no allegations being made that any jail official was hurt, and it being stated that no prisoner was injured, nevertheless, no fewer than fifty-six prisoners were given bar-fetters, and thirteen prisoners were given the maximum punishment (thirty stripes) allowed under the Whipping Act, which is a severe and inhuman punishment. It is further reported that a large supply of bar-fetters has been ordered.

(17) That the victims of the whippings were mostly boys from sixteen and seventeen up to twenty-two years.

(18) That your memorialists have reason to believe that in some cases at least whipping administered was not in accordance with the regulations laid down by Your Excellency's government. One Anglo-Indian Inspector of Police is alleged to have snatched a rattan away from the convict who had been ordered to do the job, and began flogging him. As

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a result, certain parts of the body were injured which are not specified in the regulations. It is alleged that all those who were flogged have been put in cells and have not been given proper medical care. One of them, who was extremely weak and was in bar-fetters, was caned in that condition against the provisions of the Prisons Act, and subsequently flung into a solitary cell. One prisoner was so severely injured by the flogging that two days after he was still subject to repeated fainting fits.

(19) That in identifying the persons for punishment, it seems that those who had taken a prominent part in presenting the common grievances to the authorities were singled out. It may be mentioned in this connection that a number of ordinary convicts who took part in the identification and in the execution of the caning order were given substantial remission.

(20) That according to the official communique the District Magistrate held a summary inquiry. It is not clear what this means nor under what law the whipping was administered. According to the Prisons Act, it is the Jail Superintendent who is authorised to inquire into the jail offences and mete out punishments.

(21) That your memorialists, as inmates in the jail for the last eighteen months and as political prisoners, consider it their duty to acquaint Your Excellency's government with all the facts which are within their knowledge or information. While from the limitations of their present position your memorialists cannot verify all the reports and rumours that have come to their ears, they assure Your Excellency that in spite of many things much more serious than what has been stated, being heard by them, they have put down only those which they seriously believe to have the largest amount of truth as foundation.

(22) In these circumstances your memorialists pray that a searching and strict inquiry be made into the events of August 29, the inhuman and brutal punishment of thirty stripes given to thirteen Satyagrahis [nonviolent protestors], and that the officials responsible for these be brought to book. It is further prayed that the serious injustice and oppression which the 'C' Class prisoners are suffering be forthwith removed.

Signed by thirty prisoners.

CHAPTER 25

Detained in Ostend

Arrest in Belgium with Jimmy Maxton and Reggie Bridgeman while attempting to attend the League Against Imperialism conference, 1929.

On the 14th of January 1929, some two months before the arrest of the Meerut prisoners, three minor arrests took place in Belgium. Though nothing like as important as those ruthless arrests that were to follow in India, they nonetheless attracted quite a lot of press coverage and general interest in Britain.

The League Against Imperialism (that constantly irksome prodger of the conscience of Britannic Imperial Bumbledom), was to hold a meeting in Cologne. James Maxton was President; Saklatvala and former diplomat Reginald Bridgeman were both members of the executive committee of the League. On their way to Cologne, they were arrested immediately upon their arrival in Ostend and held overnight; they were told that they must return forthwith to England on the following morning. Reginald Bridgeman sent a telegram to the Reuters correspondent and the incident received wide coverage in the national and regional press.

Mr Bridgeman, in a telephone conversation, described what had happened:

“We started at 2 o’clock yesterday from Victoria Station for Cologne to attend a meeting of the League Against Imperialism, of which Mr Maxton is President.

“On our arrival at Ostend at 8 o’clock last night Mr Maxton, Mr Saklatvala and myself were detained at the passport barrier, in full view of other passengers. [They were kept standing in the cold of a January night for more than half an hour]. We were subsequently informed by the Maritime Commissioner that, on instructions from the Belgian Minister of Justice, Mr Jansen, we were not to be allowed to enter Belgian territory.

“We were forcibly detained and told to catch the first boat back to

England this morning. No reason was given for our detention. We were told that in the meanwhile we must give our parole not to leave the hotel; otherwise we would have to be locked up in a police cell. We were deprived of our passports, tickets and luggage, and we are on parole.

“We were taken under an armed police escort from the station to the hotel. Although we were treated with courtesy, we were told that the orders were definite. We have communicated with the British Ambassador at Brussels, and Mr Maxton has telegraphed to the British Prime Minister in London, requesting the intervention of the Foreign Office.

“It seems an extraordinary thing for the Belgian government to detain British MPs without any explanation whatever, and I am afraid I am at a loss to explain the mystery. We were told to leave by the 10am boat today, but we hope that the British Foreign Office will intervene in time.”

It appears that it had originally been intended to hold the League’s meeting in Brussels, where such conferences had been held previously; but the Belgian authorities had refused visas to the delegates from the Soviet Union and so the venue had been changed to Cologne.

In a long-distance telephone call, Saklatvala informed the press of his views. “Sir Austen Chamberlain [Foreign Secretary] is to blame for this,” he declared.

“The British Foreign Office must have influenced the Belgian Foreign Office. Any schoolboy could see that. They don’t do things themselves; they allow others to do things for them... No visa is required for France, Belgium or Germany and we had bona fide passports. These passports, our railway tickets and baggage were forcibly taken away from us by the Maritime Commissioner at the Ostend customs and passport office. It was stated that this was done on the instructions of the Belgian Minister of Justice.”

Mr Saklatvala was asked if he and Mr Maxton had been taken away by an armed police escort and he replied:

“We were given the option of spending the night on the quayside at Ostend, in the police lock-up room, or going to a hotel. We elected to go to the hotel, and I suppose you might describe the officials who accompanied us as ‘armed.’ We protested strongly against the

unconstitutional method of forcibly taking our passports from us. Every customs officer has the right to look at one's passport, but they have no right to take possession of it. We communicated with Lord Granville, the British Ambassador at Brussels by telegram and we also sent a telegram to [Prime Minister] Stanley Baldwin."

Since two out of the three detainees were members of the British Parliament (according to the obviously confused Belgian authorities they were all three Communist MPs), their arrest naturally aroused a deal of interest in the British press—many of the papers would no doubt have been quite delighted to see left-wing politicians get what might be considered to be their comeuppance, but on the other hand, an insult from a foreign power to representatives of the British parliament was an insult to the nation, so feelings were confused on the issue. Also, Mr Bridgeman, a prospective Labour candidate for Uxbridge, was a cousin of Viscount Lascelles and of Mr W.C. Bridgeman, First Lord of the Admiralty—not only an Englishman you see, but a well-connected English gentleman.

The Evening Standard printed a romantically colourful description of Mr Bridgeman. Under a headline 'A Socialist Dandy' the paper hazarded a guess that it was probably the prospective Labour candidate for Uxbridge who made the telephonic appeal to the British Embassy in Brussels:

"For Mr 'Reggie' Bridgeman until a few years ago was himself one of the shining lights of diplomacy. The man who for years was the greatest dandy in Europe should be a welcome sartorial embellishment to the Labour benches. Who can forget the splendour of those lace-frilled evening shirts, when their wearer stood beside Lord Derby at British Embassy receptions in Paris? Lovely Spaniards have cried in vain over the cold, ascetic beauty of that impassive face (with side-whiskers!) and tall, immaculate figure, and beautiful Viennese have flocked to hear him read the lessons in the Embassy chapel..."

Happily the confusion in readers' minds was dispelled the very next day, for all the papers were able to report that the three had been allowed to resume their journey to Cologne.

The Communist Party in London received a telegram from their itinerant comrade which read, "Indomitable Parsi and Scotsman triumph. Leaving Ostend this morning. Arriving Cologne tonight." As usual, Father's ability to

poke fun at the ridiculous did not desert him, even when it had resulted in his own considerable discomfort, anger and indignation.

**THE LEAGUE AGAINST
IMPERIALISM.**

—

CONGRESS IN FRANKFURT.
(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.)

FRANKFURT, JULY 21.

The second world's Congress of the League against Imperialism opened in Frankfurt to-day. Mr. James Maxton, M.P., was elected president of the Board of the Congress.

Mr. Maxton said that the League was taking the side of the Soviet in the Russo-Chinese conflict, and he expressed the hope that it would be settled without bloodshed. However, the freedom, honour, unity of the Soviet Republic must not be encroached upon. Another important problem to be discussed by the Congress was that of the liberation of British India. He expressed indignation at the fact that people who had only wished to organize the Indian workmen in their fight for freedom were being imprisoned by the British Government. The workers of India should be entitled to the same rights as those enjoyed by the workers of Europe.

Mr. Chivraprasad Gupta, who spoke as delegate on behalf of the National Congress of India, declared that the Congress would assist and further the activities of the League against Imperialism. In a few months, unless Great Britain had granted full autonomy, the National Congress of India, under the leadership of Mr. Gandhi, would proclaim a general boycott against all British institutions and thereby initiate the insurrection of India.

A juvenile anti-Imperialist Congress opened here on Saturday and was addressed by Mr. Saklatvala among others.

**THE LEAGUE AGAINST
IMPERIALISM.**

—

MR. MAXTON REBUFFED.
(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.)

FRANKFURT, JULY 22.

Mr. Maxton, President of the League against Imperialism, was severely rebuffed during the opening session of the Anti-Imperialist Congress at Frankfurt yesterday by the Russian representative, M. Melnichansky, who constantly referred to the "so-called British Labour Party" and the "so-called British Government," and asked why the British Labour Party had done nothing to repair the damage caused by the forged letter (presumably the Zinovieff letter). Mr. Maxton and the British Labour Party were sharply criticized again to-day by Mr. Saklatvala.

British rule, Mr. Saklatvala said, was the most powerful, and, at the same time, the most murderous form of imperialism. It was being served and furthered by both the British Labour Government and the Independent Labour Party in the same way as by any other Government. The Russian delegates, he concluded, would bring dozens of captured British flags with them at the opening of the next conference. Mr. Maxton said in reply that, in the event of its being proven at the next congress that he and his political friends had not done all within their power to break up imperialism, he would take the consequences.

The theories and aims expounded during the congress so far clearly reveal the existence of two separate groups; on the one side the principal idea of the European representatives is class warfare and the abolition of the present economic order, whereas the main issue for the delegates of the coloured races is their national freedom and independence.

Clippings: The Times, 22nd & 23rd July 1929

Needless to say, when the trio finally arrived in Cologne, at the opening session of the conference of the League Against Imperialism, a resolution was passed condemning the action of the Belgian Minister of Justice in arresting the three delegates. Describing events leading to their release, Saklatvala told the conference, "We made a fight for it all night, and when in the morning a commissar came and told us to go and see his chief, I told him in good Battersea English to tell his chief to come and see us. He then returned and said that they had just received a telegram from Brussels that we were, after all, gentlemen and that we could do what we liked."

COMMUNISTS AND INDIA

PLANS TO FOMENT UNREST

(FROM OUR LABOUR CORRESPONDENT)

The League Against Imperialism is a Communist organization which exists for the overthrow of capitalism in all colonial territories, particularly those within the British Empire. It is an organization which the Labour Party has banned because of its Communist control, and membership of the league has been declared a bar to membership of the Labour Party.

A special meeting of the secretariat of the league has been held in Berlin to organize "international support for the great Indian struggle for emancipation and the practical measures connected therewith." Three English members of the league, Messrs. Bridgeman, Page Arnot, and Saklatvala, were summoned to the meeting.

A summary of the decisions has been circulated through Communist channels. All sections of the league are to be advised of "the enormous political importance of India's struggle for freedom." The league's intention is to stir up everywhere on behalf of the Indian "revolution" "an equally broad and intensive activity as in the case of the first phase of the Chinese revolution." Six watchwords have been issued. They are:—"Hands off India"; "No soldiers and arms for India"; "Withdrawal of the English troops and officials from India"; "Not pacifism and national reformism; only the revolutionary struggle of the masses is the way to India's independence"; "Release the Meerut prisoners"; and "Link up the Indian struggle with the fight for freedom in all colonies, and with the struggle of the revolutionary proletariat and of the peasantry in all countries."

Certain "concrete measures" for furthering this propaganda were adopted. A delegation was appointed to visit India, and it is announced that application for visas has already been made to the British Government. One speaker dwelt on the importance of British transport workers and seamen actively aiding the Indian "revolution," and the Communist paper printed in London followed this up with a call "to stop the transport of machine-guns to murder Indian workers."

Clipping: The Times, 27th May 1930

When they returned from the conference to Dover, papers belonging to Saklatvala, Maxton and Bridgeman were seized by the British customs officials. In describing this incident later to a press reporter, Saklatvala said:

"I had only my usual experience. The British conception of liberty is the lowest in the world. Maxton and Bridgeman and the others had to suffer with me yesterday. I was standing with my bag before a customs official and he was about to mark it with chalk when a detective told the customs man he had special instructions that our bags must be thoroughly searched. Maxton was made to empty his pockets and our bags were closely examined.

"Miss Budden (the secretary) had a valise with the papers of the

conference reports and notes in it. The detective got hold of a manuscript and turned his eyes up to the ceiling as if he had made a wonderful discovery. As a matter of fact it was an article by Page Arnott that had been in print for the last ten days. When Miss Budden told us that he had taken possession of the papers, Maxton and I spoke to him about it. I doubt whether he had the power to take away a person's ordinary property. The ordinary representations will be made to secure their return.

"Maxton, who is President of the League, and Bridgeman, the Secretary, will write to the Prime Minister and the Home Office and ask whether this is a British process, whether it is even strictly legal, and whether the responsible Ministers are not acting in a frivolous manner. This frivolity is harmful to British administration. I am sure when they see the papers they will see how they are wasting public money. The conference was no more secret than the Conservative Party conference.

"I really don't mind. I have a large store of humour in my nature, and these things don't worry me at all."

Incidentally, some years later in 1933, when I was fourteen, I attended a summer school in Paris with a mixed group of English and French girls, all of whom were 18 or 19. Being the baby of the group I was naturally somewhat shy of the older students, and wanted above all to conform and avoid being noticed.

When we set out on our journey home we were each given a baker's cardboard box containing a picnic lunch; the meat was unfamiliar to all of us and the word went round, as it will among giggling schoolgirls, that it was, in fact, camel meat. When we arrived in Dover, all the others went freely through customs (we were all wearing school uniform of course). But the customs official singled me out, while a man I presume was a detective stood by and watched the proceedings. He undid my suitcase and went through it minutely, much to my teenage embarrassment. He even asked me what was in the cake-box. By this time, indignation had overcome shyness and I replied, somewhat insolently I'm afraid, "Camel meat!" Whereupon the customs official even asked me to undo the string and show him what was left of my picnic lunch. All this took time and the whole contingent of schoolgirls had to be lined up to wait for my blushing, late arrival.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

For all my insolence, the episode upset and hurt me greatly and I cried when I got home and said woefully, “Oh, I wish my name was plain Mary Brown!” Even now, I think it was excessive and cruel to subject a 14-year old girl to that kind of idiocy. But it seems that even a 14-year old could be suspected of being a danger to the state and to capitalism if she were a daughter of a communist. I remain convinced that no one looked upon Father or any one in the family as being a real danger, and all these petty incidents were just carried out to make things awkward and unpleasant.

CHAPTER 26

The Pact of Deception

Speech against the Kellogg Pact, 1928.

In 1927, Aristide Briand, the French Foreign Minister, had proposed that his country and the United States should sign a pact agreeing to the renunciation of war as a means of settling international differences. The idea appealed to other governments and, eventually, no less than 65 countries signed what came to be known as the Kellogg Pact (after US Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg), Kellogg-Briand Pact or the Paris Pact; the British government had become a signatory in August 1928.

Saklatvala commented somewhat bitterly on the pact in the House of Commons (and by the end of the 1930s he had been proved right, since the pact was kept more in the breach than the observance, and as an international renunciation of war it had become meaningless).



Photo: Saklatvala

It was on 7th November 1928 that Saklatvala, addressing the House on the occasion of the King's Speech to extend the parliamentary session, commented on the Pact, among other topics. The speech was published in the Times the following day and was also issued in pamphlet form by the Communist Party.

With regard to the Gracious Speech, I can only recall the policy of the Tory government before a previous general election when they tried to hypnotise the country on the slogan of tranquility, and I believe the present Speech is also an attempt to restore tranquility, as if nothing

important is happening in the country or in the world. However, I find that while the Speech permits of a little verbal wrangling between members of different parties here, it provides to all parties that common platform of parliamentary hypocrisy which keeps from the ordinary man in the street the truth about the realities of life.

I unhesitatingly say that it devolves upon me, not only as a member of the Communist Party, but as representing the voice of all those who are not here charged with hypocritical parliamentary democracy, to point out where the reality stands.

The hon and gallant member for North Aberdeen (Captain Wedgwood Benn), who by the way has wiped out his past and swallowed a new monkey-gland and become rejuvenated to deliver his maiden speech [In August 1928, a by-election in North Aberdeen had returned Wedgwood Benn as a Labour member, after 21 years in the House as a Liberal], was hinting at the very numerous subjects I had to mention in an amendment of mine. I am not now referring to the amendment in particular.

But I would point out that the party to which the hon and gallant member has now the good fortune to belong, being a little more numerous than my party in this House, has got fourteen hon members to divide the subjects and to put down amendments on many topics under different groups, and has set up a division of labour on the different topics. I, being less numerous than any other party, just ask the House to realise that I am not trespassing on their indulgence in any way, but that I find myself called upon to instruct the only member of my party [he himself, as the single Communist MP] to take up all the topics and to speak of them.

There is the reference to the Kellogg Pact. I am very sorry that I cannot share the bubbling enthusiasm about the Kellogg Pact as an instrument of peace. It is a definite and deceitful American type of instrument of conspiracy against peace. Where is the peace about the pact? Where is the renunciation of war? When Kellogg landed in France, American soldiers were shooting Nicaraguans and interfering with their affairs. I shall not go into all the details.

The rt hon gentleman the Leader of the Opposition objected to the

British attitude. I submit that every big power that signed the Kellogg Pact signed it with a militarist reservation. Some may have been honest enough to express that, but others were cunning enough not to do so. Did America sign the Treaty without any reservation about the Monroe Doctrine [which stated that efforts by European nations to colonize further land or interfere with states in North or South America would be viewed as acts of aggression requiring US intervention]? Did she sign it without reserving to herself enough murderers, in the shape of an Army, to bully the people of Nicaragua and the Philippines?...

France signed the Treaty while in the Rhine area French troops were occupying German territory. Did France sign without reservation? She signed with the reservation that her disarmament would mean a sufficiency of murderers to terrorise the Moroccans, the people of Indo-China and of all the colonies belonging to France. Did Japan sign the Treaty without reservation? That was another hypocritical deceitful state which put its signature to the renunciation of war, while at the same time Japanese soldiers were actually killing and murdering Manchurians day after day and terrorising the Koreans in order to make wealth out of the exploitation of Korea. The Japanese signature is subject to reservation, and the Japanese renunciation of war only means that the big brothers will no longer quarrel among themselves but will keep sufficient military power to bully and terrorise helpless peoples under the false and hypocritical pretence of safeguarding their Imperial interests.

The Kellogg Pact is nothing but an attempt to deceive the public that it means a renunciation of war. Does this House believe that this country has renounced war? Our hon colleague who moved the Address to the King for his Gracious Speech is, himself, as one could judge from his clothes, still a military officer and in this House we have colonels, majors, captains, brigadier-generals, admirals and rear admirals, scattered about in all parties.

Yet members of this House would tell us that this country had renounced war and that certain parties were never in favour of war. But not one single party has taken the attitude that if that renunciation is to be a reality, no one of their members ought to hold a commission in the

Army and that the Army is not wanted. They have all renounced war but they all want officerships in the Army.”

Mr E. Brown: Are not you a colonel in the Red Army?

Mr Saklatvala: So far I am not. There was an enthusiastic colleague of mine who did become one and who felt very proud of it, but he has found it more convenient since then to retire to the Labour Party.

Hon. members: Name!

Mr Saklatvala: Mr Newbold [former Communist MP]. We are emphatically of the opinion that this Kellogg Pact is nothing but a secret conspiracy of the powerful armed nations to keep in abeyance their own quarrels, in order that they may be strong enough to suppress those countries which each one of these bullying, murderous nations is exploiting

There is not the slightest doubt that when all these people were signing this Treaty they were equally preparing for war against Russia, for an attack on China if China turned Bolshevik, for an attack on India if the Indians tried to evict the British intruder and turn him out of their country. They were all making their own preparations and, at the same time, pretending that this was some great act of peace.

All these disarmament theories neglect one important point. All the nations armed in the modern and efficient way represent only about 450 million human beings, out of the population of the world, but there are another 900 million human beings who are not armed at all, or who are very imperfectly armed. These 900 million people have no consolation whatever if they are shot down by means of a fewer number of machine guns instead of a larger number.

What is the consolation to the Egyptians if the British bully destroys Alexandria and bombards their coastal towns with six cruisers instead of sixteen? What is the consolation to the Arab of Iraq if you bomb his villages—as members of all parties in this House have done—and destroy innocent women with babies in their arms by means of bombs thrown from the air, if you say the aeroplanes employed in killing those people numbered twelve and not twenty?

If you keep that in mind, that 900 million of the people of this world are

living in an unarmed condition and an unprotected state, for a few nations to arm themselves with small cruisers or big cruisers, or with few or many bombs, is immaterial; the fact remains that you are carrying on your murderous game against humanity and against some sections of human beings and that is only to be put an end to when you begin to consider more honestly the Russian proposal of complete disarmament, instead of playing about with deceitful games.

Then comes the satisfaction about the Japanese Emperor being enthroned and so on. 'The historic friendship which for so many years has united Japan and my country has always been a potent factor in the maintenance of peace in the Far East'. What does that mean? After the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, what did Japan do? She crushed the Koreans; she sapped their life-blood. She put forward false, deceitful claims on the innocent people of China, and it was the British militarists who taught the first nation of Asia, took her into partnership, and taught her the same murderous game that Britain has always been famed for in this world.

Yet you claim that the Alliance produced peace. It produced terrorism, murder, war; it destroyed the peace that did continually exist when Japan was not encouraged by her British ally to cut other peoples' throats and take other peoples' lives.

There is now again the same flattery going on, not because the British merchants love the Japanese merchants, but because they find that perhaps it is possible to use Japan to bully and terrorise the Chinese. This House is asked to congratulate itself over the new atmosphere of peace and settled government in China, and you have all denounced war, but why has nothing been done to completely withdraw all the foreign forces from China?

There have been disturbances in China. Would there have been no disturbances in Great Britain if German troops were occupying the British Isles? There are disturbances in China because of the presence of foreign troops and of foreigners demanding in their country unjust and unequal rights and treaties. I submit that there are more Chinamen in Limehouse, Liverpool, Glasgow and Newcastle than there are British citizens in Shanghai.

Will you permit the Chinese people to keep a few battalions and Chinese battleships for the protection of their citizens in Great Britain as you presume to keep yours for the protection of yours? It is a game of cowardice and not of statesmanship, and you know it in your heart of hearts.

There are more British subjects living in France and America than in China, far more. Would you dare to keep British soldiers and British battleships in American and French soil and waters? You dare not. You are keeping them in the pretence of protection simply against weaker nations whom you can rob and plunder, and you put on the hypocritical garb of protecting them and keeping the peace in those countries.

The Speech refers to the extension of export credits. I have not yet heard a word, as formerly we used to hear from the opposition, as to whether even now the government will give up their policy of cutting their noses to spite their faces, and extend these credit facilities to traders with Russia. You will not do it. Why? Because the Workers' Soviet republic was founded through bloodshed. There was a civil war, a revolution and human beings were killed, so you will have nothing to do with them.

Was the British Empire founded without bloodshed? There was a hundred times more blood shed in the founding of the British Empire than ever was spilled in Russia during the years of the revolution. Look at all the wars from 1805 to the last German war.

This country has shed a hundred times more blood of people of all nations in the world. You have slaughtered Frenchmen, Spaniards, Dutch and Russians, you have slaughtered Turks, Persians and Afghans when they had not the least chance to fight you. You killed in their own homes the Punjabis, the Bengalis and the Mahrattas and the Ceylonese and the Burmans, the Malayans and the Chinese. You murdered poor primitive races, people who did not know geographically where your country was situated, as the Sudanese, the Zulus, the Bantus and the Swazis, and you had not the remotest excuse that they were going to attack you and kill you. You have butchered them and murdered them in a wholesale manner. You have killed them in their own country.

There is no nation in the world, no institution in the world which has devoured more human lives and created more murders than the British

nation and the British parliament. Yet the government of this Empire, which was founded on murder, armed bloodshed, armed loot, armed destruction and confiscation of other people's property and other people's land, has the insolence to say that we do not trade with Russia because they founded their state on bloodshed. You can tell that tale somewhere else, but the world is growing wiser, and the government would be wiser not to carry on this sort of falsehood any further.

We come to the one great omission, India. India makes the Empire. It is India that even gives the legal technical title of Empire to the British Empire. If India were dropped tomorrow, the British Empire would not be known as the Empire. There is again a complete omission of any mention of India at a time when the outrage is being committed by this nation of thrusting upon the people of India representatives of this Parliament to go and terrorise over the people of India, and of keeping soldiers there to extort a good opinion of this Commission from the people of India. There is no mention of it at all.

It is all very well for you to get into a frenzy about enslaving and robbing other nations, but you are forgetting your own destiny. In the constitutional development of this nation—in the days of King John—in the days of King Charles—in the days of Queen Victoria—what has been the method followed? The people wanting their liberties and freedom formulated their demands.

We did not see the powers representing the Crown telling the people what liberties and what freedom they should demand. In the development of a nation it is the people who have the right to formulate their Constitution and to make their demands upon the Crown and the agents of the Crown. It is a ridiculous farce that the Crown and the Crown's agent should keep soldiers bullying the people and say to the people, 'You will demand as your measure of liberty and freedom what we tell you to demand.'

I am sorry to say that the opposition has neglected its sacred duty towards India, and made common cause with the government in running that slavery abroad. I am sorry to say that in your frenzy you are surrendering great principles of British life. Save by the express vote of Parliament, no government officers, no agent of the Crown—not even

the King of England himself—has the right to deprive the British citizens of those liberties which their ancestors won for them, once, as I have said, under King John and once under Charles and his successors... but now, agents of the Crown, by the exercise of arbitrary and autocratic powers such as would lose the Crown the Throne if they were tried in this country, are seeking to deprive the British-born British citizens in India of their one liberty, of their right to a fair trial before being punished.

Under the law as it is they could be punished if they had done wrong, but the Crown is today seeking powers against British citizens in India such as Abdul Hamid lost his throne for, such as the Tsar of Russia lost his life for, and which the Kaiser of Germany lost his throne for, and such as are no longer tolerated in any country, great or small...

...Let me come down to the very grave situation with regard to unemployment. Here again there are so many pairs of boxing gloves, so that men of different parties may have a sham fight among themselves, but that does not bring us to the realities of life...

Unemployment can only be cured by the government passing an Act and, without any compensation, taking possession of all mines, factories, dockyards and places of industry. That is the only way of creating normal employment where capitalism is creating unemployment. Make friends with Russia. Give up your game of murder in India, treat them as you treat France and America and withdraw your troops from China, and there will be more than enough demand for all that you will produce by seizing those factories and carrying on your work without compensation to the owners.

This was to be Saklatvala's last major contribution in the House, although up until the General Election of May 1929 he continued to take a vigorous part in debates on a wide range of subjects, both domestic and foreign.

He made his very last speech on the 9th May 1929, the day before parliament was dissolved, it having run for its full five years term, during which he expressed his confidence that not, only would he himself be re-elected, but that he would be supported by a new contingent of communist members. Speaking during a long debate concerning the Royal Mercantile Marine, Saklatvala was frequently interrupted by the Deputy Speaker for being

technically out of order. Each time, with his usual quiet courtesy, he bowed to the Deputy Speaker's decision.

At one point in the debate Saklatvala said, "With the approach of the General Election we find all the three parties standing shoulder to shoulder and saying they are going to keep imperialism. [Laughter] The Labour Party laugh; they are afraid to confiscate the property of the rich people of this country for the benefit of the working class..."

Here the Deputy Speaker intervened, saying, "That will also require legislation."

Saklatvala rejoined, "I think there are shorter cuts than legislation for doing that."

Mr Deputy Speaker reproved him: "I do not think it would be proper to mention them at all."

Saklatvala agreed. "Perhaps so in the present atmosphere," he said, "and I think that even when I come back with my reinforcements it will not be very proper then."

Hon. members: "How many?"

"Thirty!" Saklatvala confidently replied.

But alas, his confidence proved misplaced. In the parliament elected at that General Election there were no representatives of the Communist Party, and Saklatvala was never again to take a place in the House of Commons.

[Editor's note: Nor was there to be another non-white MP elected in Britain until 1987].

A Disheartening Defeat

Defeat in the General Election of 1929.

Saklatvala fought the General Election of 1929 as enthusiastically and as tirelessly as he had fought his earlier ones, addressing up to five or six crowded meetings every day. But this time he stood alone, not only unsupported by the Labour Party, but actually opposed by them with a strong official Labour Party candidate who had been ardently nursing the constituency for two years. There was, for the first time in an election, open hostility between the Labour Party and the Communist Party, which was expressed vehemently by both sides. There was no longer any semblance of an alliance between the two parties and the hostility was perhaps the more bitter since they had started out on similar paths, and each looked upon the other as a traitor to their earlier creeds.

<p style="text-align: center;">NORTH BATTERSEA'S CHOICE.</p> <hr style="width: 20%; margin: auto;"/> <p>UNION JACK OR RED FLAG. (FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.)</p> <p>Quiet activity in the numerous party committee rooms is the prevailing note in the two divisions of Battersea and the campaign is not likely to become lively before the middle of the week.</p> <p>Both the seats have interesting possibilities. Mr. W. Bennett's Labour victory in the Southern division at the by-election caused by Lord Curzon's succession to his father's peerage is still fresh in the memory and people are asking whether Mr. Bennett will retain his majority of 576 or whether the seat will revert to the Unionists. Lord Curzon's majority in 1924 in a straight fight with Labour was 5,217. Now, as at the by-election, it is a three-cornered contest. Mr. H. R. Solley, the Conservative candidate, gives a prominent place in his appeals for support to the need of the restoration of trade and holds that this will come mainly through the Government's derating scheme. A determined effort to remedy slum conditions and the importance of dealing with traffic problems are also points in his appeal.</p>	<p>The Liberal candidate is Captain W. J. West, who was Mayor of Battersea in 1904, and he supports Mr. Lloyd George as a Battersea man. At the recent by-election nearly 19,000 electors failed to vote. South Battersea, which includes part of Upper Tooting, is largely a dormitory constituency and many City workers of both sexes have their homes in the division.</p> <p>North Battersea, where Mr. Saklatvala is again standing as a Communist, is of a more pronounced industrial character. At present there are three other candidates, including a Labour nominee. Mr. Saklatvala won the seat in 1924 by only 542 votes. His followers believe that the present fight will be not with the official Labour nominee but between the Communists and Commander Marsden, the Conservative. Commander Marsden says that the choice is between the Union Jack and the Red Flag. In his arguments in reply to calls for disarmament he claims that Great Britain leads the way in that field. That policy he supports, but he declares that he will never agree to any reduction which would prevent this country protecting itself and its trade routes as well as the lives of our people overseas.</p>
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Clipping: The Times, 20th May 1929

Also, the 1929 election was the first time that women between 21 and 30 were enfranchised and, for the first time also, that there were more women than men entitled to vote. Another important factor was that this was the first election since the General Strike of 1926, when the trade union movement and the working class had taken a terrible beating. Add to this the fact that there was ever-increasing unemployment, which made all those fortunate enough to have a job extremely nervous about joining any political party which was so frowned upon by the establishment and most employers. The 1929 electors were playing it safe while expressing their desire for change, and they hoped that the Labour Party would improve the lot of working people. Many of them were to be disillusioned.

Although the 1924 Conservative government had run for its complete term of five years, even the Sunday Times did not, apparently, mourn its passing. In an article on the 12th May 1929 (its first issue after parliament had been dissolved on the 10th May), it said:

“The personalities of this Parliament are soon exhausted. The only reputations that it has made are those of Mr Tom Johnston and Mr Saklatvala on the Labour benches and Mr Neville Chamberlain and Major Elliott on the Ministerial side... The mention of Mr Saklatvala as a member who has made good may seem strange, seeing that except on one or two occasions (the Address to the late Speaker was one of them), everything that he says has set the House’s teeth on edge. If one says that he can now fill the house with an attentive audience, one is paying a compliment to the magnificent tolerance of the British House of Commons, even more than to his mad logic.”

Now that we can see parliamentary debates on our television screens, and become aware of how few members actually sit in the House at any one time, most people will agree that for any member to be able “to fill the House with an attentive audience” he must be someone to be reckoned with.

There were twenty-five communist candidates for parliament (two of whom were women) in 1929, and the fact that not one of them was elected was disappointing proof that the party had lost much of the popularity it had so recently had. (Incidentally, there were 65 women candidates in all, and in the Labour government that was shortly to take office, Margaret Bondfield became the first woman cabinet minister and the first woman Privy Councillor). Both major political parties were constantly spreading propaganda against

communism, which was echoed throughout the newspaper world, except, of course, for the communist press.

The Communist Party was no longer seen as following a philosophy expounded by Karl Marx, but was usually described as a political party disloyal to Britain and owing allegiance to Russia. It was constantly presented as unpatriotic and certainly not respectable. Probably its international flavour did not appeal to the island race, and the doctrine of 'my country, right or wrong' still found favour over the Christian teaching of 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.' I think also that for many people, the prospect of losing the British Empire was quite unthinkable, and anyone advocating the end of imperialism was seen as being not only unpatriotic, but even as a traitor to the country and to the throne. Membership of the League of Nations was as close to internationalism as most Britishers were prepared to go.

This devotion to the empire was emphasised since Empire Day on May 24th fell just six days before the electorate went to the polls. There were big demonstrations and festivities in Hyde Park and all over London and up and down the country. The Times reported that the celebrations everywhere were distinguished by remarkable demonstrations of loyalty and patriotism. Flags were flown from all public buildings and shops and offices—patriotism and imperialism were presented as being synonymous.

[Editor's note: The Times, as the mouthpiece of the British ruling class, might not be an accurate source for discovering the true sentiments of the working classes].



Photo: Saklatvala at Trafalgar Square

A few days before this manifestation of imperial euphoria, Saklatvala's May Day speech in Hyde Park had been largely devoted to decrying imperialism in all its manifestations. He was apparently going against the tide of popular British opinion when he delivered the following battle-cry:

"May Day is above all the day of world proletarian solidarity. In every great city the workers will be demonstrating despite police attacks and despite the efforts of Social Democrats to suppress their manifestations. But we must remember on our platforms that our slogan is now no longer merely, 'Proletarians of all countries, unite!' but, 'Proletarians and oppressed peoples of all countries, unite!' Not only textile workers in Bombay and Calcutta, miners in India and China, and steel smelters in Bengal, but millions of oppressed peasants in India, China, Egypt and the African colonies are now with us in our fight against the common enemies—imperialism and reformist Labour.

"On our platform in Hyde Park we must remember that three English comrades are among the 31 prisoners of British imperialism now awaiting trial in Meerut in India. These British and Indian comrades are threatened with twenty years imprisonment in barbarous conditions, for no more heinous a crime than that of openly and legally organising workers and peasants in India.

"With the struggle of our comrades in India against conditions which even

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imperialists admit are indescribable, with the struggle of our heroic Chinese comrades against their native generals and British, American and Japanese capitalists, with the struggle of African peasants, tortured and exploited to the last degree, we must stand also.

“Let May Day be a pledge of our determination to rid the world of imperialism, breeder of war, poverty and pestilence. Let us vow on May Day to fight against the British white terror raging in India and against the British preparations for military intervention in Afghanistan.

“Down with Imperialism! Long live the world republic of the workers and peasants!”

Clearly the glorification of Empire on May 24th proved the more popular event.

In January 1929, there had been hunger marches from towns all over the country culminating in a vast demonstration in Trafalgar Square where Saklatvala had been one of the speakers addressing the rally. But this visible reminder of the increasing unemployment and hardship had been forgotten by the time the people were called upon to elect a new parliament.

POLLING IN THE BOROUGHES.	
Polling for the election of the new Parliament took place yesterday. In over 200 constituencies, chiefly boroughs, the count was made directly the poll had closed, but in a number of the large boroughs and many counties the count does not take place until to-day. In the results given below an asterisk denotes that the candidate was a member of the late Parliament, and a dagger denotes a candidate who represented a different constituency in the last House of Commons.	
The politics of the new members and defeated candidates are indicated as follows:—“U.”—Unionist; “L.”—Liberal; “Lab.”—Labour; “Com.”—Communist; “Ind.”—Independent; “N.”—Nationalist; “Const.”—Constitutionalist.	
The strength of the total electorate in each constituency, together with the total at the last General Election, and the separate numbers of men and women electors, is indicated by the three sets of figures after the name of the constituency, preceded by the letters E. (total electorate), M. (Men), and W. (Women). The figures below the results indicate the polling at previous elections.	
LONDON BOROUGHES	
BATTERSEA.	
North.	
E. 1924, 40,340; M. 35,022; W. 15,318	
E. 1919, 38,480; M. 34,123; W. 14,357	
Sanderson, W. S. (Lab.)	.. 12,283
Mansel, Chas. A. (U.)	.. 10,823
*Saklatvala, S. (Com.)	.. 6,224
Brogan, T. P. (L.)	.. 4,513
Labour majority	.. 2,432
LABOUR GAIN.	
1924—Com., 15,998; Const., 14,814—Com. 1919—Lab., 11,922—L., 1041—1919.	

Clipping: The Times, 31st May 1929

Early in the election campaign, the Daily Express of 20th April 1929, described a meeting of all political parties held in St Xavier's, Battersea, as being "full to overflowing with crowds outside the hall." The report goes on:

"Mr Saklatvala spoke—as he always speaks—exceptionally well, with the finish of ability and the force of experience. He thanked the Daily Express for the hustings. In his view there should be no meetings at election times unless all the candidates in a division faced the electors on the same platform. He railed at his rivals, Conservatives and Liberals—he could not differentiate between them, because they both represented capitalism, and, as for the socialists — well, Mr Saklatvala rather indicated that he had no patience with the socialist party, because knowing and realising the right and better way, it had chosen the worse way.

"Only in the plans of the Communist Party would the workers find their ideal 'What about the Terror?' shouted a voice from the back. 'You have the terror now,' retorted Mr Saklatvala. 'You had it in the suppression of the workers during the General Strike. You have it in every serious dispute.'"

Despite the well attended and enthusiastic meetings and Saklatvala's persuasive and untiring eloquence, Battersea North was won by the official Labour Party candidate, W.S. Sanders, with 13,265 votes. The Unionist candidate came next with 10,833 votes and Saklatvala, with only 6,554 votes, came third out of the five candidates—a disheartening and decisive defeat. All his hopes of returning to the House with a group of communist colleagues were dashed.

On his return home, he suffered a heart attack. There is no doubt that this defeat was a bitter and unexpected blow.

CHAPTER 28

More Family Life

Holidays in Surrey; the family scandalised; the marriages of Saklatvala's children.

My brother Beram had made friends at school with a boy called Eric Backhaus and they had gone on a walking tour in France together when they were 16. Eric came to our house for the first time just before that holiday and met my sister Candida, also 16. There followed a shy, long and faithful courtship, neither of them ever being interested in anyone else. It was not until September 1934 that they married. But because Eric had been a constant visitor to our home since I was six years old, he was my fourth brother and not a brother-in-law to me. We were also very close to his family—his parents were divorced, but his mother (Aunty Evelyn to me), her sister, May, and their mother, Mrs Phair, were an extension of my own family.



Photo: Saklatvala

When Father was released from his duties as an MP and his health was giving my mother increasing anxiety, it was arranged that the whole family should go

and stay in the Phair family home, built in the depths of the Surrey woods, in readiness for the retirement from teaching of the two elderly daughters. It was our first family holiday since we had visited the Isle of Wight several years before. Father was more relaxed than we had ever known him and it was a really happy and peaceful holiday for us all.

My brother Beram was again walking in France and returned to join us. He arrived late at night, walking through the woods giving his special call, “Peep! Peeep!” in imitation of a car horn. The next day he and I went into the woods and sat under the trees reading ‘As You Like It’—he read all the male characters and I read all the women. He had caught head-lice while he was away and he sat and combed his hair and showed them to me proudly—he said they were his very own creation and I was not to tell Mummy because she would insist on getting rid of them! Of course, she became aware of the problem and deprived him very quickly of his somewhat unusual pets!

At the end of the holiday, Father wrote to thank Mrs Phair and, since it is such a happy and personal letter, I reproduce it here:

13th August 1929.

Dear Mrs Phair,

Well, we have taken full advantage of your kindness and enjoyed ourselves to our hearts’ content in your delightful cottage. I had really no idea what a beauty spot you had in this forest glade when you were bringing my children here by turns, and now I realise why they were all so keen on jumping at your kind invitations, when I did not feel it right that they should be so frequently burdened upon you.

To me this spot has an added charm as it makes me recall memories of my Indian holidays, where in summer we generally have to run away to thickly wooded hills to escape the heat of the plains. I was really never tempted by any other place to stay on for such a long time. We are taking the full benefit of your kindness and staying on till Friday, after which we regret we must leave, as arrangements at 2 St Albans Villas will require Sehri’s presence there from this weekend. She too never had such a lengthy and complete change before.

In other holiday places we do get the sea, or a snow-clad hill-top here and there to look at, but all the rest is the same as in ordinary life, the same rush and bustle of people, buses, charabancs, cinemas and shops,

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

and the same nerve-straining life. This little secluded spot is a real and thorough change and does give a complete rest to our minds besides the fresh pure air to our bodies. I am sure I do not know how to thank you all for it. You have selected and created a truly good spot for a retired life, and we all heartily wish that you and your daughters may live long and happily to enjoy it for very many years to come, only do not be surprised if we are tempted to call on you at times to disturb you.

With kind regards from us all,

Yours truly,

Shapurji Saklatvala

It certainly was an idyllic interlude. Nor was it without humour—life with father seldom was! There was an elderly couple in a small cottage down the road from whom we bought all our vegetables. Father called in one morning when he was out enjoying a solitary walk and ordered eggs, etc. When Mr Entignap (yes, that really was his name!) came to deliver the order he said to Mummy, “The old gentleman who lives with you asked me to deliver these.” When Mummy told Daddy on his return he laughed and, teasing Mummy, said she should be ashamed of herself living with an old gentleman, the father of five children. This expression remained a joke between them for evermore.

(Incidentally, Father’s wishes for a long life to Grandma Phair, Aunty Evelyn and Aunt May were happily fulfilled and they all lived well into their nineties, though, sadly, Aunty Evelyn who had been totally deaf since her thirties, also lost her sight and her old age was therefore not so happy as Father would have wished her.)

Mr. Saklatvala has a personal grievance against the Government. He protests against the illegality and hideousness of the refusal to allow him to leave the country, and claims that he had been kept here against his own wish by the intriguing British Government. Shettleston is inclined to support his protest.

Clipping: The Times, 19th June 1930

The holiday did not last long and Father was soon back to work. Much of his activity in this period has been described in other chapters, work in connection with the League Against Imperialism, the Workers’ Welfare League of India, the Simon Commission, the Meerut prisoners, the London branch of the Indian National Congress, as well as his meetings and propaganda for the Communist Party, and collecting funds to support the newspaper The Daily

Worker. In 1930 he was nominated as delegate to the Trade Union Congress of 1930 by the National Union of Clerks, so clearly he was active in that field also. In June 1930 Saklatvala unsuccessfully contested a by-election in the Shettlestone Division of Glasgow; and he also unsuccessfully fought a by-election in Battersea in 1931. I think he took part in these elections with no hope of success, but merely to carry the communist banner into the fray—for neither my mother nor anyone else in the family learned of his participation in these elections until many years after his death. Had he had any hope of winning he would most certainly have involved Mother in his campaigns, as he had previously done; but he would not wish to involve her in the disappointment of his certain defeat.

He also gave his support to the communist candidate Jack Murphy in the Brightside Ward of Sheffield in the by-election of January 1930, working alongside old colleagues Tom Mann and J.R. Campbell.

[Editor's note: Saklatvala also stood unsuccessfully for a seat on the London County Council in May 1931 and again in March 1934]

After quite a little soul-searching I have decided that I must include the unhappy story connected with the first marriage in our family in 1932, that of my brother Beram when he was 21, because it reveals Father's strongly-held convictions on personal morality (which will seem narrow and incomprehensible to my younger readers, I have no doubt). But it also shows that Father's love of his children and family always outweighed his other moral convictions; I think that his love for us would have survived absolutely anything that we might have done, and he would have forgiven us.

While studying at University College, London, Beram met a young woman called Mair. Both were among the brightest stars in the undergraduate firmament and shared a talent for and an interest in the use and study of language. Mair was in Westfield College and they met in inter-university debates, where both won popularity and acclaim. Very soon they were writing poetry together and published a book of their poems as joint authors. It is not surprising, therefore, that these two romantic people should find their intellectual affinity grow into a romantic alliance. Mair was not only a gifted scholar, she also possessed a most unusual and appealing beauty.

**THE SHETTLESTON
BY-ELECTION**

**GOVERNMENT AND
UNEMPLOYMENT**

**LABOUR CANDIDATE'S
DISSATISFACTION**

Candidates { Mr. W. P. Templeton (U.)
Mr. J. McGovern (Lab.)
Mr. J. M. McNicol (Scot. Nat.)
Mr. S. Saklatvala (Com.)

Polling, June 26. Declaration, June 27.

LAST ELECTION :-			
Mr. J. Wheatley (Lab.)	..	..	19,594
Mr. H. J. Moss (U.)	..	..	12,870
Labour majority	..	..	6,724

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT)

GLASGOW, JUNE 19

A few of the many unemployed of Glasgow marched through Shettleston this afternoon to advertise the candidature of Mr. Saklatvala, by whom they were addressed. To some extent at least the demonstration was inspired by men for whom unemployment is at once a profession and a vested interest, and the marchers did not necessarily represent any larger body of believers in Communism as the remedy for such ills as theirs. It is commonly believed that Mr. Saklatvala will poll no more than a few hundred votes next Thursday.

The procession was not wholly an irrelevance, however. Unemployment is, above all else, the issue in the Shettleston by-election. The Secretary of State for Scotland has said this week that Scotland is probably suffering from unemployment to a greater extent than any other part of the kingdom, and this south-east corner of Glasgow will not be disposed to contradict him. Its livelihood is drawn mainly from heavy industries, which have been among the hardest hit of any, and rationalization, however inevitable as a step towards ultimate recovery, has temporarily added to the lack of openings for labour.

**THE SHETTLESTON
CONTEST**

**LEAD TO CATHOLIC
ELECTORS**

Candidates { Mr. W. P. Templeton (U.)
Mr. J. McGovern (Lab.)
Mr. J. M. McNicol (Scot. Nat.)
Mr. S. Saklatvala (Com.)

Polling, June 26. Declaration, June 27.

LAST ELECTION :-			
Mr. J. Wheatley (Lab.)	..	..	19,594
Mr. H. J. Moss (U.)	..	..	12,870
Labour majority	..	..	6,724

(FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT)

GLASGOW, JUNE 20

The by-election in Shettleston goes its unspectacular way, and it cannot truthfully be said that the electors are displaying any violent concern about the outcome. Mr. Templeton, however, had a satisfactory indoor meeting which heard Mr. H. G. Williams attentively last night, and his campaign may be expected to arouse increasing interest in the few days that remain. The final Unionist meeting on Wednesday evening will be addressed by Lord Eustace Percy, M.P.

The Communist and the Scottish Nationalist are, if anything, more prominent than their more weighty rivals. Mr. McNicol has been eloquent in the cause of a Scotland which he alleges is at once neglected and oppressed. The demagogic gifts of Mr. Saklatvala need no emphasizing. His supporters are patrolling the constituency on a motor-lorry draped in flaming red, and he has distinguished himself further by producing much the longest election address. In this violent manifesto, Mr. Saklatvala refers particularly to India. He writes:—"Just now in India the workers and peasants in revolt against the terrible conditions of exploitation and subjection are becoming the spearhead of the world advance of the workers against British Imperialism. In the Labour Government they have found, as the workers of Britain have found, hypocritical promises concealing the bitter reality of Fascist violence. Thousands of Indian workers are being daily shot and imprisoned. The rule of the Labour Government is a rule imposed with the bomb, bullet, and bayonet. It is with the particular object of uniting the struggle of the British workers with that of their Indian red comrades that the Communist Party puts forward its Indian candidate known to the workers of Britain and India as a Communist and revolutionary fighter for the working class."

Clippings: The Times, 20th & 21st June 1930

As I have already explained, Beram took me around with him during his university days, and I was almost as enamoured of Mair as he was, in an adolescent, idolatrous way. I often went with a schoolfriend to her room in Westfield College and enjoyed crumpets toasted in front of a fire, and listened to records, (one of which remains even now in my somewhat flippant memory: 'The bravest by far in the ranks of the Shah, Was Abdul Abulbul Amir.') She opened up a new world for me, and so it is not surprising that I would gladly

have laid down my life for her had I been asked to do so.

L.C.C. ELECTION

**SEVEN SEATS LOST BY
LABOUR**

**MUNICIPAL REFORM PARTY
OF SIX**

The following are the complete results of the London County Council elections, both contested and unopposed. The figures for Islington, Lambeth, Stepney, and Wandsworth were declared yesterday.

In the results the following abbreviations are used:—M.R., Municipal Reformer; Lab., Labour; Lib., Liberal; Ind., Independent; Anti-Soc., Anti-Socialist; Com., Communist. An asterisk indicates a member of the old Council.

BATTERSEA

NORTH

*E. J. Sainsbury (M.R.)	4,781
V. Clarke (M.R.)	4,047
Mrs. Caroline Ganley (Lab.)	4,107
F. C. Douglas (Lab.)	3,969
S. Saklatvala (Com.)	728
Ellen Usher (Com.)	535
No change.	

“POPULARISM” REJECTED

Lord Jessel, president of the London Municipal Society, the central organization of the Municipal Reform Party, yesterday said:—

“The eighth successive victory of the Municipal Reform Party at the L.C.C. elections is the greatest of all, considering the grave issues at stake. The factors which have contributed to this success are:—(1) That the Municipal Reform policy as laid down in 1908 and developed to meet London’s needs has been strictly adhered to; (2) London is well satisfied with Municipal Reform administration, which has been both efficient and economical; (3) the working classes as a whole have no fault to find with the Municipal Reformers’ work, and this fact, combined with dissatisfaction with the Labour Government’s attempt to raise the school age and thrust upon London a State traffic combine, led to serious abstentions yesterday on the part of Labour-Socialist adherents.

“London has decisively rejected the policy of ‘Poplarism’ in spite of the temptation of higher scales of relief held out by Labour-Socialist candidates and workers. Once again Liberalism returns an insignificant band to the Council. In 1925 there were six elected Liberals on the Council; in 1928, five. The voice of Liberalism in London affairs fell to a whisper in 1928; it is now a death rattle. Communism has become a farce. Mr. Saklatvala, who was once a force in Communist politics, secured only small support in what was once a Communist stronghold—North Battersea.”

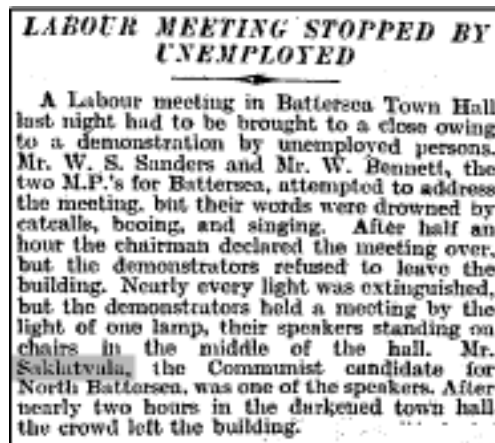
Clippings: The Times, 7th March 1931

Late in the summer of 1931, my innocent mother, always the first of the family to be up in the morning (except when I sometimes beat her to it) found a letter that had fallen through the letterbox and into a big, brass gong that stood just behind our front door; it was addressed to Mrs Saklatvala and so she opened it. It was to change all our lives dramatically. It was from a landlady in Wales who had let her bungalow to Beram and Mair for a summer holiday, where they had apparently stayed as husband and wife. In 1931, this was not the commonplace it became later. Poor Mummy was horrified and rushed upstairs to Father, still peacefully dozing in bed. The letter was asking for settlement of a small laundry bill but the story it told was painfully clear. Father was stunned.

Years later, my practical sister frequently said that if only Mummy had kept quiet, life could have gone on as before. But my mother would automatically turn to Father if anything at all upset her—it would certainly never have occurred to her to hide anything of moment from him.

The actual confrontation between Beram, Mair and my mother and father naturally took place behind the closed doors of the dining room, but I

remember the whole household being subdued and steeped in gloom (even my resilient and normally undaunted sister, Candy). From time to time Mummy would emerge to prepare meals or to go shopping throughout a period of a few days and her anger and her hurt were apparent to us all. No one talked about what was going on except that Mummy from time to time would erupt into an angry outburst. Mair's parents were summoned and joined in the family conference. And last and most terrifying, the Principal of Westfield College was called into the fray. The shame and solemnity overwhelmed us all, like a leaden sky.



Clipping: The Times, 5th October 1931

The upshot of all these deliberations and recriminations was that Beram and Mair were forbidden to see each other ever again. University College seemed not to be involved, and no mention was made of any possibility that Beram might be prevented from taking his degree the following summer. But the Principal of Westfield College took a very different view and she ordained that Mair should be 'sent down' forthwith and that she should forgo the opportunity of taking her degree.

Father was appalled at this decision; he recognised Mair's academic possibilities; she had won a scholarship to the university. He also felt it unfair that the woman in the case should be called upon to suffer more than the man. So he prevailed upon the stern lady to relent, to the extent that Mair was to be allowed to sit her exam, but she was not to be allowed to mingle with other students of her year. She was condemned, therefore, to finish her studies in the privacy of her home and she was not to be allowed to go back to college and meet her fellow students (I cannot recall if she was allowed to attend lectures or not).

Poor Mair, who due to her successes in the university had come to consider herself rather superior to her parents and family, defiantly expressed the view that she could not possibly return to the environment of her family home where she would feel it impossible to study. Mummy was so angered by this attitude of superiority that she left the room and went into the kitchen to make a cup of tea and to let off steam. As she stood at the sink filling the kettle she exploded. “The silly little bitch!” she fumed, “Thinks herself better than her own parents—it’s like expecting Binky to give birth to a greyhound!” (Needless to explain that Binky was a nondescript little dog of mixed parentage and no greyhound had figured in his family tree).

So it was thought that the two lovers were parted for ever. But Beram used me as a willing go-between. “Can you keep a secret?” he would ask me. Certainly I could and was only too eager to do so. So he and I would say innocently that we were going for a walk, or going to the Old Vic Theatre, or going to see the paintings in Kenwood, and off we would go together to meet Mair. So the romance blossomed into luxuriant growth, fertilised by the conspiratorial and clandestine meetings; who knows, but without the drama of secrecy, it might well have withered on the bough.

THE MEANS TEST

DEPUTATION AT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Demonstrations were held in various parts of London last night in support of an attempt to present a petition against the Means Test to the House of Commons.

Contingents gathered in the suburbs, and, after speeches had been made, marched to meeting places in Clerkenwell, Southwark, and elsewhere to hear reports from a deputation consisting of five men and one woman, who carried a petition containing a million signatures and wished to be allowed to state the case for the unemployed before the Bar of the House.

Elaborate police precautions prevented a concentration of demonstrators near the House of Commons. During the evening men and women gathered in groups along Westminster Bridge Road and on the bridge itself, where a large force of police was on duty. Many passers-by were questioned by the police and prevented from crossing the bridge. Several men carrying small, rolled-up banners were sent back. After 9 o'clock the crowd approaching Westminster Bridge increased considerably. Mounted and foot police stood in rows across all the thoroughfares leading to the Houses of Parliament, and omnibuses normally travelling along Whitehall were diverted to the Embankment. Shortly before 9.30 Parliament Square was cleared by the police and all vehicular traffic diverted. Marchers from the local meetings converging within a short distance of the House of Commons were turned back by cordons of police, but a small party was allowed to go to the House to present the petition.

Mr. Saklatvala, the former Communist M.P. for North Battersea, reported to a small open-air meeting in a street adjoining Edgware Road that six members of the deputation were allowed into the Lobby of the House. They asked to see the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, and waited 30 minutes. They then sent in another request, and were informed that the Parliamentary Secretary was too busy to see them. They urged that the matter was very serious, and were informed that if they wrote they would receive a written reply.

Clipping: The Times, 20th December 1932

The following summer, both Beram and Mair were awarded their degrees, though Beram was not awarded the Quain Scholarship as his enthusiastic professors had prophesied. All the parents and both families had no inkling that the two were still seeing each other. Only I was privy to the situation.

**CLAY CROSS
ELECTION**

POLLING TO-DAY

**MR. HENDERSON AND
COMMUNISTS**

(Mr. John Moores (Nat.)
Candidates: Mr. Arthur Henderson (Lab.)
(Mr. Harry Pollitt (Comm.)

Polling: To-day; declaration to-morrow

LAST ELECTION

Duncan, C. (Lab.)	..	..	21,163
Weinberg, J. (L. Nat.)	..	..	11,611
Labour majority	..	..	9,552

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CLAY CROSS, AUG. 31

Polling in the Clay Cross by-election will take place to-morrow between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. The votes will be counted on Saturday, and the result is expected to be declared about 2 p.m. Among the outstanding features of the closing day of the campaign have been the open manifestations of sympathy with the Communists at Tibshelf and South Normanton during Mr. Henderson's eve-of-the-poll tour of the division, and Mr. Henderson's own strong denunciation of Communist tactics and objectives.

Speaking at Danesmoor, Mr. HENDERSON warned his supporters not to be lulled into over-confidence by their belief in his success at the poll, but to return him by such a majority as would strike a blow at the Government and increase his interest and authority in the work he was endeavouring to do in the great field of international affairs. He asked the electors not to be misled by the tremendous amount of abuse that was being poured out against the Labour Party generally, and himself in particular, by the Communist candidate. The Communists were trying to carry out a policy of wrecking the Labour Party. They would cripple the great trade union movement, and every vote for the Communist candidate would be a vote for a policy of insurrectionary upheaval and for the use of force, with which the Labour Party would have nothing whatever to do.

At an open-air meeting at Tibshelf Mr. Henderson was listened to in silence by a large crowd, but immediately he had finished Mr. Saklatvala, who has been helping Mr. Pollitt for some days, jumped on to the platform and began to speak in opposition to the Labour speaker who followed Mr. Henderson, amid angry protests and recriminations. At South Normanton a Communist heckled Mr. Henderson.

Clipping: The Times, 1st September 1933

Later that year, in early September, my parents took me to a small and cheap hotel in Marienkirche, close to Ostend, for a short holiday. We returned in time to celebrate the double birthday of Mummy and Candy on 10th September, and carried back with us, on ferry and train, an elaborate cream

cake for the occasion.

Five days after their birthday, Beram was to celebrate his twenty-first. It was to be a grand family occasion, and Father and Mother had written out invitations to all their friends before they went on holiday and left them for Beram to post on the appropriate day. So as soon as the ladies' birthday celebrations were over, Mummy started to prepare for the dinner-party on the 15th.

On the evening of the 14th, Father was preparing the best French china, and putting leaves in the big dining table; Mother was preparing the coming feast in the kitchen. Beram went in to Father in the dining room and, looking pale and trying hard not to look frightened, he told Father it was useless to go on with the preparations because none of the guests were coming. He had not posted the invitations. Instead of a family party, he had made arrangements to celebrate his coming of age with his college friends. Father was too shocked and too sad to be angry. Once again, the house was filled with silent gloom.

**NOMINATIONS AT
SKIPTON**

FOUR CANDIDATES

Candidates: { Mr. G. W. Rickards (Con.),
Mr. R. C. Denby (Lib.),
Mr. J. P. Davies (Lab.),
Mr. J. Rushton (Com.),

Polling—November 7.

LAST ELECTION

Mr. E. R. Bird (Con.)	28,013
Mr. J. P. Davies (Lab.)	13,053
Conservative majority	14,960

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SKIPTON, OCT. 30

The four candidates in the by-election in the Skipton Division were nominated to-day. The only doubtful starter had been Mr. Rushton, the Communist. As late as yesterday the local party cash-box was still something short of the £150 deposit which it is—from Mr. Rushton's point of view—only too probable that he will forfeit. To raise the balance a demonstration was held in Skipton last night. Mr. Saklatvala addressed the meeting, which was crowded—there is not a great deal of competitive entertainment in Skipton on Sunday evening—and the financial results made possible the nomination of Mr. Rushton this morning.

Clipping: The Times, 31st October 1933

The day after his birthday, Beram dropped the final bombshell—he was now 21

and of age and he and Mair (who was some five years older than he was) planned to marry as soon as possible. Mummy's anger was boundless; as was Father's sorrow. I kept my mouth shut about my own part in the conspiracy; indeed, I never confessed to it.

Father eventually took the view that, since the marriage was to take place anyway and Mair was, willy-nilly, to become a member of the family, she must be accepted, if not exactly welcomed. He agreed to go to their wedding. Mummy was adamant—she would have none of it. There followed the most frightening row between them that any of us had ever witnessed.

L.C.C. ELECTION

**FULL RESULTS OF THE
POLL**

LABOUR'S VICTORY

We publish below the complete results of the polling on Thursday for the election of the new London County Council, which resulted in the return of 69 Labour members and 55 Municipal Reformers. The Labour Party thus obtained a majority of 14 in the new Council, and have obtained control of policy for the first time. The results of the polling are analysed on page 12.

In the detailed results which follow the figure and letters in parentheses indicate the previous representation. The abbreviations used are:—

M.R., Municipal Reform; Lab., Labour; Lib., Liberal; Ind., Independent; P.P., People's Party; I.L.P., Independent Labour Party; Com., Communist. An asterisk indicates a member of the old Council.

CITY OF LONDON (4 M.R.)

Sir Frank Bowater (M.R.).
 *W. W. Grantham, K.C. (M.R.).
 *Sir Angus Scott (M.R.).
 *Sir Percy Simmons (M.R.).
 (No contest)
 No change

BATTERSEA

NORTH (2 M.R.)

F. C. R. Douglas (Lab.)	..	..	..	8,334
Mrs. C. S. Ganley (Lab.)	..	..	..	8,325
*A. Vincent Clarke (M.R.)	..	..	..	4,549
*E. J. Sainsbury (M.R.)	..	..	..	4,459
S. Suklatvala (Com.)	..	..	..	577
B. Johnson (Com.)	..	..	..	526

Clipping: The Times, 10th March 1934

Father was determined that Mummy should be at the wedding and she was equally determined not to be. Father became quite hysterically angry—"If you

refuse to go,” he ranted, “I lay a curse upon you! Your favourite child will be carried out of this house dead!” To which my mother coldly and calmly replied, “Now you’re talking like a gypsy!” and walked away. She did not go to the wedding; Father and I went together. I bought the couple a brass toasting fork—the first wedding present I ever bought. (I think it was in memory of the crumpets eaten in Mair’s college room in happier days).

Needless to say, we all came together eventually—though Mair’s family were never happy about Beram and my family always had reservations about Mair. My own enthusiasm went quietly on, until many years later, when the inevitable end of the marriage finally came about—mercifully, after Father’s death.

This sad little story shows my father’s stern attitude to personal morality, but also proves that his love of family forced him to accept whatever lapses in morality any of us might suffer. It took my mother longer to forgive but, mercifully, parental love is well-nigh indestructible.

KING'S BENCH DIVISION
APPLICATION FOR AUTHORIZED EXCUSE
GRANTED
APPLICATION OF SHAPURJI SAKLAT-
VALA AND WILLIAM NATHANIEL
JOHNSON FOR AN AUTHORIZED
EXCUSE

Before the LORD CHIEF JUSTICE, MR. JUSTICE
AVORY, and MR. JUSTICE MACKINNON

The Court granted Mr. Shapurji Saklatvala, of 2, St. Albans Villas, Highgate, N., and Mr. William Nathaniel Johnson, of 60, Battersea Bridge Buildings, S.W., who were both candidates in the North Battersea Division at the London County Council election on March 8, 1934, an order by way of authorized excuse in respect of their omission to make a return of their election expenses with a statutory declaration within 28 days after the election.

Mr. DUDLEY COLLARD moved for relief on behalf of the two applicants. The motion was not opposed.

The LORD CHIEF JUSTICE, in giving judgment, said that it must not be taken for granted that relief would be given in circumstances such as those of the present case.

It appeared from the affidavit of Mr. Edwin Joseph Bee, who described himself as an architect and surveyor's clerk, that he agreed to act as election agent to the applicants, though he had no previous experience of election work, because he was unemployed. That was not a sufficient qualification to act as election agent. Mr. Bee then got work as a surveyor's clerk, and had not time to devote to his duties as election agent. He did not, however, resign, but continued to act as election agent.

It was by no means satisfactory that such incidents should occur, but, in view of the fact that the return of expenses was made in due time, though without the necessary declaration by the candidates, the Court, after consideration, had come to the conclusion that relief might be granted subject to payment of costs. The applicants would be allowed seven days in which to file their declaration.

Solicitor.—Mr. W. H. Thompson.

Clipping: The Times, 10th March 1934

During the next two years, two happier and more conventional marriages were celebrated in the family. My eldest brother Dorab, as soon as he had completed his medical studies, married a girl called Janet Watts, a contemporary of Beram's at University College, where she had taken a degree in History.

This was closely followed by Candy's marriage to Eric Backhaus. Both weddings followed long and ardent courtships and were welcomed by all of us, and were days of great gladness. And Father lived to see his first little granddaughter born to Janet—she was not quite a year old when he died, but he was thrilled by her arrival and an extension of the dynasty. When he returned home after his last visit, he reported to Mummy that little Wendy was not well when he arrived, "but she was her usual smiling self by the time I left."

CHAPTER 29

Final Years

Third visit to the USSR, 1934. Saklatvala's American sister-in-law visits Britain.



Photo: Saklatvala at a rally, 1933

In late April 1934, Father went for his third visit to the USSR. This time it was to be an ambitious lecture tour, starting in the north and taking him southwards to the Asiatic peoples of south east Russia; much of his travelling was to be in the more remote parts of this region, in areas which up to then had had few visitors from the non-communist world. Father wanted, no doubt, to see the effects of several years of communism on oriental communities, seeking, through communism, the possibilities of raising the living standards of the poor peasants in India (see also Chapter 30).

I have no recollection of his departure, although I recall most vividly the excitement of his homecoming. Before he left, he arranged for my mother, my sister and myself to have separate portraits taken, and these he took with him on his tour. I also recall that he telephoned to my mother regularly throughout the long visit. One day during one of these weekly phone calls, Mummy called out to him, excitedly, "Janet is expecting." "What did you say?" Father replied. Mummy repeated her joyful news, "Janet is expecting!" Father still did not understand. At last, Mummy's exasperation overcame her demure reticence and she yelled, "Janet is pregnant!" "Oh," said Father calmly, "well, these things will happen." I dare say that in the distant inland ports of the USSR, the excitement of becoming a grandfather was overshadowed by all the inspiring

things he was witnessing; but when his first grandchild, Wendy, was born, he was overjoyed and always delighted in the sight of her.

The Daily Worker of July 7th 1934 carried a letter from Saklatvala when he was already on his return home; he wrote from “somewhere in Soviet-Asia—a half-way airport on the road home,” and the letter goes on to say:

“I have finished a long and most interesting tour. On the spot, I have learned things I could never have got a real grasp of by ‘collecting information’ at home. New Russia is a wonderful place but new Soviet Asia even more so.

“One can never fully realise the tremendous extent of human development made possible by the Revolution.

“I hope an early start is being made with the November Delegation. No worker who sees for himself can leave anything but a friend of the Soviet Union, and one who is anxious to spread the news among his workmates.

“At large meetings in Tashkent, Fergana, Stalinabad, Ashkhabad, Baku, Batoum, Erivan and Tiflis I have been asked to convey resolutions of solidarity with British workers, Indian toilers and the Communist Party of Great Britain.”

The November delegation mentioned in his letter referred to a visit being organised by the Friends of the Soviet Union in connection with the 17th anniversary of the November Bolshevik revolution.

It seems that he attracted large audiences in the Soviet Union as he did wherever he addressed meetings, and this was certainly one of the most stimulating and elating experiences of his life. He made copious notes on his tour but sadly they have all been lost to us. How appalled he would have been to see the present unrest and upheaval in those southern parts of the Soviet Union that has taken place over the last few months of 1989. All his dreams of the achievement of communism among Eastern peoples would have been cruelly shattered.

He sailed home on a Soviet ship, the SS Cooperatzia, and arrived in London on the Sunday before August Bank Holiday, 1934. I went with my mother to the George V Docks in London to see the ship arrive. I spotted him standing on the rail of the ship and yelled out to Mummy, “There he is! There’s Daddy!”

and pointed to him. Mummy said scornfully, “Don’t be silly. That’s not Daddy—that’s an old man.” But as the vessel approached the dock she had to admit that I was right and that the old man was, indeed, Father.

It was quite late in the evening when we finally got home and there was general rejoicing and curiosity about his travels. Father had been paid for his lectures, but was not allowed to bring money out of the Soviet Union and so he had bought all kinds of luxurious things for the home. The star purchase was a beautiful Bokhara rug (which I only recently gave to one of my nephews and it adorns his London flat, unabashed by its age); there was lovely embroidered table linen, cushion covers and curtains, and he had bought an exquisite little silver bowl encrusted with semi-precious stones as a wedding gift for my sister.

The wonders and developments he had seen had made him happy and optimistic for the Indian people, but he was also, as always, excited to be back home among us and to be reunited with my mother. Bedtime was forgotten and we all sat enthralled to hear about his travels. Then, at almost midnight, Father said casually that he had invited all the ship’s crew—some forty people—to spend the next day, Bank Holiday Monday, with us! There was, of course, no possibility of going out shopping, as everything would be closed for the holiday. But we were all up and ready early the next morning and were dispersed to various Lyons Corner Houses, to local cafes and restaurants, to raise whatever food we could. Then it was all hands to work helping Mummy in the kitchen to prepare meals for the ‘Russian invasion.’

Before they came, Father told us that all the crew were like brothers and sisters. “You won’t know who is the Captain, who is the ship’s doctor and who are ordinary sailors—they are all friends together.” This was certainly true. We had a buffet meal in the dining room, repaired to the drawing room for tea and coffee, and then went into the garden. We had a square lawn and also a round one. The men and women from the ship performed Russian dances on the round lawn, making their own music. Our garden was overlooked by a convent, and many nuns and some of the resident girls, all leaned out of the many windows to watch the fun and the vigorous and athletic Russian dancing.

After that, the whole contingent moved off over Hampstead Heath to the fair—Father always loved fairs and took us whenever he was free. The Russians had

a lovely time, as did the whole family.

While Father was away, my youngest brother, Kaikoo, then 19, had started going out with a very nice girl, Eileen, who became a great friend of mine. Father had never given his blessing to any casual courtship and Mummy and Kaikoo were quite nervous as to how he would react. But Eileen took matters in her own competent and feminine hands; she put her arm in Father's and helped him over the rough terrain, kept up a stream of pleasant chatter, beaming at him and generally beguiling him. At the end of the day, she had been quite enthusiastically accepted, and thereafter was welcome to visit us in our home. (Unfortunately several years later the courtship ended, but that is all too common a story. I was sorry—I would have enjoyed having Eileen as a sister-in-law).

The captain of the ship made himself known by making a speech, thanking Mother and Father for their hospitality and for giving everyone such a wonderfully happy day; in return, he invited the whole family to have dinner aboard the *Cooperatzia* on the Wednesday evening. It was a real adventure for all of us to be aboard a Russian ship and they gave us a magnificent dinner—the ice cream is what I remember most vividly of the menu; no one makes ice cream like the Russians, as I was reminded when I visited the Soviet Union in 1981. Then the captain presented Father with a small statue of Lenin, which had stood in the 'Lenin corner' of the boat; it was inscribed to Father from the crew of the *SS Cooperatzia*. Mummy was presented with a huge bouquet of red roses. A few years ago I presented the statue to the Marx Memorial Library in London, where it stands in the Lenin room as a small tribute to both Saklatvala and Lenin.

[Editor's note: Many Russian homes would have had a 'Lenin corner,' containing images, icons and memorabilia of the leader; they derived from the traditional religious icon corners, called *Karylin ugolok*].

What none of us knew—and which I alone of all of us found out long after all my immediate family had died—was that Father had suffered a major heart attack on the voyage home and had been confined to his cabin for most of the journey. This accounts for Mummy not recognising him and thinking he looked so old; he must really have been far from well, even on his arrival. I only heard of this when I went to a lecture on Father fairly recently in London. An elderly man in the audience spoke from the floor; he said he had travelled

on the boat with Father, and told us all of the heart attack and the illness.

It is typical of Father that he never mentioned it to Mother or to any of us. He always tried to spare her anxiety. His health had been a matter of some concern to her for years, but about this time she was very worried indeed. She telephoned his great friend Kaikoo Mehta one day and said to him, “Kaikoo, will you talk to him? He really must slow down a bit. Even the tram men are noticing how ill he looks. One of them said to me the other day, ‘I say, hasn’t your old man gone down hill recently?’” Father took the phone from her and laughingly said to Kaikoo, “Kaikoo, you know what one of the tram conductors said to me the other day? ‘Your old woman’s looking a bit peaky—don’t you think you ought to start looking round for another wife?’!” and just turned the whole thing into a joke. He certainly did not ease up as far as his work was concerned and was just as active and committed as he had always been. His optimism about the immediate future must have diminished but, if anything, it only made him work harder

Whenever he did have heart attacks at home, he would just lie quietly on the sofa with his eyes closed, totally relaxed. He explained to Mummy that he did not want to move or to speak or to exert himself in any way, but he wanted Mummy near him, even though he would not speak to her. Usually, Mummy would get him a hot drink of water and then go and sit near him, hand in hand, until he felt a little restored. But the attacks were getting more frequent, and he really was beginning to look very frail.

Later in the year, about two months after the celebration of my sister’s wedding, he learned that his brother Phirozeshah had died in America—the first of his family. Father was naturally saddened, but he believed that grief should not lead one to indulge in gloom. He always maintained that if one were sad for any reason other than death, one would put on bright clothes and try to divert oneself out of the sadness. This is what he believed one should do in the sorrow following death. He did not believe in making a public display of mourning and grief, nor indulging in grief in any way—he believed that an effort should be made to shake it off. So whatever his feelings might have been about Phiroze’s death, he kept them to himself.

It was arranged that Phirozeshah’s American widow, Aunty Mae, should visit us the following summer. Uncle Phiroze had had his own steel works in Pittsburgh, and Father helped and advised Aunty Mae on many business

matters while she was with us. He also arranged trips for her and visits to the married children—she laughingly and affectionately called him “my manager.” During Aunty Mae’s sojourn with us, Mother developed excruciating arthritis in her knee. She and Father had moved up to the top floor, giving their bedroom and dressing-room to Aunty Mae. Mother had to come downstairs laboriously slowly, holding on to the bannister with both hands and limping painfully down. Father plied her with pineapple, which he had read somewhere was good for arthritis. Dr Gotla treated her. My brother Dorab was working in University College Hospital at the time—he was almost qualified—and he brought her a horrible-looking, thick, gray paste that looked like rat poison, called Scott’s dressing; she put it on like a poultice. For whatever reason, the pain eventually eased and never returned with such severity; though arthritis troubled her, on and off, for the rest of her life, she still kept nimble and mobile, both in mind and body, to the end of her days.

Aunty Mae had enjoyed a far more luxurious lifestyle than my parent’s had—though, sadly, she had no children; her only daughter had died when about six months old. Mae and Phirozeshah apparently had all their meals out, and she had never had to cook or do anything in the apartment where they lived. She went regularly to the hairdresser and to the manicurist and was always splendidly dressed like a fashion plate. Mae was very good company and we all enjoyed having her with us. She could not understand how we lived without an “ice barx” (in those days refrigerators were still a rarity here). So she went out and bought us a large refrigerator, which was still in use until a very few years ago, only having had to have one new motor in its long and serviceable career.

Mae despaired of me; I was just sixteen and completely unsophisticated—by present 16-year-old standards I must have been almost moronic. I had an abundance of fine wavy hair which I simply brushed and tied back with a ribbon in the nape of my neck. The fact that I wore no make-up and never visited a hairdresser appalled Aunty Mae—she could not have been more upset if I had gone about unwashed. Nevertheless, we enjoyed each other’s company, and she generously tolerated my short-comings.

Both Kaikoo and myself were acutely embarrassed when she took us into any restaurant for tea or lunch—she was invariably rude to the waitresses; we had been brought up to be polite to everyone, be they duke or dustman, and this attitude of Aunty Mae was incomprehensible to us. She always insisted that

the waitress should bring her a glass of water before she began her meal; if the girl forgot to bring it, she would call her a “dumbbell” to her face. If a waitress took too long to bring our food, she would insist on leaving, “Let her have to pay for the order!” When she went to the manicurist (an unheard of event in our lives), she would make the poor girl do her nails two and three times, and she was just as fussy about her hair. She was always most elegantly clad but towards evening she would whisper conspiratorially to Mother, “Sehri, can you tell that my corselette is undone?” or, “Sehri, can you tell that my brassiere is undone?”

But with us she was good company, full of humour, and was most bountiful in taking us out and about with her. Her ways were certainly a complete novelty to us, and she brought an unaccustomed glamour to our family life. She was to return to the states on a French ship, and we all went to see her off on the boat-train. Her visit had been enjoyable, but nonetheless was something of a strain for Mummy as her hostess and, while we all would miss her, there was a certain easing of tension when she had left. But later in the day we were informed that her boat could not sail due to a strike, and she returned to us for an extra couple of days. So we all had to mind our Ps and Qs a wee bit longer; but it was not long before our comparatively humdrum lives could be resumed.

CHAPTER 30

Last Days

Last days and death, 1936.

Now that three of the five children were married, and my youngest brother was working as an apprentice in an aircraft factory in Yeovil, life was very quiet at home with just the three of us left. Mummy's youngest sister, Phyllis, was living close by and she had a little boy, Kevan, then about four years old; they helped to fill the lonely gaps in the family. Binky the dog felt so isolated in the emptying house that he took to coming to school and sitting under my desk; I suppose he was anxiously keeping an eye on me in case I should disappear as the others had done. At first I tried to make him go home, but he stood his ground, and in the end the teachers tolerated his silent presence, maintaining that he was better behaved than most of us girls.

Candy and Eric had decided that they should spend Christmas with Eric's family, "because it will probably be Grandma Phair's last Christmas." (Happily, she lived to enjoy many more). Dorab as a doctor found it difficult to get away—doctors in those days were dedicated to full-time duty in the practice and did not think in terms of days off. Even when he went to friends or to a local cinema, he always left a phone number where he could be reached if he were needed. Beram and Mair were then living in Leicester, and I think they spent that Christmas on their own. Kaikoo was home for a brief holiday just to enjoy the festivities of Christmas, but he spent most of his time with Eileen or other friends—at twenty a young man does not sit around in the family home.

On Christmas Day, Mummy and I were in the kitchen preparing the lunch when Father proposed that he and I should go for a walk in the snow. We went up West Hill and to the Holly Lodge Estate, and it all looked most beautiful in its unfamiliar whiteness. Now that I'm older (and I hope wiser), I realise that Father should not have been climbing the steep hills of Highgate. But we both enjoyed that quiet walk together; it was to be our last.

In the afternoon we had been invited by one of Father's Indian political

admirers to tea in his house in Chalk Farm. Since there were no buses running we walked there. The house was hot, we were plied with too much food, and there was a good deal of small talk; Father kept dropping off to sleep. Our host insisted on calling a taxi to take us home—an unusual event for us. I remember Mummy scolding Father for being so rude as to fall asleep in someone else's house. But he was far from well, though we did not realise it at the time.

Soon after Christmas, Candy had to undergo minor surgery in the Hospital for Women in Soho Square. During the holiday the three of us went to visit Candy in hospital. On our way home we passed a Lyons Corner House, with its elaborate Christmas decorations in the window, and we stopped to enjoy them, Father, as always, holding Mummy's arm. There were a lot of fancy gateaux on display, and Father said to Mummy she should not bother to make a cake for his coming birthday in March but she should this once buy a cake from Lyons; they even started choosing which cakes they would have. They were planning to have all the married children and Kaikoo home for Father's birthday celebration. But that evening, as the three of us stood gazing at the cakes, and the two of them were making plans, I had an uneasy feeling and wished they would not make such detailed arrangements so far ahead. I don't claim it was a premonition or anything as definite, but I just felt a bit unhappy about it. A few days later Candy came out of hospital and stayed at home with us during her convalescence.

During the summer of 1935 I had had a completely unexpected success at a speech competition held in Oxford University, and Father had, as a reward, arranged for me to go to the London School of Broadcasting in Bond Street. Thus encouraged, I had applied for a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and during those first days of January 1936 I had presented myself for an audition. Mummy came with me and we left Father alone in the house. Looking back now, I realise that he probably felt very insecure on his own for, although he made no concessions to his illness, he could not help but be aware of it. Just before we set out he picked a silly quarrel because Mummy complained that the water came out of the kitchen tap too slowly. We left him looking sullen and unhappy.

On the 15th January 1936, Father gave a lecture on 'The Basis of Socialism' to students in the Marx Memorial Library, and my mother accompanied him, in spite of having a nasty cold. The lecture lasted for two hours and it was quite

late when they got home. Father was quite nervous and said to Mummy, "Oh, dear, Candy will scold me for keeping you out so late!" He was quite right; Candy met them at the door and rounded on Father for keeping Mummy out in the icy night air when she had a chesty cold. Father went sheepishly past her to the dining room and, after a hot drink, they all went off to bed.

Earl Winterton had never managed to subdue Father, but my sister certainly succeeded where he and many other astute politicians had failed. She of all of us was most like Father, and there had always been skirmishes between them; even in infancy, she had frequently got the better of him. Now she was a mature, married woman, Father was aware that he had at last met his match!

The next evening, the 16th, Mother and Father were to go to dinner with Dr and Mrs Gotla. After being chastised by Candy the evening before, Father decided that Mummy should stay at home, and that I should be her understudy and accompany him to the Gotlas. It was to be my first formal adult dinner party, and I was feeling most apprehensive about it and wishing with all my heart that I did not have to go.

That morning, Indulal Yajnik, an Indian journalist and activist and long-standing member of the League Against Imperialism, came to see Father in time for breakfast. They were discussing politics and we didn't bother to listen. I went off to school, came home for lunch and found Father still arguing with Mr Yajnik, sometimes quite heatedly. Mother told him not to get so excited as she feared it would bring on another of his now frequent heart attacks. When I returned from school in the afternoon, Father was seeing Mr Yajnik off at the gate, but they were still arguing—and back they came into the house. Apparently one of the subjects they were discussing was cremation—Father was all in favour of it, of course, and at one point said, "Well, when I die, I hope the dustbin men will simply take my body away with the rest of the rubbish!"

At last, the visitor left and we all sat down to tea: Mother, Father, Candy, Phyllis and her baby son Kevan. Mummy produced a marshmallow cake and Father teased little Kevan; he cut off a tiny sliver and told Kevan that that was his share, then he took the whole of the rest of the cake on a plate and claimed that as his own. Then he stopped laughing and said to Mummy, "No, seriously Sehri, haven't you some of your home-made cake instead of this rubbish?!"

I left them all having tea and set off for my lesson at the London School of

Broadcasting. Father was to collect me at the school and we were then to go together to the Gotlas in Victoria. When I came out of the studio into the reception hall, I was told there had been a telephone message for me—I was not to wait for Father, but was to go straight home as usual. What a relief! I was, after all, to be spared the embarrassment of the dinner-party. When I came out of the tube station at Kentish Town, the air was frosty and fresh, and snow was falling. I felt supremely happy. A flower-seller was sitting on the pavement with bunches of snowdrops. By way of celebrating my release from the dreaded dinner-party, I bought one. I took the tram and then almost danced my way home from the terminus.

But all my lightheartedness fell away when I reached the gate. Dr Gotla was just coming out, eyes full of tears. He threw his arms round me, tried to speak, but could say nothing and left me. At first I felt horribly guilty because I had not bothered to ask why the dinner had been cancelled; my first thought was that something must have happened to Micky, the doctor's young son. But when I got to our front door, Auntie Phyllis opened it. I don't remember that she had to say anything—her sadness, and the solemn and unfamiliar silence in the house, told me that it was Father. The hall was already full of press men. Father had been in Manchester a few days before, addressing meetings in the area, and had arranged to meet someone from the Manchester Guardian. This journalist had phoned only minutes after father had died, and Phyllis had told him the news; so the press knew within minutes of Father's death.

At about 7 o'clock that evening Father had sat down at the dining table to write a letter of congratulation to Kaikoo, who had apparently been given an unasked-for rise and had written triumphantly and jokingly to Father to tell him the good news. Father got no further than "My dear Kaikoo..." when he collapsed and cried out for Mummy. Candy and Mother came running from the kitchen, and they both realised at once that this was a more serious attack than usual. Candy phoned Dr Gotla and also Matron from the local nursing-home. Mummy stayed with Father—as did little Kevan and also Binky. Matron arrived within minutes and cleared everyone away except Mother, but there was nothing she could do. By the time Dr Gotla reached the house Father had died.

My mother was always convinced that Father knew the end had finally come after threatening him so often in the past; she said she was sure he was trying

to say goodbye but could not speak—but he looked into her face and squeezed her hand. Well, he had had many rehearsals in the last few years, and maybe he recognised that this time it was the real performance. But he did not have to suffer the knowledge for long, because the curtain came down almost at once.

It is said that those whom the gods love die young; but I think that those whom the gods love die quickly, be they young or old. And Father died mercifully quickly.

At 16, death is remote and baffling—perhaps even a little embarrassing—but the grief-filled house, my mother, white and tearful, and the air of crisis and sadness are memories that survive.



Clipping: New York Post, 17th January 1936

Harry Pollitt came round first thing the following day and tried to comfort

Mummy; Binky attacked him as soon as he touched Mother. There were streams of comforting callers, the house filled with flowers. Daddy had been lain in his bed—a grand affair of heavy mahogany ornamented with brass—a relic of the Second Empire. Parsi ladies came and lit a fire of sandalwood in a bowl on a table at the foot of the bed. The air was full of incense-laden smoke and the murmur of prayers. Father was placed in a coffin, but we could still see him. I remember thinking how he must hate all the incantation, as he lay there, still, with closed eyes, suddenly silent and powerless to stop everything going on around him.

During those terrible days, I dreamt that I was in a coffin, and people were all filing past me, peering in at me, and I wanted above all things to stop them, but could neither move nor speak. Father had always been in complete command, and suddenly he could command no more. When poor Beram went in to Father he broke down and sobbed and said, “Oh Daddy, what have I done to you?!”—still feeling guilty about the manner of his marriage, though I am absolutely sure that Father had forgiven and probably forgotten.

MR. SAKLATVALA

THE FIRST COMMUNIST M.P.

Mr. Saklatvala, who was the first Communist to be returned to the House of Commons, died yesterday at the age of 61.

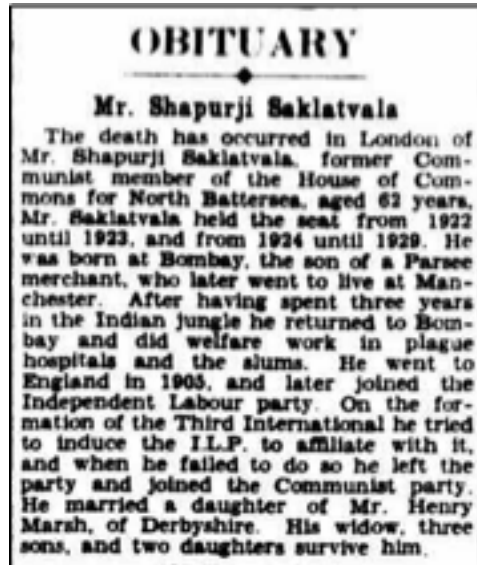
Shapurji Saklatvala, a Parsi of Bombay, was born there on March 28, 1874. His father was a merchant of Bombay, and later of Manchester, and his mother was a sister of J. N. Tata. He was educated at St. Xavier's School and College, Bombay, and was a member of Lincoln's Inn. After joining the family firm of Tata Sons, he spent three years on exploration work in the Indian jungle searching for coal, iron, and limestone, and this led to the foundation of the Tata iron and steel works in India. Afterwards he did welfare work in plague hospitals and the slums of Bombay. He resigned his position as a departmental manager in Tata's in September, 1925.

Mr. Saklatvala came to England in 1905, and at first joined the Liberal Party. He was elected as Labour member for North Battersea in 1922, but was defeated in 1923. He was successful as a Communist in 1924 and sat till 1929. It cannot be said that he made much impression in Parliament, being indeed mild in expressing the extreme character of his views. In 1926 he was sentenced to two months in the second division for refusing to find sureties for good behaviour. The charge arose out of a May Day speech in Hyde Park. He was elected as delegate by the Trades Union Congress of India to represent them at various Trades Union Congresses here. He joined the General Workers' Union, and by 1910 became an active member of the I.L.P. He also joined the Clerks' Union and the cooperative movement. After the formation of the Third International he took part in the agitation for the I.L.P. to affiliate with it, and when that failed he became a member of the British Communist Party.

In 1925 Mr. Saklatvala's passport for America, whither he desired to accompany the British "delegation" to the Inter-Parliamentary Conference in Washington, was refused by Mr. Kellogg after consultation with President Coolidge. He was refused a visa for his passport to Egypt by the Egyptian Legation in 1927. In the same year he was refused an endorsement of his passport for India, and the refusal was repeated in 1929 by Mr. Henderson, then Foreign Secretary. He married Schri, daughter of Mr. Henry Marsh, of Tansley, Derbyshire, and had three sons and two daughters.

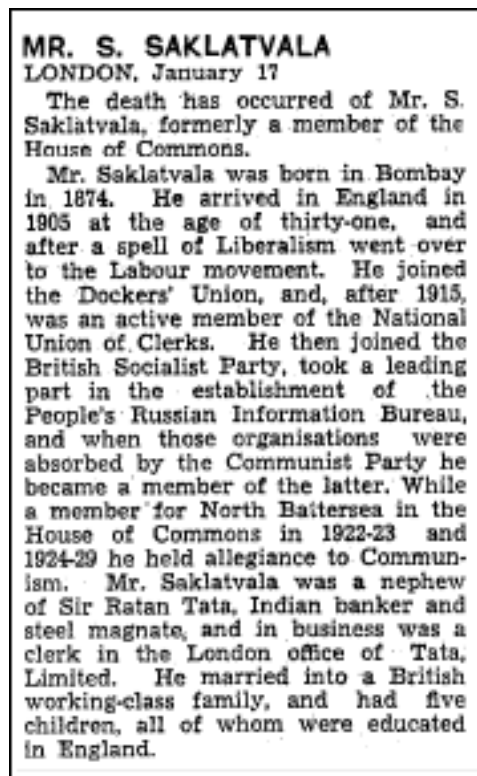
Clipping: The Times, 17th January 1936

Dorab, always tender-hearted, stayed constantly with Mother. It was the practical and strong Candy who bustled about and, with Phyllis's help, ran the household, greeted the callers, answered the telephone and generally coped with everything. I am ashamed to say that I did nothing—except probably get in the way. But no doubt our presence helped Mother through those dreaded days. We all surrounded her. It was the only time I had ever seen her beaten. Nothing would induce Mummy to eat, and the ever-devoted Binky refused to leave her and he did not eat either. Everything was so unfamiliar—I think I was more bewildered than sad.



Clipping: Melbourne Argus, 17th January 1936

Needless to say, Father's expressed wish to be thrown into the dustbin was ignored—how indignant he would have been to have his wishes flouted in any other circumstances! The funeral took place at Golders Green Crematorium on 21st January. There were hundreds of his admirers standing in the drizzly rain which had followed the snowstorms. The family and close friends drove from home to Golders Green, but between the tube station and the crematorium there were people standing to see the cortege pass.



THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Clipping: New Zealand Evening Post, 18th January 1936

The chapel was full to overflowing and many people were left standing outside. The three Parsi priests who had officiated at our Navjote conducted the prayers and rites according to the Zoroastrian faith. When the religious service had ended, the crowd, both inside and outside the chapel, burst into song with 'The International.' That was the moment when, for me, his death suddenly became a reality—at last I cried and was able to feel the sadness and grief I should have felt all those days before.

We were not brought up to believe in an afterlife, and none of us did. But I do believe that we all have a lasting influence on our families and on those we meet and love, indeed, even on our enemies and those who hate us. The influence of someone as loving, as commanding, and as sincere as Father is indelible and is, within the family, passed on from generation to generation. Of course, he shaped all of us, but he also helped to shape the thinking of friends, of comrades in the Party and even, to some extent, of his political enemies. His utopian dreams did not come true, but the world will always be a better place for his having dreamt them.

I do not mourn Shapurji's death but rejoice in his life. With such parents as I was blessed with, it always has been child's play for me to observe the Fifth Commandment.

CHAPTER 31

Tributes to Saklatvala

Palme Dutt wrote the following tribute to his friend and colleague in the Labour Monthly of February 1936:

“The death of Shapurji Saklatvala removes from our midst one of the most valued contributors of The Labour Monthly since its earliest days. Shapurji Saklatvala was in the truest and highest sense a revolutionary tribune of the people, a leader of the British working class and of the exploited and subject peoples all over the world against the bondage of imperialism and for the victory of the international revolution.

“The British working class, to whom he devoted the twenty-six most fruitful years of his life in ceaseless labour and struggle, owes him a deep and imperishable debt. The Communist Party, whose banner he upheld from its foundation, for whom he first blazed the trail of representation in Parliament, to whose cause he gave unflinching service through all this decade and a half, owes no little of its present growing hold in the heart of the masses to his work and to his teaching. Trade Unionism has lost one of its most devoted champions, who understood as no other the unity of the trade union fight in Britain and in the Empire. In India, and among all the subject peoples of the British Empire, his name is a name of veneration.

“The armed might of the British Empire feared this man as no other, whose only weapon was the truth, and dared not let him tread foot in its subject territories or even among his own people in the country of his birth... In him burned the true fire of revolutionary internationalism, the hatred of all oppression, the burning enthusiasm springing from the depths of love for humanity, which made him one of the greatest orators of our generation and the beloved of the masses wherever he spoke. In the history of the international revolution and in the memories of many

peoples over the earth, the stature of Saklatvala will grow greater as time recedes, and as the great work to which he set his hand goes forward to the victory for which he laid the foundations.”

The Daily Worker printed its own sad message:

“The Editorial Board of the Daily Worker expresses its heartfelt grief at the death of Shapurji Saklatvala who, in the midst of his myriad other activities, always found time to render us any assistance that we might require. We feel sure that in expressing these feelings we are also voicing what is in the mind of every reader of our paper.

“From early morning until we went to press yesterday we were being inundated with similar messages from individuals and organisations all over the country, a selection of which we print below.”

There followed messages from Jawaharlal Nehru, George Lansbury, Clement Attlee, M. Maisky, the Soviet Ambassador in London, William Gallacher and many others. Georgi Dimitrov of the Communist International sent the following telegram:

“Communist International lowers its fighting banner over the coffin of Comrade Saklatvala, worthy son of the Indian people, true friend of the working class and tireless fighter in the cause of socialism.”

The message from Harry Pollitt, close friend of Fathers, and Secretary of the Communist Party in Great Britain, was printed as a separate article in the Daily Worker. Pollitt wrote:

“By the death of Saklatvala, the Indian people have lost their greatest and most sincere champion, the Communist Party one of its most devoted and self-sacrificing leaders, and his family a kindly, gentle, loving husband and father.

“The honoured name of Shapurji Saklatvala was known the world over, and he will be mourned by millions of oppressed peoples, who appreciated his fight for their liberation and independence from the yoke of imperialism. Never have the workers in Britain, and the workers and peasants of India especially, had a leader who did so much and who sacrificed himself so much to their service as Saklatvala.

“His amazing vitality, his profound knowledge of anything he undertook, his ready and comradely advice, his cultural attainments,

and his unrivalled abilities as an orator and exponent of the revolutionary principles of the Communist International, leave a wide gap in our ranks. Only those who have known him intimately can form any idea of the work he did. Night after night, year after year, in all parts of Britain, he carried out his task of working class agitation, education and organisation.

“Countless memories flood in on me as I write. I remember in 1927 when he spoke at a meeting on the Sunday night in Edinburgh, took the night train to Crewe, motored to Ogmere in South Wales for a Miners’ May Meeting in the morning, did a further meeting in Swansea at night and travelled all night, back to Battersea for a Committee Meeting on the Tuesday morning. That was how he worked...

“In 1934 Saklatvala again visited the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and was enthusiastically welcomed by the workers in Leningrad and Moscow. But the proudest moments of his life, he recently told me, were those he spent in Turkestan, Kazakstan and Transcaucasia, where for weeks he was wildly greeted by tens of thousands of people freed from the yoke of Tsarism by the Russian Revolution. He saw the new industry, new collective agriculture, new culture and life, that free peoples can develop when once communism has given them their independence and emancipation. ‘Oh, Harry, what my people could do in India,’ he said, ‘if only they were as free as my comrades in these autonomous republics of the USSR.’

“This experience seemed to give even Comrade Saklatvala new and greater energy and impulse in all his later work. He went with renewed enthusiasm into the struggle for Indian independence, for solidarity between British and Indian workers, and for unity between all those organisations in India that fight against British imperialism.

“On the very day of his death he carried on this work. I know that all Thursday, and within two hours of death claiming him, he had been patiently trying to bring about unity between two groups of Indian comrades in London. One could say that ‘Unity, unity alone can give our people its freedom’ were his last words.

“Saklatvala has gone from our midst. Another soldier of the revolution has passed on. We lower our red banners before your closed eyes, dear

Comrade Saklatvala, we pay tribute to all that you have done and taught us. We are proud that you carried your early work to its logical conclusion by embracing and becoming a fearless exponent of the principles of the Communist International. You have built better than you knew. Your work will go on.

“We swear before your open grave that the red banner you held so proudly aloft, the hope and inspiration you gave to millions living in the darkness of imperial slavery, shall be carried forward to other fights and victories.

“We pledge ourselves that your unparalleled devotion and self-sacrifice shall be the example we will endeavour to emulate.

“...Today in the mining valleys of South Wales, the cotton towns of Lancashire, the shipyard centres of the North-East coast, and the factories and shipyards of Scotland, workers mourn and grieve for your passing. But you will live again in the work that will follow. The workers of the world will unite. They will break their chains. They will build that new world of which you have been so mighty an architect.”

[Editor’s note: In 1936, the year of Saklatvala’s death, civil war broke out in Spain, drawing socialists from around Europe to defend the republican revolution against the fascists of General Franco. The British unit of the international brigades was known as the Saklatvalas].

On the first anniversary of Saklatvala’s death the Labour Monthly published the following tribute from William Gallacher:

“A year ago—on January 16, 1936—the British and Indian Labour movements lost one of whom each had equal cause to be proud—Shapurji Saklatvala.

“Saklatvala held a unique position in the hearts of all who toil in Britain and in India. In the cause of Indian liberation and the emancipation of the working-class he was untiring. He was only 62 when he died—prematurely burned out by a life of incomparable devotion and service.

“Sak was born in the purple. His mother was a Tata, the sister of the founder of the great Indian firm of that name—India’s greatest industrial undertaking. In his early days he worked for the family firm and it appeared that his future would be that of the millionaire business

man. But that was not Sak's idea at all. From his earliest days he espoused the cause of Indian freedom, and with such vigour that the British authorities suggested to Tata's that a change of climate would be good for him.

"So to London he was sent in 1905, a fierce young Radical, to work in the London office of the firm. His family made him a member of the National Liberal Club—what better place to tame him? All went well for a week or so until Sak met Lord Morley—'Honest John'—a professed friend of India. Sak met the great man with enthusiasm, but was horrified when he found that his idea of friendship was to keep India tied to the imperialist chariot. For hours the verbal combat waged, and it ended with Sak banging the club doors behind it, never to enter them again except many years later as a visitor.

"Sak found quickly that it was only in the Labour movement that he could realise his aspiration of working for Indian freedom and so, when he had only been a few months in England, he joined the Independent Labour Party. Here he continued to work, always on the Left, until the Russian Revolution which inspired him to redoubled energy. Inside the I.L.P. Sak worked to win that Party for Communism and the Third International. After the Southport Conference in 1920 turned down affiliation to the Third by the typically devious MacDonald manoeuvre of forming the Vienna International Committee, Sak left the I.L.P. at the head of a group of determined revolutionaries.

"Into the Communist Party he came and here his tremendous energies and great capacity were quickly realised. Whilst everyone recognised Sak's energy, his loyalty and his wonderful oratorical powers, there was a tendency to think that these summed up all his qualities. But there was much more to the man than that. Allied to these great qualities were a quick-moving brain, a subtle intelligence and a tremendous fund of knowledge on all sorts of subjects.

"On many a subject he differed strongly from the majority of his comrades—all views held by Shapurji Saklatvala were strongly held. He would argue by the hour, by the day, by the week, for his point of view. But once a decision was taken, Sak would carry it out, be the consequences what they may.

“In 1922 he was elected to Parliament as Labour member for Battersea North, more than doubling the Labour vote at the previous election. In 1923 he lost the seat, although his vote went still higher, owing to the uniting of Liberal-Tory strength in the constituency. In 1924 Sak was back again in the House, but this time the Labour Whip was withdrawn from him.

“In Parliament he waged an uncompromising fight for working-class principles, and for the freedom of all colonial peoples. When the General Strike came in 1926, the ruling class showed in what respect they held Saklatvala. On May 2 he was arrested—the first of all the thousands of General Strike arrests, and charged in connection with a speech he had made in Hyde Park on May Day. The Bow Street magistrate wanted to bind him over. Sak refused to be bound over. ‘In circumstances such as those existing to-day,’ he told the court, ‘I shall refuse to be silenced except by force majeure.’

“So to jail he went. But even in jail Sak couldn’t be silenced. Hardly a day passed but he managed to smuggle out of jail messages of encouragement to the miners, advice for the conduct of the struggle and so forth.

“His imprisonment finished his connections with the firm of Tata. For long they had been trying to shut his mouth as a price of maintaining his job as manager of the London buying department for textile machinery. But Sak refused to be bought by Tata’s—years before he had refused to hold a pennyworth of stock in the family concern, to be anything more than a salaried employee.

“For a year previously, emissaries of the Labour Party had been pointing out to him the political career awaiting him if he dropped the Communist Party and became just a Labour man. Under-Secretary for India in the next Labour administration was the least inducement that was offered him. But neither place nor wealth could shift him from his granite loyalty.

“In 1927 Sak went to India, and from one end of the country to the other his tour was a triumphal progress, so much so that, when he returned to England, the Government refused him permission ever to visit his homeland again, a decision which, to its eternal shame, the 1929 Labour

Government upheld.

“After Sak lost his Parliamentary seat in 1929 it meant no diminution in his strenuous political exertions. Up and down the country he went, doing propaganda meetings—there was no more popular speaker in Britain, writing innumerable articles for the British and Indian press, waging a battle against all those who would sell the pass.

“In 1934 Sak paid a third visit to the Soviet Union, travelling extensively in Soviet Asia. And how his experiences thrilled him. He saw what it was possible to make of Asia and Asiatic peoples under Socialism and contrasted it with the squalor and illiteracy of his native India under British rule.

“Sak’s loyalty to the Communist Party and the working-class movement was never better illustrated than in the last General Election when—having withdrawn from Battersea in the cause of unity, he used up every ounce of his invincible energy in Rhondda and West Fife, working for my return and that of Harry Pollitt.

“I have never seen more unfeigned joy than Sak’s when he knew that our Party had won a victory in West Fife. At the victory meeting held in Shoreditch Town Hall when I came to London for the opening of Parliament, Sak made a speech which I shall never forget. It was a fine, ungrudging tribute to the Party, an expression of joy that we had once more got a voice in Parliament.

“Shapurji Saklatvala was a truly great man, whose tremendous abilities would have made him an enormous asset to the Socialist Britain and to the free India which he never lived to see. It is customary to speak well of the dead. But no words of praise spoken about Saklatvala could exaggerate his tremendous qualities.

“Sak died in harness a year ago, but his memory lives on and the work which he did is being carried on and is bearing fruit. Those of us who are carrying on can feel proud if we win the same confidence and trust that all who knew him placed in Sak.”

I will end this story of Father’s life by quoting once again the words my brother Beram composed for the tablet in Brookwood:

Nothing but death could end his courage and determination in the cause of

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

*humanity. Nothing but such determination could conquer death...
His work lives on.*



Photo: Saklatvala Hall, Southall, London

Further Reading

[Shapurji Saklatvala at the Archive of the CPGB](#)

[Shapurji Saklatvala at the Millbank Hansard Archive](#)

[Shapurji Saklatvala at the Open University Making Britain Archives](#)

Comrade Sak: a Political Biography by Marc Wadsworth (1998)

Saklatvala, a Political Biography by Mike Squires (1990)

Is India Different?: The Class Struggle in India by Shapurji Saklatvala & Mohandas Gandhi (1927)

Communism in India by Marshall Windmiller (1959)

From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain by Susan Dabney Pennybacker (2009)

A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain by N. Ali, V. S. Kalra & S. Sayyid (2007)

Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain by Peter Fryer (1984)