

Communism in Parliament

Saklatvala demands right of Party to be heard, and denounces "Continuity of Policy."

[Our comrade, Saklatvala, being the only Communist Party member in the House of Commons, and denied the Labour Party whips, is compelled to face the united opposition of all the Parties when time is being allocated for the discussion of particular business. Saklatvala is demanding the right to speak in the name of the Communist Party, and the advanced elements within the Labour movement, as well as of the struggling peoples in the colonies, and as representing a separate political opinion in opposition to that of MacDonaldism of Liberalism or Toryism.

In this fight, Saklatvala is up against the *parliamentary machine*. We have read *brave* words and listened to *strong* speeches from many of the backbenchers in the Labour Party. Party loyalty or machinery may prevent them from saying the same things on the floor of the House of Commons, but there is certainly no excuse for withholding support to the one Communist member in the House upon this claim *that the right of pronouncements in the name of the Communist Party, upon any or all questions be accorded Saklatvala, Communist Member for N. Battersea.*

The following speech was made by Comrade Saklatvala a quarter of an hour before the House rose on Wednesday, 17th December.—Editor.]

Mr. SAKLATVALA: I have to explain to the House the reason for which I have to stand up now more or less in connection with the Amendment, that stood in my name, to the Address. Though I may have to put forward a new point of view arising out of a new situation, I do not for a moment want the House to understand that it is in any spirit of wanton interruption or dragging of the proceedings at this time of the night. 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 this 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, and its branches all over the country. I would point out to hon. and right. 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 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 going on, and considering the rightful place that the Communist Party is taking in the Parliaments all over Europe, this House might now grant to us our 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 can 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 four or five 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.

The last time that I was a Member of the House, our friends of the Labour Party were fighting tooth and nail against the very scheming wording of the Amendment of the Rent Restrictions Act, which was likely to endanger its existence. Yesterday, we heard from the same Labour Party that the Rent Restrictions Act was standing, and will stand, in the way of building new houses. 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. We have seen in to-night's Debate the party believing in Protection pointing out instance after instance where the parties believing in Free Trade were indulging in Protection and almost asking for it at times when it suited them.

We have heard to-night even the example quoted about the Capital Levy having disappeared, and 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 makes friends and form a joint club so that these 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 Westhoughton 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 means international goodwill."

I offer no comment, but I suppose everyone is agreed that, foolish as the Indians may be, and wicked as the Egyptians may be, I do not believe that to-day they entertain that belief which was attributed to them last year.

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 Zaghlul 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 practise 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.
